

Interview with Manon Bradley

Development Director of the Major Projects Association, UK



Interviewed by Ömer Berkay Dağlı
Istanbul, Turkey

Manon Bradley is the Development Director of the Major Projects Association the purpose of which is to improve the initiation and delivery of major projects. Over the past 13 years Manon has been involved in every aspect of delivering that vision: from the production of thought leadership publications to the development of the Major Projects Knowledge Hub. She has a keen understanding of the barriers to major project success. Her knowledge of the systemic issues underlying the root causes of major project delivery and initiation is founded on more than a decade of involvement with members, PhD researchers and communication with members throughout the supply chain.

This knowledge led her to establish the Major Projects Association's Gender Balance initiative which frames the issue of diversity as a challenge for the whole sector to improve performance. Through this approach the Association has been able to engage a very male-dominated group of business leaders in a tough conversation, enabling them to take ownership of their own responses. In this capacity Manon also Chairs the Infrastructure Client Group Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group.

As a competitive drug-free power-lifter Manon is used to being in male-dominated environments such as infrastructure. In the 14 years that she has been competing she has won 13 World Championships, 9 European Championships and held 6 World Records and a host of British titles and records.

She is a keen writer and a practiced speaker and Chair. She has written on topics in a number of online publications including "Infrastructure Intelligence", "The Guardian" and in online publications as well as via her own blog "Passionate about Powerlifting" and she has contributed to a number of events as speaker and Chair including the Women in Construction Summit 2018; the 2018 Oxford Literary Festival; All Party Parliamentary

Group on Infrastructure panel on The Feminist City and the Global Engineering Congress (Oct 2018).

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

Manon Bradley (Bradley): Thank you. I am not a project manager; I suppose I am what you would call an Association professional. I joined the Major Projects Association in 2005 to run the day-to-day business which I still do now – although that day-to-day business has grown phenomenally since that time.

Dağlı: *What has been your most fulfilling experience as a project and program manager?*

Bradley: My most fulfilling experience in this space has been to see the impact of the work I am doing in diversity. I have seen the conversations around diversity and gender balance move from dark corners to be more main stream. I suspect that now every Board has diversity as an item on its Agenda whereas 10 years ago that was not the case.

Dağlı: *Could you tell me more about the Major Projects Association?*

Bradley: We are a membership association for companies which are involved in the initiation and delivery of major projects. Our members include client bodies, Government departments, contractors, consultants and other specialists including Academic institutions.

Dağlı: *What makes Major Projects Association different from the other PM organizations?*

Bradley: We don't limit our discussions to just project management – we do limit our discussions to things to do with MAJOR projects only. For example, we would discuss legal contracting, funding and financing of projects, things which are typically not included under the “project management” umbrella.

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

Bradley: Simple – I applied for a job and got it!

Dağlı: *As the Development Director, what is your role?*

Bradley: My role has grown over the years as the Association has developed. I have the day-to-day responsibility for ensuring the Association runs smoothly which means supporting our small team which includes our Events Manager, Knowledge Hub

Manager, Finance Manager and Office Administrator. I'm responsible for recruiting and retaining our members which means ensuring that what we deliver is what they want and need, so I spend a lot of time talking to members and feeding that intelligence back to the team to ensure our events programme reflects the interests of members. I have key responsibility for overseeing all of our publications. I lead our Gender Balance and Diversity initiatives and support the Board in the delivery of our strategic initiatives.

Dağlı: *Besides your role, I want to ask you about Major Projects Association's Gender Balance initiative that you led to establish. Could you tell us more about this initiative?*

Bradley: I joined the Association from a background in the charitable sector – a mainly female dominated sector. It was very clear to me that the major project delivery world was starkly male dominated. I began asking others if this was a problem and what we might do to make a change. There is lots of research that gender balanced teams make better decisions and I thought "if this is true of Boards it must also be true of project delivery teams". I persuaded the Board of the Major Projects Association to explore this issue in the same way that we explore other issues – by organising events to discuss it and producing reports. We now also have a regular Gender Balance bulletin and I have been invited to support many of our member organisations to help them to make the most of their diversity strategies.

Dağlı: *From your perspective, how do you think today's project management and business worlds face diversity, and what are some good practices that the PM World should take on this issue?*

Bradley: There is no silver bullet on this issue. It is not what you do but rather the way that you do it. Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce is not a 2-year project – it is a long-term change programme which will impact upon the culture of the company (hopefully) forever more. It has to be approached as a change programme which runs through every strand of corporate strategy. If it is approached in this way it has a much greater chance of success.

Dağlı: *Could you tell me more about Major Projects Management Association's strategies to ensure equity and promote a diverse business environment?*

Bradley: There is no simple answer to this. If there was, we would all be doing it. Each company has to find their own authentic narrative that works for them and for their leaders to stick with it for the long term.

Dağlı: *According to achievements of yours, I want to emphasize a bit of your influencer side. How could you encourage people and what are the challenges together with eases?*

Bradley: To tell the truth I am not a good politician. When I believe in something, I just keep doing it and saying it until others see my point of view – I am sure I could be much more subtle in my approach. But I have been saying that gender balance matters

for many years now and others are beginning to agree with me. So perhaps I am doing something right.

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

Bradley: I think that we are at a crossroads. In the UK we are struggling to find the talent to deliver all the projects we have started. Unless we start thinking “outside the box” we will fail. We have to recruit people from different backgrounds – not only to achieve greater diversity but simply to fill the vacancies created by people retiring. So I think the future will involve more creative project management driven by the diversity of thought and perspectives brought by new entrants into this space.

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

Bradley: Squat! As a competitive powerlifter I am convinced of the importance of weightlifting – as a way to reduce stress, improve strength and fitness, improve mental ability and, for women, to find a way into a male dominated world. “Squat more” is my advice to everyone – it is the answer to all of life’s questions.

Dağlı: *Thank you.*

About the Author



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Ömer Berkay Dağlı is currently a Project Manager at Entech & Semar Engineering and Marine Solutions Company. He recently graduated with an MSc Management from Southampton Business School, University of Southampton. Previously, he 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 Third and Second 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, IT Project Management, 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”