

Greater awareness of project management is needed!

Interview with Professor Adam Boddison OBE¹

**Chief Executive Officer
Association for Project Management
United Kingdom**



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Professor Adam Boddison OBE joined Association for Project Management (APM) as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in September 2021. He has a non-executive director portfolio that includes being Chair of the Corporation at Coventry College and Trustee for a multi-academy trust providing education for 32,000 pupils across 58 primary, secondary and specialist settings. Prof Boddison is also a Visiting Professor at Stranmillis University College and the University of Leicester (School of Business).

Prior to joining APM, Prof Boddison held leadership roles in several membership organisations including as CEO for nasen (the National Association for Special Educational Needs) and Director of the Centre for Professional Education at the University of Warwick. He has published a range of books and articles and is a qualified clinical hypnotherapist.

Website of APM: www.apm.org.uk

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Interview

Q1: First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. I am always curious about the career of CEOs. You studied mathematics and education. Did you envision yourself becoming a CEO? How does it happen?

Adam Boddison (Boddison): When I began my career, I didn't envisage becoming a CEO per se, but I did have a strong desire to make a positive difference for people. That's always been at the heart of everything I've ever done. It's the reason I became a teacher. Some people enter teaching because they have a love for a particular subject, but for me, as a maths teacher, it was much more from a desire to help people. That has been the golden thread through all of my roles.

As for why I became a CEO, I'm the kind of person who enjoys putting myself out there. I enjoy meeting new people and learning about what they do, and where there might be mutual opportunities to do achieve something positive. I'm not someone who insists on 'playing it safe' all the time. Sometimes, risks are necessary. Challenging the status quo, innovating and trying new things are all a form of risk-taking by their very nature, so it's impossible to lead an organisation towards a shared vision without taking some risk. I'm comfortable doing that where I feel it will make a positive difference. The most important thing for me is being able to encourage people to come with me on that journey, which is something all good CEOs do.

Like most people, I've also had some good fortune at certain times during my career, for which I'm grateful.

Q2: Why did you accept to be the CEO of APM?

Boddison: My previous role was Chief Executive of nasen, where I spent six years. It was a really rewarding job but I felt I was starting to become known as a specialist in that field rather than a leader more broadly. I wanted to find an opportunity to make a broader difference to society so, after six years, it felt like the right time to make a change.

APM interested me because projects span every single sector. That gives real breadth and scale of impact. Not only that, but this impact often goes unseen by the general public. I saw a real opportunity to change that and make people aware not only of APM but of projects in general, and the positive changes they make to people and communities. Effective project delivery across the public, private and third sectors is essential for solving some of the most challenging problems facing the world, from climate change to combating disease. As Chief Executive of APM, I want to help these projects and others to succeed.

Q3: What impact can projects have in our societies?

Boddison: Projects themselves often have some sort of societal impact as their ultimate aim. For example, it might be to address a sustainability issue, flood defences, build new infrastructure, or roll out a healthcare programme. Alternatively, it might be something more modest in scale, but which helps people to do their jobs more easily, or even creates new jobs. With almost any project, there's usually some form of societal impact.

Alongside that, there's an inherent value within the project profession itself as a vehicle for diversity and social mobility. Projects lend themselves to those things, but the profession is improving those issues at source by taking positive steps to improve diversity, equality, inclusion and belonging.

For projects to succeed and deliver these benefits for society, they must be properly funded and staffed. Project and programme professionals must also have the right skills. APM has launched a new campaign called [Future Lives and Landscapes](#) that focuses on projects that deliver benefits to society in the UK, transforming the nation's economic, social and physical landscape. We want these projects to succeed not only now but in the future. Our campaign is exploring the opportunities and challenges affecting these social projects, and how the profession needs to develop to continue benefitting society in the coming years.

Q4: How can people be educated to project management according to you?

