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Interview with Jean-Luc Favrot
by Yu Yanjuan, PMR
Interview

Project Management Should Remove Walls and Build Bridges

Interview with Jean-Luc FAVROT [1,2]

Executive Advisor, Coach, International Speaker
Tahiti, French Polynesia

Interviewed by Yu Yanjuan
Journalist, Project Management Review: PMR (China)
International Correspondent, PM World Journal

Introduction to the interviewee

Jean-Luc FAVROT is an executive consultant, coach, trainer, and international speaker in the field of agility, innovation, and project management. Currently based in Tahiti, French Polynesia, South Pacific, he travels the world regularly, either virtually or physically.

His career path has allowed him to hold responsibilities in large public and private organizations, and to create companies specializing in agile and digital transformation in Europe and Oceania.

He is one of the co-authors of the *PMBOK Guide* 7th edition (development team), and he is currently pursuing his commitment through the contribution to the strategy and content of the PMI Standards+ digital platform.

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[1] This interview was first published in PMR, Project Management Review magazine earlier this year. It is republished here with the permission of PMR. The PM World Journal maintains a cooperative relationship with PMR, periodically republishing works from each other's publications. To see the original interview with Chinese introduction, visit PMR at http://www.pmreview.com.cn/english/

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Q1. What are the major differences between the *PMBOK Guide*（7th edition and the previous editions?

Jean-Luc FAVROT: First of all, there is a fundamental shift from a process-based standard to a principle-based standard. Project are intended to deliver outcomes and value, by people and for people, in a VUCA world. The 12 project management principles focus on mindset, and they are complemented by 8 project performance domains. A project performance domain is a group of related activities that are critical for the effective delivery of project outcomes. There is also a section on Models, Methods and Artifacts, and another one on Tailoring.

I would add that the audience is not limited to project managers. Any other stakeholder of a project may be interested in the 7th edition, regardless of their role (team member, sponsor, product owner, etc.). Moreover, the 7th edition covers the entire spectrum of approaches (predictive, adaptive, hybrid).

Q2. Compared with the previous editions, the PMBOK Guide（7th edition）is a breakthrough innovation. Do you agree? What do you think are the driving factors behind the innovation?

FAVROT: I think it's both a return to the essence of project management, and a projection into the future. The *PMBOK Guide* became thicker and thicker with each successive edition. The content was very rich but difficult to read. Even though it was possible to see a form of agility (for example with the practice of Rolling Wave Planning), the *PMBOK Guide* was historically mainly linked to the Waterfall approach, so some people tended to think wrongly that project management and Waterfall were the same thing. I still see this mistake in some people who only specialize in agile approaches. Some of these people tend to caricature and denigrate project managers as if they all were micro-managers, only focused on outputs without considering outcomes or value.

 On the other side, some project managers dismissed agile approaches as not serious in a professional world. Most of us on the development team had a very broad culture, far beyond methodology wars, and I think we shared an amazing openness and respect, which made this journey fantastic for me. In my opinion, the main innovation is here: removing artificial walls, and considering project management as a whole, based on people to produce outcomes and deliver value in a VUCA world.

The other side of innovation is to consider that ways of learning have evolved over time. When studying a new field, people still need a single and reliable reference to understand the essence and to be guided through their learning journey. But they also usually look for numerous, short and varied sources of information on the Internet: blog posts, articles, videos, podcasts, whose quality is heterogeneous. Thus, the 7th PMBOK Guide should be seen as a part of a new, larger system: the book does not aim to be exhaustive but to provide deep understanding and guidance, and it is complemented by a constantly evolving digital content platform. This is called PMIstandards+ and is free to PMI

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members. In it, the Models Methods and Artifacts section of the PMBOK Guide is detailed and expanded, and more generally it includes sources in different formats (article, case study, video, audio, template, etc.) aimed at providing examples and guidance that cannot be present in a book designed to be more concise than before. The advantage is that it is regularly growing and its quality is guaranteed by PMI. As a logical extension of my experience in the PMBOK Guide 7 development team, I am now pleased to contribute to the strategy and content of PMIstandards+.

