

Perspectives of Latin American Women in Project Management

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About the Authors

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Angélica Larios, DSL, MBA, PMP, is a Project Manager with over 20 years of experience implementing software projects related to business intelligence, planning and budgeting, and software application-based financial consolidation solutions to support the business decision process. She owns ALACONTEC, an I.T. consulting firm founded in Latin America. She has held various positions in private and public organizations, such as the Ministry of Health in Mexico as I.T. Director and as Business Manager for several Mexican firms.

She holds a master's degree in business administration and a bachelor's degree in computer science from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in addition to her studies in Project Management and her ® Professional Project Management (PMP) certification, which have helped her consolidate her career and to have a better understanding of what companies and projects need today. She is a Ph.D. in Strategic Leadership from Regent University, VA; and she has been a volunteer since 2007 for the PMI local chapter in Mexico, being Former President,

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Ipek Sahra Ozguler graduated from Istanbul University, Turkey, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering, and from the Middle East Technical University, Turkey, with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a Project Manager, she has several years of experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, Project Management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has gained broader insights in a variety of projects across manufacturing, defense, FMCG (at Cola-Cola Co.), insurance (at Euler Hermes), auditing (at Deloitte), telecommunications, aviation, and finance sectors. In addition, she has been working as an international correspondent for the PM World Journal since 2014.

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, *The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals*, interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals worldwide. The book was published in March 2020 and is available on Amazon.

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Dedication

To every Project Manager who helps forge a gender-equal world.

Foreword

Paul Gaddis' (1959)¹ wrote the famous first article on The Project Manager in Harvard Business Review describing them as fulfilling an integrative function that joins many parts into a systematic whole. Gaddis portrayed Project Managers as technologists with working knowledge in many fields of science and a good understanding of general management problems while having a strong interest in teaching, training, and developing their supervisors.

We have come a long way since then. In the first decades after Gaddis' article, researchers and practitioners identified task-related management activities that the Project Manager should execute, based on the assumption that projects are processes wherein tools and techniques are applied to tasks to accomplish desired project outcomes. Later decades first saw the emergence of human-related and leadership aspects, which are now at least at balance with their task-related counterparts in terms of importance for good Project Management. This latter development comes with a change from process to principles orientation in Project Management. Here the selection of methods, tools, and techniques happens in situational contingency, underpinned by a principle that guides actions for the project. This implies equifinality; that is, the same project outcome can be accomplished by different potential means. Principles-based Project Management moves away from the dictatorship of a specific methodology and allows to choose the best suitable methods for a given situation. With the plethora of forms, and their different processes, tools, and techniques, the Project Manager (in conjunction with the governing institution) is gradually liberated, albeit at a higher level of

¹ Gaddis, P. O. (1959). The Project Manager. Harvard Business Review, 1959(May-June), 89–97

accountability, as the freedom of choice comes at the price of responsibility and visibility.

These philosophical and technical developments have made women's third development in Project Management almost go unnoticed over time. Over the years, small but steady increases in the number of female Project Managers engaged in projects, training and consulting firms, or professional organizations for Project Management have taken place. This development happens at a different pace in different parts of the world. Related products in Latin America are favorable and give rise to optimism, but there is still room to grow. This growth in numbers can occur in various ways, such as in practicing Project Managers, members of professional organizations for Project Management and their chapters, volunteers for Project Management events, such as conferences, seminars, or others. Some branches of professional organizations for Project Management have women among their board members or as Presidents Vice Presidents. However, the number of these chapters is small and should increase along with the number of practicing Project Managers. While the last decade showed a steady increase in female Project Managers, there is still much room for more women to take on these roles and develop their professional careers.

This book answers the question of how to do this and what to expect when doing this. Eighteen female Project Managers report on their journey as Project Management professionals and the different aspects of their careers. This includes their career as Project Managers, volunteer work with professional organizations, contributions to the chapters, profession, practices, and dissemination. The reflections of these remarkable individuals bring up their achievements and provide insight into issues requiring attention in the future. In other words, the book is a detailed account of what it means to be a professional female Project Manager in Latin America. To

round this up, the interviewed women share their reflections as women, leaders, and volunteers.

