

PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED INTERVIEW – AUGUST 2009

## Interview with Martin Barnes

*Project Management Pioneer  
APM Honorary Fellow*

### *Part II – Reflections on the Profession of Project Management*



**Dr. Martin Barnes**, is currently President of the Association for Project Management (APM), the professional body for project managers in the UK. He was a founding member (no. 10) of APM in 1972 and has been an active APM leader since that time. He was APM Chair in the 1980s and was named an APM Honorary Fellow in 1995. Martin has a civil engineering degree from the University of London and a PhD from the University of Manchester, UK. His doctorate was awarded in 1971 for research into improved methods of financial control for engineering projects. Martin Barnes invented the classic Time/Cost/Quality triangle and other project management techniques over the years. He built up his own PM business over 15 years until it merged with what is now PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 1985. Now a consultant in project management, Martin was also Executive Director of the Major Projects Association (MPA) for nine years until 2006. Dr Barnes has advised on significant projects in many countries in Europe, Asia and Africa, for the World Bank, other funding agencies, governments, promoters and major contractors. He has worked on projects in the engineering, defense, aerospace, IT, financial, business change and media sectors. Martin's BBC television programme on project management has been

used as a training aid in many countries. He has acted as expert witness in a number of arbitrations concerning major projects. Martin led the team that produced the New Engineering Contract (NEC), a system of contracts designed to facilitate and stimulate the use of modern project management across all the contributors on a project. The NEC is now being used in over 20 countries and is recommended by the UK government for all publicly funded projects. Martin Barnes has been active in the IPMA since 1972, having attended all but one of its world congresses since that year. He presented papers at most of them. He is a Fellow of IPMA and a former board member and Chairman of its Council of Representatives. Dr Barnes is a recipient of the Chartered Institute of Management's Special Award and of the Institution of Civil Engineers' Watson, President's and Telford awards in the UK, all for his personal contributions to the development of project management. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the UK's highest engineering recognition and is a Churchill Fellow. In June 2009 in recognition for his many years of service to England, Martin was named a Commander of the British Empire by Her Majesty the Queen. Martin Barnes lives near Oxford and is a global advisor to PMForum and PM World Today.

**Editor's Note:** *Martin Barnes is one of the world's most respected authorities on the subject of modern programme and project management. We are honored that he has agreed to share his experiences, perspective and opinions with us. Part I of the interview covering Martin's professional career and experiences was published in the June 2009 edition of PM World Today, which can be seen at <http://www.pmworldtoday.net/interviews/2009/june/Interview-with-Dr-Martin-Barnes.html>.*

**PM World Today (PMWT):** Like other leaders in the project management professional world, at some point your career led you to get involved in a professional association. As one of the founders of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK, can you share some of your memories on how that happened?

**Martin Barnes:** I went to the 'Internet' international congress in Stockholm in May 1972. My colleague John Gillespie and I thought this would be a good platform for launching our new 'Project Cost Model' software – and it was. I enjoyed the conference hugely and made some friends who are still and always will be very good friends. Our paper got an award. The experience was such good fun and so professionally interesting that I have been to later congresses every time I could. When we got back to the UK, everybody who had been to an Internet Congress was invited to a meeting in London to set up a UK branch. This took place at the Royal Society of Arts.

Those who signed up were given a membership number in alphabetical order. This is why Russ Archibald has a lower number than me! I am member 010. I was very soon on the committee alongside great men still with us like Arthur Tulip, Jim Gordon and Dennis Gower. Our first president was Professor Geoffrey Trimble of Loughborough University. Later, of course somebody else usurped the name Internet, so the

international body became IPMA (International Project Management Association) and Internet (UK) became the Association of Project Managers, abbreviated to APM.

**PMWT:** What were some of the ideas and objectives for the new organization?

**Barnes:** Most of us had had a wonderful experience at the Internet Stockholm congress and wanted to do things like that at home in the UK. Most of it was about network analysis and computer programmes which helped you do it. Intense arguments about whether 'activity on arrow' was better than 'activity on node'. I was a passionate 'activity on node' person as this was the only way my cost model software could work. The argument went on for years – long after the answer became blindingly obvious. In the beginning we had no vision for the long term. An association for network enthusiasts was what we were.

