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RECOGNITION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: IS DIVERSITY A MISSING PUZZLE?

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The constant changes and improvements in the modern world strive to improve society in all fields, including the project management field. The era of society projectification brought even more need for professional development, which started to be part of the research in different management fields such as project management, human resources, organizational science, etc. Globalization, information flow, interdisciplinarity, and present diversity bring a need in project management - to achieve excellence, but also to show outstanding individual and/or organizational results worldwide. Although there needs to be more scientific evidence of how these credentials impact the business and profession of project management, we witness the growing number of different recognition systems. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses of application for the global professional awards in the field of project management, the article aims to present how the project management profession values the awards from the perspective of different dimensions of diversity. The analysis is based on the applications for the IPMA Global Awards in the different categories using the case study research method. The findings will contribute to the existing literature in the project management field in all aspects of society and provide project professionals with guidelines for successful career evolution.

Keywords: projects; diversity; project management; recognition; awards

RECONOCIMIENTO Y DESARROLLO PROFESIONAL: ¿ES LA DIVERSIDAD UNA PIEZA FALTANTE DEL ROMPECABEZAS?

Los constantes cambios y mejoras en el mundo moderno buscan mejorar la sociedad en todos los campos, incluyendo la gestión de proyectos. La era de la proyectificación de la sociedad ha incrementado la necesidad de desarrollo profesional, lo cual ha sido objeto de investigación en diversos campos de la gestión. La globalización, el flujo de información, la interdisciplinaria y la diversidad generan una demanda en la gestión de proyectos, no solo para lograr la excelencia, sino también para obtener resultados destacados a nivel individual u organizacional. Aunque se requiere más evidencia científica sobre el impacto de estas credenciales en los negocios y la profesión de la gestión de proyectos, estamos presenciando un aumento en los sistemas de reconocimiento. Este artículo se enfoca en analizar cualitativa y cuantitativamente las solicitudes para premios profesionales globales en el campo de la gestión de proyectos, como los IPMA Global Awards, desde la perspectiva de diversas dimensiones de la diversidad. El análisis se basa en casos de estudio de las candidaturas presentadas. Los hallazgos contribuirán a la literatura existente en todos los aspectos de la sociedad y brindarán a los profesionales de proyectos directrices para una exitosa evolución en su carrera.

Palabras clave: proyectos; diversidad; gestión de proyectos; reconocimiento; premios



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1. Introduction

Professional development and lifetime learning are topics that are getting more and more attention in the field of project management nowadays. Many research studies on the project management profession and career development of managers are present in journals in the project management field, organizational studies, but also human resource management, validating the importance of this topic (Bedin & Soderlund, 2013). Increased projectification of society creates project-based organizations and work in the business, but also in public and academic sectors as well as in civil society organizations (Jacobsson, 2021; Obradović, 2022). Projectification also brings that some civil sector organizations exist to develop and create value through projects and or private-public partnerships (Stepanović, 2021).

The evidence of a positive relationship between projects, business success, and innovations are recognized by several authors (Petro & Gardiner, 2015). However, public recognition of outstanding performances and excellence became a practice in the business and academic environment (Azadegan & Pai, 2008; Jacob, Madu & Tang, 2021; Bucero, & Alonderiene, 2022).

Through qualitative and quantitative analyses of application for the global professional awards in the field of project management, the article aims to present how the project management profession values the awards from the perspective of different dimensions of diversity. The analysis is based on the applications for the IPMA Global Awards in the different categories using the case study research method.

2. Why do we need awards?

Winning different awards and showing credentials can be considered a significant validation source and improve the social, business, and professional status of individuals, group(s) or organizations in the „creational society“ (Styhre & Brorstrom, 2021). A credential holder uses the credentials as proof of achievements, to demonstrate skills, during employment processes, etc. Depending on the type of achievement, specific credentials can be observed or represented even as a part of the identity and social status (Miller et al., 2020).

Entering different competitions, researchers and practitioners consider as an effective way to increase team or individual motivation, so incentives to outperform others (or even themselves) have strong positive effects on performance (Niederle, Gneezy & Rustichini, 2003). In the case of project management (professional) awards process demands an application with individual or group effort and commitment to the process (Todorović, Toljaga-Nikolić & Obradović, 2023). Motivation for certification and awards competitions can be found in a desire to be good (Blomquist, Farashah, & Thomas, 2018), while the second is related to a desire to look good (Scott & Dwyer, 2012). Entering the world-recognized awards competition may be identified as a rite the passage, where entering the competition by filling out the application through the separation of everyday life represents Separation. The Liminal phase is a state between two statuses when applicants are waiting for the results, and at the end, the last phase is Aggregation – when hopefully the applicant will return to society with a new status of the winner of a prestigious award (van Gennepe, 2005).

