

## **Interview with IPMA Vice President Stacy Goff**

At the 2013 IPMA World Congress in Croatia

By Ivy Elizabeth Bai



Stacy Goff, IPMA Vice President

**Ivy Elizabeth Bai (Ivy):** Hello, Stacy. I am from Beijing Wow Project Management Consulting Company which is famous for project/programme management training, consulting and certification in China and ranks the top 10 Chinese Project Management Consulting Company by PMRC. We have been providing World Top 500 construction companies, large scale central enterprises and their subsidiaries, publicly-held companies, etc. project/programme management training, consulting and certification for ten years. There are 40-50 thousand project managers who attended our project management training.

Thank you very much for your time for this interview. As the vice president of IPMA Marketing and Events, what do you think of the congress this year?

**Stacy Goff (Stacy):** I think the congress is excellent. The venue is wonderful, the keynote speeches are outstanding, the parallel stream sessions that I had the chance to see are great. One of the interesting things is that participants are coming from all over the world. This is one opportunity for people from different nations to meet at the sessions, so the good news, this is an opportunity to discuss IPMA, and to move forward. The bad news is people have multiple favorite sessions at the same time, resulting in missing some of the outstanding presentations. We almost need to have a ten days congress to cover all the business, I think that it is an excellent congress.

**Ivy:** I am not a professor in project management, I am not a project manager for complex or mega projects, but I do projects. I think the topic of this congress finding balance and moving forward is great. Because all the project managers do the

projects in a controlled environment, in which project managers need to balance many aspects to have the benefits, to control the risks and to meet the satisfaction and requirements of the stakeholders. As the project management experts, could you please tell us why does the IPMA board choose this topic?

**Stacy:** There are multiple layers of answers to this excellent question. On the finding balance side, there is a lot about project management that is oriented to the technical parts; managing time, cost... that's important. Yet if you look at success aspects of many projects, well, those technical threads are merely starting points. Projects mostly need people to work together, to relate to our stakeholders' needs, to accomplish the impossible by teaming up, and working together.

And so part of the challenge is balancing the technical attributes of project success with the behaviors, the interpersonal aspects. And also, with understanding the context of the projects, the national cultures, the industry you are in, and all those important concerns. That is your "inside information" about what the balance is all about. Because if it is just the technical aspects, that's only 10% of project success, and the other 90% is everything else. Even other organizations today are now asking: "are you ready?" And they are repeating our insight, that is not just the technical aspect, it is the "rest of the story" that IPMA brings.

And about moving forward, project management is the only discipline that humans do that involves change; everything else we manage is maintaining the status quo. If we are not moving forward, the world is still changing. So we are actually moving backwards, because the earth rotates beneath us; we need to move forward faster than society grows, and complexity increases. So that is what is behind IPMA's slogan, moving forward; , if we are not moving forward, we are moving backwards.

**Ivy:** Yes, this could be a survive or die, disappear issue.

**Stacy:** There is another secret. For IPMA We have our double arrows in our logo. It has been our symbol for 6 years and you know that if you get a recorder or CD, that moving forward is just one arrow; two arrows means fast forward. So, this is a hidden message: we are not just moving forward, we are moving fast forward. Because we do not just move to keep up, we want to continue to stay ahead. Finding Balance and Moving Forward is deep symbology.

**Ivy:** The time of this congress is special, the beginning of the last quarter of 2013, almost the end of this year and the new year is at the corner, at this turning point, could you please tell us, what are the main achievements this year, let's say in research area, and in the practical area ? And what are the trends, new developments or the direction of the project management? Let's put a timeframe like next year or in 2015?

**Stacy:** This is a difficult question to answer, because first of all, there are many, many small achievements. They work together to push forward. In the area of research, a lot of things are in process, as opposed to complete. So, just as an example, on Wednesday morning, we had a meeting of leaders in PM training and

research working together. Because research is the foundation of moving forward, we had IPMA research, education and training, and Young Crew also in that meeting.

IPMA does not move forward one part at a time, otherwise we are leaving someone behind. This meeting, with all three groups, is an excellent example of moving forward--together. And we discussed whether there should be awards for educational tools, should there be awards for good books, should there be awards for registered training programmes. It becomes really complex: because ok, there is the target audience, perhaps a research project. What do they need, because we do not want to just identify things because we can do them, we want to research, and develop new product, new service, new awareness, because we are fulfilling specific needs. That meeting was a good example, tossing in a do list of a whole series of additional research topics.

