

Interview with Marc Tassé Secretary General and Executive Director of PMI Mongolia Chapter



Interviewed by Kamil MROZ, PRINCE2 TRAINER

IPMA Young Project Manager 2013
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Mark Tassé is Resident Managing Director of the [American Center for Mongolian Studies](#) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Since assuming that leadership in 2013, he has conducted an operational assessment and re-structuring of the organization by redefining core mission, streamlining current services and programs, and capitalizing on core competencies. He tripled grant revenues through development of new programs, services, attracting new funders and operational partners based on the expanded capacity and focus on core competencies; hosted international Mongolian Rangeland conservation conference resulting in several new research initiatives focusing on Mongolian climate, ecological and agricultural impacts; established the organization's first Public Private Partnership with Oyu Tolgoi LLC and Royal Roads University establishing a successful ongoing community based SME business development program in the South Gobi Desert region.

Mr. Tassé is developing a national cultural heritage preservation project in partnership with the Mongolian Ministry of Culture and Education, the Smithsonian Institute and the Luce Foundation. He is also spearheading a national Mongolian library development program focusing on modernizing rural urban public libraries through partnerships with Mongolian Ministry of Education, Western Washington University and the US Library of Congress.

He is also overseeing several multi-national academic research projects and training programs in Mongolia spanning all areas of research including humanities, social science, health, governance and law. Awarded from the Asia Foundation the management and funding of their national book donation program, his center is distributing over 50,000 new textbooks per year to Mongolian institutions.

Mr. Tassé previously held sales, marketing, managing and senior consulting positions with several industrial firms based in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada. Mr. Tassé holds a BCOM and Master's in Global Management from Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC, Canada and a Master's degree in International Business Administration from the Munich University of Applied Sciences in Germany. He is currently the General Secretary and Executive Director of the PMI Mongolian Chapter, which recently held their 3rd International Conference on Best Practices in Project Management.



Kamil Mroz (Mroz): What makes the PMI Mongolia Conference innovative in the field of PM?

Marc Tassé (Tassé): The main innovation of the conference is in the structure of the presentations and sessions. The goal is to provide practical information to new project managers. Therefore all of the presentations are case studies. Presenters are asked to give an overview of a project, select one issue or challenge they encountered in the project from one knowledge area and present their process of how they analysed the situation, what worked, what didn't and the lessons learned. For the second day, we run 1.5 hr mini workshops, again using cases and having the participants work on coming up with their own solutions in mini project teams. This interactive focus makes the participants use the tools and techniques being explained and leads to a deeper understanding of how PM works.

Mroz: What are the key benefits of attending the PMI Mongolia Chapter 2016 Conference?

Tassé: Other than the chapter training events throughout the year, there is no other structured opportunity for project managers to learn about effective project management, meet other project managers and to share their experiences with potential mentors and advisors. For many, it is their first exposure to structured project management, the vast amount of knowledge and information that is available to them through PMI and to talk to seasoned project managers from around the world. The conference presentations are structured to be mini workshops, where the presenters are presenting case studies on specific aspects of project management based on their own projects. This gives the Mongolian participants valuable examples of how to deal with project issues, and to get a glimpse of how effective project managers approach difficult situations and find solutions.

Mroz: Why did you decide to take on such a large scale initiative in Mongolia?

Tassé: This is the third conference in Mongolia, a developing economy facing many short-term challenges. Project management is a new concept for Mongolia. Historically, there were not many large scale projects in Mongolia due to their rural and pastoral lifestyle. Most of the capital projects were overseen and developed by foreign experts, so there wasn't much need for effective project management. But with the opening of Mongolia, the increase in large scale mining and the resulting construction and infrastructure development boom, it has become apparent to Mongolians that there is a strong need for effective project management. The conference provides us with the opportunity to not only showcase the local successes in project management, but bring in expertise from all over Asia to share their knowledge and experience.

Mroz: PMI Mongolia is a young, energetic and dynamic group of PMs - how has these characteristics translated into the program, workshop and speakers?

Tassé: Since 80% of the participants are under 35 years old, they have lots of theoretical knowledge of projects but don't have much practical experience. Therefore we focus on selecting experienced project managers, technical experts and community leaders who can not only share their experience, but also make themselves available as mentors and advisors. This year's theme is focusing on best practices, there have been some large Mongolian projects that have been successfully closed in the last year, we are seeking out the key personnel from these projects to talk about their projects and show that proper project management is not only possible but can be key to success in Mongolia.

Mroz: A topic close to my heart is volunteer project management and since the conference theme is "Best Practices in Project Management" - what best practices in volunteer project management can you share in organizing such a conference or leading the PMI Mongolia Chapter? What is the best part of volunteering for the PM community?

Tassé: One of the key principles of our chapter is that everyone involved, from training and admin to the conference team, are volunteers. We have no paid staff. This is a perfect opportunity for them to learn and apply their skills to a live project and see the results of their efforts. It also permits us to bring in advisors to assist the team when they run into challenges, or just give them a leg up when needed.

We also encourage our board and members to be involved in community projects outside of PMI, both as an experiential exercise, but also to give back to the community and increase the profile of the Chapter. Our volunteers oversee community cleanup events, give presentations on project management to university and high school students, and get involved in other volunteer initiatives based on their own interest.

Mroz: So far, what are the 3 project management lessons learned that you can share with other chapters who are interested in organizing their own PM Conference (and also 2 high level risks and how you mitigated them?) What is the benefit of organizing a national conference in your country?

Tassé: As in all projects, communication has been one of the key lessons and challenges with organizing the conference. This year we experimented with an online project management tool to coordinate the different project teams with varying success. We discovered that the learning curve was much steeper and adoption rate was therefore much lower than anticipated. We ended up defaulting back to a google based documentation system with Viber as a direct communication tool.

Another challenge with a young project team is their real life work commitments. Since most were in support roles within their companies, they didn't have the flexibility that more senior employees have over their time and resources. Many of them also have young families which create a greater time burden and limit their ability to meet deadlines and attend meetings. Therefore we've had to be flexible with participation and use technology like skype and other virtual meeting tools to keep the teams functional and manage the deliverables.

The third challenge has been the steadily declining economy in Mongolia. This has put a strain on sponsorship recruitment and has required us to adjust the conference attendance fee. Therefore we planned two conference formats, a two day multidisciplinary event similar to what we've done in previous years based on funding targets. The second was a stripped down conference based on current funds set aside from the previous year's

activity. We then set a board review date for end of August to make the final decision on which version of the conference we will deliver. Not the ideal situation but in line with the economic realities.

About the Interviewer



Kamil Mroz is a Certified P2 Trainer, Lean Six Sigma professional & strategic consultant (in BSC & EFQM techniques) combined with many years of experience leading projects for clients in Biotech & Pharma. He is deeply involved in the PM community as an International Correspondent for PM World Journal - regularly speaking at PM conferences, actively contributing to publications and enthusiastically sharing his experience with the next generation of project managers! In 2013 he received the prestigious International Project Management Association (IPMA) Young Project Manager of the Year Award for outstanding leadership and project management excellence, and since then he has been part of the yearly Global IPMA Jury to select future winners.

Kamil is based in Brussels and can be contacted at kamil_m@hotmail.com