

# **From PERT/CPM to AI: Four Decades of Project Management in Brazil<sup>1</sup>**

## **Interview with João Carlos Boyadjian**

Founder of PMI São Paulo Chapter,  
the Largest in Latin America  
São Paulo, Brazil



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### **Introduction to the Interviewee**

João Carlos Boyadjian, MSc, PMP is widely regarded as one of the influencing figures of the project management profession in Brazil. He has been a member of the Project Management Institute since 1982, when the discipline was virtually unknown in the country, and registered with PMI in the United States in 1987. In 1998, he was one of the leaders of the movement that established the PMI São Paulo Chapter, which grew to

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become the largest PMI chapter in Latin America. He later served as a mentor in the establishment of PMI chapters in Minas Gerais (1999), Mato Grosso (2013), and Armenia, and currently holds the title of Fellow of PMI São Paulo, the chapter's highest recognition.

Boyadjian holds a Master's degree in Naval and Ocean Engineering from the Polytechnic School of the University of São Paulo (POLI-USP), Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, and specializations in Finance from New York University, Industrial Planning from Fundação Getulio Vargas, and Data Science from USP/ESALQ. He is PMP certified and was a PMI accredited Authorized Training Partner (ATP) Trainer until 2024, combining academic depth with over three decades of hands-on consulting and training experience.

As a professor, he teaches project management practices at some of Brazil's most respected institutions, including FIA-USP, Fundação Getulio Vargas, USP/ESALQ-PECEGE, UFSCar, FATEC, FECAP, PUC Minas, and Senac — where he currently contributes to one of only six PMI GAC-accredited postgraduate programs in Latin America. He is also the author of books and project management systems, and notably the creator of a theatrical work on project management — an unconventional approach that reflects his belief in making the discipline accessible beyond the corporate boardroom.

Beyond his professional career, Boyadjian is now a volunteer, having served for more than 10 years as President of the Armenian Fund of Brazil until July 2025, an organization linked to the global Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, dedicated to humanitarian and educational projects supporting the Armenian diaspora. This interview, conducted for PM World Journal, represents his first in-depth profile published in English for an international audience.

### **About this Interview**

This interview was conducted over multiple sessions between February 23 and February 28, 2026, in Portuguese, the native language of both the interviewee and the interviewer. The transcript was subsequently translated into English.

The interview goes beyond the founding of the PMI São Paulo Chapter, revisiting Boyadjian's early exposure to project management tools in the 1970s and the institutional/cultural barriers to building professional associations in Brazil. It also highlights his role in supporting the creation of other chapters in Brazil and abroad. Finally, it discusses certifications and academic accreditation, the evolution of

methodologies (predictive, agile, and hybrid) and student profiles, the direction of the PMBOK® Guide, and how AI is reshaping what can be automated versus what remains essentially human in project leadership.

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## The Interview

**Q1.** What was the first concrete situation in which you tried to apply PMI practices in Brazil in the 1980s/1990s and heard “that doesn’t exist here”? What did you do, and what did you learn about organizational resistance?

**Boyadjian:** In fact, my first exposure to project management came in 1972 (PMI had existed for 3 years) when the organization where I worked as a service provider won a bid to manage the construction of one of the largest office centers in the city of São Paulo, the Centro Empresarial de São Paulo, CENESP (6 office blocks, each block with 8 floors, with 96,000 m<sup>2</sup> per block, plus Block G, which was an integrating block for all the blocks and had a computing center and services and a shopping center; externally there is also a belvedere with a helipad), totaling about 200,000 m<sup>2</sup> of construction <sup>2</sup>. An IBM team trained me in the PERT/CPM technique and the PCS software (Project Control System), running on an IBM 1130 with 16K of memory.

**Q2.** In 1998, you helped found PMI São Paulo, which became the largest chapter in Latin America. What was “mature” at that moment, and what was still missing? What motivated the creation of the chapter, and what were the main obstacles in the early years?

**Boyadjian:** In fact, I always sought out organizations that brought together project management professionals. I already had a degree in Business Administration and worked in the area at Equiplan Consultoria and later at Confab Industrial (a manufacturer of heavy equipment for the petroleum and petrochemical industries, gas, oil, paper and pulp, steelmaking, nuclear). I discovered that there was an initiative of PMI at the time, PMI Brazil Division (this was 1979) which remained active until 1983. The PMI leadership at the time was composed of Michael Zeitlin (President), Antonio Muller (VP), Eduardo

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<sup>2</sup> Roughly 2.15 million square feet.

