

Youth in Projects: our social and global obligation as professionals.

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Abstract.

One of the challenges facing the Project Management profession on a global and social scale is that we have an aging profession. Skills shortages and skills development are two phrases that are rarely mentioned in the same sentence. At one end of the scale, we have members with years of experience and skills and these valuable skills will be lost to retirement. On the opposing end of the scale, we have very few members entering the profession, with little or no experience. Youth (under 35 years) of age, are not widely represented in our profession. We (as a profession) have to then ask do we understand what this means for the future of our profession (and our businesses) and what we can do to decrease this skills shortage?

Part 1: Acknowledges: What is happening in the PM industry (based on the statistics of the AIPM membership)

Part 2: Analyses: How the profession is currently encouraging youth to join and

Part 3: Recommends: How we can instigate changes in our businesses to promote more youth to join our profession and support their professional development.

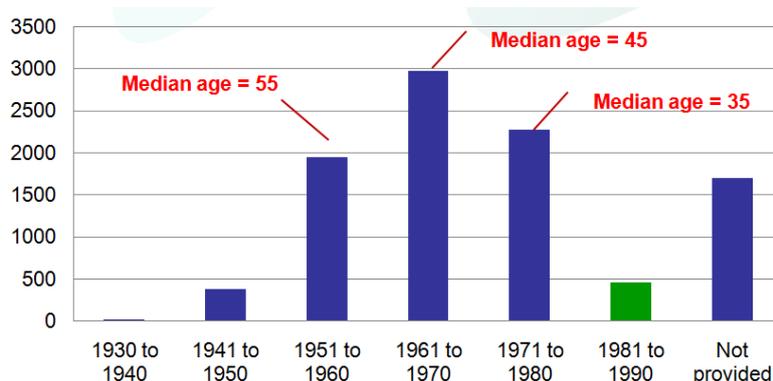
Keywords.

Youth in Project Management

Skills shortages

Encouraging youth

Part 1: Acknowledges: What is happening in the Project Management industry (based on the statistics of the AIPM membership)?¹



Based on Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) membership data (from Sept 2009) the peak age of membership is approx 45 years of age. There are two other peaks in the membership data, members born between 1951 and 1960 (median age of 55) and 1971 and 1980 (median age of 35).

There are very few members (less than 500) born between 1981 and 1990.

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Some further observations regarding the project management industry are as follows:

- You do not need a degree/certificate to become a project manager
- There are a number of pathways to becoming a project manager but there is not one clear career path
- Much has been spoken and written about the skills gap/shortage of skilled people
 - Lack of knowledge (getting certifications etc) is not the issue, lack of experience is and
 - Training will provide knowledge but not necessarily the skills, the skills of project managers are gained by experience (not training).

Part 2: Analyses: How the profession is currently encouraging youth to join?

Currently, there is little or no encouragement to “younger” project management professionals to join AIPM. There is no specific Special Interest Group (SIG) or forums to encourage discussion about youth in project management.

Part 3: Recommends: How we can instigate changes in our businesses to promote more youth to join our profession and support their professional development?

Prior to making changes to promote youth to join AIPM, we first need to analyse how younger employees are “different” in their approach to work and the project management profession.

“Younger” employees approach work differently:

- Engagement and interest is important
- Technologically savvy
- Unafraid to challenge the organisation establishment / norm / managers (which can be interpreted as a lack of respect)
- Ask questions because they want to learn
- Mutual respect is fundamental, it is earned and you get respect by leading by example and giving respect first
- Experience in different work environments (as a result of job hopping)
- Must be stimulated/engaged = junkies
- The busier they are = the more productive they are
- Challenging = “why” = because they want to understand how what they are being asked to do fits into the bigger picture
- Mutual respect is fundamental, it is earned and you get respect by leading by example and giving respect first
- Experience in different work environments (as a result of job hopping)
- Must be stimulated/engaged = junkies
- The busier they are = the more productive they are

In addition to the differences above, younger project managers:

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- Have specific PM qualifications
- PM is pursued as a discipline and a career choice
- Training and qualifications are quite high
- Strong knowledge base (due to changing roles)

Businesses need to encourage youth to by taking the following approach:

1. Start now – plan for the future by planning today.
2. Take the long term view, don't just purchase or you may perish. Think about how to grow your capabilities without having to access the market for project managers. What blend of skill development/accreditation does your organisation want?
 - Hands on practical experience
 - Formal training
 - Mentoring/Coaching
 - Developing an organization that is inclusive of everyone
 - Consider how you manage
 - Not advocating that we moving younger staff into specialist roles without foundation skills and experience
3. 3 pronged approach to increasing knowledge:
 - On job experience
 - Mentor
 - Coach
4. Capture and share 'seasoned' PM experience
5. Formal methodologies or training – process increases opportunities for quality outcomes
6. Management style understand what makes the 'younger' PM tick
 - "Talk no action" management styles won't work
 - Pessimism and criticism will have youth Project Managers running a mile
7. Emotional Intelligence and how it exists in your organisation
8. Distinguishing star performers – characteristics and place them on a career path

Conclusion

Our responsibility to our profession starts with the development of youth for the future projects.

This is an issue both globally and locally and this presentation asks honestly: "what have you done recently to encourage youth for my profession and my business?"

¹ Disclaimer:

This paper is not based on:

- Psychology

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- Sociology
- Does not contain all the answers
- Does not apply generation labels – Baby Boomers/ Gen X / Gen Y

This presentation is based on:

- Facts & data (where available)
- Real life experiences - frank & honest
- Not advocating moving younger staff into specialist roles without foundation skills and experience.