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The Impact of Professionalization in Public Procurement

- evidence from a case study -

Maria Antonietta Coppola Gustavo Piga¹

Abstract

The importance of public procurement for achieving value for money in public purchases - thus obtaining important savings in the use of taxpayers' money and effectiveness in meeting citizen's demand for public goods of a given quality - is widely recognised, as made clear by the Directive 2014/24 of the European Union and the international legal framework for public procurement at large. But how can these goals be met? Professionalization is a necessary condition and thus represents a key part of the final answer. But what kind of professionalization is really needed? In what environment? With which results? These questions are rarely answered with real life examples.

Taking advantage of a questionnaire-based cohort of individuals that have gone through a process of professionalization in an international environment, this paper expands on its challenges and on the importance of professionalization of the persons working in public procurement-related activities as key to an efficient use of public money.

Keywords

Public procurement; professionalization; advanced training; career progression

1. Introduction

Public procurement is a lever for the sound use of taxpayers' money while implementing economic and social policy objectives. The achievement of value for money and the creation of a level playing field which guarantees to economic operators equal treatment and fair competition during the whole procurement process are key principles which are clearly stated by the European Directive 2014/24/EU, the 2014 Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) and by the 2014 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Procurement. National laws and regulations of many States aim at implementing these principles both for high and low value purchases while not refraining from adding other specific tailored goals. These latter reflect a wide variety of sensitivities that governments over the world, with different emphases, usually have within their national procurement strategy. The OECD indeed recognizes as "secondary policy objectives" those who refer *"to any of a variety of objectives such as sustainable green growth, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, innovation, standards for responsible business conduct or*

¹ The opinions of the authors are personal and cannot be attributed to their organizations. Corresponding author: Gustavo Piga,

*broader industrial policy objectives, which governments increasingly pursue through use of procurement as a policy lever, in addition to the primary procurement objective*².

Equal treatment, fair competition, value for money as well as other strategic policy objectives can only be met by implementing adequate procurement procedures during all phases of the procurement process: pre-award, award and post-award phase. To make practical examples, the use of such procedures may include market consultations and product-related analysis of public expenditures and procurement needs during the first phase of the process. These could be extremely useful to write tender documents that correctly identify the object of procurement and its specific technical requirements. Moreover, the accurate definition of needs and of the object of procurement facilitates the use of the right acquisition procedures and award formulas, which are key to the award of a contract where economic operators offer the best combination of quality and price. Last but not least, a sound procurement process provides for the application of (well thought-ahead) contract management procedures that monitor the performance of the contract by suppliers. The whole procurement process may thus be intended as a cycle, where appropriate contract management coupled with performance monitoring is used in the definition of procurement needs and in the preparation of tender documents.

The implementation of such procedures during the whole public procurement process certainly needs to be regulated by national laws and regulations but this is not sufficient. It is indeed crucial that the workforce which is appointed for procurement-related tasks is well trained and experienced both in the knowledge of the related legal environment and of the managerial and technical issues that pertain to each tender.

It is a widespread general understanding that there is an active waste of public money while performing procurement activities related to integrity issues that may take place during the procurement process. Such risks may be linked to corrupt or fraudulent practices which cause misallocation of funds, higher prices and/or less quality of what is being procured. Countermeasures to prevent integrity risks can be the application of anticorruption measures, data mining to identify anomalies, the regulation of conflicts of interest as well as the implementation of integrity standards and transparency measures both at the national and institutional level. Nevertheless, integrity issues and corrupt practices are just part of the causes related to the wrongful use of public funds. As rigorously shown in a landmark study made by Bandiera, Prat and Valletti³, the main cause of waste of government spending can often be considered passive waste, pertaining to incompetence-driven inefficiencies⁴. In “Bureaucratic Competence and Procurement Outcomes” by Francesco Decarolis, Leonardo M. Giuffrida,

² Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2015). OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Procurement. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/OECD.Recommendation.on.Public.Procurement.pdf>

³ Bandiera, O., Prat, A., Valletti, T. (2009). Active and Passive Waste in Government Spending: Evidence from a Policy Experiment. *American Economic Review*, vol. 99, n. 4, 1278–1308, 2009.

⁴ We here do not deepen the relevant concept that passive and active waste, incompetence and corruption, are strategic complements that reinforce each other. This makes the issue of professionalization, also independently of anticorruption competence, relevant also to tackle and abate corrupt practices.

Elisabetta Iossa, Vincenzo Mollisi and Giancarlo Spagnolo this is confirmed: the authors argue, looking at the US public procurement market, that *“a one standard deviation increase in competence reduces cost overruns by 29 percent and the number of days of delay by 23 percent. It also reduces by half the number of renegotiations. This implies that, if all federal bureaus were to obtain NASA’s high level of competence (corresponding to the top 10 percent of the competence distribution), delays in contract execution would decline by 4.8 million days and cost overruns would drop by \$6.7 billion over the entire sample analysed”*⁵.