Therefore, awards given by globally recognized and professional organizations may have a functional role in confirming the legitimacy of some achievements (Styhre, 2022), so an example of project management awards, the most prestigious awards on a global level are IPMA Global Awards and the PMI Awards (Project Management Institute Awards).

3. Diversity

The Britannica dictionary defines excellence as an adjective meaning that something has an extremely high quality, while by Oxford English Dictionary, the same non has an explanation as “the quality of being extremely good,” or to be better than others, have extraordinary results in something. In theoretical literature, excellence is treated as a goal that should be achieved, but with one crucial aspect that business excellence does not imply achieving a maximum profit or making lower priced products (Ghicajanu, et. al, 2015), quite the opposite, excellence in business, as excellence in projects has a completely different meaning. Excellence is a complex approach that must include theoretical, economic, and societal angles of view (Ghicajanu, et al 2015).

The background of the term cultural diversity, which is the most common context of using of this term in business and social science, can be found in the dichotomy US - OTHERS, which, or which different variation was often used in social and human sciences until the middle of the last century (Todorv, 1994). In the modern world, (cultural) diversity has a wide meaning and includes a system of shared characteristic as culture, gender, background, experiences, religion, area of expertise, level of experience and all other identifying characteristics that distinguish cultural groups and individuals (Pretty et Al., 2009; Slavinski et. Al, 2020; Swartz et al, 2019). Also, diversity, together with inclusion, starts to recognize and positively value the unique contributions that individuals bring to society, the community, and even the workplace. Therefore, diversity represents the basis for achieving excellence, and in order to survive and be competitive at the global level, companies need to be able to utilize and manage diverse workplace (Wambui et al., 2013).

4. Methodology

This research combines qualitative and quantitative research methods in the case study of application for the IPMA Global Awards. The case study analysis is built on desk research of the awards applications in the different categories. It contains a presentation of statistical results and the analysis of the results.

5. IPMA Global Awards Ecosystem case study

5.1. IPMA Global Project Excellence Award

IPMA Global Awards Ecosystem represents a program of three different types of awards, which all have subcategories.

In 2002 IPMA introduced the IPMA Global Project Excellence Award, which is since 2016 based on IPMA Project Excellence Model. The aim of this most prestigious award in project management is to recognize extraordinary achievements in two main categories:

- Small-/Medium- sized Projects (budget < € 50 million),
- Large-sized projects (budget < € 200 million) and Mega-sized projects (budget > € 200 million) projects.

Each application has been assessed by several international assessors who have long-term experience in the particular field of each award category, who were trained to perform Project Excellence assessments.

The evaluation includes the assessment based on Project Excellence model criteria, and in the category of Large-/and Mega- sized Projects, is supplemented by a site visit and final scoring by judges. After announcements of the winners, all applicants receive a feedback

report which includes the strengths of the project, potential areas of improvement, and results of scoring.

Figure 1: IPMA Project Excellence Model



Application of all projects submitted for this category of the Awards are assessed based on the IPMA Project Excellence Model, consisting of the three main elements: (IPMA, 2016)

- A. People & Purpose – if the right people who sheering the same vision for success are led by excellent leaders are crucial to move project straight and achieve improvements in various aspects.
- B. Processes & Resources –represents practices necessary to reinforce excellence through sound processes and adequate resources used efficiently and sustainably. It may be considered as a basis for innovation and constant improvements.
- C. Project Results – proves that the project management approach provides outstanding and sustainable results for all key stakeholders.

According to the Project Excellence Baseline, excellence in projects will be achieved only in there is a balance between these three elements and their sub-elements (IPMA, 2016, p. 44).

The following section presents statistical data on the application for Large and Mega sized Project awards.

Figure 2 shows some of the applicants in the last 10 years for the Project Excellence Awards and their geographical distribution. Based on the graphic, it's clear that almost all off of the applicants comes from Europa or Asia.

