

## **Klaus Pannenbäcker, 1935-2026**

### **A Tribute <sup>1,2</sup>**

#### **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

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<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note; Additional tributes can be added; if you knew Klaus and want to add a statement, remembrance or personal tribute, please email your contribution to [editor@pmworldjournal.com](mailto:editor@pmworldjournal.com).

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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To view a tribute to Klaus by the German Project Management Association in German language, go to: [Nachruf auf Klaus Pannenbäcker | GPM Deutsche Gesellschaft für Projektmanagement e. V.](#)

To view the tribute to Klaus by the International Project Management Association (IPMA), go to: [In Memory of Klaus Pannenbäcker](#)

## PM World Journal Honorary Global Advisor Profile (2004)



### **Klaus Pannenbäcker**

Founder, Former President & Chair – German PM Association  
Former President & Chair, Fellow - IPMA

Erlangen, Germany



**Klaus Pannenbäcker** is currently a teacher, coach and certification assessor of project management for the 4-Level-Certification System of IPMA in Germany, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Poland, Hungary, Egypt, Russia, Ukrainian, India, Iceland, Portugal and South Africa. He is a member of an international network for R&D of new technologies in manufactories and of process development in public operations. Klaus Pannenbäcker is one of the best known figures in the world of professional project management and a leading figure in the German project management community.

Former president and current member of the “Advisory Board” of the German Project Management Association (GPM - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Projektmanagement), Klaus previously served as vice president, president and Chair of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) and remains active in the IPMA network of researchers and assessors. He remains a Project Management AWARD Assessor for GPM, First Assessor of GPM / PM-ZERT and First Foreign Assessor for IPMA in 12 countries. 2010-13 he started as Partner in Romania an EU financed Project to implement PM in middle sized Companies. Since 2010 he is member of the IPMA Research SIG “Development PM Competences”.

Besides Knowledge and Experience, personal Attitude and Aptitude should be certified too. Klaus began his 52-year career at Siemens AG (1959-1969), where he developed and implemented cost calculations for site assembled construction of industrial plants; During 1969-1981, he developed codes, standards and a project management office for Kraftwerkunion AG, a Daughter Company of Siemens AG.

From 1981 until retiring in 2001, Klaus was owner and managing director at GABO Anlagentechnik und Prozessmanagement GmbH, where he managed the development and implementation of GABO software „Re-Documentation“ used to update technical documentation (as built) for all faculties and for synchronic labeling of mechanical

systems, electrical equipment and I&C installations in power plants in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Iceland and South Africa. Gabo also developed and implemented project management via Project Management Office (PMO) in companies of plant engineering and operations plant operation, especially of power plants. He has also served as Associate Professor at universities of applied science of project management in Riedlingen, Ulm, and Hannover.

A 1959 Engineering Graduate of the University of Applied Science in Dortmund, Klaus achieved extensive technical and management training over the course of his career and became an expert and leader in the project management field based on experience, training and involvement in GPM and IPMA. Klaus lives in Erlangen near Nuremberg, in Southern Germany.

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## **Memories and Tributes from Friends and Colleagues around the World**

**Report by Sebastian Wieschowski (June 2026)**

### **Klaus Pannenbäcker – More Than a Pioneer<sup>3</sup>**



*Klaus Pannenbäcker (left) with GPM honorary member Hasso Reschke, current GPM president Prof. Dr. Peter Thuy and GPM honorary members Prof. Dr. Reinhard Wagner and Prof. Dr. Nino Grau during the 34th IPMA World Congress in Berlin*

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<sup>3</sup> Wieschowski, S. (2026). Klaus Pannenbäcker: More than a Pioneer, June 2026 PM Update from Germany, report; *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue VI, June.

I met Klaus Pannenbäcker only once. It was during the IPMA World Congress 2025 in Berlin. He was already well into his nineties and being honored for his lifetime achievements. I watched him on stage in front of hundreds of enthusiastic project management professionals from around the world. I observed him from a distance, knowing only the outline of his remarkable career. What struck me immediately was not his résumé, but his presence. He appeared curious, engaged, humorous and completely at ease among colleagues from all over the world.

After his passing, I began reading the many messages, memories and tributes shared by people who had known him for decades. As I worked through these recollections, a picture emerged that went far beyond the formal roles of former GPM board member, former IPMA President, certification pioneer or project management expert. What became visible was a human being whose impact was measured not only by institutions and systems, but by relationships.

One detail caught my attention almost immediately. Again and again, people mentioned Klaus traveling by train: Brane Semolič, Slovenian professor, head of the LENS Living Lab and a close friend and collaborator of Klaus for more than four decades, recalled how Klaus regularly traveled from Germany to Slovenia by rail for intensive discussions about the future of project management education. Rajat K. Baisya, Indian professor, management consultant and long-time collaborator of Klaus in project management education and the KM Fest initiative, remembered that Klaus preferred trains even when traveling internationally and described him as someone who seemed constantly in motion.

