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Take a Stance

6 Questions with former PMI Component Mentor Alexandre Rodrigues

Alexandre Rodrigues, PMP, has worked in the project management world for nearly 17 years. He began his career in software development and later taught project management at universities in Portugal and the United Kingdom. Today he is executive partner of PMO Consulting, a project management training and consulting company based in Lisbon, Portugal. He was also the founding president of the PMI Portugal Chapter and served as a [PMI Component Mentor](#)—an advisor for other PMI component leaders and staff—for North and West Europe.



We asked Mr. Rodrigues to share some of his thoughts on everything from upcoming trends to the state of project management in Portugal. Here's what he had to say:

What led you to a career in project management?

What motivated me to follow a career in project management was, firstly, the discipline itself—being about the challenge of achieving controlled results in innovative and changing environments. And secondly, the mixed range of skills required to execute this role—from hard mathematics to soft communication skills. Also, PMI and all it does for the profession is another motivating factor.

What is one of the most challenging projects you have ever managed?

One of the projects I have been involved with that was most challenging was the KDCOM project, aimed at developing a Combat System for the South Korean Navy. The main contractor was BAeSEMA—at that time a joint venture between British Aerospace and SEMA Group—and involved several major subcontractors spread across Europe. I was part of the project office and the scope of my work was to develop advanced computer simulation models to support the project management decision-making process based on the use of Earned Value Management. These computer models would have to recreate the project's past and then be used to simulate future, 'what-if' scenarios where project control policies were an input. The major challenges I had to face involved extensive data and metrics collection in a very time-sensitive environment, model calibration, conducting interviews and managing key stakeholders.

Using these models to predict the outcome of future scenarios naturally affected interests and expectations in an environment where stakes were high. Using formal tools and scientific methods, following project management best practices, involving stakeholders and pursuing objectives with persistence were key factors of success. Several scientific publications were later published from this work, one of which received an award from the Operational Research Society (UK).

Name a characteristic found in great project managers.

Persistence. Focus and leadership are also essential. In several consulting engagements that I have been involved in, where you also have to influence and manage considerable resistance in the client environment, maintaining a sense of direction and never stepping back is always crucial. In one of my most recent consulting projects at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Brussels, Belgium—an advanced and demanding environment where the size and the complexity of situations are also considerable—I found again that persisting in what you believe to be the right path was key.

How mature are project management practices in Portugal today?

It varies from organization to organization. There is an increasingly growing awareness of project management standards and certification, especially in the IT, telecommunications and consulting industries. Professionalism is becoming a trend still constrained by a slower change in the organizational cultures. These developments are benefiting organizations and the country as a whole as they encourage more modern management practices and a more effective management of change.

What is an exciting project currently underway in Portugal?

There are several and it depends on industry sector. The ones with more public visibility are the construction of a new airport in the Lisbon area and the construction of the fast train network (TGV) linking cities between Portugal and Spain.

What is one big trend you foresee affecting the project management profession in 2008.

The emergence of the other two complementary disciplines, program management and portfolio management, which all together form what is today referred to as organizational project management. This concept considers that projects and operations are to be effectively articulated under broader business objectives or missions, so that synergies are explored and long-term change is more effectively planned and controlled. Programs integrate and articulate projects and related operations over time. On more a practical business perspective, organizational project management implies that organizations manage their business primarily through projects of two main types: (1) conceiving, developing and launching new or improved products and services in the market place; and (2) improving its way of operating to increase higher efficiency—from cost reduction to conceiving new strategies. With organizational project management, repetitive operations are in the back end of an organization's activities, with the primary purpose of executing projects and sustaining organizational needs on a daily basis. An investment in change—in programs, and ultimately projects—is also planned and controlled so that a good balance is achieved to respond to organizational strategy. The concept of organizational project management may well soon replace the more time-limited concept of project management.

"Project management is all about organization, discipline and flexibility to accomplish new challenges in a controlled manner."

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