Passive waste is intended to be any action which does not provide a personal benefit but it is rather caused by the lack of skills of the procurement personnel, the lack of incentives that public officials have in order to minimise costs and the excessive regulatory burden that hinders the simultaneous implementation of discretion and efficiency during the procurement process. Bandiera, Prat and Valletti outlined the causes of the misuse of public money and, after performing a policy experiment in Italy, affirmed that passive waste accounted for 83% of the total estimated waste.

Ten years after this study passive waste still remains an issue to be tackled and professionalization may be its solution. The following paragraphs illustrate the approach of the European Union to professionalization in public procurement and provide evidence from a practical case study.

2. Professionalisation Of The Procurement Function In The European Union

The EU acknowledged in its Directive 24/2014 the presence of a [...] *“strong trend emerging across Union public procurement markets towards the aggregation of demand by public purchasers, with a view to obtaining economies of scale, including lower prices and transaction costs, and to improving and professionalising procurement management[...]*”⁶ but it waited three years more to approve a recommendation on the professionalisation of the public procurement profession.

Unlike Directive 24/2014, in its Recommendation 2017/1805 the European Commission does not draw a link among the emerging trend of demand aggregation and professionalisation of the procurement function. As a matter of fact, the Recommendation is addressed to all Member States regardless the type of procurement system – either centralised or decentralised – they adopt⁷. Indeed, the 2017/1805 preamble (7) states that [...] *“However, under their centralised or decentralised procurement system, Member States should further encourage and support contracting authorities/entities in rolling out professionalisation initiatives”* [...].

⁵ Decarolis, F., Giuffrida, L. M., Iossa, E., Mollisi, V. and Spagnolo, G. “Bureaucratic Competence and Procurement Outcomes”. Working Paper 24201; <http://www.nber.org/papers/w24201>.

⁶ Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC. Official Journal L 94, 28.3.2014, p. 65–242, Preamble 59.

⁷ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2017/1805 of 3 October 2017 on the professionalization of public procurement — Building an architecture for the professionalization of public procurement. Official Journal L 259, 7.10.2017, p. 28–31, Preamble (7).

By approving Recommendation 2017/1805 the EU Commission further recognised the role of public procurement *“to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”*⁸ in national environments characterised by the need for digitalisation, innovation and sustainability. Such needs unfortunately in the mind of many collide with the availability of limited budgets for public investment, but in reality, they can be more than met by the efficient use of public procurement through the removal of passive waste.⁹

The Recommendation defines the objective of professionalisation of public procurement as “the overall improvement of the whole range of professional skills and competences, knowledge and experience of the people conducting or participating in tasks related to procurement”¹⁰. The definition is based on a holistic and strategic approach to be embedded in national policy architectures that foster the professionalisation of public administrations in order not only to attract, but to develop and retains skills.

To do so, the strategic approach outlined by the European Commission for the professionalisation of the public procurement personnel recommends the creation of both initial and lifelong training programmes which benefit from the cooperation with academia. It also recommends the sharing of knowledge and good practices among practitioners as well as the creation of fora and social networks.

Another aspect of the strategic approach outlined by the Commission is the creation of defined career paths that allow not only for continuous training and improvement of skills and experience but also for incentives linked to the level of responsibility of the procurement personnel. Moreover, the implementation of tools - especially IT tools - and processes for public procurement allow EU Member States to foster the professionalisation of the procurement workforce. Other key aspects mentioned by Recommendation 2017/1805 is the promotion of integrity by means of compliance and transparency measures to be implemented by Member States.

3. IMPPM: The Case Study Of Tor Vergata University Of Rome

Tor Vergata University of Rome, more specifically its Faculty of Economics, is one of the most important centres for procurement in Italy. It has an interdisciplinary team of professors and experts working in the field of public and private procurement and supply chain, which is recognized at the international level for its top quality consultancy and training activities. Moreover, the Faculty offers a wide array of courses and interdisciplinary programs related to procurement at graduate and post-graduate level.

⁸ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2017/1805 of 3 October 2017 on the professionalisation of public procurement — Building an architecture for the professionalisation of public procurement. Official Journal L 259, 7.10.2017, p. 28–31, Preamble (1).

⁹ Indeed Bandiera et al. quantify waste in Italy at almost 2% of GDP, and only for waste due to high prices in goods and services. If we were to extend the calculation of waste to works and to quantities, such percentage may rise further. There is no sense that waste in other countries differs too much from the Italian figures (see for example the quote on the US experience by De Carolis et al. In this paper).

¹⁰ Ibid., Preamble (5).