Perhaps this detail resonated with me because I also enjoy train travel. There is something profoundly human about it. Trains connect places, but they also connect people. Looking back at Klaus' life, the train almost feels like a fitting metaphor. Throughout his career, he connected countries, professional communities, generations and ideas.

His professional achievements are impossible to overlook. As Dr. Reinhard Wagner, former chairman of GPM, project management thought leader and long-time colleague who documented Klaus's contributions to the profession, reminded us in a post on LinkedIn, Klaus was one of the driving forces behind the competence-based approach to project management qualification and certification. He helped create what became the IPMA Four-Level Certification System, based on the IPMA Competence Baseline. Introduced in the late 1990s, this framework influenced how project managers are educated, assessed and certified across the world. For many practitioners today, these standards are simply part of professional life. Yet behind them stood individuals who invested years of thought, debate and development work. Klaus was one of those individuals.

His influence reached far beyond Germany. Former IPMA President Miles Shepherd described him as a stalwart of German project management and recalled meeting him at international congresses around the world. David Pells, who had known Klaus since 1992, called him “a giant in the PM field.”

Hiroshi Tanaka, Japanese professor and project management expert, remembered his role in strengthening cooperation between IPMA and the Japanese project management community. Rajat Baisya highlighted Klaus’ support for project management development in India, where he was a frequent visitor and contributor.

The geographical reach of these memories is remarkable. From Poland to Japan, from South Africa to India, from the United States to Scandinavia, people remember Klaus not merely as a visitor but as someone who helped build something lasting.

Yet what fascinated me most while reading these tributes was how rarely people focused on his titles. Again and again, they spoke about his personality:

In comments on LinkedIn, Sandra Bartsch-Beuerlein, German project management expert and long-time assessor colleague who worked closely with Klaus in certification activities, remembered his ability to explain complex ideas through simple analogies. Alexander Miskiw, German project manager who remembers Klaus as a mentor and inspiring personality, described his patience, clarity and unmistakable sense of humor. Dr. Thomas Walenta, German project management professional, PMI Fellow and long-time colleague who knew Klaus through both PMI and GPM, recalled his openness and friendliness.

Werner Schmehr, German project management expert who remained in contact with Klaus until shortly before his passing, remembered a friend and mentor who, even in his final months, was still making plans and developing new ideas.

Joanna Stalewska, Polish project manager, wrote about his unique sense of humor.

Per Frank Povlsen, Danish IPMA assessor and long-time colleague who learned from Klaus through international certification activities, remembered him as someone who was always in a good mood.

The consistency of these recollections is striking. They come from different countries, cultures and generations, yet they describe the same person. A project management pioneer, certainly. But also a mentor. A teacher. A listener. A humanist.

Mladen Vukomanović, President of IPMA, called him one of the true pioneers of modern project management. That statement is undoubtedly correct. Klaus helped shape the profession during a period when project management evolved from a specialized

discipline into a globally recognized field. His work influenced standards, certification systems and professional communities around the world.

However, after reading dozens of tributes, I find myself thinking that his greatest achievement may have been something less tangible. Many people contribute to standards. Far fewer contribute to people.

The comments left by colleagues reveal someone who generously shared his knowledge, encouraged younger professionals, supported emerging communities and remained curious until the very end. Numerous contributors described him as a mentor. Others emphasized his optimism, his energy and his genuine interest in those around him.

Perhaps that is why so many of the messages do not read like professional acknowledgements. They read like personal farewells. I only saw Klaus Pannenbäcker once. Many others knew him for decades. Yet after reading their memories, I feel I understand why his passing has touched so many people around the world. Not because they lost a former president or a certification pioneer. They lost a colleague, a mentor and a friend.

The systems he helped create will endure. The profession he helped shape will continue to evolve. But the lasting impression left by those who knew him best is remarkably simple: Klaus Pannenbäcker was a highly accomplished professional who never stopped being deeply human. That may be the most important legacy of all.

**Sebastian Wieschowski**

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We were deeply saddened when we received the message that Klaus Pannenbaecker, dear husband, father, grandfather, and my long-time friend, had passed away.

Although he is no longer with us, the bright memory remains of a man, a world-renowned PM expert, and a friend who leaves behind a rich legacy of good deeds and, above all, warm human relationships. He was an exceptionally kind person with whom it was always a pleasure to collaborate.

We had known each other for more than forty years. During this time, we worked together in various roles, development programs, and projects within international professional associations in project management.

For the past fifteen years, Klaus had also been an active member of our LENS Living Lab group. Together, we developed a business model and competencies to educate project managers for the new era. On several occasions, he also visited me in Celje by train, and after our fruitful two-day discussions, he would return home. I am attaching a photograph that I took during one of our last meetings.