**PMWT:** Did you have any involvement or interaction with IPMA founders elsewhere in Europe?

**Barnes:** Of course we did, as we were an offshoot from IPMA. Most of the great men of IPMA at that time are still with us. Russ Archibald, Ivars Avots and Larry Bennigson of the USA (who went on to help set up a project management association in the US called PMI), Bob Gillis from Canada, and a host of super guys from all the countries in mainland Europe.

It was 40 years ago - and only 25 years since the end of World War Two. Many of us relished the fact that former enemy nations had found something new in which they were motivated to co-operate. We were dedicated to the internationalism of the new applied science of project management. I believed that Project Management could become the first truly international profession with all the national bodies being members of one international professional body on equal terms. IPMA is like that but the dream of real internationalism will not come true until PMI stops trying to dominate.

**PMWT:** When did APM become a member of INTERNET/IPMA, and how was that viewed in England?

**Barnes:** APM was an offshoot of IPMA – therefore always a member.

**PMWT:** What were some of the major lessons learned during the first 10 years or so?

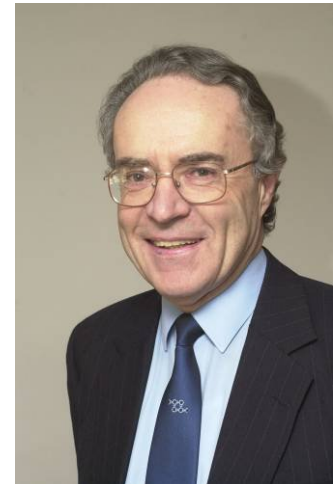
**Barnes:** It was really good fun being part of the management team of APM in the early years. All my colleagues on the committee argued about what we should do – in principle and in detail – but all of us believed we were establishing something important. It was probably the first ever specialist association which had people from all types of activity – commercial in different sectors – government local and national – the armed services - in academia - potentially everything. We always felt hampered by our size. We only had a few hundred members so not much income.

But we did all the right things. We started a monthly magazine for members, we held meetings in London, and we publicised our existence with energy but not much skill. I was the committee member in charge of publicity for a while. We did some rather outrageous things, letting the public think we were bigger and more important than we really were. We started having an annual dinner at my suggestion. My idea was thought too ambitious by some other committee members but they fell in with my policy that, if we wanted to be regarded as a proper professional body, we should act like one. The annual dinners have been very popular right from the start.

A major step was when we organised our first international conference in the UK, Birmingham 1974. It went very well considering how little experience in this field of project management any of us had. The lessons from this period were simple. Project managers are basically good at organising things, even for the first time. Go for it!

**PMWT:** Have you any favorite stories from the early years of the Association?

**Barnes:** When David Firnberg told us that he was going to give up being our President, we were discussing who we should ask to take over. I said we should go for somebody really famous. As usual, there were some on the committee who thought this was too soon. 'Like who?' they said. The most famous businessman in the UK at the time was Sir Monty Finniston head of the British Steel Corporation and lots of other companies so I suggested him. 'We could never get him' they said. 'We don't know unless we try' I said, 'let me try.' So I pursued him for weeks trying to fix up a meeting.



Eventually I got a message saying that if I would collect him from the offices of a company of which he was chairman in Manchester at a certain time on a certain day and take him to Manchester Airport, he would talk to me on the way! So I did. Fortunately his plane was delayed so I had some time with him in the cafeteria at the airport putting our case. He agreed there and then to do it for three years, if he approved of the objectives we had for that period. Eric Gabriel and I produced some

objectives very quickly indeed and Sir Monty came on board. He did us a lot of good. He was a hugely energetic, sensible and intelligent man.

Something many of us enjoyed hugely at that period was going to the IPMA expert seminars in Zurich. These were discussions lasting three or four days with people from all over the world at which we took forward a particular aspect of Project Management. They were very social events too and it was at these that we made really good friends with the leaders of the other IPMA national bodies as well as academics and working project managers.