In 2004 the Faculty launched the 1-year Italian Master in Procurement Management (MPM, *Master in procurement Management - Approvvigionamenti e Appalti*). This postgraduate Master program, which graduated so far more than 500 students now working in private and public organizations mostly in the field of procurement, is entirely taught in Italian, and is designed for young graduates and professionals who wish to have an interdisciplinary training on both public and private procurement. After nine years of experience, in 2013, MPM led to the creation of a wider international project, the International Master in Public Procurement Management (IMPPM). This is a 1-year postgraduate Master program, jointly organized by the Tor Vergata University of Rome and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), with the patronage of the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance. In the Master, the EBRD not only offers grants for public purchasers coming from its countries of operation, but it also contributes to training students by inviting some of its main procurement officers to deliver lectures. Other multilateral development banks, like the African Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank, have also contributed to the program through scholarships for expert public procurers of countries of operation.

Given the complexity of the tasks asked to the public procurement personnel, the IMPPM Master program provides an interdisciplinary training on many aspects the procurement function: negotiation strategies and techniques; legal frameworks and economic principles for effective procurement; organization and strategy of procurement; strategic tools for procurement procedure; economic analysis of the market and cost analysis; integrity and transparency practices; e-procurement. Being an international program, it also provides training on international procurement principles and best practices.

Such education - which covers many aspects of the public procurement process - is addressed to professionals coming from different parts of the globe who afterwards are going to implement what they learn during the programme in the institutions where they work, according to national laws and regulations in force. Furthermore, once IMPPM Alumni go back to their work activity, Tor Vergata University of Rome facilitates continuous training and the possibility for the exchange of good practices by organising numerous conferences and events (e.g. the Global Procurement Conference and the Interdisciplinary Symposium). The enthusiasm of a multitude of IMPPM Alumni has also brought to the creation of an Alumni Association that supports a wide social network of public procurement experts.

It is in this context that in 2018 in Paris during the 3rd Workshop on Contemporary Issues in Procurement Practice a survey on IMPPM Master program was distributed among the Alumni of the first five editions. The survey was anonymous and aimed at verifying the actual impact of the multidisciplinary training provided for in the professional life of the Alumni. Out of a total of 141 students coming from 31 countries¹¹ – located in Africa, Asia and Europe – the Master Secretariat received 103 responses.

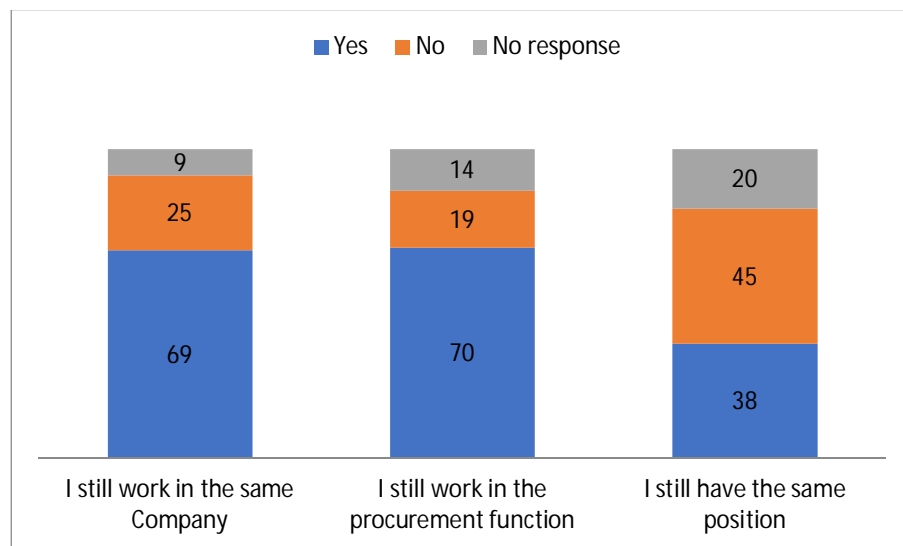
¹¹ Republic of Albania, Republic of Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Republic of Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia, Arab Republic of Egypt, Republic of the Gambia, Federal Republic of Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Republic of Italy, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Latvia, Lebanese Republic, State of Libya, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Kingdom

The survey was structured around 14 questions and below we report the most relevant ones together with the ensuing results and some comments on those.

Question 1: Career Mobility

The first question was related to the career mobility of the Alumni, who were asked to indicate whether - after having completed the Master program - they still work in the same company, still work in the procurement function, have the same position or a higher one. The purpose was to check if indeed, at least within this sample, greater capacity building in public procurement generates 1) upward mobility in terms of career recognition within one's institution and 2) greater attractiveness from other outside institutions. We also wanted to check if, after a period of capacity building, institutions would take advantage of such greater knowledge and keep the employee within the procurement function.

