

Moving Senior Membership Ahead

BY ALEXEI BOTCHKAREV

In an earlier article, "[A Strategic Approach to Senior Member Elevations](#)," November 2010, I described how the IEEE Toronto Section boosted the number of its senior members with a series of outreach campaigns. This article focuses on a way to improve the senior member program itself, a method followed by another organization I belong to: the nonprofit Project Management Institute. Established in 1969, and now with more than 320 000 members, the PMI aims to advance the practice of project management, which is the discipline of planning, organizing, securing, and managing resources to achieve objectives.

Like IEEE, the PMI has various membership grades, and the organization is divided into regions and chapters. Membership benefits include exclusive access to PMI online publications and global standards. PMI standards offer guidelines and rules for project management. The most well-known PMI standard is the Project Management Body of Knowledge. The PMI also provides networking, leadership, and volunteer opportunities as well as online communities that include the aerospace and defense industries, information systems, and ethics.

Perhaps the greatest spur to PMI membership is the levels of professional certification that the organization offers. Its most popular level is the project management professional (PMP). Candidates must demonstrate experience, including at least three years of project management with 4500 hours spent leading projects. They must hold a four-year degree or equivalent based on experience, and they must have undergone 35 hours of project management education. Most importantly, they have to pass a certification exam.

The PMI offers five credentials/certifications: project management professional, certified associate in project management, program management professional, PMI risk management professional, and PMI scheduling professional.

The number of PMPs worldwide grew from 27 000 in 2000 to more than 400 000 last year. (That is not a typographical error). Each month about 4300 PMPs join the ranks—which is comparable to the number of senior members IEEE gains every two years.

Not all PMPs are PMI members; membership is not a certification requirement. However, PMI membership is growing 6.9 percent annually.

If the trend continues, the PMI will within the next decade become the largest professional organization in the world. The PMP certification is the biggest force behind the growth.

Keep in mind that the PMI operates in a non-regulated area, as does IEEE. That is, its credentials are really a matter of personal choice and not professional certifications required by government regulation. PMI membership success is largely due to the organization's certifications. IEEE can successfully employ a similar approach with senior-member certification.

FORWARD-LOOKING

The requirements for becoming an IEEE senior member are tied to accomplishments made in one's career, with no provision for further professional growth. The PMI's PMP credential confirms the holder has what it takes to develop one's skills, and it requires continuous professional growth, as well as recertification every three years.

The IEEE senior member program is almost exclusively an internal affair. It's practically a secret; it is not widely known or appreciated outside the organization, nor are there visible efforts to communicate the value of senior membership to companies that employ engineers. On the other hand, as a result of marketing efforts, PMI certification has become a standard requirement for project management positions, at least in North America. The PMI has succeeded not only in delivering a quality product—certified project managers—but also in communicating to employers its worth and convincing them that PMP certification is of great value. Thanks to that worth perceived by employers, certification has become a tool for the thousands of PMP holders to advance their careers.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Capitalizing on the PMI's proven best practices could enhance the IEEE senior membership program. Features might include:

- A requirement for senior member candidates to have at least one year of volunteering for IEEE in any position as of the date of application. This would ensure a candidate's demonstrated commitment to the organization and profession.
- Senior membership should be granted for a limited time—say, five to seven years. After that, senior members should undergo a reevaluation to maintain their status. They would have to prove that their work continually meets performance requirements such as significant engineering; publication of papers or books; technical direction or management of important work, with evidence of accomplishment; recognized contributions to the welfare of the scientific or engineering profession; development or furtherance of important courses that fall within the IEEE fields of interest; or notable contributions in such areas as technical editing or patent law that advance progress in IEEE fields of interest.
- Senior members would be evaluated on their continuing professional development and education. A scoring system should be developed for the courses taken and for IEEE events and activities a senior member has attended. Incentives should be included for those who can prove they attended events and activities organized by IEEE.
- IEEE ought to make the value of senior members clear to employers, detailing the high-caliber qualifications that go with the membership grade. IEEE also should clearly identify the value of senior membership to all other stakeholders, including non-senior IEEE members and the organization's societies and geographic units. Microsoft uses such an approach with great success in its certification program, *Employ the Best: Microsoft Certified Professionals*. Perhaps companies that employ a certain number of IEEE senior members could enjoy tangible benefits such as discounts on IEEE Xplore corporate subscriptions.
- IEEE should commit itself to promoting senior members to employers in industry and academia. One of the goals of that campaign would be to recognize senior membership as a prerequisite for full professor appointments in academia, and similar responsible positions in industry, in IEEE's fields of interest.

With such improvements, I believe IEEE will improve the career advancement of its senior members. That would not only be a fulfillment of our professional association's prime function—it would have an avalanche-like effect on the growth of membership.

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