

## **Adaptability will be The Key!**

### **Interview with Ricardo Viana Vargas<sup>1</sup>**

Executive Director of Brightline Initiative  
Managing Partner at PMOotto.ai  
Past Chair, Project Management Institute



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

International Correspondent, PM World Journal  
Paris, France

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

Passionate about transforming ideas into action, Ricardo Vargas is a chief advocate for the project economy. Specializing in implementing innovative global initiatives, capital projects and product development, Ricardo has directed dozens of projects across industries and continents, managing more than **\$20 billion in global initiatives** over the past 25 years.

Ricardo shares his expertise with millions of professionals around the globe through his “**5 Minutes Podcast**,” which he’s hosted since 2007. He has written **15 books** on project management, risk and crisis management, and transformation, which have been translated into six languages and sold more than **half a million copies**. His latest book *Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence*, in partnership with Dr. Harold Kerzner and Dr. Al Zeitoun has been released.

Ricardo’s influence on project management was affirmed when he became the first Latin American to be elected Chairman of the Project Management Institute.

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More than two decades ago, he founded **Macrosolutions**, a global consulting firm with international operations in energy, infrastructure, IT, oil and finance.

His work as a venture capitalist and entrepreneur in artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, chatbots and machine learning resulted in tools and products that have revolutionized how users bring agility and agile management into project management software.

Between 2016 and 2020, Ricardo directed the **Brightline Initiative**, a Project Management Institute think tank bringing together leading organizations into a coalition dedicated to helping executives bridge the expensive, unproductive gap between strategic design and delivery.

Prior to his work with Brightline, Ricardo was Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (**UNOPS**) Infrastructure and Project Management Group, leading more than **1,000 projects** and \$1.2 billion in humanitarian and development projects.

Ricardo holds a **Ph.D. in Civil Engineering** from Federal Fluminense University in Brazil and an undergraduate degree in Chemical Engineering, as well as a master's degree in Industrial Engineering from Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil.

- [ricardo-vargas.com](http://ricardo-vargas.com) (Company Website)
  - His latest book Project Management Next Generation: The Pillars for Organizational Excellence, in partnership with Dr. Harold Kerzner and Dr. Al Zeitoun has been released
  - [ricardo-vargas.com/podcasts/](http://ricardo-vargas.com/podcasts/) (Podcast)
  - [youtube.com/rvargas](https://youtube.com/rvargas) (Youtube Channel)
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## Interview

**Q1:** How did your project management journey begin?

**Ricardo Vargas (Vargas):** My project management journey began, I would say from a flipped door, a side door. I started learning project management when I was a student of chemical engineering and I was also a representative of Microsoft in Brazil. And Microsoft was releasing project management software called Microsoft Project. And then, they invited me to a study to learn and to teach people how to use the tool. And this was, I would say, my first step into trying to learn and understand what project management is about.

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**Q2:** You are working in project management for more than 20 years, what are the three main changes you noticed? What impacts did they have on projects?

**Vargas:** I think that the first impact that we saw in these past 20 years is the concept of project management itself, because project management in the past was all about producing and delivering on time, on budget, with the specific scope.

And now project management goes far above and beyond that. It's about delivering value. At the time I was starting, the value was defined by the sponsor or sponsoring committee, and the role of the project management was just delivering on time and on budget. However, now project management has become far more relevant and it goes up now to be part of the value delivery system. It's not just about delivering on time and on budget, but what things that really matter for organizations. The second one is about agile, the concept of predictive and agile. This was really a game changer in the way we see project management and project management not as only something that you plan and execute, but any kind of effort that you do to connect ideas to reality. And the third one is the concept of VUCA or volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

These concepts are now on the top of every single project manager, stakeholder or executive on this planet, because we are living in an unprecedented volatility. Things are changing on a daily basis and we really need to become resilient and to be able to adapt and innovate all the time. And these, for me, are the three key things I saw happening in these past 20 years.

**Q3:** What are the top skills project managers need to hone to thrive in the new normal?

**Vargas:** For me, it's absolutely required the human skills. And I'm saying human means, the ability to lead a team, the ability to negotiate, the ability to manage conflict, the ability to keep people motivated. Project management became far more than just a technical skill, and these abilities to navigate this complexity becomes really, really critical if you want to succeed.