Figure 1 – Question 1



The results show that 73% of the Alumni that completed the questionnaire and answered this question still work in the same company or institution and that 79% of them still work in the procurement function¹² and therefore do procurement related activities. It is interesting to see that among the 45 Alumni that declared to have changed position 62% (28 people) have a higher one (from an additional question not shown here) and out of those 57% (16 of them) still work within the same institution. It is obviously not possible to affirm that changes in job positions or institutions are directly correlated to the successful attendance of the Master program even though these results seem to provide *prima facie* evidence of its impact.

of Morocco, Republic of Namibia, Republic of Belarus, Romania, Russian Federation, Republic of Serbia, Slovak Republic, Taiwan, Republic of Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine.

¹² The procurement function may include procurement-related job positions such as: legal counsels; buyers; category managers; project managers.

The fact that a majority of Alumni still remains in the same company can be probably explained by the human resource investment done by the employers that have supported former students in attending the Master program. A majority also remains in the procurement function; this too can be related to the advantages for the employer of making use of the increased specialization of the procurement professional on the activities linked to the procurement function.

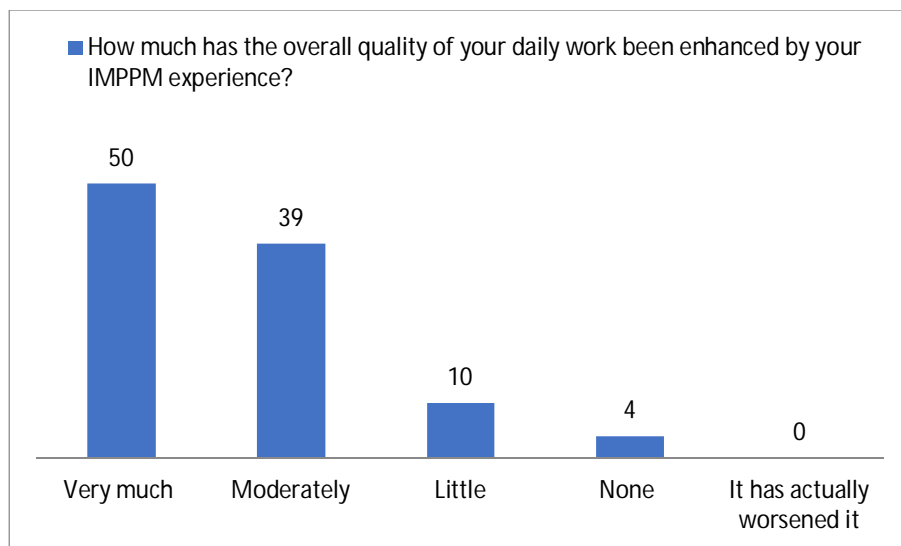
However, if one analyses the cluster of students that answered “yes” to the first two questions (47 students that work in the same company and same function), we can observe a low level of inside career mobility within the same procurement function. In this case career mobility is intended as a change in the position within that function when the student remains in the same Company. Indeed, only 36% of such students (17 persons) have changed position and among those 65% have a higher one. Therefore, generally speaking, the relatively few that have changed position within the same company have often perceived this change as a promotion.

Moreover, if one analyses the smaller cluster of students that declared not to work in the same company but to still work in the procurement function (18 persons), one can observe a high level of career mobility related to their job position. In fact, 83% (15 persons) of them declares to have changed position and, among those, 67% declares to have a higher one. In this case, we can observe that a change of employer increases the probability to change the job position as well as the one to obtain a higher one. It seems they have moved in order to take advantage of new opportunities.

Question 2: Overall quality of the daily work

The second question was about the performance of the daily work after the IMPPM experience.

Figure 2 – Question 2



None of the participants to the survey declared that the overall quality of their daily job has worsened after IMPPM. 86% of the former students either declared that the overall quality had “very much” or “moderately” been enhanced. Some of the comments linked to the responses “none” or “little” show that these former students do not actually work in the procurement function

anymore. This points to a tremendous “soft” impact of the acquired professionalization, in terms of personal satisfaction, independently of formal recognitions. This could be related to greater understanding of one’s role in the institution and society, greater collaboration and/or leadership within the internal team, greater recognition, greater capacity to engage in network-related activities.

One of the respondents actually points out the fact that being IMPPM an international program it is difficult in some cases to implement at the national/local level what has been learned. Some other comments that are worth highlighting are that the notions taught during the program have helped some Alumni to “see the bigger picture” of procurement activities and to understand complex procurement procedures. Indeed, four different comments contained the word “confidence” related to the impact of the increased understanding of the procurement function.

