

## Interview with James R. Snyder<sup>1</sup>

PMI Founder, Fellow  
Past Executive Director, First President and Chairman of the Board



*Interviewed by Petek Kabakci, PMP, PCC  
PMI Turkey Chapter*

Mr. James R. Snyder is a founder of the Project Management Institute (PMI®), Fellow of the Institute, volunteer executive director for 13 years, first president, and past chair of the Board. He continues to be an active participant in the activities of the Institute. He was been awarded the PMI Person of the Year Award and is an Honorary Life Member of the Institute. He received the 2010 James J. O'Brien Lifetime Achievement Award from the PMI College of Scheduling. Mr. Snyder is a founding member of the PMI Delaware Valley Chapter (DVC), the former PMI Pharmaceuticals Specific Interest Group, and the former PMI College of Scheduling.

As a member of the PMI Global Project Action Team (1999 – 2000), he worked to help structure the Institute to meet the challenges of 2000 and beyond. He served as a member of the Publications Board of the Institute. The James R. Snyder Knowledge and Wisdom Center at PMI Global Operations Center is named in his honor. He has served as a member of the PMI Educational Foundation Board of Directors and in January of 2006 he was recognized as Chairman Emeritus of the Educational Foundation. The PMIEF Student Paper Award is name in his honor.

Mr. Snyder served as PMI's project manager for the construction of the first PMI World Headquarters in Newtown Square, PA. The building was completed and occupied on schedule and on budget. He was also the project manager for the second office building constructed in mid-2000 and occupied in January 2001. He headed the PMI-DVC project to teach project management to selected Philadelphia and other area high school students. He has developed, and is leading, programs to implement project management programs in K-12 using project learning techniques to teach 21st century

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skills and project management. Mr. Snyder is now serving as advisor and administrator to the PMI Delaware Valley Chapter.<sup>2</sup>

*This interview was conducted by Petek Kabakci, PMP, PCC on behalf of the PMI Turkey Chapter for their bi-monthly Newsletter.*

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### **Introduction by Mr. Snyder**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts about project management and the Project Management Institute with you and your readers. As you know, I am not in any way involved in the day-to-day operations of PMI and the ideas and thoughts I am going to share with you are my own personal thoughts about PMI and the profession. Now, let's look at your questions!

**Petek Kabakci (Kabakci):** *You are one of the five founders of PMI. In 46 years, PMI has grown to a multinational, interdisciplinary leading organization. What have been the most critical internal and external factors of this success?*

**James Snyder (Snyder):** It has been an exciting adventure to be part of the dynamic and explosive growth of the project management profession over the last 46 years or so. There is no doubt that the five founders had no idea that the work they undertook in the late 1960's would result in anything like PMI is today or that we would be part of the establishment of a new profession. We were looking to build a network of managers that could learn from each other about how to manage projects in a radically changing environment.

Many things in the evolution of modern business contributed to the growth of PMI and the project management profession and many, many people have contributed to both the development and evolution of the body of professional project manage knowledge. Countless others made it all work! Without those people we would not have the techniques and processes that are the foundation of modern project management. However, there have been at least three critical factors that I think significantly influenced the growth of PMI from the meeting of seventy plus people in 1969 to a worldwide organization of over 400,000 today.

First, the time was right. For whatever the reasons we were at the right place at the right time. Communications capabilities were starting to increase our ability to share information in new and better ways, Computers were starting to play a significant role in managing projects and the world was undertaking larger and larger, more complicated and interrelated project work. There was a need for better structured approaches to managing the time, cost, and quality of project oriented work. Big "stuff" needed big new tools to get the job done! We were in the position to defined, develop and help disseminate those tools

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<sup>2</sup> James Snyder background summary is from the PMI website - <http://www.pmi.org/About-Us/Fellows/James-R-Snyder.aspx>.

Second, PMI was founded as a volunteer driven organization. Volunteers founded and operated the organization for much of the first fifteen years. Volunteers remain at the heart of the organization today. It is this personal commitment to the profession and to PMI that has driven the success of PMI. It is the volunteers that bring life and drive to the organization. The PMI vision and mission come from the prospective of people involved in both the profession and the organization. Our members have active and demanding roles in determining the direction of the profession through PMI. They have made it the multinational, interdisciplinary, leading organization that it is today.

Finally, the early association and partnership with the academic world has been a major driver of success. From the very early days of PMI there has been a recognition that academic excellence and practical application must come together to achieve growth and acceptance of the project management profession. This realization lead PMI to such tasks as the development of a guide to project management body of knowledge, the PM Journal, extensive project management standards and many certification programs. This recognition of excellence in managing projects and leadership in knowledge creation has been the backbone of organizational growth.

