

The Impact of Projects and Project Management Will Increase

Interview with Joop Schefferlie ^{1,2}

President-elect
International Project Management Association



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Introduction to the interviewee

Joop Schefferlie is Vice President Certification of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) and President-elect. His mandate as president of IPMA starts in January 2021. Joop is director of IPMA Certification B.V. He has over 15 years of experience in building and changing complex organizations up to over 800 employees based on a clear vision and objective. His passion is to develop and improve project management.

Joop is a decisive and results-oriented entrepreneur with a focus on the future and possible improvements. He is able to realize complex changes, recognize opportunities and steer others in such a way that a translation is made from vision to reality. He is

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competent in starting projects in which the intended purpose of the change, expertise and professional development are central. He communicates honestly and to the point, is independent and has preponderance.

Interview

Part I - Adaptive leadership is the new normal for the future

Q1. Based on your observation, what is the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the PM profession?

Joop Schefferlie (Schefferlie): The impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the PM profession is huge but also gives us an opportunity. On the one hand, many projects are postponed at the moment because it is almost impossible to see each other or we have to work in difficult circumstances like working from home. But on the other hand, this also gives us the opportunity to learn, study and improve our professionalism.

Q2. What will project management be like in 2021 and in the future?

Schefferlie: The impact of projects and project management on our society will increase. Almost 40% in every we do (in time and money) is project management related. But the way we're executing our projects is changing; there's a different view on (project management) leadership. Adaptive leadership is the new normal for the future.

The world is rapidly transforming and a new breed of leaders is required to meet its needs. The world needs individuals that are competent in many emerging new areas so that they can respond swiftly to technological innovation, changing social relations, new divisions of labour and new approaches of working.

The challenges that humanity faces are more complex than the those that previous generations had to endure. Adaptation to climate change, large-scale conflict, inequality, poverty, food and water scarcity are just a few examples and all of them impact the way we work. In order to succeed in this age of disruption and rapid change, organizations must assess, react, and adapt to change faster than ever. There is a perspective that the tried and tested application of what we in the project management world see as "best practices" are losing significance and a more agile approach to change is viewed as the way forward. Agility, however, is not the goal in and of itself, but rather as a means to an end. Agility is about focusing on what is valuable to customers using an iterative approach to planning and guiding project processes.

The complexity and uncertainty that the world is facing also calls for a different form of control. Greater responsibilities will now be held across all levels within the organization. Decision-makers will increasingly entrust responsibility to those with expertise and we will see a shift from pure management towards greater levels of leadership embedded vertically and horizontally across all levels of the organization.

Q3. What you said triggers me to recall the theme of 2020 IPMA Research Conference: self-organization. How do you view the necessity and importance of self-organization?

Schefferlie: Self-organization and self-management is about directing the work of teams and individual employees. But what do you actually say as an organization? In my opinion, self-management and self-organization touch on the fundamental principle of 'self-determination'. With the introduction of self-determination, organizations give employees the task of taking control of the work themselves. Think freely about how you would like to do it. The primary reason why self-management and self-organization work with the well running examples, is that it gives employees the opportunity to have more influence on their own work environment. We were used to self-determination in our own family situation and find living in freedom in the Netherlands quite normal, but within the context of work we have often been taught to take a completely different perspective when passing through the door of the organization. This has everything to do with how the organization positions itself before the introduction of self-management.

Q4. You mentioned that adaptive leadership is the new normal for the future. Would you please elaborate on that?

Schefferlie: A solution to the challenges in VUCA era is adaptive leadership in a lean-agile way of working, which is an essential part of the way teams organize work. This approach makes use of an iterative development process, quick feedback loops, and disciplined management processes for review and adaptation. Using this approach, organizations learn to make distinctions between what is valuable and what is irrelevant. There are already a number of organizations that have taken the first, sometimes bold, step toward a lean-agile transition in order to become more adaptive to their changing environments. Organizations that have experience in working with agile know that it takes more than just sending people to a training course to learn a particular framework. They undoubtedly have realized that agile working is easier to understand than it is to implement and use. In order to implement and maximize the benefits of agile, individuals are needed that can lead the way using a common learning process that inspires other employees within the organization to adopt an agile mindset. An agile mindset can best be described as the harmonization of the following attributes: respect, collaboration, making use of improvement and learning cycles, pride in ownership, a focus on delivering value, and the ability to adapt to rapid change.

But it is also not black and white. I think it is important that when you start a project, you should consider what kind of project it is, in what kind of environment, which sector and what kind of approach is needed. This can be waterfall, agile or a hybrid solution.

Q5. It has been suggested that organizations should set the role of "Chief Project Officer" (CPO) in order to emphasize the importance of project management at the top. What's your comment on it?

