

## **Creation of the PMP and some things I've learned about Project Management since then**

### **Interview with Lee Lambert<sup>1</sup>**

Author, Consultant, Popular Speaker  
PMP Co-Founder, PMI Fellow  
Columbus, OH, USA



#### **Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi**

International Correspondent, PM World Journal  
Paris, France

#### **Introduction to the interviewee**

Lee R. Lambert helped establish the original standard against which educators and practitioners in the field of Project Management are measured. In 1981 he was invited to join the team that created Project Management Institute's (PMI)<sup>®</sup> Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> Certification Program. He is a Past President of the Central Ohio PMI Chapter, PMI Fellow (2009) and PMI's Professional Development Provider of the Year (2007). Lee has authored two books and more than 30 professional article/whitepapers on project management. He is also PMI's subject matter expert (SME) for their Earned Value Management (EVM) Practice Guide and the Project Estimating Practice Guide. Educated in Engineering Design at Utah Technical College, he is a holder of a Master's Certificate in Project Management from George Washington University. As

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the creator of the “Stealth Learning” concept, no other speaker can contend with his uncanny technical knowledge, unique material content and refreshingly entertaining delivery. Lee takes the saying; “Been there, done that, got the T-shirt” to the next level as he continues to “make a difference” in his chosen field.

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## Interview

**Q1:** First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You helped create PMI’s PMP certification. Could you tell us how that happened?

**Lee Lambert (Lambert):**

I started my career in project management in Salt Lake City as an engineering designer for Chicago Bridge & Iron Company. It was 1966, only three years before the PMI was founded. Little did I know what a substantial role PMI would play in my career and my family. In 1967 I relocated to Livermore, California to work for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) managing engineering design projects to be used at the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS) for testing of nuclear weapons (testing of nuclear weapons was halted in the United States in September of 1992). This was my first opportunity (at 20 years old) to travel to Nevada to oversee the installation of the testing device I had designed. It was a life changing experience.

Later, in 1973, after 5 years working on the Clinch River Breeder Reactor for General Electric (GE) as an engineering designer, I was given an opportunity to become the lead GE trainer for the implantation of an Earned Value Management System (EVMS) on their portion of the contract. There were 300 engineers that needed training and I found great pleasure in providing them this view of the value of project management. A political change (election of Jimmy Carter as President) that spelled the end of the Breeder Reactor development resulted in my relocating my family to Richland, Washington to establish a PMO for the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL).

This job change occurred in 1978 and it was then that I was made aware of the PMI. It was a natural for me to join this association. I had fallen in love with project management and was earning a reputation as a “git r dun” kind of guy. My first PMO was a rousing success and kept me busy until 1981, when I was invited to move to Columbus, Ohio to establish a new division—the Project Management Division would provide project management expertise to large government projects. It was at this time my General Manager received a request from PMI to allow me to be one of the founding principals

for the PMP Credential. My management felt like it was a good opportunity for me and for the new division to be visible in this effort. And, so the PMP story begins.

I wish I could say the PMP was my idea but it wasn't. It was the idea of the brain trust of PMI, but I was among the initial five founders and was very active in its formulation and implementation in 1984. As I recall, the primary reason for creating the PMP certification had more to do with stimulating PMI membership than it did about a professional certification. In 1980-81 PMI had seen membership flatten and the leaders were concerned that they needed to do something to spark renewed interest in the organization. After several interviews with other professional associations (ASCE, AICP, and NSPE) it was clear that a professional certification program increased membership in these organizations.

**Q2:** And then, how was the team of the founders organized? How did it evolve?

**Lambert:** The project manager for the PMP project was Dr. Dean Martin, a Professor at Western Carolina University (WCU) in North Carolina. He was surrounded by a myriad of volunteers, including past PMI Chairman, Ken Hartley, David Morton, Charles Lambreth (WCU student), Dr. John Adams and me. (Unfortunately, Dr. Martin passed away before he could see the fruits of our labor). We met quarterly at WCU starting in August of 1981. By October of 1984 the PMP was ready to be launched at the PMI Symposium in Philadelphia. Fifty-five professionals sat for the exam that day and 39 passed the paper test that presented 320 questions covering the eight project management body of knowledge areas identified by PMI. You had to pass all eight sections to earn the PMP. One of my responsibilities was to screen all applicants to assure they met a minimum standard before being authorized to sit for the exam. (We had settled on three categories; education, experience, service to the profession). The project team worked in obscurity during development and we were disappointed we did not see the level of enthusiasm that we had anticipated.