Question 3: Salary Variation

Question 3 of the survey was related to the change of the yearly salary after having attended the Master program. The purpose of this question was to check whether employers tend to implement economic incentives for the procurement personnel that undergoes a professionalisation program. The question was therefore about the correlation between salary variation and the attendance to the IMPPM Master Program.

20% (21 persons) of the former students stated that IMPPM contributed “very much” to influence the change of their yearly salary, 25% (26 persons) chose the answer “moderately”, 22% (23 persons) “little” and 32% (33 persons) affirmed that IMPPM did not contribute to their change of yearly salary.

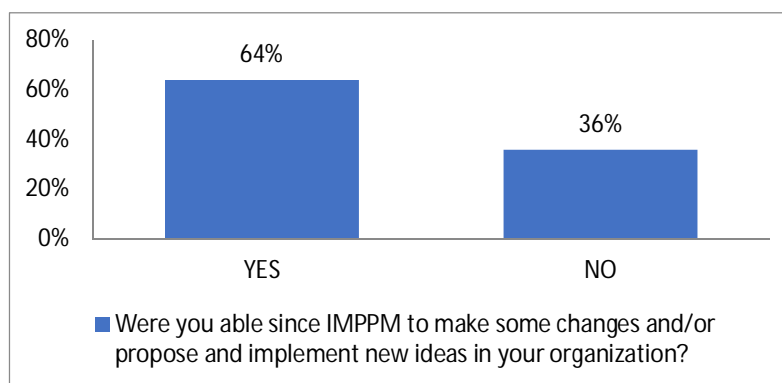
If one analyses the cluster of Alumni who answered “very much” to Question 3, we observe that 81% (17 out of 21 persons) declared to have a higher position and that only 14% (3 persons) declared not to work in the procurement function anymore. In addition, always within the same cluster of Alumni, we observe that 52% declares not to work anymore for the same company whereas 33% declares to still work within the same company (the remaining Alumni not replying). We can therefore assume that the Alumni that affirmed that the Master program highly contributed to their change of yearly salary usually have higher positions and keep working within the procurement function thus taking advantage of their further specialization. More than 50% does not work for the same company and therefore we can assume that in their case retention policies and economic incentives put in place by their previous employers were not enough in comparison with the higher specialization acquired.

The abovementioned observations seem to be confirmed by a further analysis of the cluster of Alumni who answered “none” to Question 3. These Alumni affirmed a lack of correlation between their salary variation and the attendance of the IMPPM Master Program. Out of 33 Alumni, only 2 persons declared to have a higher position; one works for the same company and the other does not; both of them still work within the procurement function. Further comparing Question 3 and Question 1, we observe that 82% of them (27 persons) still work for the same company, 15% have changed company (5 persons) and one person did not reply. It is not possible to affirm that the former students who have answered “none” to Question 3 did not have any upward variation of their yearly salary (as it could have been, in their mind, unrelated to the IMPPM attendance). Nevertheless, it is important to observe that the majority of the former students that did not affirm

a correlation between such variation and the attendance of the professionalisation program still works for the same company or institution. One possibility is that the home organization cannot implement wage raises related to attending a Master, also explaining why many who had a raise wage connected to the Master attendance have had to leave their organization. In this case – following their investment in the capacity building of employees – employers should possibly find further specific economic incentives as part of their retention policies.

Question 4: Bring the Change

Figure 3 – Question 4



Question 4 refers to the capacity of graduated students to matter operatively within their institution after the achievement of the degree.

The histogram speaks for itself. 64% of the former students declared that they had had the possibility to make some changes or implement new ideas within their organization. The result is surprising if we consider that public procurement institutions are, in the mind of many, often associated to high levels of bureaucracy and rigid processes.

Alumni were asked to comment their answer. Not many Alumni that declared they were not able to make some changes or implement new ideas within their institution commented their answer. Generally speaking, it was observed that either they went through a recent change of company/institution or that there is not much room for change within the institution. Also, these former students pointed out the lack of opportunity to propose new ideas and in some cases the fact that the job position and the type of tasks performed do not allow to implement new ideas.

Among the ones that declared to have been able to make some changes or implement new ideas, the most recurrent theme was the implementation of e.Procurement. Also, other former students mentioned the modification of forms and internal procedures, the implementation of procurement procedures that had scarcely or not been used before (such as framework agreements). Some other comments were related to the implementation of the principles of transparency, competition and anti-collusion practices. Some comments were also related to the implementation of capacity building and training measures at company level.

Going more into detail, it can be interesting to compare the answers to Question 2 and to Question 4. If one analyses the cluster of former students that declared that they were able to bring a change

within their organization we can observe that 57.5% of such students also declared that the overall quality of their daily job had been very much enhanced by the IMPPM experience. On the contrary, if one analyses the cluster of students that answered “no” to Question 4 we can further observe that only 32% declared that the overall quality of their daily job had been very much enhanced by the same experience. Therefore, we can speculate that there is a tight link between the possibility to impact within the home organization and the increase of the overall quality of the daily job of former students.