Figure 2: Graphic overview of Large- and Mega- sized Projects applications from 2013 to 2022

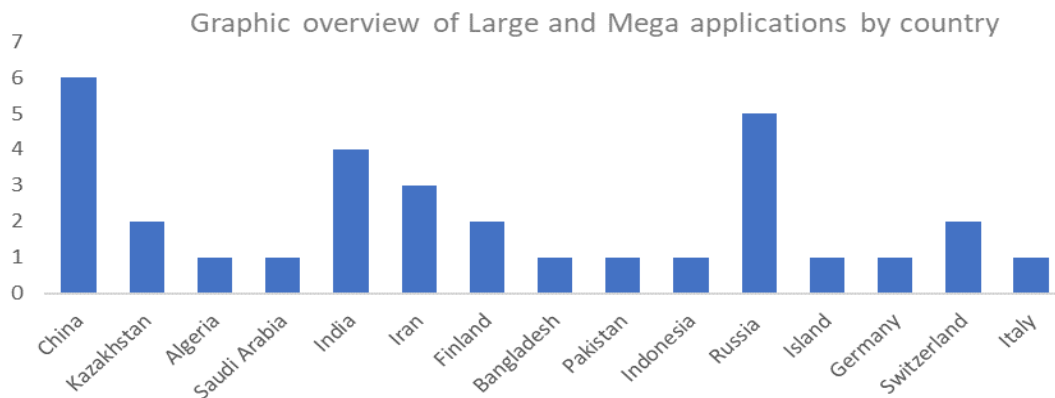


Figure 3: Graphic overview of the results for Large and Mega projects

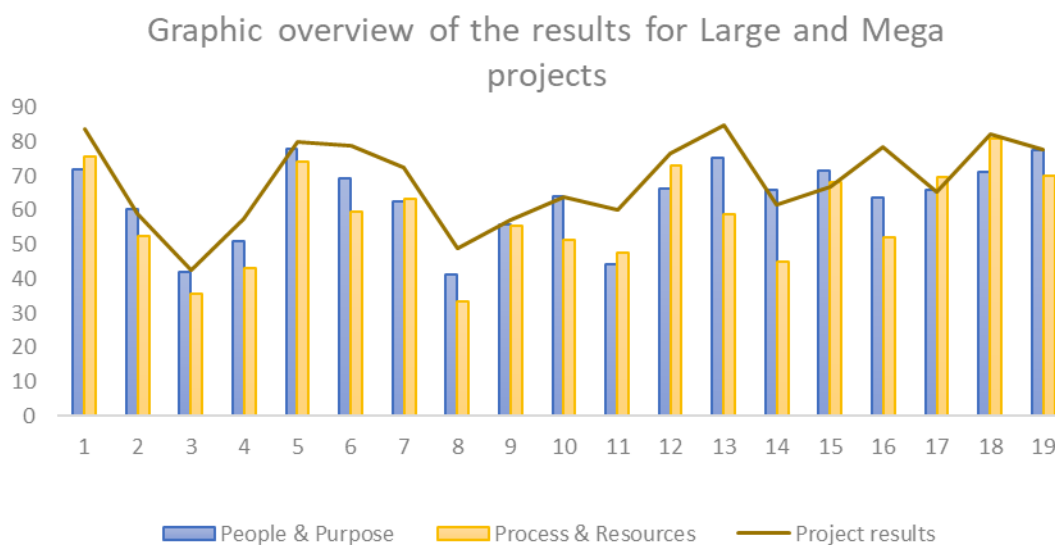


Figure 3 shows the actual results of some of the projects of the chosen applicants with different results in the last 10 years for the Project Excellence Awards. The results showed that in most cases, applicants have a balance between at least two of the three categories. But also, some of the applicants have very different results, and in most cases with disbalance, the projects are Project results driven. In these cases, if the applicant has outstanding project results but has no balance among all categories, that project will not be considered a gold award winner.

During the last 20 years of Project Excellence Awards in all categories, there were over 120 finalists from 31 countries worldwide, which indicates that this type of award is recognized as a significant global award, with the highest recognition in Europe and Asia. The same map provided in figure 4 shows that this awards jet is not recognized more in South America, from where were no finalists since the beginning of the Awards process.

Figure 4: IPMA Award Finalists 2002-2022



Further, even if in Africa there is not a huge number of applications, there can be recognized as a positive trend since all of 9 finalists submitted their applications in the last 5 years. Considering this data, we can conclude that based on the country of the finalist, that geographical diversity is achieved.

5.2. Individual Awards

Since 2012, IPMA has started with IPMA Global Individual Awards, with an aim to recognize and celebrate outstanding individual achievements.