Consistent with our objective of increasing membership, it was required that anyone applying to sit for the PMP exam was required to be a PMI member. While this requirement served its purpose it became obvious that the PMI membership restriction was preventing some who might apply it also became obvious that if we removed the PMI membership absolute that more people would apply. At that time of implementation of the PMP none of it was about money. In 1996 there were only a total of 6,018 PMPs in the world. However, once the membership requirement was lifted and the PMI market became the world the numbers increased exponentially and the money poured in. Today, there are well over one million PMPs with that number increasing daily. In some locations thousands sit for the exam simultaneously. I still make it a point to try and write a congratulatory note to everyone who passes the PMP Exam. I want them to know how special it is that they passed such a rigorous exam. And, PMI is taking full advantage of the PMP popularity and it is reinvesting significant sums of money to expand the profession.

**Q3:** We can learn a lot by doing in project management. Why is a project management certification important? What does it bring?

**Lambert:** One of the things we had to research was to be sure that there would be value-add to those who made a commitment to becoming PMP certified. One of the areas we could have been more restrictive in the application process would have been more emphasis on documenting experience to confirm that the applicant had actually had the proper project management accomplishments. The problem was that the PMP became so popular (meaning indicator of skill level) that many applicants did not have the depth of experience necessary and failed to demonstrate their actual skill on the job after earning their PMP.

**Q4:** What are according to you the 2 top skills of a project manager for tomorrow?

**Lambert:** Well, honestly it would be impossible to isolate only two but I can say with high levels of confidence that one of the skills will be understanding and utilizing a Servant Leadership approach. My saying is; “Project Managers don’t do work. They get work done through others”! I am going to cheat on the second one by saying “planning”. Considerably more time should be spent on comprehensive planning to isolate and quantify potential problems and/or risks that will impact performance. Many of the other PM skills and capabilities will be much more easily promulgated. If I could name three the third would be Common Sense, which isn’t as common as it should be!

**Q5:** You are a passionate volunteer for decades. Why are you volunteering?

**Lambert:** A large part of the success of the PMI is the result of armies of professional, dedicated volunteers. I have been proud to be included in this group since I joined PMI in 1978. But, I started volunteering in community development projects in California years before (1967) with the Jaycees (Junior Chamber of Commerce). Volunteering left me feel as though I was making a contribution to my hometown. PMI volunteering is the same except PMI volunteering can have an impact throughout the world. Just like the PMP. It was a volunteer project that has touched millions worldwide. I will never stop. I love the feeling I get when a volunteer project is successful. No power, no money, just a desire to add value to society.

**Q6:** You are still very active taking part in conferences, publishing in social media. Do you plan to retire?

**Lambert:** I remain active in work and in PMI. I am currently 75 years old and have no intention of slowing down. I love what I do. I love to write about what I do, and I love traveling to share my story with audiences throughout the world. I suppose I will retire someday. I guess we all will have to retire “someday”, just not today!

**Q7:** Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

**Lambert:** If I were to leave you with a final message it wouldn’t be an original. I would encourage you to find what you love to do and do whatever it takes to “do it”. When you

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love what you do, you will never work a day in your life. This is a good thing because I was never a big fan of “work”!

Thank you, Yasmina for raising a potpourri of project management related questions that addressed topics from the Project Management Institute’s (PMI) Project Management Professional (PMP) certification to the critical role volunteering plays in the ongoing success of the world’s most respected PM professional association.

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### About the Interviewer



**Yasmina Khelifi**

Paris, France



**Yasmina Khelifi**, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers’ activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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