Program Management is about Enabling Change that Endures

Interview with Nidhi Mahajan[1]

Advisor, Author, Expert, Mentor
Experienced International Program Manager & Leader
Texas, USA

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

Introduction to the interviewee

Nidhi Mahajan is a global program management thought leader, published author, and industry expert with more than 17 years of experience delivering large-scale, high-stakes transformation programs in regulated industries. Her expertise spans governance design, AI-enabled compliance, and infrastructure modernization, with frameworks adopted by organizations across geographies and sectors.

She has authored peer-reviewed papers in the *PM World Journal* and leading Scopus-indexed journals, including the *Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management*, *Computer Fraud & Security*, and the *International Journal of Intelligent Systems and Applications in Engineering*. Nidhi is an IEEE Senior Member and a

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Fellow of the Association for Project Management (FAPM), and is actively engaged in judging international innovation and technology competitions.

She is a mentor with PMI Dallas, where she leads the Corporate Ambassador Program and mentors project managers locally and through Project Managers Without Borders, a nonprofit organization providing global mentorship for social impact projects via The Educational Equality Institute (TEEI). She helps professionals develop the skills and strategies needed for impactful, sustainable careers. Her contributions have advanced best practices that connect technology, regulation, and business strategy, creating results that extend far beyond individual organizations.

Connect with Nidhi at: linkedin.com/in/nmahajan012 or
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Interview

Q1: First, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. How did you happen to work in the project management field?

Nidhi Mahajan (Mahajan): Thank you for inviting me. It's a pleasure to share my story with PMWJ readers.

I didn't step into my career thinking; I'll be a program manager one day. I started out as a developer and later a product owner, and I was always curious about how the pieces fit together, not just my piece, but the bigger picture. I found myself naturally gravitating toward roles where I could connect the dots between technology, business goals, and regulatory requirements.

Over time, I realized my real strength wasn't just in delivering my own part well, but in shaping how multiple streams of work could align, adapt, and move forward toward a shared vision. Project management gave me the tools to make that happen. Program management gave me the scope to drive change at a scale where it could influence not just one team or one company, but sometimes an entire industry ecosystem.

Q2: You are a program manager. What would you recommend to project leaders who want to move to program management?

Mahajan: The first shift is in perspective. In project management, your focus is on delivering one outcome or charter successfully. In program management, you need to see the web of connections between multiple outcomes; how they affect each other, and how they collectively shape the bigger goal.

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Second, build strong relationship capital. Many of the people critical to your program's success won't report to you directly. You must earn influence through trust, transparency, and consistency.

And third, don't just track deliverables, tell the story. A program isn't just a set of tasks; it's a vision that needs to be understood and embraced by different stakeholders. When people see why it matters, they're far more likely to engage fully.

Q3: How is project/program management perceived in a finance environment?

Mahajan: In finance, program management goes far beyond schedules and budgets — it's about safeguarding the very trust the system is built on. Every initiative operates in an environment where accuracy, regulatory compliance, and customer confidence are non-negotiable. This means the margin for error is almost zero. A small oversight isn't just an internal issue, it can trigger compliance breaches, disrupt transactions, and create ripples across global markets.

That's why in this space; governance is not a side function; it's the backbone of delivery. Every decision is layered with considerations of risk management, regulatory interpretation, operational continuity, and cross-functional alignment. You're working with a diverse set of stakeholders — from compliance officers to engineers, risk analysts to external partners and each has their own priorities and constraints.

The role demands both precision and foresight. You must architect change in a way that is robust enough to meet regulatory scrutiny, agile enough to adapt to shifting market conditions, and seamless enough that customers never feel the transition happening. That balance: driving transformation without compromising stability, is what defines successful program management in the financial sector.

Q4: What are the impacts of AI in your field?

Mahajan: In finance, AI is reshaping program management in two major ways. First, it's becoming a core tool for *how* we manage work. AI-driven analytics can forecast resource needs, predict delivery risks, and flag anomalies in real time, often before a human would detect them. In a sector where a small disruption can impact millions of transactions, that kind of predictive insight is invaluable.

Second, it's changing *what* we deliver. I've led initiatives where AI-powered fraud detection, real-time compliance monitoring, and automated risk scoring were the program's central outcomes. These solutions have the potential to make financial systems more resilient, responsive, and customer centric.

But finance is also a highly regulated environment, so speed without accountability can be dangerous. AI models need to be explainable, auditable, and compliant with data privacy and security requirements. That means program governance must evolve,

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integrating AI ethics reviews, bias monitoring, and regulatory checkpoints into every delivery stage.

The opportunity is huge: to create financial systems that are both agile and trustworthy. The challenge is ensuring that innovation never outpaces the safeguards that protect the trust at the heart of the industry.

Q5: You recently had a paper published in the PMWJ, which turned out to be the first peer-reviewed paper published in the journal? How did you learn about the PMWJ and how was that experience?

Mahajan: I discovered PMWJ while looking for a platform that bridges practical program delivery with the depth of academic insight. What stood out to me was its global audience and the variety of perspectives it features.

When I learned my paper could be peer reviewed, I saw it as an opportunity to test my ideas in the most rigorous way possible, not because I doubted my paper, but because I wanted my work to stand as credible references for others. The review process was thorough, but also collaborative, and it reinforced my belief that industry practitioners should contribute to the academic conversation.

Q6: Since you are a practicing program manager, not an academic researcher, why did you want your PMWJ paper to be peer reviewed?

Mahajan: For me, peer review is more than an academic formality; it's a credibility filter. It tells the reader, "This work has been examined, questioned, and validated by independent experts who know the field." In program management, especially in finance, we're often creating governance models or integration frameworks that need to be trusted and replicated beyond a single organization. That kind of trust can't rest solely on one person's track record; it must stand up to objective scrutiny.

I chose peer review because I wanted my work to move from being my own lived experience to something that could serve as a reliable reference for others; whether they're in finance, technology, or another high-stakes industry. It was a way to make sure my frameworks weren't just effective in the environments I've worked in, but that they met a broader, field-wide standard. That shift from personal insight to validated, shared knowledge; is what makes the work truly impactful.

Q7: Can you share any benefits that you found from authoring a paper published in the PMWJ? Authoring papers seems old fashioned; why should others take this step?

Mahajan: I've been writing and publishing for a couple of years now, and each time I go through the process, I'm reminded why it matters. Writing forces, you to slow down and make sense of complex experiences. You take years of lessons learned; often from challenging, high-stakes environments and distil them into something structured, teachable, and accessible to others.

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The benefit is that your knowledge doesn't stay confined to a single project or organization. Long after a program is complete, someone on the other side of the world can be applying those same lessons to solve their own challenges. I've had peers reach out to say they've used my frameworks in their own initiatives, sometimes in industries very different from finance. That's when you see the real value your experience keeps creating impact even after you've moved on.

As for the idea that authoring papers might seem "old-fashioned," I see it differently. In an era of short posts and fleeting content, well-researched, peer-reviewed writing stands out because it lasts. It becomes a credible reference point that people return to not just something that trends for a day. If you want your ideas to shape the field, not just join the noise, publishing is still one of the most effective ways to do it.

Q8: Do you have a last message?

Mahajan: For me, program management is about enabling change that endures — change that continues to create value long after the program is officially closed. Irrespective of the industry you are working in, the role is to bring clarity to complexity and align diverse priorities into a shared vision.

My advice is simple: keep learning from others and keep sharing what works. The frameworks you create today aren't just tools for your current project, they can become the foundations others build on tomorrow. That's how we move the field forward, one contribution at a time.

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About the Interviewer

Yasmina Khelifi

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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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