This book is well-structured and insightfully written by two of the most forward-thinking females in the profession. It is a significant contribution to a long-awaited development, that of more women in Project Management, which occurs in the shadow of the all-too-loud discussions about methodologies (e.g., agile versus waterfall) and other technical details of the profession. The recent decades have shown that technology and processes are tools that support Project Managers, but humans are the ones who can go the extra mile to make projects successful. In this respect, the book comes timely to support the migration to principles-based Project Management, which puts the individual in focus by giving them more freedom and responsibility. In other words, it is the right time to join the profession.

Summing up, the present text encourages all prospective female Project Managers to follow the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi: “be the change that you want to see in the world”.

Dr. Ralf Müller
Professor of Project Management
BI Norwegian Business School

Introduction

Project Management is a professional field with more followers every day and acquires greater relevance in the workplace. More and more, there are formal or informally Project Management processes carried out within the organizations as part of their strategy or that are tertiary to modify the modus operandi of the companies.

Project Management has been expanding to a large extent, thanks to the dissemination of volunteers and local and regional chapters, and the practice and experience among practitioners that is increasingly forced between organizations to ensure the success of their projects. While Project Management is not new, adoption has occurred chiefly in technology and mainly among male representatives.

However, in recent days, Project Management is making its way into other disciplines such as architecture, engineering, marketing, construction, manufacturing, and many more industries. The opportunity has also opened for women with different professional fields and disciplines to champion Project Management to develop their personal and professional ambitions.

In early 2020, the book "The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals" written by Ipek Sahra Ozguler was released, compiling the experience and vision of 29 Project Management leaders from seventeen countries. It is an exciting project that collects fascinating personal career stories through interviews with distinguished women working in Project

Management professions. The book, therefore, tries to answer the question: What is the status of women in Project Management worldwide and where do I fit in?

From that moment, the concern began in me to make a similar effort that reflects the status and feeling of women in the direction of projects throughout Latin America. And that worthy representative of Spanish and Portuguese speaking who relates through their experiences and what being involved in the management of projects means. Together with Ipek, we worked in the interviews we present here to give an idea of the status of PM for women in Latin America.

It is important to note that the selection of the interviewees does not have any bias in terms of profession, age, or position. For the authors of this book, it is very enriching to hear the opinions and points of view of young people who recently graduated from university and women who have already traveled a professional career leaving their mark. Similarly, we include women in volunteer positions in their chapters from more basic jobs to President of chapters and regional Mentors.

The questions asked are a way to illustrate the journey towards becoming a Project Management professional and a volunteer within PMI and the contributions to the chapter and practice. The interviewees assess the past, present, and future of Project Management status in Latin America. They inspire the other Project Management professionals by sharing their experiences achievements of the chapter. Furthermore, they point to the critical open issues that have been considered for continuity of this profession.

All this allows us to have a more complete and complex vision of our region's direction.

The Situation of Women in Project Management in Latin America

According to research carried out by Cecilia Boggi², a volunteer Project Manager in Argentina, on the context and status of women in Project Management in Latin American countries, the following data are found:

In 2019, at the Latin American level, of the 22 PMI Chapters that responded to the survey, women represented only 28 % of their members and 27 % of the affiliated PMPs, 37% of Directors of the Boards of Directors and 22 % of the Presidents of Chapters. In 2020 it was found that women represent only 29 % of its affiliates and 28 % of the affiliated PMPs, 38 % of Directors of the Boards of Directors, and 37 % of Presidents, presenting a slight advance in the presence of women in the direction of projects.

This book intends to show how women of various nationalities have adopted Project Management, studies, experience, professional fields from their labor perspective as a volunteer, what is the status of Project Management in the Latin American region, and what can be done to improve the results achieved.

The idea is that, with this compendium of experiences, to offer a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities every time Latin American women enters this profession, supporting them in the process of adopting Project Management as a way of life that serves them and their relatives both in personal and professional aspects.