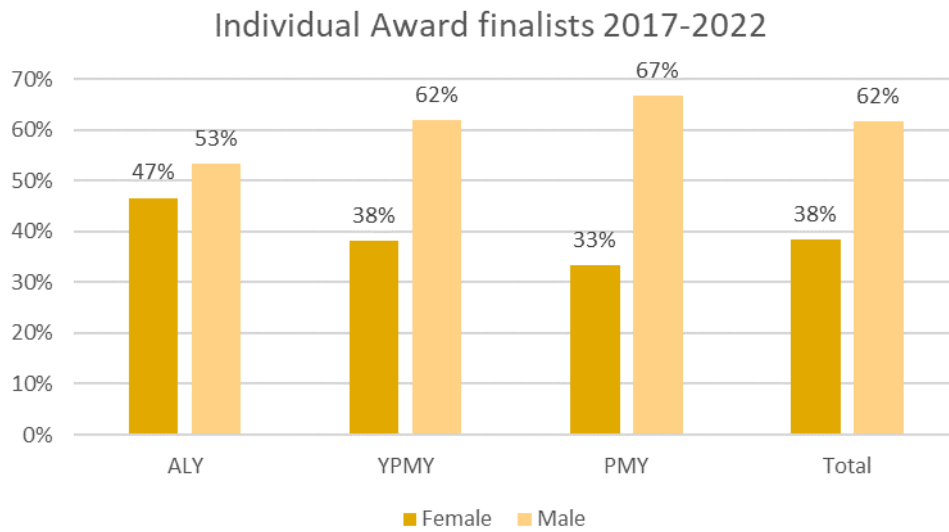
During the years, within these categories, there were several different categories, and since 2020 Individual Awards contains three following categories:

- Young Project Manager of the Year (YPMY),
- Project Manager of the Year (PMY),
- Agile Leader of the Year (ALY).

The evaluation process of the IPMA Global Individual Awards is based on the IPMA Individual Competence Baseline and Individual Competence Baseline in the Agile world for Agile Leader of the Year. For this category, the IPMA Global Research Awards assessment process includes an independent assessment of judges via an online platform based on defined criteria.

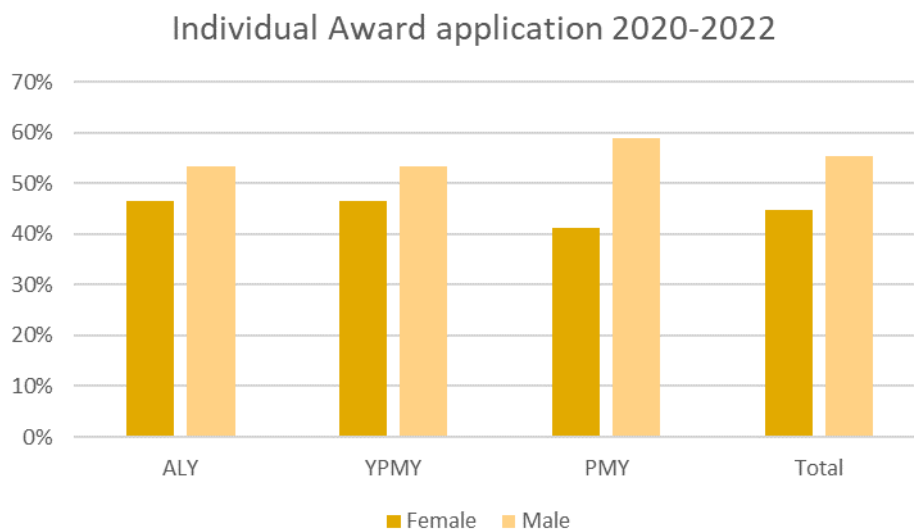
After the evaluation process, every applicant receives the report on the evaluation, with defined areas of improvement and pointed strengths of the projects or managerial methods.

Figure 5: Individual Awards applicants 2017-2022



The Individual Awards are the most recognized awards in the IPMA Award ecosystem, with more than 20 applications every year worldwide. Based on the analysis of the application from 2018 to 2022, the Individual Awards applicants are in 62% male applicants (figure 4), but when it comes to the analysis of applications from 2020 to 2022 there is a significant difference in the gender of applicants, with 45% of female applications, and 55% of the male application in total in all three categories (figure 6).

Figure 6: Individual Awards applicants 2020-2022



In support of the trend that there is an increasing number of quality applications by females is the fact that from 7 winners of individual awards in 2022, 5 of the winners were women, and for the first time, all three places for the Project Manager of the Year winner were women.

