

Interview with David L. Pells¹



David L. Pells is Managing Editor of the *PM World Journal* and Executive Director of the PM World Library. David is an internationally recognized leader in the field of professional project management with more than 35 years of experience on a variety of programs and projects, including energy, engineering, construction, defense, transit, high technology and nuclear security, and project sizes ranging from several thousand to ten billion dollars. He has been an active professional leader in the United States since the 1980s, serving on the board of directors of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) twice. He was founder and chair of the Global Project Management Forum (1995-2000), an annual meeting of leaders of PM associations from around the world.

David was awarded PMI's Person of the Year award in 1998 and Fellow Award, PMI's highest honor, in 1999. He is also an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK; Project Management Associates (PMA - India); and Russian Project Management Association. He is an honorary member of the Project Management Association of Nepal since 2010. From June 2006 until March 2012, he was the managing editor of the globally acclaimed *PM World Today* eJournal. He occasionally provides high level advisory support for major U.S. government programs and global organizations. David has published widely, spoken at conferences and events worldwide, and can be contacted at editor@peworldjournal.net.

The interview was conducted via email in late January 2015 by **Petek Kabakci**, PMP, PMI TR Communications Director and Editor of PMI TR E-Newsletter.

Before answering questions, David offered a few introductory comments.

¹ This interview was conducted via email by Ms. Petek Kabakci on behalf of the PMI Turkey chapter (PMI TR) in January 2015, and subsequently published in the PMI TR eNewsletter in February. The interview was coordinated by Ipek Sahra Özgüler, PMWJ correspondent in Turkey. More about the PMI Turkey chapter can be found at <http://www.pmi.org.tr/c7/>. The interview is republished here with approval of the PMI Turkey chapter.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. I have had four occasions in the past to visit Turkey. In 1994, I returned to the USA from a business trip to Russia via Sochi and Istanbul. I had an opportunity to spend a few days in Istanbul at that time, acting as a tourist and visiting some of the most famous sites, meeting my friend Ahmet Taspinar for lunch and a walk along the Bosphorus, and falling in love with the city.

I returned three more times over the years to speak at conferences, the most recent during the IPMA World Congress in Istanbul in 2010. Having a little knowledge about and a lot of interest in Istanbul and Turkey, I have followed economic, political and professional developments there over the years. Based on Turkey's location, size, history, economic trends and other factors, I expect Turkey to be one of the most influential countries in the world during the 21st Century.

Now to your questions.

Petek Kabakci: How do you see future trends in project management?

David Pells: Thank you for this question, which is actually not so easy to answer. First, there is the obvious trend of continued growth of the project management (PM) field as more programs and projects are launched, more organizations recognize the benefits and implement modern PM, and the visibility of the PM profession continues to increase worldwide. Programs and projects exist in every organization now, so the increased adoption of enterprise project management and project portfolio management is also both natural and widespread. More organizations, and entire industries, are being recognized and labeled as project-based, project-oriented or project-focused. The demand for project managers and project management professionals will continue to grow everywhere.

Secondly, the topics within the PM field will continue to increase. Just as PM has been recognized as very similar to general (executive) management, so will the range of responsibilities and requirements continue to expand to reflect that perspective. For example, the team responsible for a greenfield project of any kind must act as general manager for that enterprise, developing and implementing administrative, financial, human resources, operational and other systems, all while planning and implementing the project. In a similar context, project managers and entrepreneurs are engaged in similar activities, those associated with the launch of a project or the launch of a new product or business.

In fact, Russell Archibald in his latest book *Leading and Managing Innovation: What Every Executive Team Must Know about Project, Program & Portfolio Management* (co-authored with Shane Archibald) argues that "all significant innovations today are achieved through projects and programs." These may be reasons why leadership and other soft skills for project managers have grown in importance in recent years. Project management knowledge and skills are really needed by all business leaders.

A third trend may also be obvious. Keeping up with the growth of PM and the wider range of implementations across more industries and organizations, new tools and applications will continue to emerge. This trend of course is also influenced by new technological developments. As the processing capacity and speed of computing and

communications hardware have grown, and the use of mobile and cloud technologies has increased over the last decade, new applications have emerged. That trend will continue, in my opinion. There should be applications and tools to support every aspect of project management, as well as the integrated processing of multiple elements. Enterprise project portfolio management applications will also increase in range, grow in power and come down in price. The executive information systems that I studied in concept at university 40 years ago are finally here. As more organizations become more projectized (project-based), these tools mean more executive sponsorship and executive attention to projects and project management performance. This means that project managers must be both smarter and more careful.

