

From Project Managers to Changemakers!

Interview with Pierre Le Manh ¹

President and CEO

Project Management Institute



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Paris, France

This interview was originally conducted in French by Ricardo Naciff, President of PMI France, and Yasmina Khelifi. It was translated and produced here in English.

Introduction to the interviewee

Pierre Le Manh is the President & Chief Executive Officer of PMI (Project Management Institute). As a global executive with a multi-cultural background, Pierre Le Manh brings a proven track record of delivering results and guiding organizations through complex transformations. He is passionate about leading teams in innovating and creating new ways to disseminate specialized knowledge, upskilling and education.

Pierre Le Manh most recently led Galileo Global Education's expansion project in North America. Galileo is the European leading provider of higher education serving more than 170,000 students across an international network of 54 institutions and high-growth education technology platforms.

Until the end of 2021, he served as Chief Executive Officer North America and Global Deputy CEO at Ipsos, one of the world's largest data, analytics, and insights companies.

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Pierre Le Manh played a crucial role in taking Ipsos from a \$700 million primarily European-focused organization in 2004 to a \$2.5 billion global leader in its industry in 2021, growing to more than 18,000 employees operating in 90 countries.

Earlier in his career, Pierre Le Manh served as CEO of Consodata, a leader in first and third-party consumer data, precision, and digital marketing. He started his career at consulting giant Accenture before serving as CFO of performing arts non-profit Adami, CEO of digital publisher Encyclopaedia Universalis, and CEO of CFL Holding, a family office owning various assets in direct-to-consumer, marketing services, and real estate industries.

Pierre Le Manh was born and raised in France by a Vietnamese father and a French mother. He has lived in several countries before settling in New York City in 2013. He speaks English, French and Italian. He likes traveling the world to visit his very large family and his friends, watching Paris Saint-Germain soccer games and wandering around Manhattan on his electric scooter. He has two sons who live in Paris and London.

Interview

Q1: Thank you for having accepted the invitation of PMI France to talk with us. What do you do when you're not working?

Pierre Le Manh (Le Manh): First, I just want to say that I am really happy to do this interview with you - and in French. It's rare that I do interviews in French. It is very important to me that in the context of the globalization of PMI, we can have non-English speaking chapters that are also powerful, playing a central role in driving in our actions. Therefore, congratulations for what you do at PMI France.

When I'm not working, I usually fly to another place for... work!

On the plane though, sometimes I don't work. I watch movies or I read. But otherwise, it's true, I have a fairly busy professional life and so here I am, still working most of the time.

I still do a few things outside of work of course. I have a very large family - not just the PMI family, but my real genetic family! I have a lot of cousins. My father has thirteen brothers and sisters and I have 51 cousins on his side.

My father is Vietnamese so it's a family that is very spread across the world: in Australia, the United States, Europe and Vietnam. So, of course, it takes me a little time to visit them and to take care of this big family. Obviously, having worked a lot internationally, I also have many friends in many countries, and meeting them when I'm traveling takes a bit of time as well.

I do some volunteering too. In the United States, I am part of a group of businesspeople who help French entrepreneurs set up their businesses in the United States. These include young entrepreneurs seeking to better understand how to operate in the US market and how to structure their companies, so I like to give a bit of my time to help them.

Q2: Let's now move on to more professional topics. Pierre, as you know, we are in a very tumultuous period on the economic and geopolitical levels and a certain number of new challenges which are in front of us with regard to human resources, raw materials, supply, ecological environmental crisis. How can the PMI help project managers, young professional program managers and decision-makers to face these new challenges?

Le Manh: You're right, we all know that there are big challenges ahead for the world. Some are related to the environment, but there are also many others. We see many growing problems, such as growing inequalities and increasingly badly distributed resources. We can say that over time inequalities are not increasing when you take humanity as a whole, when you compare countries together for instance, but when we look within each country, the growth of inequalities and the way in which resources are shared are a big concern. As a result, we see a very significant polarization of societies which drives instability, revolts, and dissatisfaction. The generations in their 20s or 30s will inherit and have to face many difficult problems.