Boddison: The project profession is still relatively young. It isn't largely known about or understood, other than by those already working in project roles. Project management isn't widely taught in schools. Not many people grow up saying 'I want to be a project manager'. Nevertheless, a lot of people do find themselves in these roles, either by design or unintentionally (we call these people 'accidental project managers'). The challenge is therefore to prepare people for something they may not even be aware of. Greater awareness of project management is needed to make it a career of first choice.

Q5: How can APM contribute to that education?

Boddison: There are many ways APM is doing this:

- 1) We have a lot of starting points that enable people to develop their professional competences and become part of the wider project community. This can be done by accessing free resources on our website, joining our mentoring programme, attending our conferences or using our online forum, APM Community.
- 2) We create multiple pathways for people to progress in their chosen fields. For example, APM qualifications and standards, such as Chartered Project Professional (ChPP) status. We believe chartered status in particular is a

benchmark for capability at the highest level. We want it to be seen almost as a licence to practice among senior project experts.

- 3) We engage with people at all stages of their career. We partner with educational institutions to let young people know about the opportunities offered by a career in projects. We also work with employers who may be running projects in their workplace but who may not be aware that project management is a specialism. This helps us offer training and support to more of the 'accidental project managers' in the workplace, further professionalising those roles. We're also helping people transition into project roles from other careers and sectors, and helping those who are returning to the workplace (e.g. for parental leave).
- 4) We're maintaining and raising standards in the profession by evolving our Body of Knowledge, revising our qualifications, listening and leading debate, and growing the profession's collective knowledge through our research programme.
- 5) We have a compelling membership offering. APM is a non-profit organisation, so our aim is to grow our membership so that we can support as many people as possible. Ultimately, this is how we'll work towards our vision of a world where all projects succeed.

Q6: How does/will APM work with other project management associations/organizations?

Boddison: Increasingly, we're recognising that the project profession is one profession. You're a part of it, no matter where you start your journey and whatever professional organisation you're associated with. Project and programme professionals are entitled to expect that all organisations in our field will work together for a common purpose. To this end, APM is very open to working with other project organisations, whether they're pan-sector or specialist; UK-based or international.

We're working more closely with the Project Management Institute on things like events. We also work with the International Project Management Association, to help those at the early stages of their career. We're even having conversations with PeopleCert, the organisation that owns PRINCE2. We have PRINCE2 recognition for our own Project Management Qualification, so there's mutual recognition there. But we're also exploring other things we could potentially do together, which is very exciting.

It's still in the early stages, but we're working to bring together the world's most influential project-related organisations to establish some kind of global coalition. Watch this space!

Q7: You are also an active volunteer. How do you find the time to volunteer?

Boddison: I think there's an expectation that senior leaders work outside normal hours. This suits me well, because I think of my job not so much as work but more of a

way of life. Working outside core hours makes roles like mine much more fluid and flexible. The CEO role may not lend itself to the traditional 9-5 working pattern, but the world no longer works 9-5. We have a very progressive way of working at APM that reflects this and lets people work the patterns that support a healthy work/life balance, including volunteering.

Q8: Why do you volunteer?

Boddison: I enjoy giving something back. Of course, it's a good thing to do in a moral sense, but I also genuinely enjoy helping people. Fundamentally, I'm trying to make a positive difference to society. If I can do that in my day job, great. But there's more I can do beyond that.

For me, volunteering is mutually beneficial too. Helping organisations that are making a positive difference while expanding my volunteering network helps in my role at APM, because I'm working alongside so many fantastic experts whose knowledge I can draw from. I'm particularly passionate about working with charities and educational groups that support children and young people. As a former teacher and proud parent, I find this incredibly rewarding.

Q9: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Boddison: It's impossible to overstate the value and power of projects. As the CEO of a project organisation, I suppose that may sound a little biased, but I genuinely believe it. So my message to PWJ readers is simply 'thank you for continuing to make the world a better place, one project at a time'.

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

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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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