I followed Eric as Chairman of APM. During that time we expanded quite quickly and started two new things, area organisations outside London covering the whole of the United Kingdom and Specific Interest Groups for people who wanted to do things with others in their own field of interest within Project Management. Together these initiatives increased the volume of APM activity quite a lot.

After my stint as Chairman we had some really good people in the role. It was and is the tradition in APM that a former Chairman leaves the scene and does not interfere in the management of the Association after his term is over whilst remaining an activist member. It was quite funny when APM set up its accreditation scheme, they needed somebody to assess potential assessors. A role which Eric and I did after we were no longer chairman was to assess the potential assessors - by then being two 'grand old men' of APM. We enjoyed doing the interviews, except when we found we had to tell a respected member of the APM committee that he had failed.



**PMWT:** After all these years, how do you happen to be president of APM again?

**Barnes:** I am not; I was Chairman before, now I am President. Mike Nichols is current Chairman and doing the job superbly. Our President is the titular head of the association who appears at all the big functions, presents prizes, etc. The Chairman is the working head of the council which runs the Association. It's a bit like the distinction between what the Queen does in our country and what the Prime Minister does – except that I don't live in a palace and the newspapers don't write about my family all the time.

*(Photo: Martin Barnes presenting at APM's annual Awards Banquet in 2008)*

**PMWT:** When was the name of APM changed from project “managers” to “management”? Did the focus change from individual project managers to the project management process? Has there been an evolution in this focus?

**Barnes:** Simply to make it more inclusive. Everybody who has a legitimate interest in project management can join APM – they may be teachers of project management, be producing computer systems for project management or be students of project management. Our members are not all project managers. Changing the name did not change what we do.

**PMWT:** With APM's current pursuit of chartered status, has the focus returned to project managers? What is the status of that effort, by the way?

**Barnes** Our current petition to be granted a Royal Charter, when successful, will literally set the seal on project management having become a recognised profession in the UK, which will be wonderful. We think that this will be the first time in history that a body has developed from being founded to becoming chartered within the career span of some of the founders. We are expecting a decision soon as we have had tremendous support from a huge number of organisations surrounding us in government, business, education and from other professions.

**PMWT:** What does “chartered status” really mean? Would project managers be required to be licensed in certain industries in the UK, for instance? What would this mean for APM membership and the PM profession in UK, in your opinion?

**Barnes** The main effect of chartered status will be that of recognition of project managers. Our qualified project managers will be regarded as professionally qualified just like chartered engineers, doctors or any other professional. Unlike some countries, however, being a member of a chartered body in the UK is in no sense a licence to work. It's not restrictive in any way. Modern commerce needs this anyway. Virtually all major projects in the world are now staffed multi-nationally.

**PMWT:** It seems that the issue of chartered status might also be closely related to the question as to whether project management is, in fact, a “profession”. What are your thoughts on that question?

**Barnes:** Getting a charter means, in the UK, you are recognised as a proper profession with a proper professional body. That's why we are going for it. Yes, certainly, project management is a profession. But by which criterion do you want to judge? Try this one: We do something specialised and useful to the community as a result of the intelligent application of what we have learnt from our education and experience.

**PMWT:** Over the years, which INTERNET/IPMA world congresses have you attended? Which was the most memorable, from your perspective, and why?

**Barnes:** I have been to all but two, so I think that means I have attended seventeen. The most memorable were: Stockholm because it was the first, Birmingham because it was the first in the UK and I was on the project management team for it, Garmisch was particularly enjoyable socially, Copenhagen was very good, Glasgow because it was the second we held in the UK and it was whilst I was Chairman of APM., Berlin was very good technically and had a wonderful international spirit. Recently Shanghai and Delhi stand out. But really, they were all memorable and it's been a great way of making friends with people from so many countries and seeing so many great cities of the world. Cracow was memorable for having the privilege of introducing Lech Walesa, the former head of state of Poland as keynote speaker, and for being made a 'Knight of Poland' at the end - I have the sword to prove it!