Geographically, the finalists in the last 6 years for Project Manager of the Year are from 16 countries in Europe, North America, Australia, Asia, and Africa. Most countries have a continuation in applications from year to year, such as Hungary, Germany, The Netherlands,

Australia, China, Malaysia, Iran, South Africa, the USA, etc. Significantly the highest number of applications for Individual awards comes from Iran and South Africa, which shows that this type of award is highly valued among these countries. Also, this may be explained if participants from the previous year had a positive experience or if they benefited from the award on personal, professional, and/or organizational levels.

5.3. IPMA Research Award

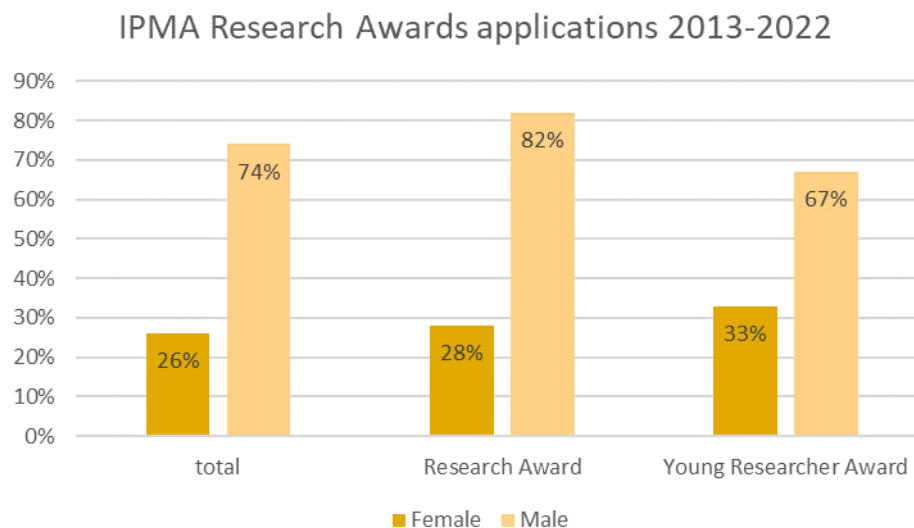
IPMA Research awards were introduced in 2009, and since then, change few different types of awards categories which are included. But, even if different categories for applicants may apply, the constant categories for 17 years now are the Research Award and the Young Researcher Award for researchers with less than 36 years or up to 10 years of research experience.

Researchers who participate may represent disciplines other than project management but must contribute to developing project, program, and portfolio management and the project-oriented companies or any element named in the IPMA Standards.

Analysing the application in the last 10 years, from 2013, results show a significant interest of researchers in these two types of awards. On a sample of 120 applications which were in the second phase of assessment, assessment by a poll of judges demographic results shows that project management in Academia and Researchers are still a male discipline, as shown in figure 7.

Results show brother gender diversity in the category of Young Research Award, where differences among gender are less obvious.

Figure 7: IPMA Research Awards applications 2013-2022

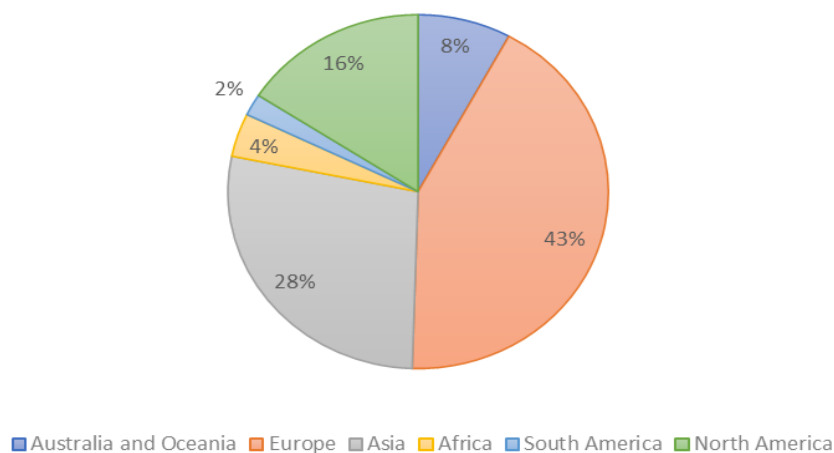


If we look at the female application for Young Researcher Award in the last 10 years, 35% of applications were submitted in the first 5 years, while 65% were submitted in 2019 or later. Some of the possible questions for future analysis can be whether females are female more competitive in the early stage of their carer and whether other social aspects affect willingness to compete. However, it can be observed are a new generation of females will continue the trend and be braver in enrolling in competition.