But people who belong to my generation - Generation X - have a very important responsibility as well. We have come to the point when we have both the levers to act and the energy, ambition, and also understanding of the world to do it perhaps more than previous generations, who might have had less of this sensitivity.

One of the consequences of the pandemic is that we generally feel a much stronger awareness, a greater motivation to solve problems that humanity is facing. This raised awareness and willingness to act is actually fascinating because none of these problems are recent or have been recently identified.

Of course, the sense of urgency is not homogeneous across the world. I would say that in the United States, for example, I observe that awareness is often linked to the resolution of tactical risks – the attitude is something to the effect of, “If I don't do anything to address social issues, I won't be able to retain employees” rather than a deep conviction to act. But maybe it doesn't really matter, as long as the dynamics is there.

During the initial period of COVID, with the large scale lockdowns and restrictions, we went through a kind of large-scale social experimentation. We all changed our lifestyle, our relationships with others, we had a phenomenon that reached the whole world within a matter of a few days which completely transformed us. I believe this served as a catalyst and there is now a greater awareness of the fragility of humanity. This increased awareness is not only affecting the younger generations, even if the Generation Z or even millennials were perhaps a little more sensitive to the general topic of sustainability to start with.

Coming back to the big challenges, the question for us PMI is "what can we do?" I feel in the community a very great desire to participate in the solutions, not just in analysing the problems. I believe that it is already important that we take stances, and we do, but we also want to be really active in bringing and implementing solutions.

We have a unique opportunity because PMI is so influential: we have 700,000 members, we have millions of people who participate in our courses, who take our certifications, who come to our conferences, who read our publications and are exposed to our thought leadership - and even more who are reached through our personal networks on social media. There is what we do in the chapters. We also have a great influence in the business world through our connections in different industries. The same goes with governmental agencies across the globe. It is important that we express a firm position on the challenges and how to deal with them, and that we act.

Q3: PMI had more of a positioning with senior project managers. This is why the PMP certification rather targets seniority. But in recent years we have paved the way for what are called change makers. This term popularizes the management of projects to help people come together behind a common goal. What could we do and what are you going to do from the United States to help non-formal project managers better organize themselves to make their project a success?

Le Manh: The idea of changemakers is also a form of recognition that the term "project manager" does not apply to all or that it is not necessarily the title that people who work with us have. There are companies that don't like to talk too much about projects. They prefer to talk about products. The whole context of agile transformation also has an influence. The idea was to express more clearly that we promote values and methodologies that apply beyond what is explicitly called "project management" or beyond project manager titles.

Now, the difficulty we obviously face is that we are a professional organization, and it is important that we remain so. I don't think that in 10 years from now we will be anything other than a professional organization.

It is important that people who are part of our professional organization understand why they are with PMI. It is not just to learn a technical skillset. Of course, technical skills are important and even essential, and we provide this better than anyone thanks to decades of the combined experience of the best project professionals. But what we seek to do, and it is particularly important precisely in a context of uncertainty, of great challenges, is to develop skills that last a lifetime; we want to help our members and volunteers be more influential and drive greater impact.

To achieve this goal, the path for PMI is not to multiply small trainings and to just become a kind of catalog where everyone comes to take something. There is a bit of that of course for some professionals and it is fine, but for PMI what is most important is to focus on broadening your skills throughout your professional life and gradually acquiring everything you need to succeed in an uncertain world with increasingly important challenges.

Beyond learning through trainings and getting certified, being part of PMI is also about providing connections and opportunities to drive social impact. It is truly about being part of a global family in which members support each other and help each other grow as professional and as a person.

Q4: PMI France is one of the five largest chapters in the world. In this context, how do you see the contributions that PMI France could make?

Le Manh: We are in a situation that is particularly difficult in Europe. For instance, I am not one of those people who think that Brexit is good news for Europe. On the contrary it creates a kind of imbalance, and it weakens Europe overall.