**PMWT:** I remember your performance on stage at INTERNET'92 in Florence. If I remember correctly, you wrote and staged a short play about the experience of a project manager? Please remind me of that performance. What was the title of your play, what was the subject/theme, and what do you remember from that event?

**Barnes:** I was on the organising committee for the congress and, at an early meeting, they were planning the opening ceremony which, to me, sounded as if it was going to be very boring. So I suggested we did something to make it interesting. 'Like what?' they asked. 'Well, we could put on a play about project management' I said. 'There is no play about Project Management' they said. So I got committed to mounting a play about project management to end the opening ceremony. I ended up writing it, producing it and performing in it. There were three people in it – me and two colleagues from my company in London – and my wife Diana was Stage Manager.

The play was loosely derived from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' and Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'. I played Prospero/Scrooge, David Hadfield played various project managers and Sally Aylard played Ariel. The play was a series of short sketches with me as Prospero interviewing Project Managers in history from the Pyramids of Egypt through Lorenzo the Magnificent of Renaissance Florence, to the present day and into the future. Prospero was cynical about whether project management was real or important, finally, the great climax, he is convinced that it is! Huge applause, everybody goes off to lunch. It was great fun to do; it's a pity it was only ever presented once. There were little jokes about IPMA and IPMA characters woven in. I still have the script, so if anybody reading PMForum wants to revive the play .....

**PMWT:** Around that same period of time, you created a show that was televised by the BBC in Britain about project management. Can you elaborate on that program and experience? How did that come about, and what were some of the results?

**Barnes:** That was another experience which was good fun. We started making the programme at the end of 1989 and it was first broadcast on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1990. I was chairman of APM at the time so, when the BBC decided that they wanted to make a program about project management, somebody directed them to me first. Mike Weatherley was the producer chosen to make the programme. He came to see me in my office in London and told me he did not know what project management meant. 'What is a project?' he asked, 'Any human endeavour which has an objective, a beginning and an end' says I. 'So making this television programme is a project' he joked. 'Certainly is' says I. 'Do you mean that you could manage making this programme?' 'Yes' says I. So we hatched the plan that the programme would be about me managing making the programme. Quite difficult logistically!

We did not start filming until quite near the end of the project period. So we had to recreate the key meetings which had taken place over the preceding months for filming, including the very first one which I have just told you about. I taught Mike how to set objectives and make decisions using the TCQ triangle, how to draw up a network and monitor progress and how to do cost control – all with the programme itself as the project. Obviously we finished it on time and within budget!

The last scene was filmed in the editing studio and spliced into the film as transmitted. It was broadcast twice on prime time BBC television. The BBC and I also converted it into a training video with notes and class activities and so on. That sold very well and went all over the world. I used to get people coming up to me occasionally and saying something like 'you don't know me but I know you very well from watching your PM Video so many times with my students'.

**PMWT:** Over the past ten years, there has been a dramatically increased interest in program and project management worldwide, and especially in Britain and the USA. As a result, project management professional organizations have seen their memberships grow significantly. In your opinion, is this a temporary phenomena or of longer term importance? Can you elaborate?

**Barnes:** I am quite sure it's long term. Look at it this way, if PM is management of change, which I think everybody would agree it is, all the rest of management is management of no change. How difficult or important is that? It's just 'administration'. If you could populate a company or any organisation with managers, every last one of whom was really good at identifying beneficial change and delivering it, you could do anything. And you would be on top in a rapidly changing world instead of crushed by it. All the managers would be project managers, even the heads of HR, Finance and Marketing. The doers would be doing whatever they were good at.

This scenario, if not fanciful, has a problem for the project management profession in the long term. If PM becomes the norm, as this hypothesis contemplates, all managers will be project managers. By that time, will PM have lost its distinctiveness. IPMA will have become “IMA”, PMI “MI” and APM “AM”. Don’t worry about this forecast, if it did come true, it would not be in our lifetime. A hint that it’s getting closer will be when PM is taught to children in the first year or two of their schooling. That idea is certainly not fanciful.