Question 5-6: Relevant topics

Question 5 asked former students whether there are other fields or topics that can be useful during a career in procurement and that were not covered during the program. 42% answered positively and suggested additional topics that could be covered during the Master.

The two main suggestions were related to contract management and to the importance of practical cases studies in order to better understand how to implement the notions learned. Also, procurement of innovation and green public procurement implementation were mentioned.

It is also important to highlight an anonymous comment, which is related to integrity and transparency practices:

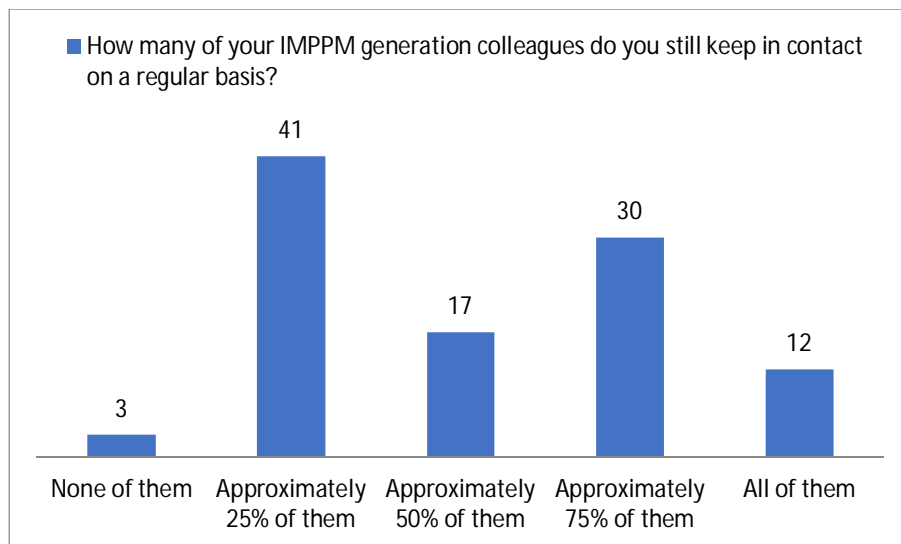
“During my study in Italy, one question was in my mind all the time; can we protect a public procurement officer from the public authorities themselves, where he/she is working? If yes, how? In fact, this matter is very important because when we treated the principle of the protection of any bidder, who decides to cooperate with the public authorities, in order to reveal the colluded procedures in the tenders' system, the main question which remains without a clear answer was: how can we protect the public officers from the sanctions of the system itself, when this system is totally corrupted?” – cit. Anonymous

This comment highlights the necessity to implement adequate anticorruption measures in order not only to detect unlawful practices but to guarantee adequate protection and anonymity to the person who uses whistleblowing mechanisms. At the same time, it points to a cultural heterogeneity among different institutions that could prove capable of nullifying outright the impact of professionalization on graduate students.

Question 7-10: Networking

The following questions were related to networking. Alumni were asked with how many colleagues that have attended the same Master course they still keep in touch on a regular basis.

Figure 4 – Question 7



It was interesting to see that - notwithstanding the fact that many students are located in different countries and continents - 29% of them declared to keep in touch with close to 75% of the former students with whom they attended the same class and 12% declared to keep in touch with all such students.

Furthermore, Question 8 asked students to tell whether they have exchanges with other students that attended different editions (years) of the same Master program. 62% replied "yes, sometimes", 10% replied "yes, a lot" and 28% replied "no, never".

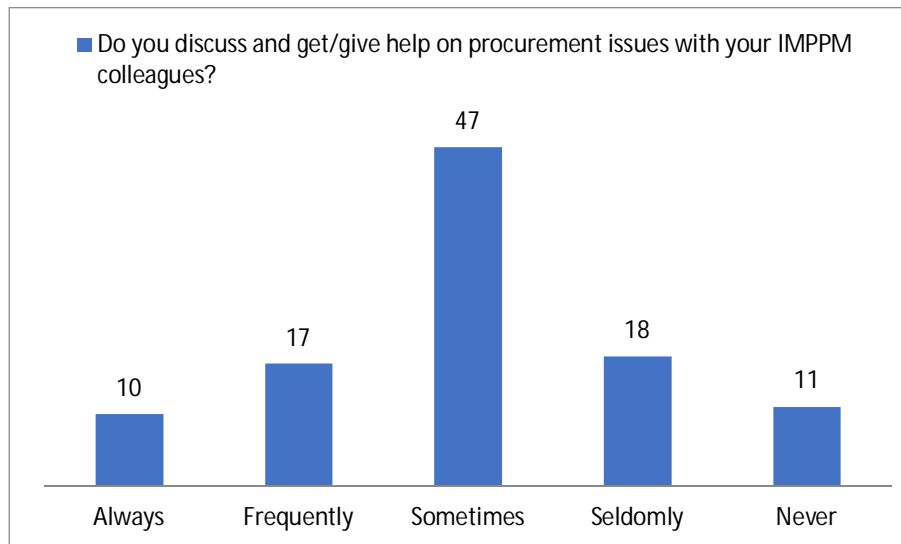
What we observe is therefore the advanced (but not fully complete) creation of a wide social network among procurement professionals that have attended the same edition of the Master program. Such network has also been established among former students that have attended different editions and is likely to create an additional externality which increases the value of an education program in procurement, both at the human and professional level. This pattern of relationships is probably due to several reasons.

