

# Project management is a very socially responsible profession

## Interview with Dr Mladen Vukomanović <sup>1</sup>

Professor, University of Zagreb  
President, IPMA



### Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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### Introduction to the interviewee

Prof. Dr Mladen Vukomanović has been active for more than 20 years in different leadership and consultancy roles across various industries, including AEC, Oil & Gas, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. As a Project Professional, Mladen works diligently on facilitating sustainable social change, developing the project profession, and applying project management in real life. Mladen is an experienced professor specializing in construction and civil engineering and is currently teaching at the University of Zagreb. In more than 20 years of his voluntary engagement, Mladen has served various NGOs and Charities, including the Croatian Association for Project Management - IPMA Croatia as well as the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in a range

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of different leadership roles (including President, Vice President, Chairman, etc.). He is widely respected in the project management discipline and has several prestigious certifications and awards. He can be contacted via [mladen@ipma.world](mailto:mladen@ipma.world)

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## Interview

**Q1:** First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. Congratulations on your new role as President of IPMA. What were your first thoughts when you were elected? How did the election process go?

**Mladen Vukomanović (Vukomanović):** Thank you for asking this. It's a big honor because IPMA was founded in 1965 and was the first professional body in project management. Then, there was still a cold war between the Soviet Union and America. They were fighting to get better weapons in less time and with less budget, which is when modern project management began. IPMA was the first to be recognized, and from 1965, IPMA was still called the Internet, but for specific, of course, apparent reasons, it was later renamed IPMA. Since 1965, IPMA has been here to vouch and guarantee the delivery of the added value that people who deliver projects give to society and give to the human legacy. And, of course, coming at the helm of that organization, which is governed by more than 70 countries and six continents, is a big honour, but also a responsible and accountable position for the following period of three years where we need to build stronger foundations for project management to be finally recognized as a discipline, and globally accepted as a profession.

What is also important is that it is an election. In IPMA, you have 70 countries. It's very democratic and transparent. Each country puts forward its candidates, who were then voted on and supported by local associations' executive boards. And in the end, you have full-blown elections on paper of 70 countries, each representative casting their votes for their preferred candidates.

**Q2:** How do you envision the future of project management and after the future of IPMA, in fact, in your subsequent tenure?

**Vukomanović:** We are now transcribing this text by AI engines. And, of course, when you read reports from, for example, other associations, like Green Project Management and PMI, it's always about digital technologies and artificial intelligence that will remove some of project managers' roles, tasks, and activities. But I tend to think differently. When you look and rewind 100 years from now, you have had stories about how, in 100 years, people will not need to work more than four, five, or six hours per week.

The hypothesis was that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humankind would have developed all the machinery and operations, so we would commit to body and mind. But when you look at how it has happened, we now have even more tasks and more responsibility on our shoulders. And even with all the Internet of things and robots at hand, people are working more and more hours.

Technology has developed so quickly that we humans can hardly catch up with the immense development gradient. Think of AI and how our organizations and law regulations still have to catch up. Project management is about human interaction; it is about people, making decisions, taking risks, organizing, planning, and controlling.

And, of course, some of the tasks can be overtaken by machines. But humans will get more uncertainties and more issues at hand coming from using such technologies in terms of ethics, decision-making, people skills, fraud, corruption, and, in the end, trusting technologies as part of your decision-making process.

And this is how I see project management will develop. I work in the construction, oil and gas, and pharmaceutical industries. And I have quite a lot of experience working on projects and being on project boards. And, of course, when you look at, for example, the last oil refinery project, we had more than 26,000 activities in our GANTT chart. And it's hard without computers and machine learning to accommodate such high-demand activities and make decisions. "What is critical?" "What is uncritical?". In the end, as a human, you need to decide on the size of that schedule, its design, the practicalities of running it, and its efficiency. Ultimately, you must sign off and decide by trusting that schedule, but also trusting your inner gut feeling.

And this is where we will need to focus our development as a project management profession.

**Q3:** So you think that project managers will still be needed and even more needed even in the age of AI?

**Vukomanović:** It is just one angle, so you have different angles from my point of view.

Currently, projects are taking the majority of the turnover of the budget companies are spending in a year. So before, you had budgets spent on operations and production, and now you have, for example, in Siemens Energy, more than half of their budget spent on projects. Projects are also always delivering new value. So we are facing a big acceleration of development today.