Schefferlie: I'm absolutely in favor of creating such a role as CPO in bigger organizations in which project management and executing projects is their main business. This will emphasize the importance of doing successful projects.

Part II - Project management is all about competent people

Q6. It's not enough to demonstrate leadership in a multiple-choice exam, right? How do you understand the value of various certifications in the market?

Schefferlie: I think project management is all about competent people. A knowledge exam doesn't make the difference. Being competent, experienced (in years and complexity of the projects) is what matters. By offering a competence-based model, IPMA certification will offer you a clear picture of your competences. By doing this as a project manager, you will know what kind of project fits you and also how you can develop yourself.

Q7. What are the top qualities or competences needed for project managers in the VUCA era?

Schefferlie: The following competences are relatively more important for a project manager in a VUCA era:

(1) Humbleness: The ability to accept feedback and acknowledge that others know more than you.

- » In a world of rapid change, it is important to know what you don't know.
- » Leaders need to be open to learning.
- » They need to trust others to know more than they do.
- » They should understand the need to build the right team.
- » They should encourage individuals to develop.

(2) Being adaptable: An acceptance that change is constant and that changing your mind based on new information is a strength rather than a weakness.

- » The ability to adapt is critical in a complex and changing environment.
- » Rapid change of the digital context requires adaptability from leaders.
- » Agile leaders adapt their behavior in the short-term based on their ability to make evidence-based decisions.
- » Being adaptable is key to the success of both the organization (innovation and ability to react) and the agile leader (being open to new ideas, changing opinions).
- » Changing your mind is not a weakness but a strength when faced with changing information.

(3) Visionary: A clear sense of long-term direction, even in the face of short-term uncertainty.

- » It is important to have a clear vision for the future of the organization.
- » In a time of rapid change and business model disruption with opportunities opening up on all sides, a clear vision becomes even more important.
- » Visionary leaders have a well-defined idea of where to go, even if they don't know exactly how to get there.

(4) Engaged: A willingness to listen, interact and communicate with internal and external stakeholders combined with a strong sense of interest and curiosity in emerging trends.

- » Successful communication of all mentioned factors before through constant engagement with all stakeholders is a requirement.
- » Agile leaders are always engaged, with customers, partners, suppliers, team members, staff, etc.
- » The desire to explore, discover, learn and discuss with others is as much a mindset as a definable set of business-focused activities.

Part III Joop's story with IPMA

Q8. Last but not least, please share your story with project management. What is your dream in this profession?

Schefferlie: I entered the world of project management about 20 years ago, after working for a long time in IT-consulting as a business unit manager and director, starting by being responsible for a big project management department of a consulting company. At that moment, the added value of the team was ready for improvement. By introducing development programs (based on people competences), we were able to grow and be more successful. And I became an active member of IPMA.

My dream is that we will be able to connect the right project to the right project managers. By knowing what kind of competences are needed in every project and by knowing the maturity and competences of the project managers, we will be able to do the perfect match and will be more successful.

Q9. What will IPMA do to promote the PM profession with you as the President starting from 2021?

Schefferlie: IPMA will focus on strengthening its member associations all over the world by branding and promoting IPMA's products and services. And we will also focus on alliances and partnership with big companies, organizations and partner associations.

Q10. Sustainable project management is a trend. What will IPMA do in this aspect to promote sustainability in project management?

Schefferlie: For IPMA, it is one of the strategic focus points for the next years to focus on digital transformation, environment and diversity. Sustainability has many aspects of course, but one of them of course, is to contribute to our environment by less travelling. For every appointment you make (this is also important for international projects), you should ask yourself the question if it's really needed to travel, or if we can meet via Zoom, MS Teams or any other application.

Besides that, IPMA's mission is "promoting competence throughout society to enable a world in which all projects succeed". IPMA therefore recognizes projects which have special value for society ([see project achievement awards](#)). IPMA recognizes its responsibility to help not-for-profit organizations increase their PM competence, by offering IPMA Coaching for Development® (IPMA C4D). And of course, IPMA recognizes that we need to set a code of ethics and professional conduct for our profession.

To read the original interview and to learn more about PMR magazine, visit
<http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/>



About the Interviewer



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Yu Yanjuan (English name: Spring), Bachelor's Degree, graduated from the English Department of Beijing International Studies University (BISU) in China. She is now an English-language journalist and editor working for *Project Management Review* (PMR) Magazine and website. She has interviewed over sixty top experts in the field of project management. Before joining PMR, she once worked as a journalist and editor for other media platforms in China. She has also worked part-time as an English teacher in training centers in Beijing. Beginning in January 2020, Spring also serves as an international correspondent for the *PM World Journal*.

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