**Q4:** What are your lessons learned of the coronavirus crisis that can help our readers to be better leaders?

**Vargas:** At first, coronavirus demonstrated to us that many times we think that we are in a more secure place than we really are. Even when you think that you have control of many aspects of your business or even your life, things can become quite unpredictable. For people to succeed, they need to be able to embrace these environments, to embrace this change. And the coronavirus also brought us a new perspective of uncertainty and brought us also a dramatic change in the pace on the adoption of technology and some of the myths of the workplace, because people always thought that they need to work in a physical office and things like that and this is not true. And this now today we can see that people do meetings normally online and this is just part of the business and this is changing dramatically the landscape on how do we

interact with people, how do we communicate to people. And this was dramatically accelerated by the COVID 19.

**Q5:** You are developing different content: 15 books, a five-minute podcast, a youtube channel. Why so diverse content? And often you provide the content in English and in Brazilian.

**Vargas:** At first, you need to adapt to the different styles of audience. For example, people that want to read a book or study in project management, they have a different interest from someone listening. And inside the five-minute podcast, it's a five minute usually length episode where I just share some ideas and some thoughts. The idea is a podcast that is a bit size and the size of a music that you can just easily listen while jogging or while doing something else. And you can get some insights for your week with that podcast. The YouTube Channel. It's because I stopped teaching classes most of the time due to time. And then I started preparing this lecture so I can reach a far broader audience using the YouTube channel. And I think we need to be also up to date. And this is one thing that I spend a lot of time trying to keep myself updating not only in the project management, but in the way we communicate to people.

And why do I provide content in English and in Brazilian Portuguese? First, Brazilian Portuguese is my native language, so I think I owe it to Brazilian society and to the country that gave me the full support during a big part of my life.

So this is why I decide to record always in Portuguese. Not everything, but many things in English, because it's the language of business and also because these are the two languages that I feel comfortable on speaking. Of course, my English is not perfect because I learned it very, very late, but it's the best I can do to allow people from Japan to Korea, from Germany to South Africa to listen to the ideas, I think, are worth sharing.

**Q6:** In a time paced and busy world, are books still a source of learning?

**Vargas:** Definitely, yes. Now I know people read less, but books are still very deep in content. Maybe people will use books more as a reference. Maybe they will learn using other things. And the book will be a solid reference for them. But I still believe in the books. I don't agree that books will play a role like the books played in the past because now there is this multimedia environment. But I think that it will continue. I plan to continue. I'm releasing a new book this year with Professor Dr. Harald Kastner that will go live about case studies. It's called **Project Management Next Generation**, published by Wiley. So we still believe that, for example, academics, people that want to go deeper, they will use books to learn.

**Q7:** A personal question: when do you find the time to write books? Do you have some tips for time management to share?

**Vargas:** Yeah, this is an interesting thing because a lot of people ask me, How do I find time? I am very well organized. I need to say to you that I plan very well my day,

my year. So I don't waste time while doing real work. And this I'm not saying that I do this all the time, but this is something I do. When I start writing a book, I really focus on it and I do it quickly. I'm not saying that I will write a book in a couple of hours, but when I have the idea, I build the idea and I write really, really 24/7 in order to get everything out of my mind. And this is not only for books, it's the same for courses. I have several online courses and most of the time I record the course in 2 to 3 days. I get all the ideas, everything I want to talk, I want to say. And when I record, I want to do everything because I don't lose my concentration. But time management is critical and most of the time people lose time because they don't have the right focus.

**Q8:** Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

**Vargas:** Yes. I think that the world we are living in is a challenging world. We are facing really a lot of turbulence, a lot of volatility now with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This brings a lot of instability for the global environment. I'm not talking climate here, but I'm talking about the environment, the business environment, supply chain. And I think that we need to adapt. We need to react and be resilient. Those project managers that are not able to adapt to different circumstances, they will have a really big challenge to get things through because it's a really new environment where something that we have expected to happen in three or four years is now happening in two weeks. So this is the biggest challenge. This is my final message to the readers: improve your adaptability because this will make you very successful in the future where volatility will be the main aspect of everything.

## 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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