Fernandes (Secretary), Michel Levi (Treasurer), and Marcio Prieto (Director of Coordination). Unfortunately, in that same period, PMI Brazil had to close its doors because we were under a state of exception<sup>3</sup>; we could no longer send dollars abroad. Meetings took place at the headquarters of Jaakko Poyry and/or Promon Engenharia. Around the same time, I met GEGE (Grupo de Estudos de Gerenciamento de Empreendimentos, or Enterprise Management Study Group), which had a group interested in the development of good project management practices and met once a month at the Hilton Hotel. I became the organization's secretary, and later GEGE "hibernated" at the Institute of Engineering of USP (University of São Paulo) at the same time associations ended by decree.

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, I began to participate in the International Project Management Symposia in the United States. My first symposium was in 1987 in Milwaukee, USA. At that time, few Brazilians attended the symposia. On that first occasion, I met Lucio Diniz and Paul Dinsmore (who ended up becoming my guru, along with Robert Sebald, David Cleland, James Snyder, and later Russell Archibald). In the following years the presence of Brazilians began to grow and little by little, in conversations among Brazilians, the idea of having PMI again in Brazil began to resurface. The problem was finding someone to take the initiative. Since nobody took the lead, I decided to join with a partner and consultant from my office, Professor Maria Fernanda Ferreira, to form an association (CENGE—Center for Project Management) together with FATEC, the State of São Paulo Technology College.

Together we developed a project to restart PMI in Brazil as if it were an association. Thus, in 1994, after presenting the project to the PMI Board during the Vancouver Symposium, when I returned, on the holiday of November 15, 1994<sup>4</sup>, I was working in my office when I received a fax from PMI, signed by Deborah Bigelow, requesting the signing of the contract. It was an immense joy, because I did not imagine the response would be so fast.

When I took the response to FATEC, it declined for reasons related to the São Paulo dean being transferred to Taubaté. It was frustrating. However, I did not stop persisting in my natural Armenian resilience. Talking with interlocutors of the late Marcio Prieto, Professor Guilherme Ary Plonsky, representing USP (University of São Paulo), approached me to constitute a new PMI formation, this time with FGV (Fundação Getúlio Vargas, represented by Mr. Paulo Sabbag), my company CPLAN Consultoria, and Racional Engenharia, represented by Mr. Mauricio Martins Lopes.

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<sup>3</sup> At the time, Brazil enforced strict foreign exchange controls that prohibited remittances in foreign currency, making it impossible to maintain PMI membership fees paid in US dollars.

<sup>4</sup> Republic Day, a national holiday in Brazil.

Thus, on December 27, 1996, we gathered additional efforts, bringing together other professionals of the time, such as Paul Dinsmore, Edson Satoshi Gomi, Isak Kruglianskas, Luiz José Marques, Antonio Cesar Amaru Maximiano, Roberto Sbragia, Nilton Nunes Toledo, and we created a movement titled **MOVEMENT IN FAVOR OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN BRAZIL**.

**Q3.** How many professionals were involved in that founding and which sectors did they come from? Was the profile of those seeking PMI in the 1990s different from today's profile?

**Boyadjian:** At that time, PMI required a minimum of 25 people to create a potential chapter. We had much more than that. We had exactly 75 people confirmed as demand and interest in creating the PMI chapter in Brazil. There was a core group of 12 people, as explained in the previous question, who worked more intensively on coordination for the chapter's creation, and another 63 who participated in that first meeting as supporters of the movement in favor of project management in Brazil.

The people intending to create PMI were more senior practitioners, and the composition was mostly professors from FEA-USP and POLI-USP, and others representing industry, research companies, sanitation, the metro, NGOs, engineering companies, information technology, government, services, and food.

**Q4.** You also guided the creation of chapters in other states and outside Brazil, such as in Armenia. What did those experiences teach about how the profession develops in very different cultural and institutional contexts?

