

Interview with Ben Breen¹

Managing Director, Asia Pacific, Global Head of Construction
Project Management Institute (PMI)



Interviewed by Ipek Sahra Ozguler

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Introduction to interviewee

Ben Breen is Managing Director, Asia Pacific, and Global Head of Construction for the Project Management Institute (PMI), where he oversees regional activity to ensure PMI can stay close to the needs of stakeholders and provide solutions that create value for individuals and organizations. Ben also represents PMI chapters in the region, allowing a like-minded community of professionals who share a passion to drive change in their organizations and communities to come together. Most recently, Ben spearheaded PMI's first industry-specific offering, Construction Professional in Built Environment Projects (CPBEP)[™] to help individuals gain the skills and knowledge needed to transform the global construction industry.

Originally from Australia, Ben moved to Singapore in 1994 and has since supported or led hundreds of projects including iconic developments such as Marina Bay Sands and the award-winning Suntec Convention Centre. He has founded several project management and design companies, helping them to grow and develop into best-in-class providers.

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Ben has a Bachelor of Engineering degree in building engineering from Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, and is based in PMI's office in Singapore.

Interview

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ about the new infrastructure bill that recently passed. What does the infrastructure bill entail?

Ben Breen (Breen): Thank you for having me. The bipartisan, \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that U.S. President Biden signed into law will deliver key federal investments in America's infrastructure, enhancing bridges, roads, and water and energy systems, as well as the nation's broadband. The bill also provides funds to modernize public transit, in addition to investing in passenger and freight rail, connecting people and goods more efficiently throughout the country.

There's a lot of work that will be done as a result of this infrastructure bill, opening up a host of jobs and opportunities in various industries and sectors, with many looking to project professionals to ensure the work is carried out in a timely and efficient manner.

Ozguler: What role do project managers play in carrying out the work under the infrastructure bill?

Breen: Project managers will play a critical role in carrying out the work under this bill, as they are the backbone of the projects that will be carried out — the key in ensuring work is done on time, efficiently and within budget. But more than that, the project manager's role is evolving to center on strategy more than ever before, and we'll see this even more so as project professionals work with teams to carry out the important work behind this new infrastructure bill.

Ozguler: How can construction professionals make themselves more marketable as the need for skilled workers intensifies?

Breen: Professionals need to upskill to ensure they have the technical and people skills to bring projects to life, especially as more construction organizations experiment with AI, drones, and other forms of robotics. Challenges often impacting to the construction industry such as delays, scope creep and going over budget are impacting

the success of project outcomes and taking a toll on the professionals leading these projects—and the companies funding them.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities facing construction professionals and organizations, [Project Management Institute](#) (PMI), created the [Construction Professional in Built Environment Projects \(CPBEP\)](#)[™], our first industry-specific offering to upskill construction professionals. The CPBEP includes seven e-learning courses, three of which are micro-credentials and were designed in collaboration with construction industry experts and course designers and defines the standard for construction management.

Professionals who seek to differentiate themselves can pursue the CPBEP certification to help them sharpen or develop new skills for an existing or future role in the built environment, in addition to perfecting effective power skills — like communication and collaborative leadership — that help drive team and project success.

Ozguler: According to PMI's 2021 Talent Gap report, more than 61 million project management positions in manufacturing and construction need to be filled by 2030, a 13% increase from 2019. Do you expect the signing of the infrastructure bill to widen the talent gap even more?

Breen: We do expect the talent gap to widen more following the passing of this important bill simply because there will be more projects, creating more of a need for skilled professionals to carry out the work. The Talent Gap report is a 10-year outlook on the project management profession, so when we think about how this report is curated — without considering unknowns like potential legislation — it's clear that we will see even more of a boom in opportunity from a project management standpoint as the bill goes into effect and projects get started all over the country.

The Biden administration has projected that the new infrastructure deal combined with the Build Back Framework will add on average [1.5 million jobs per year](#) in the next 10 years.

Ozguler: How can organizations overcome this shortage of talent?

Breen: Simply put, organizations and organizational leaders need to upskill and reskill their talent to meet this demand. Construction and the larger built environment are key to the world's constant state of transformation, so by upskilling talent and utilizing leading resources, like the CPBEP, organizations can future-proof themselves and lead the way in monumental projects that are critical to the future of our world.

Ozguler: What are some challenges the construction industry faces globally, and how can project management help ease those pain points?

Breen: In 2020, PMI surveyed more than 40,000 global Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification holders in the construction industry and found that 72 percent of them experience project delays always or often, 70 percent experience scope creep always or often, and 73 percent of projects ended over budget. Furthermore, construction is among the least digitized industries globally and rarely innovative due to limited margins and general risk aversion. In order to lead local, national and global transformation efforts, the construction industry — as well as industry professionals — needs to transform. This starts with upskilling and reskilling the workforce to ensure professionals have the technical and people skills needed to bring projects to life.

Ozguler: How does the need for these projects and skilled workers in the U.S. compare to other parts of the world?

Breen: Enhancing infrastructure is a priority across the regions beyond the conversation happening in the U.S. According to the [Global Infrastructure Outlook](#), it is estimated that by 2040, there will be a \$15 trillion gap between infrastructure needs and actual investment, so world leaders will look to close this gap as the demand for these projects intensifies. From work on the Kribi-Edea highway in Cameroon to the Energy Bridge in Ukraine, infrastructure updates are critical globally, which will result in a plethora of job opportunities and the need for skilled workers to fill them.

Ozguler: How will the new bill shape the global conversation on infrastructure?

Breen: As the U.S. takes this critical first step in improving the nation's infrastructure, we can expect more conversations surrounding global infrastructure as cities continue to grow and global connectivity increases across regions. With the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating some of these needs and connecting us in ways we've never seen before, resiliency and innovation will be paramount around the world as leaders and decision-makers shape the futures of not only organizations and countries, but the world as a whole.

PMI is also creating a Global Industry Leaders Forum to bring together like-minded construction representatives from the world's leading construction companies. The forum will seek to develop a network of global construction professionals to discuss the big-picture challenges experienced in the industry and identify standards to employ in their organizations.

Ozguler: Thank you for giving detail information.

About the Interviewer



Ipek Sahra Ozguler

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Ipek Sahra Ozguler graduated from the Istanbul University, Turkey with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University, Turkey with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 13 years of experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has gained broader insights in a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, aviation and finance sectors. In addition, she has been working as an international correspondent for the PM World Journal since 2014.

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, [The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals](#), interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals around the world. The book was published in March 2020 and is available [here](#).

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