

PMHub.net interviews Max Wideman – The person
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Editor's Note:

PMHub¹ is a Professional PM Community group comprising almost 50,000 Project Managers, Project Leaders and Program Managers. It was founded on June 4, 2001, initially as the Yahoo group, "PMPCERT". The PMHub web site is a study resource that aims to assist managers around the world to study for their PMP or CAPM (Certified Associate in Project Management) certification exams, based on the Project Management Institute's Project Management Body of Knowledge ("PMBOK").

Since May 2005, PMHub has a four-prong solution in its mission to help Project Managers to upgrade their professional skills:

- The PMHub.net web site provides additional info and links to important PM information and at the same time provides PM with community building tools: PM Blog and PM Photo Gallery.
- PMHub Forums: extends PMHub@yahoogroups.com to meet the needs of the PM world, PMP and PMP aspirants for a PM hub. Not only are Project Management Professional ("PMP") issues discussed, but also the real world PM, Country issues, Study clubs, Job Boards, Vacancies, salary, review of books/articles, Buy& Sell etc. We have expanded from a mere PMP Preparation group to a real PM Hub. With membership approaching 20,000 by 2008, this will be the largest PM community
- PMHUB Googlegroups: pmhub@googlegroups.com
- PMPHub@Yahoogroups .com is now the largest global PM group on the web with more than 18,000 members

PMHub's questions on Max's personal career

PMH: Max, could you please tell us a little bit about yourself, personal and professional? What is your personal background?

PMH: Max, please let us know a little bit of your professional background.

PMH: How about your PM career?

PMH: When did you start doing PM work?

PMH: Why and how did you start your PM work?

PMH: What is the difference between the PM world at that time and now?

PMH: Do you have any particular memorable case study in your PM experience?

PMHub's questions on Max's relationship with PMI

PMH: How is your experience and working relationship with PMI in the past and now?

PMH: Do you think that a PM whose entire career was IT could manage a construction project?

PMH: What do you think about the PMP certification and why?

PMH: If today you were asked to write PMBOK what would you do?

PMH: Max, how do you make PMBOK really useful?

PMH: Do you think the PM profession is a well-respected one as compared to medical or legal?

PMH: Please tell us about a project that you are now involved in.

PMH Introduction

It is hard to find a PM who has never heard of Max Wideman, a legendary figure and a guru of the PM Universe. Max was the President of PMI in 1987 and later the Chairman of the Board in 1988. More interestingly to all of us here, Max is the "Father of PMBOK." He was the Master PM who launched PMBOK at its birth. Max led a team of PMs to write the first ever PMBOK that was published in 1987. For this gigantic effort and Max's other contributions, Max received PMI's Distinguished Contribution and Person of the Year (1985, 1986). He also founded our local PMI Chapter, The West Coast B.C. Chapter

Max wrote two books for PMI, A Framework for Project and Program Integration (1991) and Project and Program Risk Management: A guide to Managing Project Risk and Opportunities (1992), and donated it to PMI. He has contributed chapters to Project Risk Management in Project Management Handbook (PMI/Jossey-Bass, 1998); How to Motivate All Stakeholders to Work Together in Field Guide to Project Management (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1998, 2004) and Professional and Personal Development Management: A Practical Approach to Education and Training in Project Management for the Business Professional - A Comprehensive Guide (Wiley, 2001). His latest book is A Management Framework for Project, Program and Portfolio Integration. (Trafford Publishing, Victoria, BC, Canada, 2004). He has also published more than 75 papers on Project Management.

Max is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers (UK), a Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada, a Fellow of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, a Fellow of the PMI, and a long-time member of the Institute of Management (UK). He is recognized internationally as a speaker and workshop leader having presented seminars and papers on a variety of project management topics in eleven different countries.

Now let us start our interview with Max.

PMH: Max, could you please tell us a little bit about yourself, personal and professional? What is your personal background?

MW: I was born near Cardiff in South Wales, UK. This is noteworthy because, unbeknownst to me until only a few months ago, my grandfather started an Anglo-French society there that just last November held its centenary celebration. By happy coincidence, the current secretary of the society spotted my name on the Internet, sent me an Email - one of those long shots - and so I was able to supply early family history and photographs to put on display at the function. By even greater coincidence, this society member has a brother in Vancouver located only a few blocks away from me and, further, had arranged a visit here so we were able to meet in person. The fact that I founded the local PMI chapter suggests that this society creation thing must be something in the genes!