**Boyadjian:** Projects exist around us and in practically everything we do. Human beings are unique by nature, and that alone explains the existence of projects as a basic necessity for people to develop. Project Management is present in the creation of our families, our homes, marriages, parties, and in everything we dream of achieving. The same is true in companies with innovations in products, services, organizational processes, people development, product sales... Everything can be seen as a project in what we call the project economy.

Thus, regional and multinational cultures also develop around projects. Their needs are the same as ours and are applied in other specific activities according to the characteristics of each person's origins and therefore rooted in each culture we live in. There are countries that apply more projects in tourism, others in religion, others because they suffer catastrophes and wars (in fact, Henry Gantt, the inventor of the schedule chart, developed this tool during the First World War, and today it has existed for 116 years), and many in humanitarian aid projects.

What I was able to perceive in these activities is that management is a necessity for administrative improvement and project governance anywhere in the world, and it needs to be specified according to the principles and customs of each place. In this way, pillars of conduct and professional ethics can be regionalized; for example, practicing management by leading projects with responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty unites human beings regardless of their area of activity in project management practice.

In mentoring the creation of the Minas Gerais chapter, it happened through a partnership I had with IETEC, the Institute of Education and Technology of Belo Horizonte. We clearly saw that interest in Project Management was growing in the state. Thus, the entity's director, Ronaldo Gusmão, a great visionary, after persistent initiative, decided to invite people from the project management field on June 19, 1998 to build PMI in Minas Gerais. And that was the kickoff. I handed Ricardo Viana Vargas and Antonio Jose Soares a VHS tape with all the tips to develop the first bylaws that would guide the first statute of the Minas Gerais chapter. Today the chapter is led by Mr. Felipe Borges.

In Mato Grosso, the mentoring occurred on a day when I was teaching a course in Salvador, Bahia. I received a call from my friend Clebiano Nogueira in 2013 asking for guidance to develop the chapter there. The group worked in the same direction and in 2014 PMI-MT emerged, with Mr. Clebiano Nogueira as president at the time. The chapter's consolidation happened with the first seminar in Cuiabá in 2014. Today the Mato Grosso chapter unfortunately no longer exists.

In Armenia, the first steps were taken in 2008, when I visited Armenia for the first time. I met with two important people in project management at the time: the rector of the American University of Armenia (AUA), and Mr. Albert Poghosyan, from APMA—Armenian Project Management Association. I gave both of them my course materials on project management fundamentals and PMI membership information. To my surprise, Mr. Albert already had a version of the PMBOK Guide translated into Armenian and was leaning toward affiliating with IPMA due to the high cost of PMI membership by Armenian standards. I encouraged him to affiliate with PMI, which I believed offered broader global

reach and recognition. I introduced Mr. Albert to the university rector and from there the first movements began to emerge.

On May 26, 2015, I gave a lecture at Eurasia University, which was interested in creating PMI. I went there to give a talk to explain how the process worked. And thus their initial efforts began to propose creating a chapter. However, at that same time, an initiative by consultants filed the request first and, in the competition, they ended up initiating the process with the dear and late Thomas Mazejian... and that is how the chapter began. Today the chapter is very well led by Ms. Astghik Sahakyan, who was present at my lecture at Eurasia University in May 2015.

**Q5.** Brazil today is among the 10 countries with the most PMPs in the world, and the certification market has expanded with CAPM, PMI-ACP, PMI-RMP, and others. Do you see this expansion as a maturation of the profession or as fragmentation?

**Boyadjian:** I see it as a need in the search for maturity, and I explain: for someone leaving undergraduate school and wanting to enter project management in a more operational dimension, there is the CAPM—Certified Associate in Project Management. For someone entering the area as a professional and later, with greater experience requirements, there is the PMP—Project Management Professional. Continuing the maturity concept, in a tactical management dimension there is the certification for program managers (PgMP), and for the strategic dimension the portfolio manager certification (PfMP). However, some certifications can be said to be segmented, such as Agile (ACP), Business (PBA), the Construction Professional (CP) certification for construction specialists, among others.

**Q6.** Senac, where you also teach, recently obtained PMI's GAC accreditation, and is now one of only 6 programs in all of Latin America. In your assessment, why do so few Latin American institutions pursue this accreditation?

