

Making the World a Better Place through Project Management

Interview with Deanna Landers

PMI Fellow, Founder and Chair
Project Managers Without Borders
Past Chair, PMI Board of Directors
Los Angeles, California, USA



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Deanna Landers is a PMI Fellow, and the Founder and Chairman of the Board of Project Managers Without Borders (PMWB), which has the mission to make a positive difference in the world through collaborative and sustainable projects.

She previously served on the board of directors of IEEE Smart Village, Metro Denver PM Education Foundation, PMI Mile Hi Chapter, and for 6 years on the international board of directors of PMI, leading the board as Chair in 2013.

She was previously the Director of Program Management at Charter Communications, responsible for improving the maturity and effectiveness of project, program and portfolio management for the organization. Prior to working for Charter, she was with IBM for 11 years, contributing to their award-winning Project Management Center of Excellence, as well as delivering a \$350M portfolio of projects.

Interview

Q1: First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You have been Chair of the PMI Board of Directors. You were also the leader of Project Managers Without Borders, which was acquired by PMI earlier in 2024. What were the aims and vision of this not-for-profit?

Deanna Landers (Landers): Project Managers Without Borders (PMWB) connects project professionals with not-for-profit organizations to help them achieve their missions more efficiently and effectively, by improving their project management maturity.

When those of us in the project management profession share our skills, knowledge, tools, and techniques with these organizations that are supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, we amplify the positive impact they have in the world. Many project managers work for organizations that focus on financial gains but are finding it quite rewarding to also contribute to making social and environmental impacts. We help make those connections to provide a means to contribute project management experience to improve the lives of others.

It was a clear win-win to combine the efforts of PMWB with the huge membership and customer base of PMI, with their chapter model enabling localized delivery of benefits, providing a way to share our positive impact on a greater scale.

Q2: How will the integration into PMI impact these aims and visions?

Landers: Our mission and aims are not changing now that we're part of PMI. Since we fit very well into PMI's newly articulated purpose, to "maximize project success to elevate our world", we are focusing on integrating our core business into the infrastructure and organizational structure that PMI has dedicated to it. The challenge is scaling those to support the expected increase of PMWB Communities in many chapters. As we expand the number of PMWB communities in the world, the positive impact that we have will grow. This will enable greater reach into areas previously not supported.

Q3: How can project management shape a better world?

Landers: Project management is a super-power, a set of skills and knowledge that can be applied to the world's problems to shape a better world.

Any change in business, government, or the social sector is accomplished through projects. Applying successful approaches to these projects will lead to the delivery of value and benefits that support business or governmental goals, and in the social sector will lead to a better society and world.

Many of these socially focused organizations have leaders who are passionate about what they do but may not know anything about how to deliver results. So, they waste time and other resources that could be applied to achieving their missions. Knowing more about and applying project management can help them be more efficient and effective, and purposeful in their execution.

Q4: Do you think project managers will still be needed in the age of AI? Why?

Landers: Absolutely. Artificial intelligence can support project managers in many ways. For instance, providing accessible data when needed so lessons learned can actually inform new projects to avoid repeating mistakes. Many support functions that AI can fill, like notetaking and translation, can allow project managers to focus on the higher value aspects of their own roles. Examples of these higher value skills are communication and applying soft skills within the context of the bigger project and organizational picture.

Though what has been recently achieved in the AI space is impressive, there is no substitute for the connection between humans to share understanding and apply the AI results and output appropriately. AI is another tool for the project manager's toolbox, and we all need to identify how it can be applied in our own unique situations.

Q5: What are two skills every project leader will need to thrive?

Landers: Adaptability is a key characteristic that project managers will need to thrive in our world today, and that can be improved over time. We've been called change agents, and we lead the way to implement change for others. However, our versatility will be tested with the rapid changes that we need to embrace in order to continue to deliver benefits.

I'd say the second skill that will serve to support a thriving project management career would be diplomacy. Creating environments where all assume positive intent leads to a breeding ground for success, but we are not all blessed with that situation at the start of each project. It takes diplomacy to bridge trust gaps and communicate in a manner that brings team members together to drive toward meaningful results.

Q6: On a personal note, you have been sailing along the coast for two years. How did project management help you in this personal project? What are your takeaways?

Landers: It was a special opportunity to be able to apply project management experience from my profession to our family's big sailing adventure.

There was a lot of research and planning that went into our transition from land life, including the development of our risk log that included 101 risks by the time we started moving down the coast. I'm happy to report that we were able to avoid any issues with hurricanes, pirates, or sharks due to our mitigation strategy.

One of the main differences between traveling along the coast in a boat, and the professional life I'd lived for several decades before is that plans must be more fluid on the ocean. Or more accurately, we had to be willing to throw away plans and goals, regroup and identify new ones. Weather impacted and often dictated decisions about when and where we moved, plus there were many other factors beyond our control that also imposed unexpected restrictions. It was a significant change to live in reaction mode, without goals or purpose besides taking advantage of where we were at any given time.

Q7: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Landers: We live in a unique time, at the intersection between an advanced artificial intelligence, climate change realization and impact, increasing nationalism and media bias, and renewed focus on humanitarianism by individuals and corporations.

Those of us in the project management profession have a unique opportunity to be the change we want to see in the world. We do so by applying our skills to a variety of interests, in our day jobs and also in our communities.

We can and should share our knowledge of how to improve results and provide benefits to a broad array of organizations, to make the world a better place through project management.

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 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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