Klaus leaves behind a great void as an active international expert and practitioner in project management, with a clear understanding of the challenges, needs, and opportunities of modern society. Above all, however, we will miss him as a kind and selfless person with a profound sense of community and social responsibility.

Klaus, we will miss you!

We are planning to organize a one-day KM FEST event this autumn as an “in Memory” event dedicated to Klaus.

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## **Remembering Klaus Pannenbäcker**

I had the privilege of knowing Klaus Pannenbäcker through my long association with IPMA. We first met at the IPMA World Congress in New Delhi in 2005, and over the years our paths crossed frequently at conferences and professional gatherings across Europe.

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Klaus also visited India on several occasions to support the Indian member association and conduct training programmes for Project Management certification.

As a former President of IPMA, Klaus played a significant role in advancing the Project Management profession worldwide. He was instrumental in helping many countries establish their national Project Management associations under the IPMA umbrella. He was also a regular contributor to our annual Knowledge Management Festival events and an active member of the Lens Living Lab Group for nearly fifteen years. I last met him at one of these events in Odense, Denmark.

Klaus was a remarkable professional and, more importantly, a wonderful human being. Humble, approachable, and generous with his time and knowledge, he inspired countless professionals across the world. His contributions to IPMA and particularly to the German Project Management Association (GPM) have left a lasting legacy. Well-read, widely travelled, and intellectually curious, he devoted his life to promoting excellence in Project Management education and practice.

Despite his international stature, Klaus remained exceptionally simple in his lifestyle. He preferred travelling across Europe by train to attend conferences and meetings and remained actively involved in professional activities until the very end of his life.

One story that Klaus himself shared with me perfectly reflected his courage and resilience. While travelling by train to Slovenia, he suffered a heart attack during the journey. After arriving at Ljubljana railway station, he calmly walked to a nearby hospital, admitted himself, recovered fully, and carried on with his work. That quiet determination was typical of the man I knew.

I remained in touch with Klaus all these years. His optimism, conviction, and delightful sense of humour brought warmth to every gathering. His witty observations invariably filled the room with laughter and left everyone smiling.

Although Klaus is no longer with us, his legacy lives on through the countless professionals he mentored, the institutions he helped build, and the friendships he nurtured around the world. He will be remembered not only as a distinguished leader in the Project Management community but also as a compassionate friend whose kindness touched many lives.

The PM World Journal deserves sincere appreciation for dedicating a special issue to honouring this extraordinary individual. Klaus's passing is a deeply personal loss to me. I have lost not only an outstanding colleague but also a cherished friend and well-wisher.

May his memory continue to inspire younger generation of PM professionals, and may his soul rest in eternal peace.

**Rajat K Baisya**

President- Project & Technology Management Foundation, India

Chairman- Strategic Consulting Group Pvt Ltd.

CEO- Winning Sparrow ([www.winningsparrow.com](http://www.winningsparrow.com))

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I first met Klaus in June 1992. I had recently begun traveling internationally, had learned about the German PM association and the International PM Association (IPMA), and had somehow learned about Klaus' leadership roles in those organizations. I contacted him, somehow I don't remember how, and he joined my then girlfriend (now wife of 30 years) Carla and me for dinner, as we were passing through Munich enroute to Vienna. I then saw him again a week later at the INTERNET'92 congress in Florence, where so many international leaders in the project management professional field were gathered.

I had visited Russia for the first time in May 1992, only a few weeks prior to the dinner in Munich, meeting and spending time with SOVNET leaders in Moscow. This was very soon after the fall of the Soviet Union (in 1991), so I was the first American the Russian PM leaders had met. But I was told, the Germans had been there first, as Klaus had apparently been the first international PM leader to visit the newly independent Russian Federation. I learned quickly that Klaus had already gained a reputation for breaking new ground, promoting new ideas (and PM qualifications) as well as the European PM field.

We connected again at various IPMA and PMI conferences over the next several years, most notably at IPMA'94 Congress in Oslo, PMI'95 in New Orleans and IPMA'96 in Paris. We spent hours in various hotel rooms, bars and restaurants sharing stories and ideas for more international cooperation. I remember him as being rather entertaining and a good speech maker after a few shots of Russian or Ukrainian vodka. In any setting, he asserted himself as a leader and spokesman for IPMA and especially the European PM organizations. Over the years, I learned more about his relationships and influence throughout the IPMA family of member countries.

In 2006, he became one of our first honorary global advisors, for first the PM World Today eJournal which I produced from 2006-2012, then for the PM World Journal. He became a trusted friend and colleague, continuing to be active in IPMA and various

international PM event until recent years. I was saddened to learn of his passing in May, but also honored to have had his friendship, trust and support for so long. He was so well respected for so many years. I will always remember him as one of the early champions of the international project management community, another of the giants who are leaving us for quieter, more peaceful shores.

**David L. Pells, PMI Fellow, HonFAPM**

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