

Chapter XVIII

Developing a Basis for Global Reciprocity: Negotiating Between the Many Standards for Project Management

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ABSTRACT

Professional standards are a significant issue for professions such as IT and project management, where certification and licensure are either necessary to practice or to demonstrate individual competence and capability. In many professions there is no basis for international reciprocity of professional standards. This paper documents the development of a standard for global reciprocity between already existing professional standards in the field of project management. Data are based on personal involvement by the authors and interviews with participants. This discussion addresses different approaches to standardisation, how common issues in the standardisation process have been addressed, and how the hin-

dering influence of the professional associations' proprietary interest was avoided. Significantly different standards of development processes have been used compared to those typical in Project Management standards development, including: an emphasis on negotiation and joint modification rather than market dominance, and an open access approach, rather than one based on exclusion and gate-keeping.

INTRODUCTION

The role of standards in professional licensure and certification has been an important issue for many years. As early as 1953, Carey wrote that the "... medical profession, the dental profession and the

certified public accountants have all used standard examinations for many years and with outstanding success ...” (Carey, 1953, p. 36). In 1962 Milton Friedman commented that occupational licensure was then very widespread (Friedman, 1962, p. 139). Researchers have found continuing agitation to extend standardisation to more professions (Leland, 1980, p. 265), and this does not seem to be reducing, with Blind and Thumm (2004, p. 61) recently finding that the number of standards has “... risen tremendously.” In the IT industry, certification has been raised from a hiring tool to a screening tool, with high-level certification being necessary for consideration in many jobs (George, 2002, p. 76).

Standards development should be pursued critically and with care, with some industries needing to revisit the role that standards play within the community. For instance, in the IT industry, certification is often viewed as a vital way to indicate competence. However, studies have found that professional IT certification is not a robust predictor of ability (Cegielski, 2004, p. 105). One study found that “... no statistically significant difference exists between the capabilities of certified network professionals and non-certified network professionals ...” (Cegielski, et al., 2003, p. 97). IT standards of certification and accreditation may even mask a lack of the very qualities that employers are looking for (Schrage, 2004, p. 1).

Over the last decade, the profession of Project Management has moved from one typified by isolated national standards to one struggling with the process of creating global professional standards for knowledge, education, and workplace performance. The profession has developed from clusters of professionals sharing knowledge at a company or industry level, to commonly accepted national frameworks for Project Management, and is now moving towards globally accepted and transferable qualifications in the profession. This paper examines recent efforts to create a framework for global reciprocity between Project

Management standards. This is discussed in relation to professional licensure and certification in general, different approaches to standardisation, and recent failures to create globally applicable standards for Project Management.

Project Management Standards: From Community to Profession

Modern Project Management may be considered to have had its genesis in the international arena when, in the 1950s (Stretton, 1994; Morris, 1994), companies such as Bechtel began to use the term “project manager” in their international work, primarily on remote sites. Before long, local communities of Project Management practice developed, becoming formalized in national Project Management professional associations. The development of standards in Project Management began with recognition of shared interests, resulting in fairly informal community gatherings. Through regular meetings and recognition of shared experience, practitioners began to think of themselves as a community and a profession. This led to attempts to define and delineate that profession in order to make it visible and acceptable to those outside the community (Crawford, 2004b, pp. 1389-90).

Dean (1997) identifies seven building blocks of a profession, characteristics that distinguish it from a community. These are: a store or body of knowledge that is more than ordinarily complex; a theoretical understanding of the area of practice; ability to apply theoretical and complex knowledge to a practice; a desire to add to and improve the body of knowledge; a formal process for transferring the body of knowledge and associated practices; established criteria for admission, legitimate practice, and proper conduct (standards and certification); and an altruistic spirit.

Of these building blocks, bodies of knowledge, standards, and certification programs have been of particular significance to Project Management. Before an industry attains a certain maturity,

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