Fourth, the underlying nature of project management as a change management process is leading to the wider recognition and usage of project management for organizational transformations, both large and small. In some places, change management and project management are becoming synonymous. As the rate of change in technologies, industries, societies and environments increases, in part due to various aspects of globalization, organizational changes are both more common and more frequent. Project management, with its emphasis on planning and efficiency, is being embraced as the smartest way to accomplish organizational change “better, faster, cheaper”. If objectives can be defined, and requirements agreed, then organizational change projects should be more successfully achieved using program/project management approaches. This trend is especially apparent in technology, manufacturing, services, government and other product-based organizations.

The final trend that I want to mention is the following. As the popularity and implementation of program and project management have grown in more industries and environments, significant differences are emerging. That is, the projects and PM needs in some industries and organizations are quite different from those in others. For example, PM in construction is quite different than PM in software development. In some cases those differences are based on the nature of the projects, but in some there are quite different cultures, experiences and requirements. In construction, oil & gas, defense, aerospace, shipbuilding, petrochemicals, transportation and other project-based industries, the emphasis will continue to be on traditional PM concepts and applications – such as cost estimating, scheduling, quality, risk, procurement and logistics.

In other industries, for example, information technology, software development, research and development, innovative product development, etc., more flexibility is needed. These are fields where Agile PM is thriving. In all cases, soft skills are needed. But the trend will be wider recognition that one size does not fit all, different models are needed for different industries and types of projects, and PM staff will need to be qualified accordingly. This broad trend is being reflected by the number of different guides and standards being published by the Project Management Institute (PMI®).

There are many more specific trends that could be mentioned, but I think those five are both real and significant.

Kabakci: What are the top three essential soft skills of today's project manager, in your opinion?

Pells: Thank you for this good question as well. Leadership is often cited as the top soft skill for project managers today, but what is leadership? It is sometimes hard to define, and frankly includes many other soft skills. So rather than focus on such a general subject, I would mention the following.

Emotional Intelligence – all projects and programs are accomplished by teams of people. Project managers and project leadership teams must get to know the people on their teams, and not just within the sponsor organization but also the executive stakeholders as people, contractors and suppliers as people, customers and users as people. This can be quite challenging when working on virtual teams, but important nevertheless. More empathetic leaders can generate more support, emotional commitment and energetic performance from team members. What project manager does not want that?

Cultural Intelligence – every project team of any size most likely has some diversity. Cultures can vary by organization, industry, education, geographic location, ethnic group, age group, religious background and other factors. Project managers and project team leaders must become sensitive to those differences, how they might influence behavior or performance, and how to incorporate those factors into project risk management, communications, teambuilding, leadership transition, supply chain management, stakeholder engagement and other processes. Cultural intelligence is therefore also a critical aspect of leadership in today's programs and projects, where it is ever more likely that participants will be in other parts of the world with entirely different histories and cultures.

Passion – the best project managers understand and fully embrace the purpose, mission and objectives for her or his projects. Passionate project leaders instill purpose and commitment among project participants; passion is contagious and powerful. Passionate leadership can even influence project sponsors and external stakeholders, who might not understand the details of the project but who can be won over by passionate explanations of benefits and value. In my experience, passionate project managers are more successful.

I would also like to mention two skills that combine soft skills with technical knowledge: Stakeholder Intelligence and Environmental Intelligence. Stakeholder intelligence encompasses such topics as stakeholder engagement, requirements management, value/benefits management, stakeholder communications, stakeholder management and other related topics that we often see discussed individually.

Environmental intelligence encompasses the information gathering and analysis related to the physical, economic, political, social and industrial conditions surrounding a project, including external stakeholders and trends. These are big topics that deserve more attention as well, but I think I'm running out of space in this interview.

Kabakci: What is the vision for the *PM World Journal*?

Pells: The *PM World Journal* (PMWJ) at www.pmworldjournal.net is an independent online project management publication for sharing knowledge related to program and project management (P/PM) anywhere in the world. The vision is to become a truly global resource for P/PM knowledge sharing and continuous learning, and in the process advance professional project management in more places. My answer to your next question should make that a little more clear.

Kabakci: What would you like to achieve through the *PM World Journal*?

