

## **The project profession remaining relevant in an ever-changing world**

### **Interview with Alistair Godbold <sup>1</sup>**

Vice President, Former Director, Fellow  
Association for Project Management  
Former Director, Major Projects Association  
HonFellow, International Project Management Association  
United Kingdom



**Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi**  
International Correspondent, PM World Journal  
Paris, France

#### **Introduction to the interviewee**

Alistair Godbold is an experienced programme director with over 30 years' experience, managing and advising companies on the set up, operation and governance of complex major projects and programmes. He has advised on, set up and led the transformation of organisations to improve the delivery of major projects and programmes. He has delivered and worked on projects ranging from construction through IT enabled business transformations to high integrity systems and advised government, defence, rail, nuclear, aviation and mining projects in the UK and abroad.

He has also served as a director of the APM and the Major Projects Association. He is a Fellow of the APM, a Fellow of the Institute of Engineering and Technology, a Fellow of

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the Royal Society of Arts and a Fellow of the International Centre for Complex Project Management and a member of their board. As a member of the governance group for Project 13 he published the Infrastructure Governance code. He is a Chartered Engineer and a Chartered Project Professional, in 2011 he was made an Honorary Fellow of the APM for his services to project management. Alistair is also an honorary Fellow of the International Project Management Association, was also a member of their council and chaired their Advisory Committee.

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## Interview

**Q1:** First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You have been appointed APM Vice President. Congratulations. What do you envisage for APM?

**Alistair Godbold (Godbold):** APM is leading the way in so many areas of the project profession. It embraces and supports all of the different parts of the profession and constantly strives to move the art and science of the profession on. With its mission to make projects successful so society benefits it has a very worthwhile mission everyone can subscribe to.

For me, the next stage on the journey is to support the profession and the successful delivery of projects not only in the UK, but all over the world. We also need to expand out of our traditional comfort zone into new industries and areas and bring the benefit of successfully delivered projects to all. To do all of this we need to make ourselves relevant to in an international context and to new industries. We need to alter the language we use and the way we talk about the profession so that it means something in this different context and not just talk about it in the way we always have done and assume it will mean the same in these new areas.

**Q2:** APM is a UK project association. What are the most critical trends for project management in the UK in the coming years?

**Godbold:** We live in a world that is constantly evolving and constantly changing and the profession needs to evolve with it. Over the years project management has incorporated; Total Quality Management, Critical Chain, Sponsorship and Agile etc. In the near future it needs to adapt to embrace AI and complexity.

I think there are two aspects to Artificial Intelligence that will impact the profession, the first is how it will impact the way we deliver projects, the second is what sort of projects we deliver.

I think will first impact on how we deliver projects, AI will be embedded in the tools we use today and improve what we have always done. It will change some of the jobs we do. It may impact how we schedule projects using data on estimates and dependencies from similar projects that we will have to review and correct, much in the same way that you may ask ChatGPT to write an article and then edit it. It will impact on how we identify

opportunities, risks and issues, it will help us with learning from experience and how we write reports. The second stage of this is AI will help us do different things to manage projects there will be new tools to deploy and the secondary impacts of this will be many. This is the same for any other profession or sector. The industrial revolution had steam power to weave faster, harvest fields. The secondary impacts of this were the rise of the city, the decline of the countryside, the beginnings of climate change.

These are all new and exciting things to watch out for. But watch out for them we must and be proactive in their use, and not victims of their consequences.

**Q3:** You have also managed major and complex projects. How do you define a complex project? A major project?

**Godbold:** For me they are very similar. Most major projects are complex as well as complicated. I use these words carefully. Complicated is something that is hard to understand but it is deterministic. If you do the same thing with the same project, you get the same answer, it is a linear problem. A complex project is one in which there are emergent properties and unpredictable outcomes, they are more organic. These require different ways of managing them.

**Q4:** What is needed to deliver successfully a complex project successfully? A major project?

**Godbold:** If we use the tools for complicated projects on complex projects and force them in, they will help us fail faster. With complex projects they require a lot of listening to your teams, stakeholders and experts. The solutions you put in place may be more self-organizing teams and work their own path, they then disband and reform in a different way for the next issue. The role of the PM in this is to create the environment where this can happen whilst still retaining control. Easier said than done, but lots of fun.

**Q5:** You have a passion for continuous improvement. First, how is artificial intelligence going to impact continuous improvement? Second, projects are more globalized, hybrid, and remote. How can you implement continuous improvement efficiently?

**Godbold:** Continuous improvement is essential in any walk of life, in any profession. In the past this relied on the ingenuity of the individual looking at the way things are, understanding other areas and looking for new ways to apply knowledge. Some of this knowledge comes from experience and some from research and new knowledge. AI helps us join dots and create new ways of applying things. If you ever use ChatGPT and ask it a question, most of the time it will look for the most probable thing, based on the amount of existing data that there is. This, for me, changes the context of continuous improvement from one in which you focus on answering the question for the problem at hand, to one on which we need to focus on how we ask the question, what question we ask. Our creativity moves to the reframing of the question so we can use all this data that AI has processed for us to help us improve.

In a globalised context it is the bringing together of different people and, crucially, different perspectives that allows us to ask new questions.

**Q6:** You have extensive experience on boards and in executive roles. You briefed them on high-value projects. How has the vision of boards and executives changed over the years?

**Godbold:** The role of the board has significantly evolved over the years. This is due to the research, regulation, the sharing and publication of good practice. In the UK corporate sector much of this has been shared by the Financial Reporting Council with the Corporate Governance code the various reports on how boards should operate. It has moved from a collection of owners and friends to more of a professional role that relies on knowledge and skill. Many investors in companies and when looking at the governance of projects, look at how they are governed. When working on Project 13 we published the Infrastructure Governance Code. This is a code that gives guidance for how the board of a major project should govern and ensure it is using good practice. It uses a “comply and explain” approach, rather than the US rules-based approach. This means that it is easier to contextualise for each project. Also, the principles it contains are harder to find a way round than a rule with which you can maliciously comply with, but miss the intent.

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

**Godbold:** Project Management is getting things done. It is vital to the prosperity of the world in which we live. It can be used to deliver so much value to our society. How we talk about it and the language we use is so important. Many of us have learned our craft in technical disciplines or been taught by those who have. The language we use is from these professions. If we are to expand the use of project management, we must learn the language of new professionals and new industries.

We have one way of saying Gantt chart, the British have 100 words for rain. We must learn new ways of communicating with others to deliver the benefits of our profession.

## 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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