

## PM WORLD TODAY – FEATURED INTERVIEW – FEBRUARY 2009

Interview with Mary McKinlay  
Immediate Past Vice President of IPMA  
Member of Board of Trustees of **apm** in UK



**Mary McKinlay**, BA FAPM MIOd, is Managing Director of Mary McKinlay Projects Ltd, a Project Assessment and Training firm based in the UK. She is also currently an Adjunct Professor of Project Management at (ESC Lille) in Lille, France. For the past two years, she has been a Vice President and member of the Executive Board of the International Project Management Association (IPMA). Having worked in Project Management for almost 30 years as practitioner, researcher and trainer, Mary is a Project Management enthusiast who is often invited as a Conference speaker. Recent speaking engagements have included the IPMA World Congresses in Budapest, India, Shanghai, Krakow, and Rome; PM Tage in Vienna; Ukrainian PM Association conferences in Kiev; conferences in Dubai, Slovenia, Nizhny Novgorod (Russia), Vienna (Austria), and Lisbon (Portugal), and the APM Conferences in London. She has given workshops and tutorials all over the world. Following a degree in Systems Engineering, she started her career on the Tornado aircraft project and subsequently worked on many large defence programmes. A further dimension was added by participation in research programmes involving collaboration between industry and academics e.g. Alvey, SERC and ESPRIT. One of these projects was to generate a process model for Project Management using soft systems methodologies. This underlined the need for Project Management improvement and influenced her later work. Having trained in the use of the Project Excellence Model, Mary has acted as an assessor for the IPMA Awards since 2004. She has also jointly delivered Training Workshops for the Awards. She has been Governor of the University of Greenwich and is an active member of the UK Institute of Directors.

**Editor's Note:** Mary McKinlay has been one of the most active and visible leaders of IPMA over the last two years, speaking at many conferences and traveling worldwide to promote professional project management. We had an opportunity to visit with Mary in both Rome and Helsinki during November 2008, then pose the questions below in December as her position on the IPMA Executive Board (ExBo) came to an end. Mary responded to the questions via email from Paris in early January.

**PM World Today (PMWT):** As this year comes to a close, and as your position on the IPMA Executive Board (ExBo) comes to an end, perhaps you can reflect a little on your IPMA experiences. To begin, what was your leadership role this year on the IPMA ExBo?

**Mary McKinlay:** My principal responsibilities were for Membership and Young Crew and then after Otto's death I acquired the Project Excellence awards. Having started the initiative to look at the governance of IPMA, I have been responsible for the Governance Implementation Working Group. I have also been working with Veikko Valila on alliances e.g. with PMI and the International Centre for Complex Project Management (Previously the College of Complex Project Managers)

**PMWT:** How long have you been involved with IPMA in leadership roles and what IPMA hats have you worn?

**McKinlay:** I have been a Vice-President for two years, a member of the Awards Board for three years and previously was APM delegate to the Council of delegates

**PMWT:** What was your favorite role, and why?

**McKinlay:** Young Crew, they are the future of Project Management and I strongly believe that we should be encouraging them and giving them the opportunity to develop,

*(Photo at right: IPMA Finnish Young Crew leader Ray Lindberg and Mary McKinlay at PM Days Symposium in Helsinki, Finland, 18 November 2008)*



**PMWT:** How did you first get involved with IPMA, and how were you nominated to the ExBo?

**McKinlay:** I was a member of the APM (UK Membership Association) Council and volunteered my services as a representative on the IPMA Council of Delegates. I was elected to the ExBo at the CoD meeting in Zagreb by the Council members, my nomination to ExBo came from APM

**PMWT:** Looking back at this last year, what were one or two highlights for you personally?

**McKinlay:** The World Congress in Rome was terrific and I really enjoyed the whole thing. I had a lot to do and at times it was quite stressful but I think that it was a wonderful event .I also made a visit to Libya last January and found this really interesting.

**PMWT:** I have had an opportunity to hear you speak twice in the last month, first in Rome and then in Finland. You seem to enjoy speaking and sharing knowledge with people. Can you reflect on the speaking experience? Why do you do it and what do you take away from each engagement?