Pells: One of the most important early objectives for the PMWJ was to offer PM professionals and leaders an easier opportunity to share their knowledge and experience – to get published. We also wanted to provide authors of PM articles and papers with more visibility and recognition, which is not always provided by other publications or even the big professional societies. We don't believe that knowledge can so easily be separated from the authors, so we include author profiles with everything we publish, including location and national flags, and have built up a great Author Showcase in the PM World Library (www.pmworldlibrary.net) as a result.

With regards to that first objective, I would also note that authoring an article or papers is one of the best and least expensive options for PMI members to get PDUs for PMP recertification. To have an article or paper published in the PMWJ, just email it to me at editor@pmworldjournal.net. Publication is generally fast and easy.

The second objective was, of course, to publish educational and useful contents each month. This led to a model that includes different categories or types of contents. So we not only publish serious and professionally researched Featured Papers, but also Series Articles (by invited experts), Advisory Articles (how to solve a problem or address PM-related issues), Commentary Articles (personal opinions and perspectives), Case Studies, Student Papers, Personal Stories, Book Reviews, Second Editions and News Articles.

The third objective was to advance the PM profession, especially in organizations and places where PM is not yet well developed or where the needs are greatest. So there is an element of knowledge transfer underlying our model.

We also promote the concept of “global”, meaning global audience (readers in over 100 countries), authors from around the world (from over 50 countries so far), global topics (projects and PM in many countries and industries), and globally independent (covering all professional organizations and standards, PM companies, etc.).

We want to promote and support the use of professional project management in helping solve global problems. This of course leads to the issue of “doing the right project” – this too is an important aspect of project management that needs more attention.

Finally, and of equal importance, the PMWJ is used to create and grow contents for the PM World Library (PMWL), our global resource for continuous learning related to P/PM. All works published in the PMWJ, and all authors published, are archived in the PMWL.

The PM World Collection in the PMWL now contains over 1,200 original works, all searchable with a robust multi-dimensional key word/topic model. The Author Showcase in the PMWL now contains profiles of more than 550 authors, with direct access to their works in the library.

Kabakci: How does the PMI Turkey Chapter look, from your perspective?

Pells: I have been very happy to learn more about the PMI Turkey Chapter. Like many other PMI chapters around the world, PMI Turkey plays a critical role in bringing international standards and knowledge to local professionals and organizations. By making PMI standards, products and information more visible in Turkey, the potential positive impact can be very important – both to local enterprises and to the Turkish economy.

In addition, the PMI Turkey Chapter provides an opportunity for Turkish PM professionals to advance their careers, both through education and participation. As a former PMI chapter president, I know personally how beneficial it can be to get involved in a local chapter. Volunteer leaders can learn more about project management, meet influential PM leaders at both local and international levels, and find new career opportunities.

It can be a big challenge for a single chapter to represent an entire country, especially a nation the size of Turkey. It will be a challenge to increase membership and produce events and benefits in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and other major cities. Istanbul itself is a huge city, with thousands of projects underway. So I commend the PMI Turkey Chapter for rising to these challenges.

Kabakci: What would be your message to project managers in Turkey?

Pells: My main message to project managers everywhere is that while project management requires both technical knowledge and leadership, most importantly it requires teamwork. Few projects of any significance are achieved by just one person. Most projects involve teams, and large programs and projects can involve hundreds of participants. This is why the soft skills matter so much – communications, emotional intelligence, stakeholder intelligence, conflict management, teambuilding and leadership. Without effective teams, few project managers will be successful. Recognize and treat team members as human beings, motivate and reward them, and you will be more successful.

My second main point is to commit to continuous learning. With the wide variety of programs, projects, applications, standards, methods, issues, conditions and experiences in the world today, it is impossible to learn enough through either courses or experience alone. We must all continue to learn from others. This helps us stay abreast of changes, risks and good practices, which should be useful to everyone in the PM business.



*Photo from the Asian side of Istanbul taken in April 2010,
after David Pells spoke at the DYNAMICS 2010 conference*

This interview first appeared in the PMI TR newsletter, which includes a full range of articles and stories about project management in Turkey and information about the PMI TR volunteer management team. The full URL for the PMI TR newsletter is <http://pmi.org.tr/c7/images/e-dergi/subat2015/PDF/PMI-Turkiye-E-Dergi-15-02.pdf>

The **PMI Turkey Chapter** (PMI TR) is a component of the Project Management Institute (PMI®), the world's largest member-based project management professional organization. PMI TR represents PMI in Turkey, sponsors activities and events in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir (and other Turkish cities), and offers educational and professional development resources to project management professionals in Turkey. For more information, go to <http://www.pmi.org.tr/c7/>