

## **Interview with Elizabeth Russell, FAPM**

APM Wessex Branch Chair, UK



***Interviewed by Ömer Berkay Dağlı***  
*Southampton, United Kingdom*

Elizabeth Russell has been active for more than 25 years in project, programme and PMO management. A Fellow of the Association for Project Management (FAPM), she is a certified PRINCE2 and MSP practitioner with ITIL V2. Her career started in IT as a software developer/systems analyst, moving through team leader, project and programme manager. As a PM, she covered IT infrastructure and networks then progressed to span multiple business sectors including the re-role of a prison, the London Bikes expansion, and various corporate projects including bids and divestment.

As a Project Management professional, Elizabeth has been an APM member since 2007 and a Fellow since 2014. Her commitment to the development of Project Management as a profession of first choice and in the rise of its Professional status through the APM is reflected through serving on the local Branch committee, currently as Chair, previously judging on the annual awards and serving on the national Branch Steering Group.

She is passionate about project management and enabling a culture and environment where hard work and experience is enhanced by people who really care about what they do and have the support in place to enable them to excel.

**Ömer Berkay Dağlı (Dağlı):** *Dear Elizabeth, first of all, thank you very much for accepting my invitation for an interview. Please introduce yourself for PM World Journal readers, and firstly how did you get involved with Project Management?*

**Elizabeth Russell (Russell):** Project management was something that I became aware of as I progressed as a software developer, through either working on my colleague's small projects or managing my own, often in parallel, it was a part of everyone's role. I then moved into a large corporate and realised that there was a team of people who just did either project management or business analysis. Working with them as a team leader on larger projects opened my eyes to the skill set and potential and I realised that I wanted to be a project manager.

I learnt my trade by under-studying the project managers I admired and asking them to mentor me, ultimately to sponsor me when an opening came up in their team. A lot of my colleagues questioned me on my choice, concerned that I was moving into a profession they saw as thankless and stressful. But I have always been passionate about the role and knew it was ideal for me.

My path has been a classic rise through a technical, then team leader background, but also I have sought out every opportunity to progress. I once attended a presentation entitled "What's love got to do with it" where they talked through the skill sets people attributed to a PM. At the end we were told the answer, Passion! You can be good at anything if you try hard enough, but you need passion to be that extra special. I am proud to have persuaded various employers to include that word in role and job specs as I believe anyone can do project management, but it takes an extra something to be a successful project manager.

**Dağlı:** *What was your most fulfilling experience as a project or program manager?*

**Russell:** I love to see people stretching themselves and learning new things. As a project professional I have the opportunity to coach my teams and mentor other project managers. Enabling projects and people to achieve through my knowledge and experience is extremely fulfilling.

**Dağlı:** *Could you tell me more about the APM and Wessex Branch?*

**Russell:** In 1972 INTERNET (UK chapter) was formed by 7 pioneers; INTERNET was later to become the International Project Management Association (IPMA). In 1976 the INTERNET (UK), in a move to formalise and move towards being an established professional body, registered the Association of Project Managers (APM) as a company. In 1996 it changed its name again and became the Association for Project Management to reflect the broader interest in project management throughout the business and industry. The APM has 13 Branches with the Wessex Branch borders stretching out to cover Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset. Wessex branch organise events for the 1249 active members in this region.

**Dağlı:** *How did you get involved with the APM?*

**Russell:** I had been a corporate member of the APM and knew about APM through previous employers. I became a full member when I joined the Wessex committee. Through attending local events I became enthused by the friendliness of the committee and the opportunity to become active in an organisation that was developing the professionalism relating to my career.

**Dağlı:** *As the APM Wessex Branch Chair, what is your role?*

**Russell:** This very much echoes that of a programme manager in a corporate, the committee are the team of experts that you get to lead, with the APM as your Sponsor and the regions APM members as your Users. We have various events/projects in our portfolio which need to reflect the APM strategy, for which we have budgets and schedules to manage. As Chair I am invited to regular updates from the various national groups such as the Volunteers Steering Group and the Partnership Development team at which I am able to discuss any issues and question points raised. I then pass on these updates my committee.

**Dağlı:** *How do you use your project management experience for the APM?*

**Russell:** Volunteers within the APM have a pivotal role in the future of the APM, they are the experts who can work by inspiring the communities, contribute to research, knowledge and standards, lead in continuous professional development and represent the project management community in working towards the shared APM vision of a world in which all projects succeed as a life skill for all.

**Dağlı:** *What makes Wessex Branch different from the others?*

**Russell:** Wessex have a reputation for getting involved in all aspects of the APM, often leading on new ideas, trialling national proposals and getting involved in research projects. Members of the committee have been on the national Volunteers Steering Group and on the judging panel of the Annual Awards. As a committee we are very democratic and collaborative and responsive to our membership.

**Dağlı:** *With the first quarter of the year gone, what has the APM Wessex Branch accomplished so far in 2018 compared with 2017?*

**Russell:** Wessex are developing a relationship with the Guernsey Construction Industry Forum (CIF) who are looking to improve the PM capability on the island. Wessex are working with CIF to provide 2 events this year to promote PM competencies.

**Dağlı:** *As a student member of APM Wessex Branch, I know the Branch is so supportive to the students and future project managers. Could you tell me more about APM and Wessex Branch strategies for inspire the trainees of today for the challenges of tomorrow?*

**Russell:** As a chartered body one of the APM objectives is to be an accepted benchmark standard for project professionals. The APM is working with Higher Education Institutes and corporates with its Apprenticeship qualifications, student memberships, corporate and HEI workshops. The Wessex Branch hosts an annual PM Challenge between corporate apprentices and HEI students, providing mentors for finalist teams. Committee members have also presented at PM Master Classes at Bournemouth university.

**Dağlı:** *Could you describe the future of the project management from your perspective?*

**Russell:** Project Management is increasingly becoming accepted as a profession in its own right. Many people include project management as part of their role but see themselves as a contract manager, engineer, architect, etc. first, so a technical skill required to substantiate the role, but now it is possible to enter project management directly as a project manager or to move into a defined role, the future will see the role accepted as that of first choice.

**Dağlı:** *How can the project management professionals adapt themselves to the future?*

**Russell:** It is up to Project managers to promote the professional aspect of the role to their companies and colleagues. With budgets and deadlines being hot topics on all projects the people in the teams are often overlooked and they are the key element that can deliver a project.

**Dağlı:** *Finally, what do you suggest to current and future project managers?*

**Russell:** Project managers should gather a portfolio of evidence on the projects they have managed and the continuous professional development they have undertaken. This is essential for gaining professional accreditations but also extremely useful in preparing for appraisals and both internal and external interviews. Having the evidence to hand enables quick access to examples of experience and also to remind ourselves that we have some memorable achievements in our careers.

**Dağlı:** *Thank you.*

## About the Author



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**Ömer Berkay Dağlı** is currently a Masters Candidate at Southampton Business School, University of Southampton, based in UK for the academic year 2017-2018. Previously, he has served as an Officer on Watch for over 30 months on board chemical tankers, based in different routes around the world where he served as Junior Officer. He completed his graduation in Marine Transportation Management dual diploma with honours from both Istanbul Technical University, Turkey and State University of New York Maritime College, USA in 2014. His major fields of study are project management, logistics and inter-modal transportation. His research interests include global project management, leadership, uncertainty management, programme and portfolio management, strategic PM, PM governance, stakeholders, project control and PM in the transportation and logistics industries. Omer served as a [research intern for the PM World Library](#) during January 2018, completing the program in record time. He can be contacted at [omerberkaydagli@gmail.com](mailto:omerberkaydagli@gmail.com)