So about accomplishments in research this year, I'll first point out, one of my very good friends Anbang Qi, who is from China, is the Chair of IPMA Research. He has identified a whole series of Research initiatives, including sustaining the IPMA Festival of Knowledge. He planned and held an excellent Festival of Knowledge event in conjunction with a Young Crew--China meeting in Beijing, last Spring. So i think it is a great achievement. It was the second Festival of Knowledge that has been done in China. And so is that an achievement? Yes, it is, but it is not new because it was done before.



The actual results of much of IPMA's research will not be published for two or three years. One of example is the challenge has been given to research, it has not yet been realized, but we will, at some point, identify the relationship between IPMA's flavor of project management and project success and business success. IPMA's differentiation in the market is understanding the full circle of competences we need to be successful, then this is something we can uniquely do.

Other organizations spent millions or more US dollars, trying to establish the value of project management in their flavor, and because that is a more technical orientation, they ignore the rest of our success factors. They found no publishable value of their project management. Sometime in the next two or three years, IPMA Research will be able to give either the testimony or by research driven proof (or some aspect of both) to show, yes, here is what the executive gets from people who are certified at IPMA level C®, IPMA Level B® or IPMA level A®. This is what businesses need to raise project management to become the strategic partner of executives who want beneficial change. Now IPMA research is the key to that but with no results yet this year.

**Ivy:** OK, we talked about the achievements in research area, what about the moving forward, new achievements or milestones of the project management in other aspects, such as in the project-oriented companies.

**Stacy:** One of the continuing initiatives of IPMA is the IPMA Family Social Network. The way people in project oriented companies relate to each other in a global context is often virtual -- we are not always meeting face to face. In fact, we rarely have the opportunity to meet face to face, so IPMA Research manages our social collaboration website called the IPMA Family, [IPMAfamily.org](http://IPMAfamily.org). This is an opportunity for ongoing engagement for people who are remote, who do not have the chance to come together in a World Congress. I think the IPMA Family is another continuing achievement.

Of course, virtual collaboration is not as rich a level of engagement as a World Congress, like this one. But not all practitioners in project oriented companies can attend an IPMA World Congress. Of course, many could begin planning now for our next IPMA World Congress in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, a year from now. This is the one in the Netherland for World congress. And then we will have, in November of next year, an Asia Pacific Regional congress in Beijing, sponsored by PMRC.

The combination of the IPMA family website and Global and regional events is a way for people in project oriented companies—and government agencies--to anticipate, participate, and guide their own learning, development, and exposure to new ideas to their preferences. I think this combination is a major ongoing achievement. We do not try to do individual small achievements which are like simple fireworks, with one small sparkle then it is gone. We want brilliant, sustaining and continuous flashes of PM enlightenment, like the waves of the ocean that keep coming and coming and coming.

**Ivy:** Very vivid! I am curious, what are the trends, new development or the direction of the project management, let's put a timeframe like next year or in 2015?

**Stacy:** It is good for you to put a timeframe on it, because there are different answers depending on the time horizon. There are stylistic differences, and there are also national differences, industry differences. Just to illustrate, I wrote a chapter of a book, called "*Project Management Circle 2025*." That is a somewhat distant horizon; my chapter was called "Visions for the project management software industry". To write that chapter, first I looked out to the year 2050, to see where we might be then, and compare it to where are we now. I did this because if I predict where we will be in 2025, that is a data point, but I felt the need to look out much further, so the data point was on right path; otherwise we tend to zigzag. I also felt the need to look back, so I could establish the full trajectory. I started with 1967, capturing the major achievements from 1967 to the year I wrote the chapter. Then I traced industry achievements over time periods. I wrote, here is what I expect to happen here, here, here and here.

Now, this was not just my own thinking; I engaged the owners and the top managers of major global project management software products, such as Ludo Hauduc from Microsoft, I engaged also a great visionary, Kraft Bell, from Gartner Group; I engaged also Ron Brown as an visionary executive. He was Rose's (my wife) manager at Digital Equipment. So you see, I established a working group of experts

in where we are and where we are headed in the world of project and program management.