To cut a long life story short I know what it's like to: Lie awake on the top floor of a glassless windowed brick-built high-rise in a bombed city, wondering whether it would be better to descend on top of the rubble or be buried underneath it; Be blown across the road by a WWII flying bomb; Crawl through mud scooping it up into the barrel of my rifle while under fire; Be thrown off a cavalry horse and have the animal recaptured by a sympathetic German farmer.

I also know what it is like to land in a city not knowing anyone; Work many months away from home; Work long hours to make a living; Watch personal friends go bankrupt and work many hours on damage

control; Be fired instantly, only to discover years later that I was just being "out placed"; Write hundreds of letters looking for a job; Participate in litigation that cost more than the project that gave rise to the original dispute.

At the end of the day, I now enjoy a partnership with my wife in a marriage of over fifty years and live in relative tranquility and comfort in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Along the way we've traveled extensively and had lots of fun - all because of project management.

PMH: Max, please let us know a little bit of your professional background.

MW: I am a civil engineer by profession. I knew that I wanted to be a civil engineer ever since my first project at the age of seven. That was digging a hole in the soft sand of one of the beaches on the coast of southern England and watching it fill with water from a rivulet issuing from further up the beach. Since then, I've dug a lot of holes and filled them with a lot of things like sewage plants, railway lines, water and ships, as well as hospitals and tall buildings.

I've also built dams to provide African villages with a water supply, and solved a native conflict over a valued six-penny piece by chopping it in half; Watched a hillside collapse and destroy a year's work; Been in a cofferdam when it fails and floods with water; Carried a suitcase full of wages in cash and be rammed by a gang of thugs with a sawn-off shot gun. My assistant and I escaped with the cash and without injury, but the car was a real mess.

In the course of my career, I've flown right around the world and verified to my satisfaction that it really isn't flat. Had the privilege of addressing many different nationalities, only to discover that their problems are very similar to ours - but much more so; Been the only "white" in a large, inquisitive, swarming crowd and begun to understand what it is like for someone to be the other way round; Received awards for public service that I'm not sure I deserve.

PMH: How about your PM career?

MW: For the last half of my career I have tried to study the effectiveness and efficiency of doing "projects", how to do them better, and how to make them more successful, by satisfying the people involved. It has been both frustrating as well as rewarding. I think I can fairly say that I've had a few original thoughts in my day, frustrating because it takes five or more years for new ideas to sink into the popular psyche. Rewarding because eventually someone else discovers how to market the idea and makes a lot of money out of it.

A typical example is the Project and Program Risk Management handbook that I wrote and donated to the Project Management Institute in 1991, a book that brought the Institute very substantial revenue. Yet I had a devil of a job persuading the aficionados of the day that project risk management was a serious subject and to include it in the original project management body of knowledge. Would you believe? Now project risk management is the consulting flavor-of-the-day and almost transcends project management itself. By the way, most people now know that original body-of-knowledge document as "PMBOK", a term that I also invented.

More recently, the challenge has been to what extent can a civil engineer migrate from engineering projects to software development or IT projects. I think that it is possible, but a lot of "relearning" is necessary, and in both cases you have to have a fair grasp of the technology involved. In short, one size

does not fit all.

PMH: When did you start doing PM work?

MW: I think that project management is inherent in any project-like activities. If you don't have any management, the result is just chaos. Of course some people don't know that it is called project management but do it anyway. Since I started work long before "project management" became fashionable, I probably started doing PM the day I first started paid work. Of course, there are people who prefer chaos. They are known as crisis managers. They are typically very good at creating crises where none exists before.

PMH: Why and how did you start your PM work?

MW: In general, there are two types of personalities in project work: Those who get their satisfaction from the interactive processes involved, and those who get their satisfaction from getting the job done, from creating a product and delivering it. I'm in the latter group. Of course there are other types of people in the world as well, but they have no business coming anywhere near a project. In my early days, I once spent four weeks behind a drawing board. While I can do technical drawings tolerably well, I had no idea what I was doing during those four weeks. That's when they sent me out on site to dig a hole. Man! That's when I saw real action!