**Boyadjian:** I believe few institutions want the GAC due to the complexity of making a school more recognized by the public in a given area. I believe some schools, because they are more traditional and already recognized with other MBA accreditations (like ANAMBA) and other global entities, bring more recognition to the organization. Another factor is also the cost of accreditation, and the very strong competition PMI exerts in the region, which ends up drawing students away from accredited organizations.

**Q7.** You have trained generations of project managers over decades. What has changed in the profile of students arriving today compared to 10 or 20 years ago—in preparation level, expectations, and their relationship with methodologies?

**Boyadjian:** I think that for better understanding, I will divide this answer into three parts:

First, preparation and maturity. At the beginning of the millennium, students who arrived in project management MBAs were generally more experienced professionals, with fewer specialization options. There was more willingness to deepen concepts, more time for reading, and greater patience to practice active listening and method discipline. Academic retention seemed higher to me because attention was less contested.

Second, expectations. The world was more predictable and less disruptive. Today, with volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity, the market demands earlier delivery and fast value. So the student arrives with different expectations: they want immediate application, real cases, tools, and practical decisions. The “how to do it tomorrow” has gained weight over the “how to structure it forever.”

Third, the relationship with methodologies. Ten to twenty years ago, the path was more convergent: predictive logic prevailed and few standards were referenced. Today we have a large ecosystem: predictive, adaptive, and hybrid approaches, more guides and methodologies by project type (IT, construction, government, CAPEX, OPEX, innovation). This made the students realize there isn’t a single way; they want to learn how to combine and adapt.

And now AI comes in: it automates a lot of operational work and accelerates analyses, but it creates a paradox. Students ask for more practicality, but to use AI well, they need more depth. Because without fundamentals and critical reasoning, you become a “tool operator,” not a manager. The project manager’s value rises precisely in the capacity to question, interpret, negotiate, and decide based on what AI produces.

**Q8.** PMBOK 8 tries to be more actionable: 6 principles, 7 performance domains, and the return of process guidance in a less prescriptive way, plus more space for AI and sustainability. For the “real-world” project manager, which change is most immediately impactful? <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Boyadjian provided a structured written response to this question, reproduced below.

**Boyadjian:** The 7th edition of the PMBOK was, for many professionals, a breaking point. It emerged in a period when the world was living an exception, and the pandemic accelerated the search for flexibility, principles, and adaptation. I experienced part of this movement up close: in 2019, during PMI meetings in the United States, I participated in dynamics in which professionals from different countries debated, in collaborative workshops, how principles and domains should translate into practical guidance. The intention was noble: to update project management thinking for a more uncertain and less “recipe-driven” scenario.

But in the “real world,” a side effect quickly appeared: for a significant part of the market, the 7th edition was perceived as good philosophy, but not very actionable in day-to-day work. When pressure is on schedule, cost, risk, and stakeholder alignment (and the project is “on fire”) the manager needs language that helps them decide and act, without returning to rigid prescriptivism, but also without staying only in the abstract.

That is precisely where, in my reading, lies the most immediately relevant impact of the PMBOK 8th edition: the rebalancing between flexibility and operationality.

The most immediately impactful change: “Governance” as the center of the game, and more actionable guidance.

For the project manager, the most practical leap is the shift from a discourse that seemed dispersed to a model that better organizes reality: governance becomes the integrating axis of the life cycle, connecting decisions, quality, controls, and value generation. This is more than a change of name. It is a repositioning: the project manager stops being seen only as an “integrator of parts” and becomes, explicitly, the orchestrator of governance that ensures coherence between strategy, execution, and benefits.

In practice, this helps with three immediate pains:

1. Clarity of responsibility: Projects fail less due to lack of “tools” and more due to lack of decisions, alignment, and acceptance criteria. By placing governance at the center, the guide reinforces that the manager’s job is to sustain the decision-making environment: roles, escalation, quality, criteria, controls, transparency, and accountability.
2. Language closer to executives: The shift from “costs” to finance is also an important signal: the real world doesn’t discuss only budget; it discusses flow, trade-offs, constraints, predictability, and value. This brings the PM closer to the

business conversation (revenues, expenses, disbursements, financial risks, and return).