But in that high development, we must rethink how we value projects. The traditional triangle and triple constraint models of time, cost, and quality have become obsolete in valuing projects. Of course, projects need to meet the requirements. And if you were to

scale this to the Olympics in Paris, France, the project would be called unsuccessful, a disaster. In the end, because of time, budget, and specification breaches. But if you look at what value this project will deliver to France, its people, and the society, and what the takeaways are before the next 5, 10, 15 years from now, then it is a different story. Project management is a very socially responsible profession and discipline, and this responsibility and this added value is something that we give to humankind as a society is what we need to focus on in the next period.

**Q4:** If we get back to IPMA, what do you envision for the future of IPMA? We can see many project organizations signing partnerships.

**Vukomanović:** IPMA is very agnostic regarding different methodologies and certification systems that we certify, and we have a unique certified competence system. In IPMA, we focus on the value and the end value that a person can give to the project, a project can deliver to an organization, and an organization can provide to society. It is what we call competence - that you have successfully completed a task whether you use a standard methodology coming from Prince 2 APM, PMI, or PMP. We don't make a preference. It's the final value we provide to society and organizations and the competence we recognize and, in the end, certify. IPMA has a memorandum of understanding with many project management associations, such as PMI. We support each other. We respect each other. I see all these associations as beacons, providing guidance and light for the project profession.

**Q5:** Can you tell us more about how IPMA is led?

**Vukomanović:** IPMA is a not-for-profit organization that is mostly voluntarily led. Even though we have a strong staff and organizational capacities of people working for the organization, it's voluntarily governed, and our members must be not-for-profit.

Another important aspect is that IPMA is always bridging to other standards, and we have a unique program called "Recognition of Prior Learning and Achievements." Let me explain it. Suppose you have acquired some qualification in another association or sector. In that case, we recognize this as a part of our own competence. We are constantly scanning and benchmarking with different associations and industries to understand how the project profession is evolving. For example, last week, we announced that we did the same for the European Commission's PM<sup>2</sup> as a fundamental methodology of people getting first knowledge in project management and becoming more ready to get certified on levels D to A at IPMA.

**Q6:** How do you see the evolution of project management education?

**Vukomanović:** People need to accept getting educated and acquiring new knowledge not just throughout their time at university but through their long-life careers, through non-formal and informal ways of learning.

Formal education is not enough. In practice, you need to acquire additional project management competencies in real life. I often explain this to some of my students who will become construction engineers and think they can immediately run projects. During the last few years, they would hear something about project management, but only after they have acquired all the knowledge, successfully passed the exams, finished their studies, and then gotten some expertise and practice, they need to master the project management skills. I wouldn't say that education will change, that we can produce project managers after five years. Project Management is an applied science.

**Q7:** Can project management become a discipline?

**Vukomanović:** Project management is still not a regulated profession, i.e. a discipline, but is widely accepted and recognized. We can find such stories even in construction and infrastructure or banking. For example, our IPMA member association in the UK, APM, bears a royal charter. Another example is Croatia, where you need an IPMA certificate to lead infrastructure projects funded by public funds. People need to understand that project management is not a vocational study profession (albeit all the PM masters and MBAs) but builds on the basic vocation and then develops further knowledge, skills, and abilities in project management. This further development is typically a part of non-formal education. I don't believe you need to be licensed to run HR projects, but it's imperative that you can prove your worth – and this is where certified competences come to play. This is what IPMA advocates for.

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

**Vukomanović:** I'm a great fan and supporter of David Pells, the editor of PM World Journal, and what he and his team (and you Yasmina!) have accomplished over the years with the PM World Journal.

I've been supporting the journal (part of the board of Honorary Academic Advisors) and tracking what the leadership has done over the years. PM World Journal is one of the beacons of the project profession. And that IPMA has always had a positive attitude and view on what PM World Journal is doing. We will support it as one of the sources of knowledge and insights in project management, and I would suggest to anyone starting project management or wanting to keep track of what is happening and developing project management to stay close to PM World Journal and read the insights and case studies listed in it.

## 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 SA](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with significant manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives to build 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 volunteer 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](#), which aims to help people become better international leaders.

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