

# Remembering Klaus Pannenbäcker: A Global Architect of Project Management

11 May 2026 – Berlin, Germany - The German Project Management Association (GPM) mourns the loss of Klaus Pannenbäcker. With his passing, GPM (German: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Projektmanagement) loses not only one of its great pioneers, but also a man who provided guidance, assumed responsibility, and shaped generations of project managers over the course of decades.

As a longtime member of the GPM Executive Board, former president of the International Project Management Association, and honorary chairman of GPM, he stood like few others for the professionalization of project management. “With Klaus Pannenbäcker, the project management community loses a figure who played a decisive role in building and shaping project management in Germany and far beyond over many decades. His legacy endures – professionally, institutionally, and personally,” said GPM President Peter Thuy.



Born in 1935, Klaus Pannenbäcker studied electrical engineering at the Technical University of Dortmund. After joining Siemens-Schuckert AG in 1959 and later working for Kraftwerkunion AG, he became deeply engaged early on with the question of how complex technical projects could be systematically planned, documented, and managed. His practical experience in industry and large-scale plant engineering fundamentally shaped his understanding of project management: not as a purely theoretical concept, but as a professional discipline built on clearly defined roles, transparent processes, and reliable standards. In 1981, he founded GABO GmbH, a company specializing in applied project management and technical documentation, which he transferred to his employees in 2001 – another reflection of his trust in people, responsibility, and shared growth.

At the same time, Klaus Pannenbäcker devoted himself tirelessly to establishing project management as an independent profession. His work within GPM proved especially influential. From 1983 to 1994, he served on the GPM Executive Board and belonged to the generation that systematically built and professionalized project management in Germany – organizationally, methodologically, and institutionally. While many were still focused primarily on discussing methods, he was already working on how project management could be systematically taught, assessed, and quality-assured. He viewed project

management more broadly – as competence, as mindset, and as responsibility toward people, organizations, and society.

Klaus Pannenbäcker played a key role in developing the foundations of competency-based qualification and certification in project management. This work later evolved into the IPMA Four-Level Certification System based on the IPMA Competence Baseline (ICB), which continues to shape international project management certification to this day. Pannenbäcker firmly believed that professional project management is rooted above all in practical experience, personal development, and learning from others. In an interview conducted during the introduction of the ICB 4, he said about many certification participants: “They learned much about project management from others and gained experience in practice.” The quote also reflected his own philosophy: for him, project management was never merely methodology, but lived experience, exchange, trust, and continuous learning. Many elements of project management qualification that are taken for granted today can be traced back to structures that Klaus Pannenbäcker helped develop.

At the same time, Klaus Pannenbäcker stood like few others for the international networking of the profession. During the 1990s, as a “First Assessor,” he established IPMA organizations in 18 countries and introduced training and certification systems there. Everywhere he pursued the same goal: creating a shared, competency-based understanding of professional project management. Those who worked with him encountered a man who combined technical clarity with an international mindset – demanding in standards, open in dialogue, and driven by the conviction that cooperation across borders can succeed.

Klaus Pannenbäcker’s work played a decisive role in establishing project management worldwide as an independent profession with binding competency standards. As a senior trainer for GPM and lecturer at universities of applied sciences, he also worked extensively to advance the international dissemination of professional project management standards. Serving as president of the IPMA from 1994 to 1996, and later as Chairman of the Council, he made a major contribution to strengthening international cooperation among project management associations. He gave the profession structure – and gave many people the confidence to further develop their own expertise.

Despite his international influence, Klaus Pannenbäcker always remained deeply practice-oriented. His focus was never on abstract models, but on how projects in companies and organizations could be delivered more successfully. Many colleagues experienced him as a precise, structured, yet open-minded conversation partner who combined international perspectives with practical experience. His clarity was never an end in itself; it served the shared goal of improving projects and strengthening people in their professional development.

In recognition of his contributions, he was honored in 1998 as one of the four founding assessors of PM-ZERT and later became honorary chairman of GPM. Just last year, GPM and the IPMA honored him at the IPMA World Congress 2025 as one of the defining

pioneers of modern project management. The tribute reflected deep gratitude for a lifetime of achievements extending far beyond positions and titles.

With Klaus Pannenbäcker, the project management community loses one of its most important pioneers. His legacy remains visible – in international standards, in education and certification systems, and in the very structures upon which professional project management is built today. Above all, however, he will be remembered as a man who shared his experience, supported others, and gave project management a character that was at once clear, professional, and profoundly human. “With deep sympathy, our thoughts are with his wife, his children, all family members, and his longtime companions and colleagues. We will remember Klaus Pannenbäcker with gratitude and the greatest respect,” said GPM President Peter Thuy.

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*Note: This memorial provided by [Sebatian Wieschowski](#), editor and communication lead at the German Project Management Association (GPM) and International Correspondent for the PM World Journal for Germany.*