3. More action, less polarization between “process vs. agility”: PMBOK 8 tries to be more actionable without returning to a “recipe manual.” It recovers process guidance in a less prescriptive way and builds a bridge to different project types and contexts. For the PM, this reduces methodological fatigue: instead of “choosing a side,” the guide gives a basis to combine approaches coherently.

And the other changes? Important, but with a more gradual effect. Other editorial decisions in PMBOK 8 are relevant, but tend to mature over time inside organizations:

- Communication absorbed into Stakeholders: it makes sense because communication is, in practice, the “circulatory system” of engagement.
- Quality connected to governance: it reinforces that quality is not a department; it is a decision and management criterion throughout the life cycle.
- Procurement moved to an appendix: it is controversial, but it reflects a market reality in which purchasing is a specialized function; the PM’s role is to ensure governance, contractual integration, and supplier performance (without necessarily “executing purchasing”).
- More space for AI and sustainability: here the change is inevitable and growing, but the immediate impact depends on each organization’s level of maturity in data, tools, and culture.

In summary, for real-world project managers, the most immediately impactful change in PMBOK 8 is that it becomes a guide that helps you act again: placing governance as an integrating axis and offering less prescriptive, but more operational, guidance to navigate the life cycle and deliver value.

**Q9.** Looking back, what do you consider the turning point: the moment project management stopped being a niche and became recognized as a strategic competence in the Brazilian market?

**Boyadjian:** If I must point to a turning point in Brazil, I describe it less as a “specific day” and more as a maturation cycle with a clear catalyst. The discipline had already been

growing with CAPEX, infrastructure expansion, IT professionalization, and the spread of MBAs and certifications, but it was still often seen as a competence of “the schedule manager.”

The turning point, for me, happens when the market begins to see project management as the execution mechanism of strategy, and this consolidated unequivocally in the 2020–2022 transition, with the pandemic functioning as an accelerator. There, Brazil saw live that the organization that cannot decide quickly, replan, protect value, and deliver results under uncertainty loses competitiveness, or stops. From then on, projects ceased to be “isolated initiatives” and began to be treated as the operating model itself: people and resources organized around projects, products, and value streams.

The practical signal of this change was a shift in language at the top: executives and boards began discussing not only “schedule and cost,” but portfolio prioritization, governance, benefits, risk, delivery capacity, and value alignment. In other words: project management stopped being a technical niche and became a strategic competence because it began answering directly the question that matters to any organization: how do we turn decisions into results, with predictability and adaptation?

In this context, the growth of hybrid approaches is not the primary cause: it is the natural consequence. The market understood there is not a single way to manage projects. The differentiator became the ability to choose the right approach, adjust the level of control to risk and complexity, and sustain governance that allows speed without losing quality. This also reinforced the importance of stronger and more adaptive PMO/XMO structures, not as “method police,” but as an execution architecture connecting strategy, portfolio, and delivery.

**Q10.** If you could leave a message for a project management professional at the start of their career today, reading this interview from anywhere in the world, what would you say?

**Boyadjian:** If I could leave a message for someone starting today, I would say the following: project management is not an exact science. It has technique, method, and tools, but in the end, it is deeply human discipline. Projects happen inside organizations, with people, interests, pressures, and real dilemmas. So don’t train yourself only as a “schedule manager.” Train yourself as a business and value manager.

Understand the context where the project exists: strategy, customers, stakeholders, risks, constraints, and impacts. Learn to make decisions responsibly, and to coordinate actions by creating a healthy environment of collaboration and trust, where the team feels committed to a common goal. Your result depends as much on the quality of the plan as on the maturity of the team and the quality of the conversations you lead.

And never relativize what sustains your reputation: ethics, transparency, and respect for rules and the local environment (legislation, culture, standards, and social expectations). In any country, in any sector, successful projects are those that deliver benefits, reduce waste, treat risks seriously, and preserve relationships.

At the start of your career, you will seek “certainty.” The advice is different: seek judgment. Use methods and AI as support, but develop the ability to think critically, align people, negotiate choices, and decide with awareness of impact.

In summary: master the tools but build your career on trust—because projects are made by people and for people.

**Q11.** What is the biggest project management myth that Brazil still repeats and that is costing dearly in public and private money?