Q3. Many experts said that the PMBOK Guide (7th Edition) and the sixth edition are complementary. The 6th edition solves the problem of "how" and the seventh edition deals with the problems of "what" and "why". Do you think so?

FAVROT: In the "Models Methods and Artifacts" (MMA) section of the PMBOK7, there are many models. Each of them is briefly described, and if you want more information, you should go to the PMIstandards+ platform or any other source.

Process groups (initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, closing) are mentioned as one of the models in the PMBOK Guide 7. You can use them if you are comfortable with them, but it is not mandatory at all, just like other models about communication or change management for example. The same way you can find further information elsewhere about the MMA you are interested in, you can find further information about the process groups on PMI Standards+ or in the *PMBOK Guide* 6th edition. But you don't need to read the entire 6th edition to understand the 7th. Moreover, the 7th edition is not limited to the problems of "what" and "why", it also addresses the "how" through the activities described in the project performance domains and in the Models, Methods and Artifacts section.

So, in my own opinion, instead on focusing on the previous editions, consider the PMBOK Guide 7th edition and the PMI Standards+ platform as a whole

Q4. Based on the PMBOK Guide (7th Edition) and your own observation, how to deal with Complexity?

FAVROT: One of the principles of the Standard is "Navigate Complexity".

Since one of the main sources of complexity is human behavior, I strongly recommend that you develop your ability to understand and deal with human aspects of project management. Other principles, performance domains, and models are specific to human relationships (Stewardship, Team, Stakeholders, Leadership, Project team development, Conflict management, Motivation, etc.).

Another main source of complexity is the interactions between systems. You can therefore find help in another principle that deals with systems thinking, as well as in practices such as dividing into smaller and more manageable subsystems, and conducting short and frequent experiments in order to collect and improve learnings.

You can see that complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and volatility are often mentioned in

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the PMBOK Guide, sometimes together and with some links, even though "VUCA" is not used as such.

Q5. The concept "Value" is a hot word in the *PMBOK Guide* (7th Edition). Why do you think value matters so much in project management? How to you define "Value"? In order to become value-oriented, what do you believe organizations should do?

FAVROT: Value is indeed one of the key concepts of *PMBOK Guide* (7th Edition). As I said before, seeking to deliver value in not exclusive to agile approaches. A project manager who would focus only on outputs instead of outcomes and value would not be a project manager using a waterfall approach (as some agilists may think). He would only be a project manager who should step back to improve his way of working and thinking, provided that this kind of project manager really exists, which I am not totally sure. Project management is not an activity that exists by itself, it's a means to produce outcomes through outputs, and to deliver value through outcomes. Opposing outputs and outcomes is not relevant in my opinion.

The very definition of Value depends on the context. The *PMBOK Guide* explains that it is the worth, importance or usefulness of something, and that it is very subjective, as different stakeholders can perceive it in different ways. To broaden the definition, I would personally add that delivering value is producing something that has a positive impact somewhere, sometime, and for someone. From a general point of view, I think that organizations wanting to become value-oriented should focus on their mission and purpose, and even more on their stakeholders.

Q6. The *PMBOK Guide* (7th Edition) offers 12 principles of delivering value. What are your comments on these principles? Which principles impress you most?

FAVROT: Having said that Value is one of the key concepts in the PMBOK Guide, it is not surprising that one of my favorite principles is "Focus on value". But we should consider the twelve principles as a whole. For example, you cannot deliver value if you neglect all the powerful principles dealing with the human aspects of project management. Nor could you deliver value without considering the world around you (uncertainty/risks, systems thinking, tailoring based on context, adaptation, resiliency, change).

Q7. From your perspective, what kind of leadership style will help leaders face the future challenges in project management? What are the top qualities of a future project leader?

FAVROT: Personally, I think that curiosity, practiced with open-mindedness and respect, is one of the key factors of success.