PMH: What is the difference between the PM world at that time and now?

MW: There have been a lot of changes from around 1974 when I first started seriously in project management. Since the majority of your audience is probably in or affiliated with North America, let's stick to this continent. At that time the Project Management Institute was only five years old - and generally regarded by its members as one of the best-kept secrets. It was populated largely by the engineering, procurement construction (EPC) and building fraternity, although there was a significant contingent of "pharmaceuticals" that generally kept to themselves.

At that time there was no such thing as a personal computer, and while there were "systems" projects, information technology (or "IT") was a thing of the future. Nevertheless, I was one of the first to recognize and promote the wider application of a project management "methodology" to areas other than construction. Looking back, I view that as rather more inevitable than prescient. By 1984 there was a great drive to "prove" that managing a project was somehow different from general management. And so the PMBOK was born, not a "Guide" as it is now, but a documentation of what specific knowledge is encompassed by the discipline.

One thing that has not changed is that project management is a high-risk occupation. First because when companies decide to "economize" (read fire lots of people) the project management folks are the first to go. They are, after all, an overhead.

Secondly, because project management tends to be populated by highly opinionated people that have difficulty in agreeing on anything. Perhaps that's why they get fired. But anyway, no one could agree on how the original PMBOK should be updated, which is why after a lot of anguish, it morphed into a "Guide". Of course, the Guide is not a methodology, although in places it seems to me that it looks very much like one, and too many people try to make it so. It is not even the sole source document for "PMP" certification content, but in the absence of any other published recommendations, it has effectively

become so.

People must judge for themselves whether they are better off now than they were a few decades ago. In a few years you will see project management becoming "old hat" and people will either have moved on to more esoteric things like project portfolio management, or back to competing methodologies in the technological arena. We already see a greater focus on someone deciding to "Do the right thing" as distinct from "Doing the thing right" - and that someone, folks, is not a project manager!

PMH: Do you have any particular memorable case study in your PM experience?

MW: The term "memorable case study" is a polite way of referring to successful war stories, and most war stories are associated with difficult people, so here's one. I was once promoted to project manager of a very large and difficult engineering project. In those days, perhaps even today, there was always a technical boffin in charge and a very pragmatic and forceful "superintendent" in charge of labor. My superintendent had no time for "educated" people like myself and whatever I and my engineering staff planned for the week, this superintendent would do just the opposite – at least, so it seemed to me. I finally concluded that it was either him or me, and so we had a "set to". The exchange started quietly at first but soon became loud and raucous all the while we were walking from one end of the site to the other and back. By this time the whole site was at a standstill entranced by the show and waiting for a winner.

We got back to the site office and the superintendent's massive frame filled the doorway as he entered inside. I thought to myself - that's it, enough is enough. I'll fill out my resignation immediately. But at that moment he turned and looked at me straight in the eye and said "Y'know, I really enjoyed that!" Folks, believe it or not, from that moment on we got on like a house on fire, the job made better progress and eventually between us we got a very difficult engineering works successfully completed. Lesson: there are times when you just have to bite the bullet and put your foot down.

PMH: How is your experience and working relationship with PMI in the past and now?

MW: I enjoyed the Institute more when it was run almost entirely by volunteers for the benefit of the members. I don't find that to be the case today. I make a point of not contributing to the technical exchanges for two reasons: Firstly, because I don't like the copyright restrictions imposed on contributions, restrictions that I believe to be inhibitive of quality work. That is not to say that the Institute has not done a lot of good work, it has. It is to say that it could do a lot better. Secondly, because they probably would not take any notice anyway and I should lose the unfettered right to my own material.

PMH: Do you think that a PM whose entire career was IT could manage a construction project (or the other way around: a civil engineer whose career was entirely in construction, could he manage an IT project?)

MW: It is possible, but the nature of the product and therefore the types of people and the way that they need to be managed are very different. Not everyone is able to make that transition comfortably. Those who can and do are quite few amongst the population at large. That hurdle is in addition to the need to have a credible understanding of the technology involved in each case.

