

Interview with Mark Dickson

Chair, Board of Directors
Project Management Institute



Interviewed by İpek Sahra Özgüler
Istanbul, Turkey

Mark Dickson has more than 30 years of experience in managing and leading multi-disciplinary teams and has been a Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] credential holder since 1998. Mr. Dickson's global experience covers a broad range of endeavors, including project and program management, business management, and advisory services for government and commercial clients. He has worked in the defense, infrastructure, transport, building, information systems, urban development, and resource industries; planning and delivering projects and programs in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Australia. Mr. Dickson has led teams delivering relatively small projects through to multi-billion dollar programs.

As a volunteer with PMI, he completed a six-year term on the PMI Certification Governance Council, the body overseeing PMI certifications and credentials, including two terms as Chair. Since joining the PMI Board of Directors, he has served on the Board Audit and Performance Oversight Committee (APOC) and as Vice Chair. In 2017, he became the new Chair of the PMI Board.

Mr. Dickson is a graduate of the Royal Military College of Australia. He holds a degree in engineering and is a past Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia. Mr.

Dickson also has a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

İpek Sahra Özgüler (Özgüler): Tell me about yourself and summarize your project management passion in three sentences

Mark Dickson (Dickson): I have more than 30 years of experience in managing and leading multi-disciplinary teams across multiple industries including defense, infrastructure, transport, building, information systems, urban development, and resources. My career has taken me to North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Australia. It has covered a broad range of endeavors, including project and program management, business management, and advisory services for government and commercial clients. Managing projects and people gives me a sense of achievement and the satisfaction of making a difference. There is nothing like the camaraderie of a team working together, each with their own part to play, but combined as a finely tuned and high-performing unit.

Özgüler: Why did you choose project management as a profession?

Dickson: I didn't really choose project management; project management chose me. When I retired from the military I was offered a position as a project manager in a consulting firm. The head of the firm recognized the leadership skills the military provided and how they could be transferred to a technical city and environment. I didn't truly appreciate it at the time, but to me the transition was easy and, in hindsight, obvious.

Özgüler: Can you explain your duties as the Chair of PMI's Board of Directors?

Dickson: The PMI Board of Directors is the governing entity of the Project Management Institute and is accountable to the PMI membership as a body. The Board is responsible and accountable for strategic planning and the establishment of policy with respect to the activities of the Institute. The Board also oversees the management, control and supervision of the operations of the Institute. The Chair's role is to lead the board and work with the CEO, who is responsible for delivering the operations of the institute. From to day to day, this means setting the agenda for board meetings, coordinating committee activities, maintaining momentum and focus for board work, and communicating with the board and the CEO.

Özgüler: What is a usual day for a PMI Board Member?

Dickson: Although the directors commit a significant amount of time to their role, it's not a full-time commitment so the Board has delegated to our permanent staff, through

the CEO, the implementation of strategy and the operations of the Institute. We meet five times a year, either in person or by webinar, and each meeting requires prior reading and preparation. The board also has an outreach program and directors will represent the board at a variety of chapter and industry events. It's important to note that members of the Board are selected for their corporate management skills, and not just their project management skills. Professional project skills give context, but management and leadership skills are essential for PMI Board members.

Özgüler: Could you evaluate the 2016 PMI activities and events for the PMWJ readers?

Dickson: PMI maintains an active program to serve our members and the wider project management community. Some of the highlights of 2016 were:

- PMI sponsored the Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act (PMIAA) in the USA. The Act was approved by the U.S. president in 2016 and we should start seeing project management mandated across the U.S. government shortly.
- The PMI Professional in Business Analysis certification (PMI-PBA) was launched in China.
- Three new standards were published: Governance of Portfolios, Programs, and Projects: A Practice Guide; The Construction Extension to the PMBOK; and the Project Manager Competency Development Framework - Third Edition. Work continued on the latest edition of PMI's foundational standards which will be released early in 2017, as well as the new Agile Practice Guide and the Standard For Business Analysis.
- The latest Pulse of the Profession and thought leadership series reports were published; the 2016 theme was benefits realization management.

Özgüler: What are the rising project management trends in the last few years?

Dickson: Project management trends depend to some extent on the industry. In the infrastructure or construction industries, the most significant trend has been the rise of the mega project. Mega projects have capital values in the billions of dollars or even tens of billions of dollars and involve large, complex multidisciplinary and even multicultural teams over a number of years. Owners are looking for a one-stop shop type solution where the delivery of multiple phases and components are amalgamated. Mega projects require more sophisticated project control systems and broader management and leadership skills from the project managers. Project managers can no longer rely only on their specialist technical skills and need to be able to understand and communicate across disciplines and even industries and lead large teams.

In the information systems and software industries, the most significant trend has been the rise of agile methodologies. Agile methodologies are not mutually exclusive with traditional project management but are a tool to be used in particular circumstances.

The challenge is to balance rapid and adaptive development being responsive to evolving customer requirements with appropriate governance structures.

In many industries project management is becoming seen as an essential business skill and being absorbed into the mainstream. Project management is no longer the domain of isolated specialists: technical and general management staff are expected to have project management competencies to be able to deliver relatively simple projects themselves, and project managers are expected to have business and leadership competencies to be up to deliver more complex projects within the organizational and strategic context.

Özgüler: In the last few years, everything has changed rapidly. Could you describe the future for the project management professionals?

Dickson: Project management is fundamentally about managing change and project managers should see themselves as change agents. In the past, project managers relied on, or were even judged by, their expertise within a particular discipline. Over time, project managers were judged by their ability to master the technical aspects of the science of project management. As project management is absorbed more into the mainstream, more opportunities will arise for project management professionals to capitalize on their project management expertise to become business leaders and carry the project management baton through to senior management, the C-suite and even the board room. That being said, not all project managers will become business leaders, and some may specialise in the science of project management in a similar manner as specialists in other professions. Even so, project management professionals should be able to enable the logistic, administrative, organizational and human implications of their project.

Özgüler: How can the project management professionals adapt themselves to the future?

Dickson: It's essential to know the language of the subject of the project and the stakeholders. As a project manager, I find that most of my time is translating between the various parties. Even within industries, different functions speak different languages – electrical engineers vs civil engineers, for example. You need to know how to ask the questions to determine what you mean. You can't get credibility if you can't talk the language. And you can't lead the project. In looking to the future, it's important not to forget the basics. Functional expertise in your base discipline, a good understanding of related business disciplines and mastery of the science of project management provide the fundamentals to develop your career.

About the Interviewer



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İpek Sahra Özgüler graduated from the Istanbul University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 10 years' experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has managed a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, ICT and aviation sectors and gained broader insights. In addition, she has worked as international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* since 2014.

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