When you mentioned 2015 as your timeframe, for that period we have excellent resource, Vladimir Liberzon, who inspired Spider software in Russia. Spider software is a most popular construction and oil industry portfolio/project/programme management tool. Vladimir stated that it is pretty silly that organizations have one portfolio of capital projects, for all their new buildings, one portfolio for all the operations, and one separate portfolio for all the projects and programmes.

Those portfolios all compete for the same funding, for the same resources, for the same priorities, for the same strategic alignment. Vladimir said, by around 2015, organizations will be moving towards one portfolio for all their strategic decisions. From that one portfolio they will be able, just like with a financial portfolio, to understand the data, the risk exposure. In finance, you do not have a portfolio of all high risk investments, you have some low yield, low risk, which are balanced by the high risk innovative kind of things.

By that point, we will move to a time when executives having strategic control over all their portfolio decision-making. This shared insight of Vladimir's is significant and interestingly, because these are the experts who know these things about the future of project management. It is also interesting because most of them are working on the tools for this, right now. The barrier for advancements like this is a common one: The tools are often there, but the organization must be mature enough to apply the tools wisely. So to the specific question about changes to project management by 2015 or other date, it is not the innovations that make the difference, it is the organizations' ability to harness the innovations and reap the benefits.

As part of the chapter, I established ten criteria that organizations apply using project management technology. And I do a Gaussian Curve (bell curve) with leaders and laggards. Then I established a pie chart, showing how much of today's opportunity is actually applied in today's organizations. And there are statements to the effect that 60% of businesses are still using the state of the art as of 1980. The trailing edge laggards in technology used to be 10 years behind the leading edge. Today, they are 30 years behind. So it is not the innovations as much as the maturity of every organization in reaping the potential benefits from those innovations. So, as a comparison, there are a lot of people using Microsoft word to capture information, but most people use less than 10% of the features of Microsoft Word. We cannot innovate by adding more features to Microsoft Word, we innovate by harnessing more of the features that exist, where they help.

So, 2015 as the reference point of the story of portfolios and other innovations, is only relevant for the bleeding edge and leading edge. The rest of the gap widens between the leaders and laggards; this is a society issue. If we truly understand business needs, the innovations in project management do not just serve the project managers, they serve the entire management chain above her, and until they serve that entire the entire chain, they are not worth the investment. So, that is the long answer.

**Ivy:** It is a long and wonderful answer. You mentioned the ability, the capability of project management is very important to an organization. So the next question is, in your opinion, how to improve the ability and capabilities?

**Stacy:** In IPMA we have certifications for individuals, and we have awards for project or programme excellence. So that is already the established one tier or level of recognition for individuals, another tier for projects or programmes. In addition, IPMA has developed an organizational assessment in project and programme management. This is from the executive point of view, to help identify where are the strengths in projects and programmes, where are the gaps, how mature are you throughout your organization in the various departments? You might have an engineering group that is very mature, an IT group that is only somewhat mature and other groups that are in between. Most organizations tend to take groups that already are good, giving them more investment, and making them even better. If you can get 5% improvement in an engineering group, that is good.



But if I can get 50% improvement in IT, that's a smarter use of my investment. So, if I use IPMA Delta, IPMA's organizational assessment, I can look at where I am strong, where I am not as strong, where is my smartest investment of improvement resources, and improvement efforts.

So, this way, we are dealing with the all parts of the organization, helping to improve abilities and capabilities. We are dealing with individuals; and with their projects or programmes. IPMA Delta uses the awards framework criteria at the project level. For individuals, we evaluate whether they are certified just for knowledge, because knowledge is really passive, or are they certified for competence? So at three levels, IPMA Delta helps organizations to look at their strengths, the greatest gaps, and where are the smartest places to focus executive attention to improve business or government results. So IPMA Delta is one answer to your question.

**Ivy:** As you know, with the development of the Chinese economy, Chinese enterprises, more and more Chinese companies are going abroad to do projects, many of them are complex or mega projects. We do have a lot of project managers, a lot of good project managers, but the issue is first of all, we do not have enough project managers for all the projects. Secondly, we need more excellent project managers like those who won the award on Wednesday night. The fact is that the speed of the business development is much much faster than the speed of growth of people, talents, project managers. So, could you please give us some suggestions?

