

Interview with Deena Gordon Parla, PMP¹

Chair of the Strategy Development and Oversight Committee
PMI Board of Directors



*Interviewed by Petek Kabakci, PMP, PCC
PMI Turkey Chapter*

Ms. Deena Gordon Parla, PMP, has extensive leadership experience in strategy development, business transformation, and project/program/portfolio management, primarily in the ICT, pharmaceutical, R&D, energy and defense industries. This includes delivery of projects for global multi-national corporations, governmental and not-for-profit organizations in North America and EMEA who are seeking to close the gap between strategy and execution. She is currently engaged with CXO level clientele for delivery of program assurance services to organizations undertaking strategic mergers/acquisitions. She also teaches project management at the Middle Eastern Technical University in Turkey.

For the non-profit sector, she established an organizational relationship between PMI and the American Red Cross to more rapidly progress their project management maturity. Previously at Booz & Co, she worked with CXO level clientele to transform e-business strategies into e-solutions that delivered operational savings and increased market share. She has also served as Secretary, Board of Directors, for the bi-national Turkish American Association-Ankara.

Ms. Gordon Parla has served PMI as a volunteer leader since 2004. Since joining the PMI Board, she has been a member of and is currently the Chair of the Strategy Development and Oversight Committee (SDOC), responsible for guiding the PMI Board's strategic dialogue and planning. She has also worked on strategic initiatives for chapters worldwide, including improved chapter governance processes, reporting, and rollout of the chapter conflict resolution framework. Ms. Gordon Parla is a keynote

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speaker at PM conferences and PMI® Leadership Institute Meetings globally. She graduated from the PMI® Leadership Institute Master Class in 2007.

This interview was conducted by Petek Kabakci, PMP, PCC on behalf of the PMI Turkey Chapter for their bi-monthly Newsletter.

Petek Kabakci (Kabakci): **What makes Organizational Project Management (OPM) a core strategic competency in today's business world?**

Deena Gordon Parla (Parla): Strategic initiatives are realized through projects and programs. Organizations that develop, improve and mature their project management processes increase their competitive advantage and reduce their risk. Without mature organizational PM practices and skilled project talent, organizations lose their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing marketplace. For example, the pharmaceutical industry has faced increasing competition from smaller start-up companies in emerging markets. When a big pharma company faces delays projects to launch a new product to market, they risk erosion of their market position.

Low performance in project management comes at a high cost, especially when stakes are high and resources limited. If you organization is a low performer, it risks 12 times more money than high performing counterparts. On average, 36 percent of projects finish on goal in low performing organizations. In contrast, high performing organizations will see, on average, 89 percent or more projects successfully delivered. (Source: PMI 2014 Pulse of the Profession®)

OPM advances organizational capability by developing and linking portfolio, program, and project management principles and practices with organizational enablers (e.g., structural, cultural, technological, and human resource practices) to support strategic goals. An organization measures its capabilities, then plans and implements improvements toward the systematic achievement of best practices.

Organizations that use a methodology can focus more on the important tasks of leading, innovating and delivering products and services, while at the same time improving efficiency and performance. PMI defines a methodology as a set of customized project management processes to fit objectives, practices and environments.

A methodology usually incorporates and integrates:

Knowledge about how the organization conducts its business, including requirements and processes.

Key aspects of culture and capabilities, as well as environment, industry sector and operational context.

Proven, recognized good practices or techniques and approaches such as those found in the PMBOK® Guide and other PMI standards.

A methodology provides consistency for both project managers and team members. Common tools, templates and other resources help project managers meet goals and team members better understand their roles and contributions.

By adopting and practicing effective Organizational Project Management techniques, companies can create a holistic, high-level blueprint of projects and programs to ensure that every strategic initiative aligns with overall business objectives.

Kabakci: **How do you think new global trends will affect the project management profession?**

Parla: Organizations are recognizing the strategic role of Project Management Offices (PMOs) in implementing their strategy. Successful PMOs are shown by research conducted by Forrester on behalf of PMI to be enablers:

Positively influence business results and deliver value at every level of planning and execution across the organization.

Enable the organization to grow the business through a core set of practices that delivered consistent outcomes.

As global and local economies recover from last decade's recession, new complex projects are being initiated in numerous industries - including construction, healthcare, information technology, and energy.

The need for skilled project professionals able to deliver larger, more complex projects is therefore growing at an accelerated pace. Between now and 2020, 1.5 million new project management roles will be created each year – with no one available to fill them. Research conducted by the Manpower Group revealed globally, about three-quarters of employers cited a lack of experience, skills or knowledge as the primary reason for the struggle to hire appropriate workers.