² <https://pmi.org.ar/investigacion-sobre-mujeres-lideres-en-direccion-de-proyectos/>

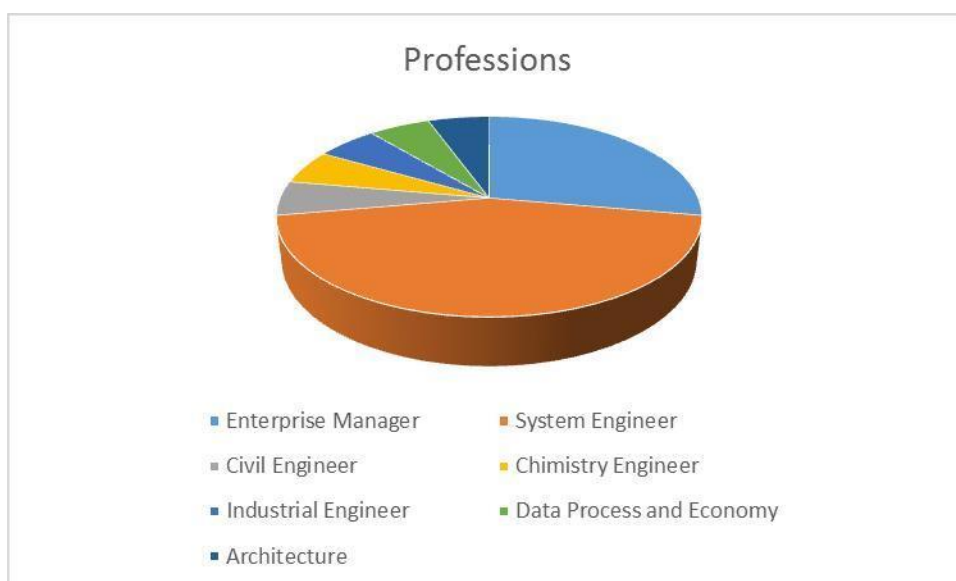
X-ray of the Respondents

By gathering the information provided during the interviews presented below, we find the following data that we consider relevant.

Professions and Postgraduates

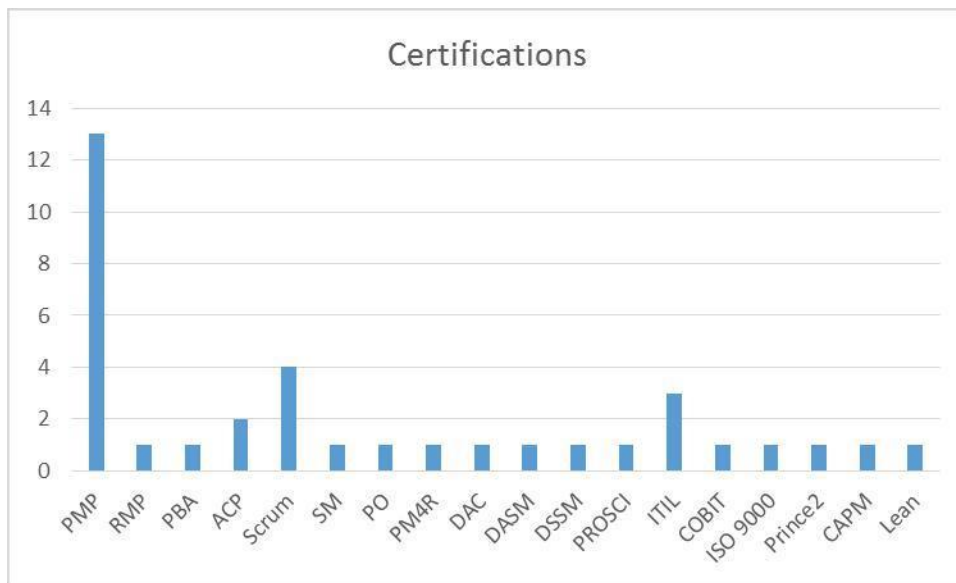
Most of our interviewees come from the area of systems or data analysis. Although there are other areas of engineering, there is an area of opportunity for these representatives to involve other members of their guilds in Project Management.

Within the result of the respondents, we noticed that 33 % of them have a master's degree and 17 % hold a PhD.