**Stacy:** First, this is an issue because of your insights behind some of the things you just said. I have a little different view of China, and China's project managers, especially in construction. As you said, Wednesday night, we saw the awards for Chinese Construction Project Managers. Rose and I were very happy to see, this time, one of the award winners is a woman. I think that is great progress.

I had the opportunity in 2006, at the Shanghai IPMA World Congress, to be a judge for the Chinese Construction Project Managers award. IPMA has, with PMRC, a strategic relationship with Mr. Wu Tao and his group. My experience in 2006, and my working experience with Wu Tao tells me he is brilliant, in the way he helps develop his association's members.

In our Award judging in 2006, our role was to ask difficult questions of the award candidates, to see how well they could answer them. Most of the questions were about challenges they faced in their projects and programmes. In one part of the judging, we asked about the challenges of the project building a Sub-Sahara highway, with great distances away from suppliers, and your ecosystem, water, electricity, and having to carry everything you use. Managing local workers from different cultures, with different workdays even, different languages, different food requirements; how do you deal with these things?

In another example, with a new tall skyscraper in Beijing: How do you bring tons and tons per day of materials and the equipment? In the 2006 awards event, they were all young men, ranging from 30 to 35 years of age. In most of the rest of the world, if you have this level of responsibilities, you are in your 40s and 50s. So young, and so great! I saw brilliant construction project managers. I think China has brilliant construction project managers, in part because of the efforts of Wu Tao and PMRC.

And to your original statement, yes, it is not enough, for all the projects which you need to do. And still, these project managers, more than half of them are working on the projects outside of China. And many, of course, are working on the projects inside of China. So, yes, you need more, but you are growing, in China, a generation of incredible, great project managers already. So I think you have already identified the way for that to scale. I think for the construction project managers concerned, the relationship between the Chinese Construction Management Association and PMRC is excellent, they are working with each other to achieve ever-higher levels of success. And because all these construction project managers participate in PMRC's IPMA certification programme, this is beautiful, working together in the best possible way. The key question is how do we scale that to other types of projects, because the demand is great in other areas too.

We can scale that in part in kind of a coaching, mentoring way, working with China's excellent schools. In Wuhan, we spoke with the BIM School Dean who is doing excellent work, and we talked with doctoral students about what they are learning. This is the most important foundation for China and its future. It was encouraging, because you are continuing to grow great people. There are still challenges. How do you grow ten times as many? I think that is a market demand question. Maybe as the salaries grow in China, you will start attracting people from other nations to those schools, and to those professional associations. That is one answer, but culturally, I see China is moving from an export-dependent economy, to one with a larger middle class that has stronger consumer tendencies. I think that the progression of China as a world leader, internally and externally, for economics is one piece of the puzzle to answer your question.

Somebody who lives on their piece of land and is just a little bit above subsistence, is not going to go through the education systems that China has built, so the very actions that China is taking today, to move more people into the middle class to build the consumer society has benefits for those citizens who wish to go to school, who can afford to go to school, and then the limit is the wealth of the economy, and the capacity of the universities, and the ability of the professional associations to boost them into a higher orbit. Note that I am not a China expert, only a careful observer.

**Ivy:** Yes, this is also a social issue which needs social resolutions.

**Stacy:** It is good insight on your part, because beyond the individual, the project team, and the cooperation of government entities, my ambition is for society to reach higher levels to move forward for the benefit of all.

**Ivy:** Thank you for your suggestions. For many different reasons, many Chinese project managers or project management professionals just could not come here to attend the congress, could you please say something to them?

**Stacy:** I believe that everyone is a project manager—most people just don't realize it yet. If we had one billion Chinese at this congress, we just could not handle the crowd! And to your question, if you cannot come to a congress, what you can do to move yourself forward? It starts in your city. And depending on the city, there are many resources from universities, the chapters of PMRC, and private training organizations that can help to provide the insight, the path, the opportunity to find the right balance. This is important because if you try to move forward without having balance, you fall. So I think it starts with local opportunity. And in every association, PMRC as one example, or in US Professional Associations, it is only 5-10% of the people who affiliate with the association who go beyond the local setting, so 90-95% get huge benefits first from their local chapter or educational institutions.

