

Interview with Aldo Gebbia

**Senior Vice President, Saipem S.p.A.
President of IPMA Italy**



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The evolution of Project Management: current trends, best practices and future challenges

Introduction

Starting this month we are launching a new initiative, a series of featured interviews with prominent players in the field of project management: they will share with us the state of the art of the discipline here in Italy, considered as one of the most promising profession in the coming years. We will have the pleasure to host different professionals, from business, academia and other industries, to understand how projects are managed, comparing the different approaches and highlighting the characteristics of each.

As a first guest we have the pleasure to welcome Aldo Gebbia, Senior Vice President of Saipem SpA and President of IPMA Italy.

Luca Cavone (Cavone): Aldo, let's start with a quick introduction about yourself, can you share with our readers your professional background?

Aldo Gebbia (Gebbia): Sure, and first of all let me thank you and PMWJ for interviewing me!

I am a mechanical engineer graduated at Naples University, and I have spent my entire professional career in Saipem, an Oil & Gas Contractor in which Eni SpA holds a 43% stake.

My job has taken me around the world, taking part and then leading offshore projects for a number of multinationals and national oil companies. I have then assumed general management duties in Italy and abroad, but never distancing myself from cultivating the discipline of Project Management, which is at the root of Saipem's *modus operandi*.

I've been one of the founding members and then President of the Rome PMI Chapter in Italy and also now as President of IPMA Italy I'm seeking to continue my support to the promotion of the project management culture.

Cavone: Based on your long experience in managing projects, especially in Oil & Gas industry, what kind of evolution and changes did you observe over these years?

Gebbia: Certainly the "management of the complexity" has become the name of the game! This in turns has determined a dramatic change of the profile and of the competencies needed, I mean skills like:

- Ability to coordinate large project teams and to integrate their work with the company's permanent structures;
- multi-faceted competencies such to allow to harness and bring to fruition different specialist contributions;
- strength and determination to pursue the ultimate project goals in an evolving context;
- constant attention to the ever changing risk scenario and readiness to develop robust and adaptive mitigation actions;
- timely outreach and understanding of all the project stakeholders roles and expectations.

Modern project leadership requires all this, and more, to determine the project success.

Cavone: These are for sure big challenges: in your opinion, how companies are facing these issues and what did they put in place as best practice?

Gebbia: A distinctive connotation of the most successful companies in recent years has been their investment in the continuing education in project management.

A further element is the commitment to capitalize on the lessons learned, to create a knowledge base such that the experiences often so dearly gained over the years are analysed and defined in their essential 'core' features.

This knowledge base should remain accessible to new generations of project teams, moving beyond the individual legacies that large multinational companies would find very difficult to render effective today.

Cavone: In your opinion, what are the future challenges for Italian companies in short and long term?

Gebbia: As said, I am proud and grateful that my experience has been developed in a global environment and I can only see “being Italian” as a positive, distinctive connotation and a proxy for adaptability, flexibility, ingenuity, and respect for all parties we interact with: host-Country, Client, Partners, Vendors, Stakeholders.

The Italian companies which today are expanding abroad should treasure such distinctive characteristics, such DNA I like to say, while making their project environment abroad genuinely multinational, one in which the best can see their competencies and effectiveness recognized and rewarded irrespective of their nationality or gender.

A further reply to the question may be drawn from observing that in the past some countries seem to have been better structured to support their leading companies in their market penetration and consolidation efforts: hopefully this is changing, but in the meantime we all would do the good of the Italian industry if we are able to create the conditions to facilitate the export and deployment of the best, by pursuing only synergies among intrinsic value propositions.

Cavone: Since the beginning of 2015 you are President of IPMA Italy, what is the contribution that the association can provide?

Gebbia: Contribute to the broadening of the base of professionals and indeed of public employees in Italy, who should understand how vital a robust education in project management is for the effectiveness of their work, even if they are not directly involved in projects.

Ensure that the IPMA Professional Certifications preserve and further foster in this country the recognition that have gained over the years all over the world, and by doing so creating value both, for the professionals seeking international recognition, and for the employers willing to select and retain the best according to international standards.

Cavone: According to some recent research, project management is considered as one of the emerging professions and most searched by job seekers: if you can share few tips to young people interested to this discipline, what would you tell to them?

Gebbia: Yes this is true, and rightfully so: I am very excited that this is gaining maturity and recognition well beyond the conventional turf!

I tell younger, ambitious, and open minded professionals in-the-make to study project management methods and develop their own project management skills, keeping always in their mind that it's not a matter of studying books or passing exams but, ultimately, to develop over the years a better and more mature self, able to understand, interact, and deliver, when tasked on achieving specific and ambitious objectives: that's life, and that's where the reward may come from!

About the Interviewer



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Luca Cavone is a Consultant at JMAC Europe, the Consulting firm of the Japan Management Association. He is mainly focused to support companies in the governance of innovation projects and product development. He has a strong background and expertise in project management methodologies and business practices. Before joining JMAC he had several years of experience in international projects within the aerospace industry. Together with the consulting activities he's involved as a lecturer for masters and university courses on project management and innovation management. Since 2014 he's Adjunct Professor in "Language and Communication Skills for Project Management" at Master in International Business & Economics, University of Pavia.

Since 2009 he has been member of the IPMA (International Project Management Association), for which he has held board positions both a national and international level. He's regularly invited at international conferences to deliver speeches and workshops. Luca joined the PMWJ in 2013 as an international correspondent in Italy; he can be contacted at luca.cavone@tiscali.it.