

Interview with Deena Gordon Parla, PMP

PMI Board of Directors (2013-2015)



Interviewed by Sertug Yilmaz
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 Booze & 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 speaker at PM conferences and PMI® Leadership Institute Meetings globally. She graduated from the PMI® Leadership Institute Master Class in 2007.

Sertug Yilmaz (Yilmaz): Let's begin with a quick introduction. Can you share a little about your professional background with our readers?

Deena Gordon Parla (Parla): I have 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 multinational corporations, government entities and not-for-profit organizations in North America and EMEA that are seeking to close the gap between strategy and execution. Given the global nature of my clientele, I work primarily from Turkey, Washington, D.C. and London. I am currently engaged with C-level clientele for delivery of program assurance services to organizations undertaking strategic mergers/acquisitions.

I recently completed a three-year term on the PMI Board of Directors, including serving as the 2015 Strategy Development Oversight Committee Chair, responsible for guiding strategic dialogue and planning. A PMI volunteer leader since 2004, I worked on strategic initiatives for chapters worldwide, including improved governance processes, performance reporting, and rollout of a conflict resolution framework. I'm also a regular speaker at PM Conferences and PMI® Leadership Institute Meetings globally.

Yilmaz: What were your impressions of the recent PM Summit in Ankara, Turkey?

Parla: It was an impactful, well-organized summit bringing together 300 practitioners representing a wide range of industries, from private, public, and international development sectors. Topics were timely and relevant to the value of our profession and applying PPM practices as an enabler for:

- Managing complexity associated with mega-infrastructure projects (e.g., the 3rd Bosphorus Bridge)
- Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects such as delivery of large (e.g., 3,500-bed) Integrated Health Campuses as part of the current healthcare sector privatization in Turkey
- Agile project delivery in the IT sector
- Knowledge Transfer across public sector and multi-national organizations
- Organizational agility, given Turkey's dynamic economic and geo-political environment

There was a high level of engagement and discussion during break-out sessions as attendees took advantage of opportunities to share experience and insights with other professionals tackling similar challenges.

Yilmaz: The continued global growth of the project management profession is also evident here in Turkey. What advice do you have for project managers in Turkey?

Parla: The environment in which we deliver projects and programs 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.

My advice is to balance development of “hard skills” with the essential “soft skills” needed for effective multicultural project teams. These include flexibility, open-mindedness, communication, and emotional intelligence (EI). These competencies enable the project team to adapt to new or unfamiliar work environments, reflect unique cultural considerations, be innovative, as well as remain aligned across different geographic time-zones and communication preferences.

Turkey’s very young population, (compared to Europe and North America) and geographical location bridging “East” and “West” position its workforce as an asset for multi-cultural, geographically dispersed projects.

Yilmaz: What will be some of the new developments in strategic project/portfolio management over the next 5 years?

Parla: A true understanding of projects as the drivers of strategy implementation could change the game for program and portfolio management. The gap that currently exists in the minds of executives around the strategic value of this discipline is likely to close over the next 3-5 years. With the complex portfolios associated with global events, there is an increased use of program and portfolio management practices as the foundation for seamless integration between investment decisions, effective use of enterprise resources, and the implementation of the strategic initiatives that they represent. Program and portfolio managers will play a more prominent role in ensuring the alignment between projects and organizational strategy.

Yilmaz: How have you seen the development of the PMO and portfolio management evolve over the past few years?

Parla: As businesses begin to undertake more complex projects and develop programs to manage them, the role of the PMO has become much more visible. Where the project office was once viewed simply as an internal monitoring and compliance entity, organizations are now looking to their PMO as a strategic resource. All strategic change is driven by projects and programs, and once an organization makes the vital connection between project/program management and business strategy, they can incorporate vision and experience from their PMO into long-term business planning. The PMO also serves as the central resource for organizational knowledge transfer.

Yilmaz: Strategy remains vitally important for organizations. However, many of them are still unsure how a successful strategy should look. What makes a good strategy, and what should it deliver?

Parla: To begin with, a business strategy should be realistic and executable, with clearly stated goals and measurable results. Establishing an actionable strategic roadmap allows program managers to select the right mix of initiatives and effectively tailor a program to align with the vision of the executive team and project planners. To be successful, the strategy should deliver tangible benefits such as an increase in

revenue or market share, a decrease in overhead and waste, or reduction in time-to-market for subsequent products or initiatives.

Yilmaz: Strategy and portfolio management are linked together to define clear goals and objectives. How do we make these meaningful to our organizations?

Parla: Strategic objectives become meaningful when they drive innovation and create value across an organization once achieved. Demonstrating this value begins with effective communication across stakeholder groups, and a well-defined reporting structure that continually reinforces the connection between project processes and their related business outcomes. By then aligning multiple projects in a portfolio to a set of tangible and measurable business objectives, the organization can effectively link project implementation with long-term benefits realization.

About the Interviewer



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Sertug Yilmaz, PMP is working as a project manager in Istanbul. He has specialized in the field of project and portfolio management. He studied Management Information Systems in Turkey and has more than 9 years of project related work and leadership experience. He has served in various positions in the IT services of airports in Turkey, most recently as project manager of the TAV Information Technologies.

His professional background includes major projects in aviation systems, IT Infrastructure and Construction IT infrastructure. He lives close to Istanbul and can be contacted via ssertugyilmaz@gmail.com.