Leaders should be curious to discover and learn relentlessly (methodologies, approaches, practices, directly or indirectly linked to their core area of competence). Even if sometimes they heard something wrong about something (for example predictive, or adaptive, or hybrid approaches), they have to make up their own mind and pick at least

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a few good ideas.

Leaders should be curious about and understand people working with them (team members, customers, end-users, and generally all kinds of stakeholders): empathy, "soft skills".

Leaders should be curious to perceive the strategic, organizational, and cultural aspects that are at stake in their projects.

So, if you manage to have a wide range of knowledge, and if you are able to understand the context surrounding you, you will probably choose and improve the best way of working and delivering value in your situation.

This is fundamental but not sufficient. I believe that leaders should lead with passion, determination, and courage.

Q8. In the VUCA era, what do you believe is the right attitude towards risk?

FAVROT: The main challenge is to find a balance between establishing an overly heavy and detailed risk management plan at the beginning of a project and using a very light plan, consisting of a series of short-term experiments ("fail fast, fail often, fail cheap").

These two approaches are at the extremes of the possible spectrum, but they are not mutually exclusive. Mixing them according to the context is probably a good choice. Sometimes, spending energy to over-secure a project may prevent us from delivering value quickly. Conversely, not all risks can be manageable by experiments. Some risks may be beyond the project team's reach, and when stakes are high and critical, some experiments may be dangerous. Therefore, it will likely be more effective to manage risks in a hybrid way, tailored to the environment.

Last, it shouldn't be forgotten that uncertainty may also bring a chance to seize new opportunities. And managing opportunities is sometimes as important as managing threats in the VUCA era.

Q9. Which part of the *PMBOK Guide* (7th edition) did you contribute? Are there some stories or interesting experience to share in the process of developing the *PMBOK Guide* (7th edition)?

FAVROT: I don't know in detail how the previous editions were developed, but I think we experimented with a new way of working and I really enjoyed it. Each team member worked on a large spectrum of topics, thanks to a very iterative and flexible approach. Sometimes I worked with the whole team on transversal subjects (list of principles for example), sometimes I worked in small groups, either to create some specific content, to refine the content created by another group, or to examine and integrate feedback from review team members (we were a 12-member development team, and a total of 70+ people working remotely in 2 review teams). I also worked alone to review 1000+

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comments from the exposure draft. It was a mix between choosing the topics we were most interested in (frequently) and working on topics assigned by the leader. It was also a mix between face-to-face meetings of the development team in Philadelphia, at PMI Headquarters (before pandemic), individual work at home, and remote meetings.

The decision to rewrite from scratch had been made by PMI prior to hiring the development team and that's what boosted my motivation to send my application when I saw the global call for candidates.

Q10. In your eyes, what does the profession of project management look like in the future?

FAVROT: We all know now that both predictive and adaptive development approaches are relevant. It's just a matter of context. Hybrid approaches can also be tailored to maximize outcomes and value, without any dogmatism.

Some people seem to focus on another divide, between project management and product management. While they have some obvious differences, I think they share a lot of things, directly or via program management. Personally, I think that a very significant part of the *PMBOK Guide* 7th edition is relevant to both project and product management as it is. So, if we take an even higher perspective, project management may remove more walls and/or build more bridges in the future.

Roles and responsibilities are evolving in the same way, and we have already introduced functions associated with projects in the PMBOK Guide 7th edition. The goal is to ensure that all activities are covered by people without staying stuck on terminology related to one approach, nor stuck on a specific degree of centralization or decentralization of leadership (context matters here again).

Thus, I believe that project management will be used more and more widely by "project practitioners" (as we call them in the *PMBOK Guide*), beyond the sole project managers.

Q11. As far as you are concerned, what aspects of the *PMBOK Guide* (7th edition) should improve in future editions?

FAVROT: As this was a complete rewrite, the development of this edition was incredibly intense, especially since we had a very short time frame to work on it. So, I feel very proud and grateful to have had such an amazing journey, and at the same time I am sure that this edition can be improved. Personally, I don't feel I have sufficient distance yet. Some ideas are obviously starting to emerge, but it's too early to share them in a structured way.

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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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