

Prioritize Continuous Learning and Adaptability

Interview with Dr. Darius Danesh¹

Chief Executive Officer
Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM)



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Dr. Darius Danesh is a results-driven professional renowned for his extensive track record in project portfolio management, data analytics, and executive leadership. He has served as a distinguished advisor to diverse industries in both the public and private sectors.

An esteemed Fellow Certified Practicing Portfolio Executive (FAIPM CPPE), Dr. Danesh also holds the distinguished title of Fellow Chartered Professional Engineering Executive of Engineers Australia (FIEAust CPEng EngExec NER APEC Engineer IntPE). Furthermore, as a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD), he possesses a profound understanding of corporate governance.

Academically accomplished, he has earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Engineering Science, complemented by a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Strategic Project Portfolio Management, specializing in Data Analytics and Decision Sciences, from the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

¹ How to cite this work: Khelifi, Y. (2023). Prioritize Continuous Learning and Adaptability, Interview with Dr. Darius Danesh, CEO, AIPM, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue XI, November.

Dr. Danesh has received numerous awards and commendations, including recognition as one of the world's top data-driven innovators and leaders by Insight.

Beyond the academic realm, he has made significant contributions to the field, assuming roles as Company Director, Chair, and Board Director at various engineering and project management organizations.

Currently, Dr. Danesh serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM).

For inquiries or to leverage his expertise in advancing your organization's strategic objectives, you can connect with him via LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/darius-danesh.

Interview

Q1: First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You are an engineer. How did you come to project management?

Dr. Darius Danesh (Danesh): You're most welcome, and I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this interview with PMWJ. My journey into project management from an engineering background can be attributed to a confluence of factors. While engineering equips individuals with a robust foundation in technical and problem-solving skills, it also emphasizes the importance of structured planning and execution. This foundation naturally led me to explore the realm of project management, where I discovered the synergy between engineering principles and effective project delivery. Recognizing that successful project outcomes hinge not only on technical expertise but also on strategic planning, leadership, and stakeholder engagement, I embarked on a path to integrate these facets into my professional repertoire.

Moreover, my academic pursuits and practical experience in engineering underscored the imperative of efficient project management in achieving organizational goals. This realization further fuelled my passion for project management, prompting me to seek advanced knowledge and qualifications in the field. In essence, my journey from engineering to project management has been driven by a pursuit of holistic and strategic approaches to addressing complex challenges in diverse industries.

Q2: You have numerous qualifications in project management. Why?

Danesh: The pursuit of numerous qualifications in project management reflects my unwavering commitment to professional development and the pursuit of excellence in this dynamic field. Project management continually evolves to address the ever-changing landscape of challenges and opportunities in the business world. Therefore, my decision to acquire a diverse range of qualifications in project management serves several strategic purposes.

Each qualification offers a unique perspective and skill set, allowing me to develop a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the discipline. This expertise enables me to approach projects from various angles, ensuring a well-rounded approach to project delivery. Moreover, the dynamic nature of project management necessitates adaptability and agility, and expanding my knowledge and skill base through diverse qualifications allows me to readily adapt to new project requirements and industry trends, ensuring ongoing relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, certifications in specialized areas deepen my expertise in specific aspects of project management, such as data analytics, governance, and strategic portfolio management, which is invaluable when addressing complex and specialized projects.

My academic journey, culminating in a PhD in Strategic Project Portfolio Management, has significantly shaped my approach to project management and continues to enhance my ability to drive value in practice. This pursuit aimed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, fostering evidence-based decision-making in project management. One primary contribution of this academic journey has been a profound understanding of the intricate interplay between data analytics, strategic decision-making, and project success. This insight has enabled me to leverage data-driven methodologies to optimize project portfolios, assess risk, and identify opportunities for enhancement, resulting in a more agile and informed approach to project management.

Lastly, the pursuit of certifications fosters a culture of continuous learning, encouraging me to stay informed about emerging trends, best practices, and innovations in project management, ensuring I provide organizations with up-to-date and effective solutions, address complex challenges, and contribute to the advancement of the project management profession.

Q3: Congratulations for being the CEO of the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM). Could you remind our readers of some data and facts about AIPM: date of birth, number of members, missions?

Danesh: Thank you for your kind words, and I'm delighted to share some key information about the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) with your readers.

AIPM is Australia's peak body and membership association for project professionals. We empower and advocate for our members at every stage of their project management careers, driving thought leadership, knowledge, performance, and success. Founded in 1976 as the Project Managers' Forum, the AIPM has been shaping the project management community in Australia for nearly 45 years. With almost five decades of history, AIPM has played a pivotal role in advancing the field of project management in the region. We exist to lead and represent the project profession in Australia, creating a community and ecosystem that enables project success and the professional advancement of our members. We are represented in every state and territory in Australia by chapters, consisting of AIPM members. Our

members come from various industries, sectors, and backgrounds, reflecting the broad applicability of project management principles.

AIPM is driven by a set of core missions and objectives that guide our activities and initiatives. These include promoting excellence, advocacy, professional development, networking and community building, research and innovation, and industry collaboration, among others. We offer a wide range of certifications designed to empower individuals to advance their project management careers. Additionally, we foster a vibrant project management community by facilitating networking events, conferences, and forums where professionals can exchange ideas, experiences, and insights.

As the CEO of AIPM, it is my privilege to lead an organization that is deeply committed to these missions and to serving our members and the broader project management community. Together, we work towards elevating the standards of project management in Australia and fostering a culture of excellence and innovation in the profession.

Q4: How do you foresee collaboration with other project management organizations?

Danesh: I believe that mutual collaborations with other project management organizations are a key aspect of strategic improvement for any organization, fostering knowledge sharing, best practices, and a global perspective within the project management community.