Organizations will need to address the growing gap with more aggressive recruitment campaigns and more robust programs for talent development and retention. According to PMI's Thought Leadership Series: Spotlight on Success - Developing Talent for Strategic Impact, on-the-job learning has become the cornerstone of developing project management skills and is valued in many organizations more than any other form of development. This approach gives talent the chance to hone skills while gaining the credibility needed to effectively lead a project team.

Organizations will look to develop talent and build an organizational culture around the value of mature project and program management practices through:

Ongoing sharing of lessons learned and good practices across the organization

Developing project management talent from other parts of the organization, especially those with demonstrated leadership and cross-cultural/multilingual skills.

Provide opportunities for staff to apply new skills in stretch assignments.

Adapt to mobile workforce needs and providing work-life balance opportunities such as teleworking.

When an organization's project portfolios are aligned with strategic goals, every project assignment offers people chances to demonstrate and grow the skills most valued by the organization.

Kabakci: **We believe that project management profession can be a potential career path to C-level management. What are your thoughts on this?**

Parla: Projects are ultimately about people working together towards a common set of objectives. Project management as a discipline gives us processes and tools to effectively coordinate the activities of the project team. Delivery of innovative, impactful projects goes beyond processes and tools. The differentiator is the leadership and business acumen skills of the project team collectively:

Is the team inspired and do they trust each other?

Do they have a shared understanding of how their project aligns with the organization's strategic objectives? Ability to think strategically and relate to the business side of the organization is as important as their ability to create accurate budgets and timelines.

Are the leadership skills developed in the areas of conflict resolution and stakeholder management?

As project professionals take on larger, more complex strategic initiatives with increased resources and responsibilities, the traditional role of project manager has evolved to that of project leader. With a higher the cost in terms of resources and market position lost when projects fail, successful project leaders are those with the experience and flexibility to deliver projects at the same pace as the organization is changing, in addition to strong leadership and cross-cultural communication skills, is needed to adapt to and thrive in an increasingly complex, global environment.

In developing additional skills, these individuals are becoming more qualified to take the reins of their organizations at higher levels of management. We are already seeing this trend in the IT sector with the CIO role, which is being filled by professionals with direct experience in leading technology project teams.

Additionally, C-Level managers with experience successfully delivering complex strategic initiatives are well suited to fill project/program Executive Sponsor roles.

Kabakci: **Globalization brings crosscultural project management into focus. Which skills should team members have as part of an effective multicultural project team?**

Parla: The environment we deliver projects and programs in continues to grow more complex and global. As a result, there is growing demand for talent - often described as global citizens adept at blending leadership skills (inspire, collaborate, communicate), business acumen, and technical knowledge.

Flexibility, open-mindedness, communication, and emotional intelligence (EI) are key skills needed for effective multicultural project teams. These skillsets enable the project team to adapt to new or unfamiliar work environments, reflect unique cultural considerations, as well as remain aligned across different geographic time-zones and communication preferences.

Kabakci: **What do you recommend to new project management professionals?**

Parla: Practitioners who are just beginning their career should strive to obtain as many hours of real-world project experience as possible, whether through volunteer/outreach programs or on-the-job training. In addition, aspiring project professionals should seek out any mentorship or apprenticeship opportunities offered by their employer or institution. The key is to never stop learning; even seasoned project managers can add new skills, or refine existing ones, as the project management profession evolves to meet emerging business challenges.

There are resources such as projectmanagement.com and PMI's chapters for ongoing professional development. The PMI Turkey chapter, in particular, offers networking, learning and mentoring opportunities to its members.

PMI Turkey works as a non-profit association with support of volunteers. PMI Turkey is focusing on increasing of awareness of project management, supplying project management in every disciplines that accepts it as a profession, spreading out and improving project management practices and theories, encouraging total quality and professionalism in project management, protecting and encouraging standards, ethics and accreditations conditions in project management in Turkey.

PMI Turkey is a reference point for project management knowledge exchange. Thus it completed works on translating PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) and PMP certification exam set into Turkish in order for project managers in Turkey to improve their competency. PMI Turkey has more than 600 members from various sectors in particular Information Technologies (IT/IS), Finance, Telecommunication, defense and public sectors. For more information, visit <http://www.pmi.org.tr/>

PMI Turkey is a chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI^R), the world largest professional member association serving the project management profession. For more about PMI, go to <http://www.pmi.org/>