Then for those 5-10% who wish to continue moving ahead, look for regional opportunities. For example, coming at the end of November 2014, for those who live near Beijing, I would say, go to the Asia-Pacific PM Congress in Beijing which will be hosted by PMRC. So, that is a huge opportunity. There is still a gap today for those who would rather relate to professional peers in an ongoing basis as opposed to these one year major event. But that is why we mentioned collaborative alternatives, and other ways of building your network of peers.

You can move forward very quickly in a Congress in two or three days, but what can you do on the other three hundred and sixty days of the year? Here is the opportunity for things like the IPMA family, or local opportunities, perhaps available through PMRC.

One excellent online reference resource that I use and appreciate is *PM World Journal*. David Pells manages this great resource, [www.pmworldjournal.net](http://www.pmworldjournal.net), and it is available for free for all people. It includes monthly editions for far more frequent insights than a once a year Congress. And in addition to the monthly journal, they



have daily and weekly news updates, useful articles, and notices of events around the world. So this is as much project and programme management information as most people would ever want. You can find out what is happening in the world of today's project management and read all the articles.

Pick something; search for something on the web. Like construction project management, type it as the key words, for this, you do not need to go to a chapter meeting, you do not go to an once-a-year event, it is real time and online, so it is a great untapped resource. I have seen, on the upper left corner on each page at PM World Journal, it says translate. I have not tested for its Chinese translation, but that would be an interesting exercise. You take a page, say ok to translate this into Chinese. But I would not stop with one website, instead, look for three or four such resources, this one is the best one I know online.

This adds to your ongoing engagement, ongoing, moving forward. Because you can move forward as fast as you can for two days at the Asia-Pacific Congress, but that is not enough to meet the demand. What do you do in the other days of the year? So the PM World Journal website is the kind of thing that I would point everybody towards. In my opinion, that is the best example for project managers. And people can sign up for a notice for the newsletters, so you get the summary. So it is a push instead of you having to go and to look. That is a resource available to everybody.

**Ivy:** Good, I think this is almost everything I would like to talk with you about in this very limited time. Thank you so much for your time and for your very inspiring comments and suggestions.

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*Editor's note: This interview was conducted by Ms. Bai during the 27<sup>th</sup> IPMA World Congress on Project Management in Dubrovnik, Croatia, Sep 30 – Oct 2, 2013.*

## About Stacy Goff



### Stacy Goff

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**Stacy Goff**, the PM Performance Coach, is Vice President of Marketing & Events for IPMA, the International Project Management Association, and President of *asapm*, the American Society for the Advancement of Project Management (IPMA-USA). In these roles, Goff presents keynotes and speaks at conferences around the World on topics related to the advancement of project and program management competence, and improved PM performance. During 2011 he presented to dozens of audiences on five continents.

When he is not serving not-for-profit organizations, Goff is owner and President of his USA based Program and Project Management consulting, tools and learning company. A Project Management practitioner since 1970 and consultant since 1982, he helps improve enterprise, department, project team or individual pm competence, effectiveness and performance.

An insightful consultant and dynamic speaker, Mr. Goff offers workshops of interest to Executives, Managers, Program and Project Managers, and individual contributors. His Project Management tools and methods are used by government agencies, Enterprises, consultancies and individuals on six continents. By the year 2000, he had exposed over 45,000 people to the World of Project Management. And, he does not just teach project management, he lives it.

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## About the Author



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**Ivy Elizabeth Bai** graduated from Beijing Normal University, Master's Degree in Comparative Education. Ivy has 18 years of working experience in education and training industry, working as management in Chinese and global top business schools such as Chinese European International Business School and Management School of Fudan University, working as director in education group. Ivy has been involved in project management education and training for years; currently she is general manager of Beijing Wow Project Management Consulting Company, Shanghai Branch. She is an assessor and language owner of PRINCE2 certifications. She translated the books of P3O, PRINCE2 and all of the courseware of PRINCE2, MSP and MoR for use in China. Ivy can be contacted at [baiwei@wowproject.org](mailto:baiwei@wowproject.org).