**PMWT:** Please tell us a little about the Major Projects Association? What is it, where is it based, who are members and what is the mission? When were you the MPA executive director, by the way?

**Barnes:** The Major Projects Association was founded in the UK about 30 years ago and has always been based in Oxford. It has about 80 members, all businesses or organisations, and it is run to help them collectively create and deliver major projects successfully. The membership is from all sectors and industries, clients for and deliverers of major projects and supporting professions including financiers and lawyers. Since all major projects these days are multinational, much of the work of the MPA has international relevance. I was the Executive Director of it from 1997 to 2006, a fascinating part-time job in the course of which I worked with an amazing variety of very influential, interesting and competent people. MPA also runs courses in topics relevant to major projects. I can’t go into more detail in this interview but, dear reader, please look at [www.majorprojects.org](http://www.majorprojects.org) if you are interested.

**PMWT:** This leads to the whole question of projects vs programmes vs portfolios, etc. In your opinion, when does a major project become a programme and a programme become a portfolio? What are some of the differences, and different issues for management?

**Barnes:** I am very sorry that these terms have come into use at all. Many years ago I came up with the mantra that ‘everybody’s project is somebody else’s subproject’ and I still use it. For example, take a very small company building a length of fence on a highway improvement project in the UK. For the company, it’s a project. Their bit of fence is part of the fencing subcontractor’s project which is part of the main contractor’s project. It is part of the highway authority’s project to improve traffic flows in the immediate area. This is part of their project to improve traffic flows in their whole area. This is part of the government’s project to improve traffic flows in the whole country. This is part of the Minister of Transport’s project to create the impression in the population that the government is improving the roads. This is part of Gordon Brown’s project to get the Labour Government re-elected next year, this is part of Gordon Brown’s project to achieve his personal objective for life, whatever that is.

At what point in this hierarchy does the task clearly change from being a project to a programme to a portfolio? At what point does the task cease to become that of identifying what needs to be done and delivering it? Which bits of project management technique become irrelevant as you go up the hierarchy? What skills does the project manager need at the top which the project manager at the bottom does not and vice versa? Answer 'never' or 'none' as appropriate to each question.

There is no real distinction. We fragment our position and image in the world by pretending that PM should be broken up into three professions. It is a very stupid thing to do for the future health and reputation of our profession. When many people out there are still not clear about what project management is and whether they need it, it is very stupid to be fragmenting the discipline already.

**PMWT:** Where do you see the future of project management headed? Major changes? More of the same, but better? New dimensions, new applications?

**Barnes:** I am very bullish about the future of PM. There are still a huge number of sectors of human activity and areas of the world where it is not used at all. For example, there is a super organisation called PM4NGOS which is working to introduce good project management into the activities around the world of all the major charities. And there are so many more new areas we shall begin to help as time passes.

The only danger, a real one in my mind, is that of people not doing project management well. People using project managers for the first time will be put off it forever if their first experience is a bad one, and they will tell others to steer clear of it. The risk of this happening is quite large when so many people are jumping on the bandwagon without having the skills. Another aspect of this problem is making project management too complicated for new users. Focus on the behaviours for new people, don't assault them with things like complex scheduling, cost control and risk management procedures.

**PMWT:** In the UK, it seems that the government is now taking project management more seriously, what with various best practices and standards being developed and promoted by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). And yet, we still see stories about major over-spends, programmes being cancelled, and some outright failures on government programmes and projects. Now with all the economic stimulus spending with the government financing infrastructure programmes and projects, how can truly significant improvements in performance be advanced? What more is needed?