The number of applications for the Young Research Award has been lower since 2020, when IPMA introduced a new category - Graduated Research Award. All master's and Ph.D. theses are moved into this new category.

Geographically, with applications from 42 different countries worldwide, it looks like there is a diversity among applications. Nevertheless, still, the most significant number of applications comes from researchers from Europe (42%) and Asia (28%), and the lowest number of applications is from Africa (4%), and South America (2%). If we make a crosscut, all applicants are male in these two eras with the lowest number of applicants.

Figure 8: Geographical distribution of Research Award and Young Researcher Award applications 2013-2022



6. Discussion and the conclusion

The challenging conditions of the contemporary environment and the great importance of project management nowadays move the focus from project results and redirect attention to the central figure of the project – The project Manager, the primary person responsible for achieving project aims (Obradović, V., Montenegro, A., Bjelica, D, 2018). According to IPMA Individual Competence Baseline (2018), besides the practice or technical competencies, the personal and interpersonal qualities (people), as well as competitive competencies required within a specific environment (perspective), are crucial for managing projects. The project manager can only consider the broader context of the project with all social aspects, through the balance between perspectives and people competencies. Combining these competencies, understanding the relationships with people and the overall picture of the project represents the basis and more essential skill for managing projects in diverse environments.

Participating in this professional competition signifies the eagerness of organizations and individuals to showcase their achievements to the world. It also reflects their commitment to evaluating these accomplishments and improving their performance based on the valuable insights obtained from feedback reports. By adopting a systematic approach to learning from both successes and failures, applicants continually expand their knowledge through the process of post-project reviews (Obradović, V. 2010). This enables them to enhance their skills in implementing change and fostering ongoing improvement. Even if the guidance to achieve excellence can't be researched in total, and applicable in all contexts, the possible good way to achieve it is to constantly improve our work, adopt changes and strive to the

new challenges through which we will improve. Excellence should be more perceived as a general goal of our professional practice which will push us to excite our boundaries and think out of the box.

Social sciences will say to us that when we step back from an egocentric point of view and allow other individuals, cultures, or team members to bring new or different ideas, we, as project managers, may be able to achieve excellence. As human communities and individuals as well have different developed ways and abilities to interpret the world and symbols around them (Gorunović, 2010), interpretation of the culture, business, and even managing projects has a background in differentiation roots in culture and experience, but also differences in needs and purpose (Milton, 2010; Pretty, et al. 2009). Therefore, only through diversity, we can achieve excellence and through values of different opinions and practices, which may be interpreted and included in new contexts as a guide. Managing diversity in project teams and implementing different ideas in organizational systems and practices allow us to manage people in a way that project managers can potentially maximize the advantages of diversity and minimize the disadvantages (Pretty et al., 2009; Cox & Blake, 1991).

The results demonstrate how the IPMA Global Awards brand evolves over time and increases recognition in new geographical areas. Based on the number of applicants from specific countries, such as China for Research Awards and Project Excellence Awards, or Iran and South Africa for Individual Awards, it can be concluded that certain cultures differently value credentials compared to others. In a society with numerous awards and prizes, being a winner is often crucial in determining its perceived value and the developmental opportunities for the future work. One of the further questions that can also be researched is the motivation of returning applicants in the same or different categories since achieving a successful business, or in IPMA case professional competition is the same important as gaining new applicants to retain the current ones (*Marčinko Trkulja, Ž., Dlačić, J., Primorac, D., 2023*).

The evidence presented aims to enhance our understanding of the significance of professional awards for organizations and individuals. It also raises new research questions about other IPMA award categories and can serve as a foundation for further comparative analysis of various professional awards in the project management field. The findings in this article contribute to the existing literature not only in project management but also in human resource management, gender studies, and other social sciences. One of the questions for further research may explore the societal changes that have led to an increase in female applications and the underlying factors driving women to participate in such competitions. Future research directions could also involve empirical examinations of the personal and professional impact of winning awards, as well as the effects on organizations and the careers of the winners.

One of the limitations of this research is that it is based only on a review of the demographic data of applications submitted for a certain type of professional award in the field of project management. It does not include the opinions and attitudes of the applicants nor the opinions and attitudes of the evaluators who reviewed the projects.

Finally, this article contributes to the 5th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations, Gender equality, by providing gender-oriented data on the IPMA Awards ecosystem.

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