Students that come from the same country or that work for the same institution usually get in touch to exchange experiences before one of them is to move to Rome to attend the Program. These students tend to keep in touch also after attending the Program thus establishing an additional, smaller, local network. Another reason is related to the international conferences/workshops and social events organized within the activities of the Master program and of the Alumni Association to which all former students are invited to participate. Moreover, what should not be underestimated is the human aspect linked to an intense Campus life which complements the professional experience. In fact, the majority of students are not Italian and in order to attend the Master program they have to live abroad - in Rome - for some months. They have thus to leave their families and to be housed in a University campus, all together. Therefore, we can conclude that the bond that was created among students was not just due to the creation of study groups

inside or outside class hours but it was also the direct consequence of the sharing of real-life everyday experiences in a challenging culturally new environment.

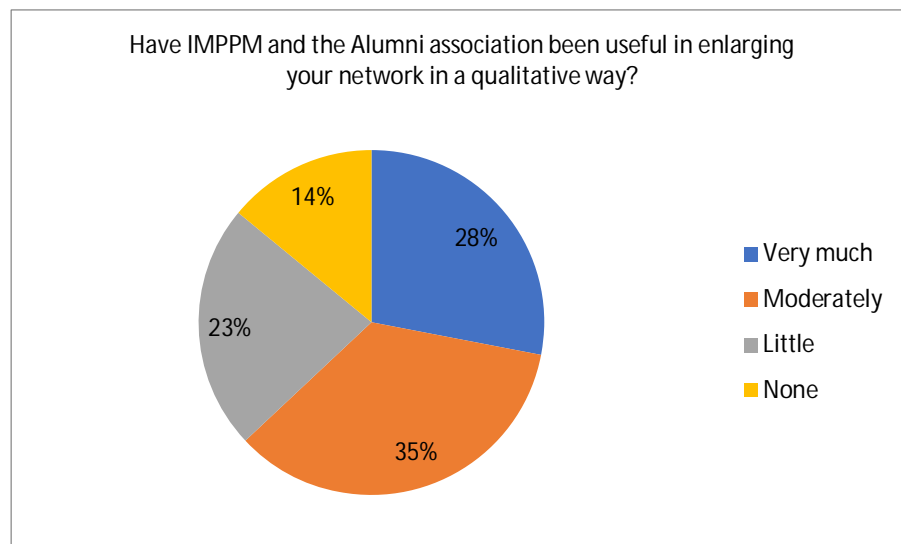
On a similar note, the following question was related to the type of interaction that occurs among former students, and it asked whether they discuss about procurement-related issues. The answers confirm the personal, in addition to professional, bond established among the Alumni as interactions are not always related to procurement topics.

Figure 5 – Question 9



Lastly, Question 10 was related to the role of the Alumni Association and asked former students whether it has been useful in enlarging their network in a qualitative way.

Figure 6 – Question 10



Alumni were given the opportunity to write comments in order to indicate how to improve the role of the Alumni Association in enlarging their network. Few suggested to organize more

international meetings or workshops. On the other hand, more comments suggested the use of a communication platform, fora, or social networks to communicate and/or share ideas given the geographic distance among Alumni. In general terms, participants asked for more opportunities to interact either online or in person.

4. Conclusions and Main Findings

Public procurement is a fundamental instrument for obtaining important savings in the use of taxpayers' money and effectiveness in meeting citizen's demand for public goods of a given quality. In its Directive 2014/24 the European Union considers value for money, equal treatment, competition and transparency as key principles for the implementation of public procurement activities. Moreover, OECD recommends the sound use of public procurement for the achievement of policy goals which are related to the economic, social and environmental aspects of national policies. The role of public procurement in achieving such principles and objectives appears to be internationally recognised and is implemented at the national level by many States.