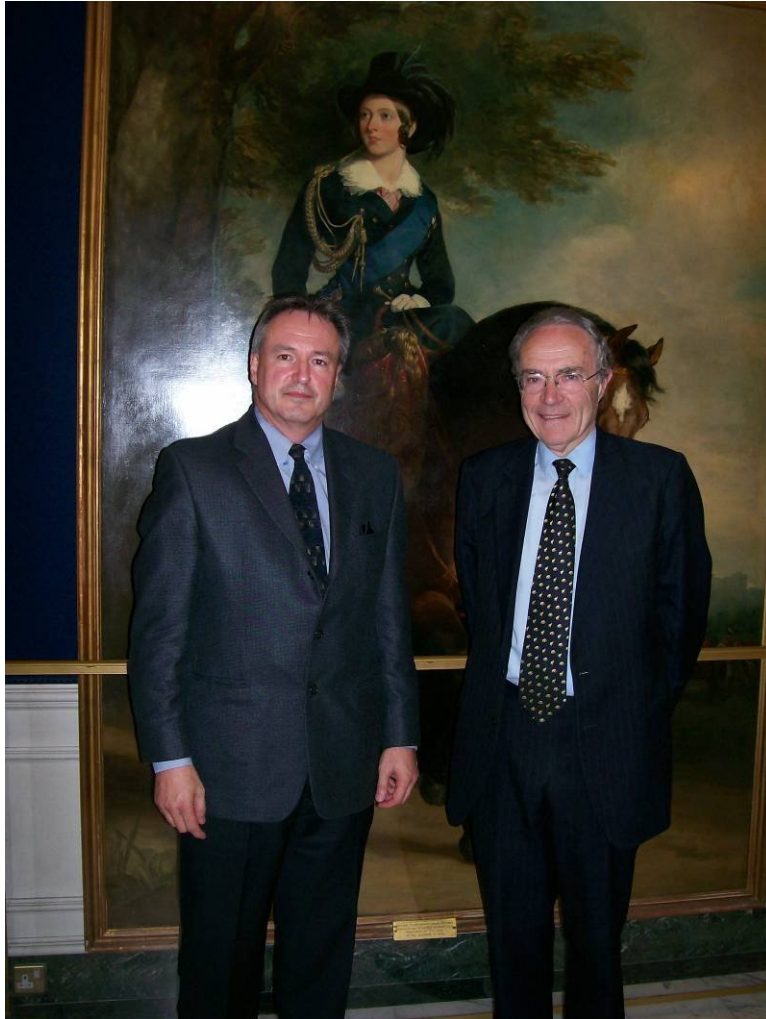
**Barnes:** There is now no excuse for any major project to go seriously wrong. Our profession is now sufficiently well developed as to theory and practice that we can be getting things done on time, within budget and so that they achieve what was intended nearly every time. The failures which still occur I think are usually of one of two types. Some of them are down to serious failures by the promoter/client in not being perfectly clear and firm about what the project has to achieve and in what way. Project managers should, in my view, take some responsibility here in letting promoters start with unclear and unstable objectives.

The other type of problem is due to lack of cohesion in the project delivery team. The project might be very good and most contributors working well together, but if only one key contributor behaves in the wrong way, it can mess up delivery of the whole project.

I have believed for many years that the latter problem is exacerbated by the traditional contracts used to link the organisations in a project team. They stimulate the wrong behaviour. This is why I have spent a lot of my time in the last twenty years designing and bringing into use new contracts which motivate participants to be an effective part of the project team. Lawyers don't like my new contracts but they seriously reduce the risk of a disaster project ([www.neccontract.com](http://www.neccontract.com)).



**Dr. Martin Barnes at his home near Oxford**



*PM World Today editor David Pells and Dr. Martin Barnes  
Before historic portrait of the young Queen Victoria at the Army and Navy Club  
London, UK, July 2007*

**Editor's note:** We want to thank Martin for his many contributions to the field of project management, for taking the time to answer these questions, and for sharing some personal stories from his early years in the project management field. Please see Part I of the Interview with Martin Barnes in the June 2009 edition of **PM World today** at <http://www.pmworldtoday.net/interviews/2009/june/Interview-with-Dr-Martin-Barnes.html>. To see the article regarding Martin Barnes being named a CBE by HM The Queen, visit <http://www.pmforum.org/blogs/news/2009/06/AwardforMartinBarnesinUKHonoursLis.html>.