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Educational experiences in the Project Management field

Revealing major characteristics of a modern learning environment

In this issue the author Vanhoucke was invited to publish a paper that illustrated **“how a mix of existing Project Management methodologies used in the classroom helps enhancing student learning and engagement, stimulating interaction between students and professionals as well as creating enthusiasm and passion for the Project Management discipline”**. An important contribution for open or reinforced task force to expand the learning systems, especially in today’s widely available technological environment. Finding which teaching methods have effective impacts on learning, as suggested by that author, a mix of PM tools, techniques, case studies, business games and social networking have become alternatives to achieve a high level of education. Moreover, classic teaching methods such as group lectures, discussions or case study assignments, and also working independently, in small or large groups, use simulation tools or e-learning platforms. This enables a stimulating engagement, involvement and even enthusiasm, resulting in a better learning experience.

But how are project management tools and techniques used to support efforts to innovate teaching and implement effective pedagogies in and beyond projects? Possibly through blended learning methods that promote a collection of ways to improve learning and communication with students, and also a collaborative environment in which professionals inserted in the actual industry can share tasks. The aforementioned paper explores a variety of learning methods that clearly brings forward educational environments, considering modern perspectives. Additionally, it is suggested that students, professors and academics learn with Open Source Initiatives examples, hence set an objective and share responsibilities for building it up. Similarly, learning institutions and communities (*ONGs, Corporations, UNOPS - United Nations Office for Project Services, and General Institutes*) could establish a common agenda for a specific task scope and work together in a synergic two-way learning environment. This adds value to both sides like experience to students and experts labor for communities.

A shared agenda among student researchers and practitioners is also an option to provide a resident environment for both. It means a win-win situation for all, students can have real problems to investigate, solve and put in practice their learning,

while practitioners can have new experiments, using additional techniques, methods or concepts to be applied in simulations of real situations which they face in their everyday routine.

Another alternative is to provide learning by sharing research papers published in specialized journals. Thus, the knowledge of specific experiments and studies can be divulged, besides contributing to disclosing the findings and allowing further studies to be conducted from these. And also conferences, a common ground for the meeting of experts.

In fact, to have a better learning experience it is necessary to provide the student with a practical application of the theoretical knowledge acquired. Learning means not only having the theoretical knowledge one needs to know how to apply. When trying to apply his knowledge, the learner observes that the surroundings of the situation are as important as the knowledge itself, and comes to understand that he also needs to master contextual and behavioral skills. The student has an even better learning experience when practical situations can be assimilated by “necessity” or by “unexpected” positive/negative effects, in each case the student gains distinguished experiences, the first obtained by execution for results under pressure, and the second for having a taste of success/fail by using competence/inexperience. The fact of applying knowledge and perceiving its practical effect turns it into a lived-out experience, thus this learning experience will continue throughout his professional career. The challenge is to create opportunities for students to live their own experiences while still students.

Resilience is only created by consistently roam looping the theory-practice-research circle. In a modern learning environment all resources used target building resilience to confront the uncertainties encountered in the real world. This results in combining the learned experiences in a multidisciplinary team in order to have the required competence to better and more efficiently perform the projects.

Finally but not less important, a professor’s role in today’s modern learning system should not only design information on the grid environment, as a transmission element, but also treat it in a such way as to make it accurate information for each individual who has the enthusiasm to learn by his particular way and timeframe in order to fulfill the role of a student.