

FEATURED INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Veikko Valila, IPMA President

Editor's Note: Veikko Valila, President of IPMA, was in Dallas during April 9-10, 2007 for meetings with David Pells, Managing Editor of PM World Today and www.pmforum.org. David took the liberty of conducting an interview of Mr. Valila with a set of questions related to IPMA and the future of project management. The interview was conducted over coffees at a Starbucks and at an office in downtown Dallas, Texas, USA.

PMWT: What is IPMA, in your words? What kind of organization is it?

Valila: The International Project Management Association, or IPMA, is a federation of independent member organizations. The independent member associations really hold the power. So IPMA is an association of local project management



associations, and very decentralized by nature. IPMA serves its member associations and their local members. They both are IPMA's customers. The question we have to address among IPMA leaders is, How to serve the member associations better?

PMWT: How many member societies are currently included? And how many individuals does that represent?

Valila: IPMA has today 45 member associations, located in 41 countries. Our newest member association is in Turkey, which is growing rapidly. As for the number of individuals, that is harder to answer. Each national association has its own membership model, for example, with individual and corporate members. In Finland, for instance, Nokia has a corporate membership with which they nominate 100 individuals to represent the company in the Finnish PM Society. Assuming that each corporate member represents 5-10 individuals within each national member association, IPMA reaches around 50 to 60,000 persons.

PMWT: Where has the most IPMA growth occurred recently? What new societies?

Valila: Growth is occurring everywhere, but especially in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Northern Africa and in Latin America. These are areas where we are seeing new PM societies being formed and inquiries to IPMA. There is a lot of interest in project management around the Mediterranean, in the Middle East and in Africa. In some cities in Brazil, there are new Project Management Clubs being formed. These represent new IPMA members.

PMWT: In which parts of the world do you see IPMA expanding now?

Valila: As I said, we see more interest in Southeast Asia, Middle East, Northern Africa, Latin America. Our newest member association is in Turkey, but we have several pending around the Mediterranean Sea and in Southeast Asia.

PMWT: What is the state of IPMA? Is the organization healthy, in your opinion?

Valila: IPMA is strong financially but we need to organize ourselves better. That is my primary focus. We have a lot of activities underway, especially in our member organizations. IPMA is not a profit-making organization. It is a professional organization and all management is by volunteers. We have a nice family feeling that we need to keep. This is one of our strong points, one of the elements often mentioned by IPMA volunteer leaders. Everyone talks about this "family spirit" and it is important.

PMWT: What are some of the major activities being sponsored by IPMA this year?

Valila: The major activity and the most important is our Certification program. We are establishing more certification bodies in more countries because interest in certification is growing, this is an important point. We have to support these new certification bodies.

The Awards program is also developing very fast. This is a splendid new development for IPMA. The IPMA Awards program is based on a solid assessment structure. Corporations that participate get real feedback on their project management capabilities, good benchmarking feedback.



The World Congress is coming up in Cracow, Poland. This is our main event. Next year it will be in Rome. Our national member associations also have annual events, some as large as the IPMA congress. IPMA helps the national conferences by providing speakers and lecturers. There are also regional events, like the NORDNET conferences.

PMWT: What are some of your personal objectives during your IPMA presidency?

Valila: The IPMA president serves for two years, so I have some time but limited. I would say first, to get the organization to simply work better, to establish clear management goals, work groups with clear responsibilities, management work. Second, I would like to see a renewal of the IPMA website. We have now installed a shareware platform so individual web pages can be assigned to different people to provide specific content and maintenance. The IPMA website has a lot of interest, receives a lot of traffic, so it is an important element for IPMA's health. Third, I want to see the various Work Groups become successful. This is also a somewhat new development. Each IPMA vice president will have a management team to help achieve more activities and programs. We are getting many more people involved

this way. The idea is to empower the volunteers and to support them, while maintaining the decentralized and independent nature of the IPMA organization.

We are also forming new regional networks among IPMA member associations. This is an exciting development that I want to support, that resulted from our recent meetings in Budapest. The NORDNET group of Scandinavian societies in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden has been very successful. We are forming a similar network for local members around the Mediterranean Sea called MEDNET. You might want to write about this for PMForum or PM World Today. Gilles Caupin in France is leading this initiative.

Finally, I want to help develop project management as a profession. And I am very interested in research and development from that standpoint. We're too old fashioned. I'm very interested in some ideas coming from the US defense department, for example, management of network centered warfare and systems of systems. I'm interested in the merging functions of project management, general management and systems engineering. In project management, we need to develop more ideas and models using systems engineering concepts, and ideas from other disciplines as well. I think traditional PM is too susceptible to disruption. For example, when there is a significant scope change or project disruption, change control becomes very difficult and many projects stumble. PM tools have not kept pace. Instead of talking just about simple task management we should develop more robust project management techniques.

PMWT: What is your vision for IPMA, say for five years from now?