The polarization of society exists in many countries. It is not limited to Europe, but it is true that it is particularly acute in Europe. We have all seen the results of the recent general elections in Italy or Sweden. In France and Germany, there is also a polarization of the extremes which are increasingly close to power, resulting in a rather unstable balance. We experienced that a bit in the United States too, not to mention countries like Brazil. Europe is unfortunately dealing with the consequences of this social fracture and division.

An organization like PMI precisely must transcend these fractures.

What unites us at PMI is much stronger than what divides us. We are a factor of cohesion. Everyone can have their own political opinion; everyone can have their own vision of the world. But at PMI we have ultimately aligned around values and ambitions that are common.

To come back to PMI France, what you do on the ground is critical. What can be the solutions to the most important problems that divide European societies? We don't have all the solutions of course but we know that for example education can be one. The whole area of sustainability is another one where Europe has credibility and where for instance the United States, at least when it comes to environmental issues, lags Europe.

One of the most important challenges for the next decade lies in reducing the cost of the "green premium". It means reducing the cost difference between operating in a sustainable way vs not, so the main barrier to transformation at scale towards a more sustainable world can be lifted.

If we don't reduce the risk premium, we will never be able to improve our situation in a lasting way. We know the argument of the developing countries: "You put us in this situation in the first place, now it is unfair that we can't catch up in terms of economic development because we need to adopt more sustainable practices than you did, without you paying for it". It is fair that the most advanced economies reduce the risk premium and for this they need to invest massively in new technologies and new practices. The investments, the innovation that are needed to reduce the risk premium must come from the developed countries. It is the debt that the most advanced economies have toward

the world, and it is also an incredible opportunity for them to rally capital and talent, know-how and energy, governments and corporations, citizens and professionals behind the same goal. I believe Europe is ahead of the curve and has a motivation and a credibility to lead. I see the green premium reduction as one of the platforms to build the future of Europe and who better than project professionals can play a key role in it?

Let's go back to education. The more societies are educated, the better off we all are, I think we have known that since the "siècle des lumières". Chapters certainly have a role to play in improving both higher education and lifelong learning. The more educated we are, the better off we will all be. At least this is my belief.

At PMI, we are of course not doing everything in education: we are not going to solve the problems of higher education in France alone for instance, but we can certainly bring a meaningful contribution to improving lifelong education because we have a significant reach and because this is an expertise in which we have accumulated a lot of experience.

Finally, there is the digitization of the economy. This is an area where the Europeans and the French in particular are very good at. I was talking earlier about the French Tech entrepreneurs who are having amazing accomplishments the United States even though they don't have, at the start, access to the same capital, to the same talent pool at scale, nor have the same links to research as start-ups usually have in the United States. But in terms of innovation, and of ability to understand consumer needs, the European start-up ecosystems and the French one in particular are rather well positioned to succeed globally and in the US market, together with Israel's. For example, in the retail banking world, Europeans have a huge lead in the digitalization of consumer relations with clients.

At PMI, we are focused on digital transformation, which is what a very large number of our members are doing and what even more of the future members of PMI who are still in universities today will do. Our French Chapter should naturally play a significant role in sharing and scaling best practices, connecting the French ecosystem together and with others internationally, and helping it be even more successful.

In summary, there are many areas where France is well positioned to take on leadership regarding critical subjects for the future of the world – and that extends to the chapter as well. As one of our largest chapters France can not only contribute but even take leadership on very important subjects for the future of the country, of Europe and of the world.

Q5: PMI France has almost 5,000 members and 250 volunteers. An initiative that supports our commitment to education is the PMPDays in partnership with SKEMA, and we are trying to extend the concept to other schools. The idea is to gather around the same table the school, PMI and companies to help young professionals find their first job. We also have at a higher level of education in high schools, the first PMI Education Foundation Youth schools to introduce the concepts of project management from an early age. PMI World will continue this line in the future. Is this something that is part of PMI World's strategy?

Le Manh: It is a strategy that we are going to pursue even more globally – strengthening our relationships with the academic world.

