

**Frank Turley (FT), Director of Professional Development at PMI Belgium Chapter interviewed Gil Dehogne**

**Frank: What is your current job title and what do you do?**

**Gil:** My current job title is quality assurance manager @ Yara and within the Yara project office (YPO), which is the engineering office of the Yara company.

**Frank: How long have you been in this role and what did you do beforehand?**

**Gil:** It has been five years, so I've been here since 2013. Previously, I was in charge of business development in a small company extracting essential oils, and before that I was in charge of regulatory affairs within a chemical company called Methanex which is the biggest producer of methanol.

**Frank: Why did you choose this new role as it seems to be very different from before?**

**Gil:** It was just a change. I was looking for new challenges and Yara offered me the opportunity to work in an international environment with multiple projects. We have approximately 40 factories that are taken care of by the Yara project office, and I did find the challenge and the environment to be very interesting and that's the main reason why I got into this interesting position.

**Frank: How many project managers do you deal with at the moment in your quality assurance role and what type of projects?**

**Gil:** We have 26 project managers within the Yara project office. Some are dedicated to major projects, others are dedicated to medium and small-sized projects. I work with them regarding risk management on all of their projects, which is a mandatory requirement. Sometimes we have challenges but globally it is very well accepted. I mean the benefits are seen and understood. Obviously, we always get some pushback from people that are unconvinced, but I would say that luckily for me, those are generally the projects that had the most problems, so it backfires on them.

**Frank: Does quality management and risk management go together at Yara?**

**Gil:** That's correct. We have two parts of it in quality as always. We have the quality assurance and risk management is clearly part of the quality assurance. Once we get into execution and the projects are being built or constructed, then we get into quality control, but regardless, the risk register or the risk analysis carries on. For some, we know that we will be facing risks that we will have to live with. For other risks, as the project matures, we have new risks coming on the radar. Therefore, it's an exercise, the risk review is an exercise that we do ... we try to do every month to every six weeks with the team.

I facilitate the first meeting when we launch it and then I basically follow up. We usually leave it with the project manager and then every two to three months, we investigate the

status of the risk register. If they need our support, we can facilitate some more, but generally they see the benefit and they use it regularly during their team or their project team meetings.

**Frank: That answers my questions about frequency of follow-up. How do the project managers see your role? Is it somebody looking over their shoulder or do they see you as a help in their role?**

**Gil:** You've got it all ... I would say that mostly they see that as a help, especially if we are facilitating. The quality team is facilitating the exercise. Sometimes people want to take control, especially if there is a big time difference. We let the contractor manage that. That's another option. Generally, it's well received because they understand that it's a good way to mitigate problems. It's also ... and sometimes, I wouldn't say that we get hijacked, but we get side-tracked because it's one of the few meetings where all the key members of the teams are present together and it allows them to discuss other topics that are related to the project and to the risks, or to other problems or solutions, which are defined right away.

**Frank: How is the reporting done? I mean, do people ... project managers report to you and who do you report to?**

**Gil:** Clearly, we are here as support for project management. I'm on an independent structure, which is the quality and project guidance group, and I'm reporting to the head of the quality and project guidance group, but the project managers are reporting to their head of project management. So we are independent, we are the same company, and that's how it works. We do not have a reporting line between each other. On the other hand, we are now more and more reporting all the information that we get to what we call the management team, and therefore that's the way the progress is escalated or the issues are voiced.

**Frank: Do you have the power to stop a project if you see it ... that it's a real danger?**

**Gil:** In the early phase, we have within quality assurance the opportunity to stop projects during our project review or at least ask them to mitigate or to resolve some issues. Once they are in execution, the project manager is the only one able to stop the project. However, we can escalate issues in order to make sure that they are addressed or at least that the mitigation action are taken care of.

**Frank: Can you give me an example where you saw a project in deep trouble and perhaps it failed because risk management didn't go correctly or because a big risk actually happened that you thought might come up?**

**Gil:** Well, I wouldn't want to be specific. We've had multiple cases where issues had not been mitigated and then we pushed in order for those issues to be addressed and that allowed the project to basically carry on normally in a safe environment.

We've had multiple sites that have been delayed because of problems that we had foreseen but we had not mitigated, so it kind of backfired. Unfortunately, what I find a little bit frustrating is that even though I try to be constructive and looking forward, it is sometimes

in a situation where, “I told you so,” especially since the risk was identified earlier. I find that sad because it doesn’t add anything to the resolution of the problem, but if we had been heard, it could have been resolved.

**Frank: Do project managers learn from each other to deal with quality assurance and risk management?**

**Gil** Well, it depends. We have lessons learned and we are implementing that. We have a database which is becoming pretty significant. We also have during the project assurance review, the peer review, where other senior project managers are coming into the meetings and challenging all the critical decisions - process decisions, construction decisions, site layout, in order to be sure that all stones have been turned. Nothing is being kept aside or forgotten. This is the kind of exercise which is seen as very valuable by the project manager because we are all running left and right and a little bit like in a beehive, so it’s important sometimes to just sit down, think thoroughly, and assess the situation.

**Frank: You’re also a member of BELRIM. Can you explain what BELRIM is and what you get from it? How does it help you?**

**Gil:** Well, I don’t know if I’m a member. I know that I took part in some of their activities and I did some presentations. BELRIM is the Belgium Risk Management Association and its an association of Belgian risk managers. The good thing is that it’s very wide. You have all the different areas of the economy or the Belgian economy that are covered there from transport to chemical world to construction to banking to insurance. So it’s just a place where likeminded people can exchange, can unite, and try to talk about their problems and the solutions. So it’s something which is ... I discovered lately, but it’s extremely useful and it turns out that it also prevents you from reinventing the wheel in your field and see that you are not alone facing some similar problems.

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