

## **Project Management: Discipline or Profession?**

**By Ed Naughton Director General**

As the number of practising project management professionals continues to grow worldwide, the debate as to whether project management constitutes a profession or a discipline is emerging more frequently. Currently some 65% of the PMI-USA membership identifies project management as a profession. However, according to the traditional definition of a profession, project management does not qualify, and in many countries it is not even recognised as an occupation for statistical reporting purposes.

Other occupations that have struggled to become officially recognised as professions have found the process to be long and arduous. Our most recent example is that of “nursing in Ireland”. Once considered simply as an individual who carted for patients, nurses have evolved into highly in-demand, independent healthcare professionals.

Project management, unlike medicine, law, engineering, dentistry etc., currently has no fundamental undergraduate programme to sustain its claim to being a profession. Project management draws its practitioners from a wide multiplicity of backgrounds, like for instance individuals studying for MBAs. People who successfully complete MBA programmes do not consider themselves as part of the “MBA profession”. They are part of a community of practising MBAs. It is my opinion that this analogy constitutes the best fit for current practitioners of project management.

If it ever is to be recognised as a profession, its journey to be a complex and difficult one. The key issues that will have to be addressed are: scope of practice issues, registration, education and accreditation strategies, body of knowledge, and monopoly over the use of the title, “project manager”.

A significant research study is underway into the professionalisation of project management.

This study can almost be considered as a glimpse into the future of our knowledge-based occupation. While the practice of project management continues to grow rapidly, project management “profession” will evolve incrementally, if ever.