Partnering with other project management organizations enables the exchange of best practices and innovative approaches. Learning from each other's successes and challenges allows organizations to collectively elevate global project management standards. International collaboration offers organization members exposure to diverse global perspectives, facilitating adaptation to various cultures, methodologies, and business environments - an increasingly important skill in our interconnected world.

By working together, we can tackle complex industry issues, conduct impactful research, and contribute to the development of evidence-based project management practices. Additionally, I believe that a unified voice is often more influential when advocating for the recognition and importance of project management at the industry level.

Q5: You held various leadership roles; what is one advice you would give about career management in the project management world?

Danesh: My advice would be to Prioritize Continuous Learning and Adaptability.

The project management landscape is dynamic, characterized by evolving methodologies, technologies, and global trends. To thrive and advance in this field, there is a need to commit to continuous learning and professional development. For example:

- Pursue certifications, attend workshops, webinars, and conferences, and stay updated on the latest tools, methodologies, and best practices through industry publications.
- Technology is transforming project management. Familiarize yourself with project management software, data analytics tools, and automation solutions to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.
- Effective project management goes beyond technical skills. Invest in developing soft skills like communication, leadership, negotiation, and emotional intelligence.
- Don't limit yourself to a single industry or type of project. Seek diverse experiences that expose you to different challenges and sectors. This breadth of experience can make you a more versatile project manager.
- Embrace change and be adaptable. The ability to pivot when necessary and embrace new approaches is a valuable asset in today's fast-paced project environments.
- Build a strong professional network within the project management community. Networking can open doors to opportunities, collaborations, and mentorship.
- Define your career objectives and create a plan to achieve them. Regularly review and adjust your goals as your career progresses.
- Seek out mentors and advisors who can provide guidance based on their own experiences. Learning from seasoned professionals can accelerate your career growth.
- The project management field is evolving rapidly, with changes in methodologies, tools, and expectations. Be prepared to adapt and embrace change rather than resist it.

A successful project management career is built on a foundation of continuous learning, adaptability, and a commitment to excellence. By staying proactive in your professional development and remaining open to new opportunities and challenges, you can not only advance your career but also contribute significantly to the success of your projects and organization.

Q6: In the uncertain and fast paced environment we experience today, what are the 3 essential skills for project managers today?

Danesh: In today's dynamic and uncertain business environment, project managers must cultivate several essential skills to thrive. However, three of these critical skills are:

1. **Adaptability and Change Management:** The ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances is paramount. Project managers must be skilled in change management, capable of guiding their teams and stakeholders through transitions smoothly. This skill involves effective communication, managing resistance, and ensuring that project objectives remain aligned with changing organizational goals.

2. **Risk Management and Decision-Making:** The modern business landscape is rife with risks and uncertainties. Project managers need strong risk management skills to identify, assess, and mitigate potential issues that could derail projects. Additionally, making informed decisions in the face of ambiguity is critical. This includes weighing available data, considering various scenarios, and choosing the most suitable course of action.
3. **Digital Literacy and Technology Integration:** Technology is deeply integrated into project management today. Project managers should possess digital literacy and be adept at leveraging project management software, data analytics tools, and collaboration platforms. This expertise enables efficient project planning, monitoring, and reporting, as well as leveraging data-driven insights to enhance decision-making.

Q7: How has volunteering helped you in your career?

Danesh: Volunteering, particularly in leadership roles, has played an important role in shaping my career and professional journey in several ways. It exposes individuals to a diverse network of professionals from various backgrounds and industries. Through my volunteer experiences, I have had the privilege of connecting with individuals who share a passion for project management. These connections have not only enriched my professional network but have also opened doors to new opportunities, collaborations, and valuable connections instrumental in my career growth.

Serving in volunteer leadership positions allowed me to gain practical experience in areas such as governance, strategic decision-making, and AI. These experiences provided valuable insights into the intricacies of running complex organizations, directly applicable to my roles as a leader in the project management field. Volunteering often involves working closely with individuals who bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table. This exposure allowed me to learn more about innovative approaches and industry trends from my fellow volunteers, contributing to my ability to stay informed about emerging developments in project management and apply them effectively in my career.

Volunteering provides a sense of personal fulfilment and satisfaction that transcends one's professional life. Knowing that you are making a positive impact on a cause or organization you are passionate about can boost morale and motivation, and this positive energy often carries over into one's career, leading to increased enthusiasm and dedication.

Moreover, many volunteer organizations offer leadership roles that may not be readily available in one's professional career. These opportunities allow individuals to take on responsibilities, make decisions, and lead teams, all of which are valuable experiences that can enhance one's leadership skills and confidence.

In summary, volunteering has been a catalyst for my career growth, offering a platform to improve my skills and practical experience, expand my network, and stay connected to best practices in project management. It has been a source of both personal and professional enrichment, contributing significantly to my journey in the field.

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

Danesh: In today's dynamic and rapidly changing world, the role of project managers and professionals in the project management field has never been more critical. Projects, whether large or small, are the driving force behind innovation, transformation, and progress in virtually every industry.

Embrace change, seize opportunities, and continually invest in your professional development. Equip yourselves with the latest tools, methodologies, and best practices to stay at the forefront of your field.

Collaboration and knowledge sharing are central to our profession. Engage with professional organizations, attend industry events, and connect with peers and mentors who can inspire and guide your journey. Remember that the challenges we face today are the stepping stones to the innovations of tomorrow.

Together, as a global community of project management professionals, we can continue to drive progress, build resilience, and create a brighter future.

As stated by project management thought leader Joy Gumz, *“operations keeps the lights on, strategy provides a light at the end of the tunnel, but project management is the train engine that moves the organization forward.”*

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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