Developing strong links with the academia is a bit of a return to the origins of PMI; the organization was originally founded by Jim Snyder and a few friends and colleagues, mostly accomplished engineers managing large projects and facing similar issues to share the methods and best practices they had come up with on their own. They started with the support of Georgia Tech, which was Jim’s alma mater. Georgia Tech hosted them on their campus; therefore, the origin of PMI is truly linked to the academic world.

A very strong relationship with the academic world is important. We may sometimes feel that the academic world is somewhat theoretical and of course if you want to make a career in the academic world, you indeed must contribute to research and theoretical concepts. But there is also a lot of interest, among large companies, particularly in corporate America, for research and for leading edge concepts brought by the academic world. Innovative ideas and research are seen by companies as a potential source of competitive advantage. On the other hand, the academic world also wants to be close to the corporate world for a lot of reasons. However, both corporations and academic institutions generally don't know how to work well together, mostly because the business and academic worlds don't always speak the same language, nor follow the same timeframes and cycles.

PMI can play a very important role because we are situated between both. Companies are interested in our relationships with the academic world and our ability to sort out what is being done in the academic world as well. Meanwhile, the academic world is very interested in our very close relationships with the corporate world and our understanding, through our members, of real-life problems to solve.

Q6: If you had to sum up what your vision of PMI is in 10 years, what would you say?

Le Manh: First, I would like to say that as I've been here for just a few months, I prefer to take the little time to engage with our community before coming up with a revision of our strategy. It is not about just thinking by myself. It is also about engaging with all of our stakeholders – chapters, employees, corporate partners, governments, etc. to co-create the future of PMI.

That being said I believe some things won't change. For instance, we will always be a professional organization that does three things which are interrelated – form deep connections, develop and share knowledge, and provide opportunities to give back to society. It is what we do, it is what unites our community.

But I think we will be much stronger in each of these three pillars in 10 years. Firstly, we will put a lot of emphasis on operational excellence. Over time, PMI has grown complex by multiplying initiatives, such as shifting the emphasis from project managers to changemakers, launching many new products or globalizing PMI. This has created operational challenges. Little by little and with the right focus on operational excellence

we are going to find our ways of better executing on each of our three domains of communities, knowledge, and social impact.

For example, we may evolve the way we develop connections; today they are mainly built around our chapters. We can think of our chapters as local communities that foster friendship and closeness, including close proximity to local companies and employers.

But in addition to these very important local communities, there is an aspiration for some of our members to also be part of networks within PMI which are not necessarily related to a specific geographic location, but more closely related to other common interests, ranging from specific industries to specific business problems ...all the way to topics that are almost on the fringes of what PMI does. Therefore, creating these different somewhat fluid and post-COVID virtual communities and giving them the tools and support to thrive in addition to our chapters is something I envision for the future of PMI.

More broadly like I said the move, in our current strategy, from project managers to changemakers, is a reflection of the evolution of the profession, which is becoming more fluid and less strictly defined, especially in some industries. In the Tech industry, in particular, and we know the influence the Tech industry is having on the entire corporate world and economy, project and product lifecycles are often less distinct. I can see how this evolution may impact who we will serve in 10 years, as we share a clearer vision of the evolution of the profession. I believe that in 10 years we will have defined the profession we represent in a way that is broader than the definition of Project Management as it is today, but also in a way that is more specific than “changemakers”.

On the knowledge pillar, we will certainly see evolutions as well, which will reflect the evolution of what our community is focused on. I believe that for instance almost everything we will do in 10 years will have a very important component related to sustainability. When you will take your PMP in 10 years, for example, I can't imagine that a significant part of the test won't relate to sustainability. We have already started, by the way: we have partnerships with specialized organizations like The Green Project Management or with the United Nations.

On the social impact pillar, we are still at the beginning of our journey. In 10 years, we will have better clarified how we intend to drive that impact without spreading ourselves too thin. We cannot save the world by trying to do everything at once, so we have to find a way to unite millions of people - and I do believe our community will only continue to grow - while choosing where to focus our impact. It will with no doubt be a challenge because everyone has their own way of seeing where priorities are for the world and for humanity, and everyone has special areas of interest – but I firmly believe that we can all come together around clarifying how we can maximize our social impact as a community.

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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