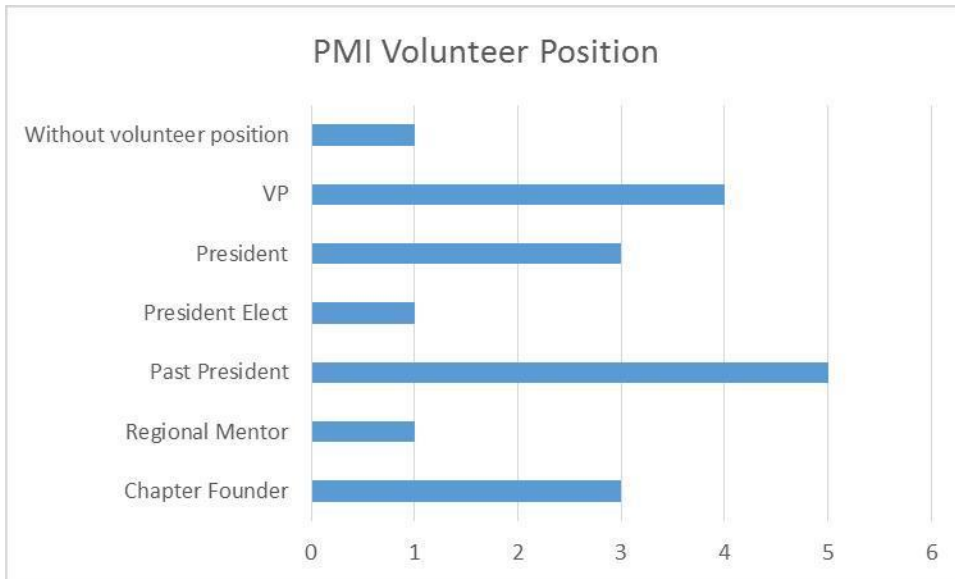
Certifications

Another relevant point of the information shared by our interviewees shows the high level of certifications they demonstrate, being PMP the most used and valued certification in the field of Project Management.



Positions are held within the chapters of the PMI.

We discovered that the passion for Project Management leads these women to get involved from different spheres during our analysis. We have from the initiators or creators of chapters to volunteer coordinators, Vice Presidents, and regional mentors. All of them for the love of the profession, commitment, and dedication. And above all, the conviction that, through Project Management, great things can be achieved, and the contribution made as women, no matter how small it may seem in the long run, has a significant impact.



Each of our interviewees voluntarily answered six questions that were thought and formulated to understand their way of getting involved in Project Management. The questions were focused on what implies being a Project Manager, what is the status of the project management profession in Latin America and, above all, a message for the audience.

Most of the respondents said they came from various professions or professional fields but that they came or knew about the PMI through the regional chapters and were invited to participate, developing their passion and interest. Others were invited through classes or courses. Their teachers opened the panorama, which motivated them to step into the field and got in contact with representatives in their countries of origin.

As for the status of Project Management in the Latin American region, most agree that while it is true that there is excellent progress and that we are in a better position than 5 or 10 years ago, there is still a long way to go. It recognizes the value and importance of project management, minimizing risks and costs, and making delivered and valuable projects. Most find in this field an incentive to continue working and be able to contact people about its potential.

To the question of why being a professional Project Manager, there is an exciting variety of answers. Still, they are summarized in that a Project Manager is a leader, has the ability in his hands to transform an idea into reality, generate benefits, and help others. For some women, being a Project Manager is magic! And from the practical perspective, it is one of the certifications with more demand and better paid in the market.

As for the initial and final questions, they were left blank to allow the interviewees to talk about themselves, as people, as professionals, with their challenges, their aspirations, their dreams, and their efforts. Anyone who reads their answers will be able to identify in one way or another the path they have taken to move forward; it is exciting to read them.

Especially in the last question, I am struck by the invitation they openly make to women to lose their fear, dare, and believe that they can. There are answers full of love and enthusiasm that reflect, in essence, what we Latin American Project Managers are.

We thank the participants of these interviews for their time, dedication, and effort in answering. But above all, their willingness to share with other women in the region their life experience so that this book can be the guide or example to follow for many women that will probably find the management of projects as fascinating as for those involved in this book.