In order for the abovementioned role of public procurement to be not only recognised but also efficiently implemented, it is necessary to approve adequate laws and regulations at the national and/or subnational level. However, this is not enough. Rules and regulations are implemented every day by professionals that perform procurement-related tasks and need to be aware of the importance and of the complexity of their job. For this reason, professionalisation of the public procurement workforce is becoming more and more a key issue for companies and institutions. As was mentioned already in 2015 by Joachim Nunes de Almeida: *"the EC is developing a policy to promote professionalization of public buyers. The policy will include inter alia professionalisation plans, promotion of defined training schemes, capacity building and exchange of best practice. Market intelligence, business skills and a focus on skills must become the heart of public purchasing. In short, public procurement needs to become a business skill - rather than an inefficient (at best) or corrupt (at worse) administrative endeavour"*¹³.

So the question is: what kind of professionalization is really needed? In what environment? And how should we invest in professionalizing people?

Starting from this last question, the results of the case study with regard to incentives and career paths show that the procurement workforce that attends a capacity building program usually remains in the same company and continues working in the procurement function holding the same job positions. Few Alumni that did not change company after attending the Master Program have changed position within the same procurement function and the ones that underwent such change usually perceived it as a promotion.

Notwithstanding the low level of internal career mobility, one can observe that the human resources investment done by employers in supporting the capacity building of procurement professionals is confirmed by the fact that almost 80% still performs procurement related activities. Moreover, when it comes to economic incentives, which may be conceived as part of

¹³ Piga G., Tátrai T. (2015). Public Procurement Policy. Series The Economics of Legal Relationships, Routledge, p.5.

broader retention policies, only a small percentage of Alumni did not recognize a link between their salary variation and the attendance of the capacity-building program. Based on the results, we can infer that companies keep investing in the procurement workforce that has been trained, as the majority of these employees neither changes company nor job function. However, it is important to note that an upward change in position is more likely to occur when the procurement professional changes employer. The results of the case study should be read taking into account the peculiarities of the public sector - which is usually considered less flexible in comparison with the private sector in terms of salary and job position variations - as the majority of the Alumni works within the public sector.

In line with the responses, a capacity building program for procurement professionals should take into account many aspects of the procurement process in order to blend the practical and theoretical aspects of the tasks performed. Indeed, if one observes the description of a procurement process in all of its phases it can be noticed that a procurement professional is asked to know and implement notions related to different disciplines (e.g. law, economy, statistics, social sciences). Also, being procurement embedded in complex processes, its related activities require interaction and cooperation among different functions that hold different competencies within the same company or institution.

As Decarolis, Giuffrida, Iossa, Mollisi and Spagnolo recently stated in their working paper "Bureaucratic Competence and Procurement Outcomes": [...] *"Cooperation in the bureau seems to be by far the most important component of bureau competence in terms of the effects on procurement performance."* [...] As a matter of fact, given the interdisciplinarity and the complexity of public procurement activities, cooperation is indeed a crucial element that needs to be taken into account for the efficient performance of such activities. It is in this light that the abovementioned working paper highlights that existing certification programs mainly target individual contracting officers and therefore might not be sufficient.

Capacity building in public procurement based on interdisciplinary – and international - university programs can bring together professionals of different ages, university backgrounds, and cultures to confront on the principles at the base of their daily job activities. Such programs should provide students with a comprehensive view of public procurement in order to allow them to frame the job activities they perform within a bigger picture. This can bring more confidence, job satisfaction and improve the overall quality of the daily job allowing professionals to understand their role in the achievement of wider policy objectives as stated in some comments highlighted in the analyzed case study.

To this regard, it is important to mention the results of Question 4 of the survey: more than 60% of the Alumni declared to have had the possibility to matter operatively by making some changes or implementing new ideas within their organization. The capacity to innovate and suggest new solutions is a peculiarity of employees equipped with a wide vision of the frame where their job activities stand. These results might seem surprising if we consider that many public institutions are in the mind of many associated to high levels of bureaucracy and rigid processes. However, it might one way to provide job satisfaction to skilled individuals there where other rigidities do not allow for other types of more direct remunerations; whether these satisfactions are enough to retain the same individual is another issue.

University environments are the places where it is possible to receive interdisciplinary training in order to obtain such a broad and comprehensive vision. They may be considered as "playgrounds" where students tend to feel at ease and at the same level regardless of the qualification or job position they hold. Such feeling allows students to confront on job-related topics in an open manner getting to know different ways in which procurement activities can be performed and implemented.

However important in the working life of an employee such university programs might be, learning is a continuous process and outlasts the time of a professionalisation program. This continuous process on one side is definitely encouraged by the creation of professional social networks which allow Alumni to confront on a regular basis on different topics related to their job activities. On the other side, continuous learning processes need to be supported by employers who should incentivize the implementation of the notions learned and recognize - when it is the case - the value added brought by the employee who undergoes a continuous learning process.