Valila: IPMA should be much larger, and more global. I think this will happen. We have at least ten new member associations prepared to join, negotiations are already underway. We see rapid growth in Southeast Asia and in Latin America. We are supporting this growth through alliances with other organizations. For example, in the USA we are interested in establishing new alliances with other global professional organizations such as ICEC and IACCM. We want to talk to the American Management Association (AMA). So I think that IPMA will be larger, stronger and more global with more alliance partners.

PMWT: Are you an employee of IPMA or a volunteer leader? If a volunteer, who is your employer and how do they support your involvement? How many employees does IPMA actually have?

Valila: I am a volunteer, like everyone else on the IPMA ExBo. We are a non-profit professional association, with only a few staff persons. We have a small team in Holland to deal with administrative matters. I have an assistant in Helsinki – she is really good, by the way, and speaks at least five languages fluently, including French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. We have an employee in Poland this year helping with the award programs and world congress. So we only have a few people who are not volunteers. Professionally, I work for Marsh & McLennan, the world's largest risk management and insurance broker. It's based in the USA, but has

40,000 employees around the world. They understand that IPMA is a global organization and they appreciate the value of such a close relationship with a global professional network that my involvement provides.

PMWT: What is your educational and professional background? Which industries?

Valila: I have an MS in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Technology in Helsinki. Most of my experience has been related to risk management though, in heavy industries like pulp and paper, power, transportation infrastructure, etc.

PMWT: How and when were you first introduced to "Project Management"?

Valila: I actually started out as an R&D manager. In 1978, I joined Kone Corporation; they make elevators, escalators and heavy cranes such as those used at large seaports. I was responsible for marketing and projects, so I was a project manager at Kone. My territory was the Caribbean and North America, and I traveled all around the USA, especially to all the major ports. We sold shipyard and container cranes, and I was the project manager for all of our projects in the USA.



In 1985, I was appointed Scientific and Industrial Commissioner of Finland for China and Southeast Asia, based at the Finnish Consulate in Hong Kong. That was an interesting 18 month assignment. In the 1990s I worked in London as an insurance underwriter dealing with large projects in the power, pulp & paper and similar industries. So I dealt with projects during all those years.

I first heard about project management and the PM profession in around 1989 or 90. I then learned about the Finnish National PM Society, which I joined about ten years ago. I have served as the president and chair of that association, which is an IPMA member, since 2002. I was also an IPMA vice president the last two years, so I was on the ExBo.

PMWT: What, in your opinion, will the future of project management entail? What are some of the trends that you see?

Valila: This is an interesting question. First, I see a new competitive landscape, with two important contexts to consider. There is a new technology context based on widely available access to highly capable but low cost IT, and falling barriers to market entry (falling competitive barriers). At the same time, there is a new business context associated with uncertainties from rapidly emerging threats, global versus non-global perspectives, asymmetric business opportunities, and fewer restrictions. While global barriers are falling, the entire business environment is becoming more complex. I call this Globalization III, characterized by continuous, permeating, transforming porosity, a pervasive ambient asymmetric transformation

of the global economy. Countries and corporations are losing control. Individuals and networks are becoming more powerful.

As for management trends affecting project management, I have a model that I am actually presenting at the IACCM conference in New Orleans. We have been dealing up to now with the three disciplines, one of general management (disciplines of business leadership & management), systems engineering (disciplines of systems thinking) and project management (disciplines of execution). The relations between these three areas are merging, to what I call Program Management, Mission Management and Commitment Management. As enterprises become more project oriented, program management is becoming more prevalent and critical. As more projects involve managing the supply chain, and relations among project participants, the management of commitments is becoming the overriding issue. And Systems Theory is important for relating everything to each other, to beneficial end results, to end users, and to life cycle considerations.

PMWT: Is there anything else that you would like to share with PM World Today readers?

Valila: Yes, I want to mention how valuable each member of the IPMA ExBo is. Each of the Vice Presidents, and their respective teams, are all dedicated professionals with critical responsibilities. The management of IPMA is really a team effort, so I appreciate their involvement and commitment. I also appreciate this opportunity that I have been provided as IPMA President. It's quite an honor.

Also, thank you for the opportunity to meet with you. I would like to see a more strategic relationship between IPMA and PMForum. For example, more of our members should see your monthly PM World Today publication, which is the future of publishing – online, downloadable, eJournals.

And you really must come to the IPMA World Congress in Poland in June. In fact, all of your readers should attend. Yes, this is a good idea. You will all be welcome in Cracow!

Founded in 1967, the **International Project Management Association** (IPMA) is a global federation of national project management societies that serve the specific project management needs of each country in its national language. IPMA provides an umbrella



organization to represent them at the international level. The IPMA now consists of 45 member associations spread across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. IPMA's internationally acclaimed 4 Level Project Management Certification Programme continues to grow, with over 50,000 professionals having now achieved IPMA Certification. The IPMA annually presents project management awards to teams that achieve, and can prove, great feats in project management. IPMA maintains its continuous presence in the global project management arena through its regular hosting of International Symposia, Expert Seminars and its Annual World Congress. Veikko Valila will serve as IPMA President through 2008. For more information, visit <http://www.ipma.ch/Pages/IPMA.aspx>.