PMH: What do you think about the PMP certification and why?

MW: All else being equal, if I had a choice between hiring a PMP or a non-PMI member, I would choose the PMP simple because of the exposure that person would have had during his or her studying. A PMI member but not a PMP may or may not have had the required exposure. As to the certification process itself, there is no doubt that it has led to a booming consulting industry. Whether the designation means that you can manage a project seems to me to be questionable. Passing the PMP exam is a question of knowledge, managing a project is a question of competence.

PMH: If today you were asked to write PMBOK what would you do?

MW: Start writing . . . ! More seriously, I would keep it simple and dispense with all those "ins" and "outs", except for one. The rest have already served their purpose. I would explain that project management is a process, the most important element of which is the project life span through which this process evolves. I would explain that the project life span and an appropriate technological methodology are closely related but not the same thing. I would then describe the eight knowledge areas and how they contribute sub-processes and how some of these sub-processes are more important than others.

In particular, I would make it clear that scope and quality are two separate variables and moreover product scope and project scope are two different things, and likewise with quality grade and quality conformance. The first of the two in each case determine what the product will be like and the second two how it will be built. The inputs are the management plans and resources. The output is the product (or deliverables). Time and cost are not the outputs but simply the consequences of the management of the inputs. They provide the metrics for judging the efficiency of the process.

It's that simple. Why do we have to make it so difficult?

PMH: Max, how do you make PMBOK really useful?

MW: I printed my copy of the PDF file single sided. Three hundred and eighty eight pages come out at about two inches thick. I have found that this makes it into a wonderful doorstop.

PMH: Do you think the PM profession is a well-respected one as compared to medical or legal?

MW: The presumption in this question is that PM is a profession. I don't consider that project management is a profession. Rather it is a very important discipline, one of several falling within the overall domain of general management that itself has only recently been recognized as a profession. That is not to say that project managers and their teams are not professionals - you can be professional without being a member of a profession. Medical practice and the law are on a different plane simply because they offer a personal service and interface more closely with the public. It follows that it is unlikely that project management will ever become a "profession" in the general public's sense of the word.

PMH: What about the PM designation?

MW: I'm not clear on this question. If you mean the designation of being a project manager, the reality is that unless or until "project manager" is a protected label by regulation or statute, then anyone can be designated as a project manager. Being called a project manager sounds impressive and is cheaper for the company than giving a raise in salary. Consequently, people labeled project manager are two-a-

penny – which is why you often find several project managers all working on parts of the same project. So, when you are confronted with any new situation, always ask the question: "Will the real project manager please stand up!"

PMH: If you design a course syllabus for PM what are the subjects/knowledge areas that you will include?

MW: Interestingly, I think that the four core functions of scope, quality, time and cost, plus the four facilitating functions of risk, human resources, contract/procurement and information/communications has stood the test of time pretty well. You don't necessarily need all of all these knowledge areas on all projects all the time, of course, but all the same it is well to have a good grounding in all of them.

PMH: If you can start all over again, what profession would you choose?

With the experience and knowledge of hindsight, I would certainly do some things a little differently, but by and large I would do it all, the same all over again.

PMH: Max, do you have any message for members of PMHUB?

MW: For those in, or entertaining the idea of getting into project management, it is very important to establish whether you are really cut out for it. Project management is stressful and you do have to move from one to the next. You cannot expect always to have a steady stream of projects to keep you busy and handed to you on a plate. The world economy and its projects are simply not like that. That means you have to take charge of your own career, a good idea anyway, and be quite clear on where you want to go. As in any project, it will not always work out the way you hoped for, but having a good plan is a big help.

By my reckoning, some 30% of the working population is not suited to project work of any kind and those people should seek careers elsewhere. For the rest, the work is exciting, satisfying, and full of opportunities.

PMH: Please tell us about a project that you are now involved in.

MW: No projects of significance on hand at this moment. It's much easier to stand around and criticize, er; I mean, provide consulting advice.

PMH: Max, thank you very much for agreeing to spend the time with PMHUB. Wish you the best this Christmas [2006]

¹ Visit the PMHub web site at <http://pmhub.net/index.php>