**Boyadjian:** The biggest myth Brazil still repeats (and that costs dearly in the public and private sectors) is the culture of what I call “fazejamento”<sup>6</sup>: the belief that the best path is to start running and “adjust along the way,” as if planning were bureaucracy and not management.

The problem is that a project is not routine operations. A project is, by definition, a unique delivery, with its own uncertainties. When you start without maturing assumptions, constraints, and requirements, what usually happens is predictable: scope is born fragile, the schedule becomes a “wish date,” the budget becomes a “guess estimate,” and contracting begins without sufficient maturity of the solution.

The cost of this myth appears quickly:

- Rework and change orders: late changes cost more than well-made decisions at the start.

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<sup>6</sup> A Brazilian colloquialism roughly meaning 'just-do-it-ism' — the habit of rushing into execution without planning.

- Poorly specified contracts and tenders: they generate disputes, claims, stoppages, and often judicialization.
- Unrealistic schedules: they produce expensive acceleration, overtime, fines, and loss of productivity.
- Ignored risks: they become crises, and managing in crisis is almost always more expensive than preventing with a good risk register and responses.

In short, we must be careful. Haste at the beginning often buys delay, and change orders, at the end. When that happens, the project may even “finish,” but it often finishes without delivering the value and benefits that justified the investment.

**Q12.** With AI entering day-to-day work, what becomes commodity (and can be automated) and what becomes even more human (and more valuable) in the profession?

**Boyadjian:** I have always been passionate about management practices—and perhaps that is why I see the arrival of AI as another chapter in a long story. At the beginning of my career, in 1972, I already used computers to support schedules and analyze the critical path. It was a time when processing took hours and demanded discipline: before running the model, we needed consistent reasoning, because “pressing the button” did not solve the project’s logic. That taught me a lesson that remains current: technology accelerates calculations and documents but does not replace judgment.

With AI entering daily work, I see a clear division.

In my opinion, what becomes commodity: AI will make increasingly automatable standardized and repetitive activities, especially those based on text and data, such as:

- Generation and maintenance of artifacts: project charter, plans, WBS, initial schedules, minutes, templates, reports.
- Routine monitoring and control: progress consolidation, indicator updates, deviation alerts, variance analyses, projections, S-curve, and trends.
- Operational communication: draft emails and announcements, reminders, meeting summaries, organizing pending items, support in structuring scenarios.

This is positive: it reduces friction, frees time, and raises the minimum quality of “the basics well done.”

In my opinion, what remains even more human (and more valuable): at the same time, AI increases the value of what it cannot do deeply: lead, interpret context, and decide in ambiguous environments. In other words, the project manager's differentiator tends to migrate to:

- Prioritizing and making real trade-offs (scope × schedule × risk × cost × value), especially under pressure.
- Negotiating and aligning stakeholders, reading interests, power, conflicts, and political or organizational constraints.
- Leading teams: motivation, trust, psychological safety, conflict management, building maturity and a delivery culture.
- Governance and ethics: transparency, limits on data use, responsibility, escalation, and decision-making with integrity.
- Leading change: turning decisions into adoption—and adoption into sustainable results.

There is an essential point here: to use AI well, professionals need to know the fundamentals even more. AI can suggest paths, but it does not answer for the impact of choices. Without fundamentals in scope, schedule, finance, risks, resources, and stakeholders, the risk is becoming a “tool operator”, not a value manager.

In the end, I see AI as the great co-pilot of this era: it makes operational work faster and more consistent. And that is great. But the project manager will remain responsible for what matters most: making the right choices. In other words: AI will take us out of spreadsheets and place us even more on the chessboard.

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**Use of AI.** Large language models (OpenAI ChatGPT-5.2) assisted with translations. All content was reviewed and verified by the author; no confidential or proprietary data were provided to the models; and the models are not listed as authors nor bear responsibility for the claims.

## About the Author



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João contributed to projects for organizations including AGCO, Boticário, CPFL, General Electric, GLP Properties, Jacuzzi, JBS Seara, Nissin Foods, and Zongshen Machinery. He is a member of the Brazilian Association of Technical Standards (ABNT) Special Study Committee CEE/093 on Project, Program and Portfolio Management. He has authored academic research and international peer-reviewed papers on project, program, and portfolio management. João can be contacted at [pettena.joao@pm.me](mailto:pettena.joao@pm.me)

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