**McKinlay:** I do enjoy speaking, I think that it is important to make things simple so that even complex issues can be understood by many people, I care about my subject and hope to be able to get this across. It's a great pleasure to see the smiles and nods of recognition in an audience and make contact with them. I like questions and discussions. and very often this opens the door to new contacts and new ideas.

**PMWT:** Perhaps we should back up a moment. What was your keynote speech at the 22<sup>nd</sup> IPMA World Congress in Rome about, and what was the main message?

**McKinlay:** The theme of the Congress was "Project management to Run" and so I was looking at where it has run from and where it is going. I think that we are in an exciting time for the development of Project Management; we have come beyond the simple use of tools into the need to really manage people in the team and the environment, including all the stakeholders. As Project Managers, we are being asked to take more responsibility for the projects that we undertake and this is a sign of the dawn of the project management profession. The ability to deal with ethical issues and sustainability now form part of the competency requirements for a Project Manager. Another interesting element is our recognition of the notion of complexity and how to deal with the interconnectedness of project elements.



**PMWT:** Was your speech at the PM Days symposium in Finland on November 19 on the same topic? If not, what was that presentation about?

**McKinlay:** Certainly there were some of the same elements, but I also talked about the characteristics needed for a good project manager.

**PMWT:** Prior to your work with IPMA, you were among the leaders of the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK. Can you briefly explain what the APM is and how your involvement with APM has contributed to your personal and professional development?

**McKinlay:** The APM (Association for Project Management) is the UK Member Association of IPMA. Many of the founders of APM were involved in the formation of IPMA and there is a shared heritage. APM has over 14,000 members and is growing very rapidly. The association is very active, we are currently applying for a Royal Charter

which will be an important step for the Profession. I was a member of the APM Council for several years but then took a break when APM re-structured and replaced the Council with a smaller Board of Trustees. This October I was elected to the Board and this will require more of my time as we meet more frequently. I am also the Chairman of the Membership Panel, a judge for the APM Annual Awards, an active member of our local Branch Committee and have been part of the Professional Development Board,. I am also very much involved with some of the other APM committees. APM is important to me and provides many opportunities to participate in development activity.



*(Photo: Mary McKinlay delivering keynote speech at 22<sup>nd</sup> IPMA World Congress in Rome, Italy in November 2008)*

**PMWT:** It is our understanding that you will return to a leadership role with APM next year. What would you hope to achieve in that role, or contribute to the PM community in UK now?

**McKinlay:** Yes, I am a Board member of APM and hope to participate in the International development work of APM. We have a lot of work to do to prepare for Chartered Status and the way ahead for APM.

**PMWT:** At the IPMA World Congress in Rome this month, we witnessed the signing of a cooperation agreement between IPMA and PMI. What was the significance of that signing ceremony and the new agreement?

**McKinlay:** One of the things that has puzzled Young Crew is the division between PMI and IPMA and it does seem to me that they are right. Both organisations are concerned with the promotion of PM but they do it in different ways. I feel that this agreement will allow us to work together in two areas where we have common ground. There's no point in getting into a competition about the relative virtues of different documents and examinations but we can jointly encourage research and also the accreditation of higher education. IPMA has space for developing different ways of thinking and is open to ideas.

**PMWT:** How did you get started in project management anyway?

**McKinlay:** I joined GEC-Marconi with my degree in Systems and found that we worked in projects. Looking at the way in which we did this, it struck me that there was room for improvement and so I started work within the Company to do this.

**PMWT:** Take us back through your career a little. What have been some of the positions that you have held leading up to your eventual achievements as a senior project manager?

**McKinlay:** I was very fortunate in that I was encouraged within the Company and had many opportunities to look at the business overall. I worked on a variety of projects, becoming Head of Application Software at one point, later I became the training manager progressing to Head of Human Resource Development which gave me the chance to do some personal HR development. I was seconded to the GEC Management College to assist with PM development and training. My final role was as Functional Head of Project Management – so you can see that there was a wide range and a lot of opportunity to develop different experience and skills.

**PMWT:** What kinds of programmes and projects have you worked on? What was the most memorable, and why – or can you tell?

**McKinlay:** I have worked mostly on aircraft projects both military and civil but then have had input to a nuclear submarine programme. I worked on business application software. Every one has had unique moments and I would be hard put to identify any one as more memorable than any others. Many have involved working with teams overseas.

**PMWT:** Over the last 30 years, you have witnessed many advancements and changes in the management of defense programs. What were some of the most significant developments related to PM in that sector, in your opinion?

**McKinlay:** I find it very difficult to think of specific sector related developments. Since leaving defence, I have used my PM skills in many other domains. The real changes have been in technology and the organisation of the projects. I suppose that another major change came in with the toolsets – when I started we worked with a large mainframe and punched cards – this slowed things down a lot!

**PMWT:** What is the general status of PM in Defense today? Is the industry still moving forward in its ability to manage large, complex programs – or not? Where do you see the challenges?

**McKinlay:** The challenges have come with economic changes, governments are short of money and want to see more for it; projects are much more visible than they used to be and the world shows greater interest. The movement to deal with complexity started by being driven from the Defence world. As you know, I am much involved with the complexity issues – have just been appointed to the Board of the International Centre for Complex Project Management and have been working with Queensland University of Technology on their Executive MBA Programme that is focused on Complexity. It is apparent that there is great concern worldwide on this topic and it has moved beyond Defence. In January I will be attending the third Knowledge Sharing Forum of ICCPM in Singapore; the others were in Washington DC and Frankfurt. I also was the stream Champion for Complexity at the APM Conference in London in October.

**PMWT:** “Complex project management” seems to be an area of interest to you. Are projects really any more complex today than previously? Will complexity keep growing? What should the professional PM community do about this? Your thoughts?

**McKinlay:** Continuing from the last point, we have a new research field opening up and this is work that should be done in tandem with the Systems thinking fraternity. Interactivity is the key feature of complexity and we need that Systems approach. It is a different issue from complicated projects and much tied in with “Wicked” problems.

**PMWT:** How are you engaged with the ESC Lille Graduate Program in Programme and Project Management? Are you teaching, leading research or just advising?

**McKinlay:** I teach some modules in the Masters, MBA and PhD programmes. I also help students with their theses. I enjoy interacting with the students

**PMWT:** This week you are in Paris? What are you doing there?

**McKinlay:** This is a module concerned with project health checks, Project audit and project excellence.

**PMWT:** And next week you are off to Iran? What is that trip about? Who will you meet with there and what are the objectives?

**McKinlay:** The Iranian PMA is establishing a National Project Award scheme using the IPMA Project Excellence Model. I will be training potential assessors to use the PEM.

**PMWT:** Mary, one last question and I apologize for so many. What about the future? What would you like to accomplish before you really do retire?

**McKinlay:** Whilst I can still be useful, I’ll keep going. I would like to see IPMA getting stronger and working better – the continuation of the work that I have been doing in the last couple of years on governance. As long as I can keep on meeting people, putting them in touch with others and spreading the messages about Project Management – then count me in. I’ve always felt the need to keep moving on, learning new things and with new mountains to climb so whilst I am able – I’ll go for it.

**Mary McKinlay** is also a member of the PM Ambassadors™ Speakers Bureau. Her areas of expertise include Project and Programme Management, Risk Management, Systems Engineering. Special field of interest Aerospace and Defence. Professional interests are in the principles & theories of programme/project management and development of a closer relationship between Industry and Academe; working together trans-nationally and establishment of standards to make this possible; and use of Systems Thinking principles as a foundation for effective project management, especially in the field of complexity. For more information, visit <http://www.pmforum.org/ambassadors/ambassadors.htm#McKinlay>.

**Editor's note:** We want to thank Mary McKinlay for taking the time to answer these questions and to share her experiences over the last two years as a member of the IPMA executive board.



*Photo: PMWT Managing Editor David Pells & Mary McKinlay  
in Denver, Colorado, USA in October 2008*