**Kabakci:** *How do you envision PMI's global impact for the next 10 years?*

**Snyder:** PMI is all about managing change in dynamic environments. The one thing we can say with certainty is that the next ten years will present a changing environment with many new challenges. The fundamental tools of project management are best used to identify and deal with this changing world. I think that there will be an increasing reliance on PM tools in the future. However, we need to return to some of the fundamental concepts of our profession and apply the knowledge we have to the problems of the day. Drifting too far from the fundamental tools of PM can distract us from those things that created the shift to modern project management in the 1960's and 1970's. PMI is the organization that will supply the leaders of the future who are best prepared to manage a changing project oriented world,

**Kabakci:** *How do you see the role of NGO's in changing the world?*

**Snyder:** It is time that we recognizing the significant role of NGOs as influential agents of change on a global scale. *The Global Journal*, in a 2012 special edition, sought to move beyond outdated clichés and narrow conceptions about what an NGO is and does. The article defined their role as being at the forefront of developments shaping the lives of millions of people in every phase of their lives. Their impact on the world is becoming more and more important every day! If you look at the list of the top 100 NGO's, published by the Global Journal, it is very obvious that the great work of many of these organizations is accomplished one project at a time.

I can't think of a better way for PMI to support much of this work than to return to its roots and find ways to facilitate the exchange of information, experiences, and learnings between these organizations. Every organization can grow from learning what others do well

**Kabakci:** *What leadership qualities are critical for leading a volunteer team and an organization?*

**Snyder:** What is a leader? I won't even start to name the resources available to answer that question. Book after article, after paper, has been written on this subject. My conclusion is that leaders come in all kind, with many skills, talents, different styles, and varying personalities. One size does not fit all! Frank Saladis, in his book "Positive Leadership in Project Management" defines project leadership as "... the ability to get things done well through other people, to achieve the expatiations of stakeholders and to deliver the project's product successfully through the team". This definition embraces the idea that it might take different kinds of leadership for different kinds of projects.



Volunteer teams, like any team, are put together to accomplish an objective. Knowing what the project objective is, the environment in which it will be undertaken, and how the project will be staffed should be the guide to the identification of the leadership qualities needed for the project. Every project is different. We need to match leadership skills to the project and the team. I think it is a fatal mistake to believe that there is a special set of skills for leading a volunteer team that are different than leading any other project team. Know the project and the environment – pick the leader. Having said that, I think that when leading volunteer teams and organizations the environment really demands leader with communications, motivation, and creative skills along with a major dose of patients!

**Kabakci:** *What are your recommendations to PMI chapter leaders to make PMI recognized and embraced in their countries?*

**Snyder:** As PMI Leaders we seem to be doing a good job of spreading the word about our organization and even the project management profession within the project management community. Where we really need to do some work is in the larger communities in which we live and work. Ask the man on the street what PMI is and quite often you will not get a knowable response. Our Chapters, and even individual volunteers, need to become much more visible. First we need to become involved in projects in the community and schools in which we live and work. Every Chapter should have at least one on going community service project underway at all times. The PMleF is a great source of potential project ideas and can be a great help in getting started.

Next we need to talk about what we are doing; not just to other Chapters, but to the world in which we live and work. If you are making a difference in your community, let the community know what you are doing and do that often. Be sure to talk about how project management is being used to make your community project a success and recognize the volunteers in the community who are participating. Let's start talking "out" as much as we talk "in". Try for at least one mention a quarter in your local community in some media form! If we don't talk about the benefits of project management no one will! You can get started by forming partnerships with local NGO's, civic groups, and schools.

**Kabakci:** *What would you say about value of volunteering for new project management professionals?*

**Snyder:** The primary source of new information and growth in the project management profession is networking. Becoming a PMI volunteer, at any level in the organization, will maximize your opportunities to expand your personal contacts in the profession and give you access to broad sources of new management skill and practices. As you expand your knowledge base and extend your professional contacts you become an increasingly valuable asset to your organization. Volunteering with PMI is also the best place to learn and develop new professional skills.

Often the responsibility that you will have as a PMI project leader may be greater than you have in your job. What a great way to learn through doing with considerably less professional risk! The more you undertake as a volunteer the more you will benefit from the experience a volunteer role gives you and the more professional contacts you will make. Your career as a project manager is to a large part as dependent on who you know as it is on what you know.

**Kabakci:** *What is your message to project management professionals worldwide?*

**Snyder:** As a project management professional you are a member of a dynamic, fast growing group of people who are challenged daily to keep up with the demands of society to make things happen. The world is growing much faster than we realize. In information technology, for instance, many studies have identified that performance (in relation to price) doubles on average every 18 months. Without people ready to manage the expanding numbers of large, complex, high cost, high risk projects emerging in the world today we will not meet the challenges to move from concepts to reality. Meeting these challenges demands that project management professionals continue to sharpen their capabilities by expanding their personal knowledge base through continuing study and application of their professional skills and by demonstrating that they have these skills. Continuing professional development, leading to certification and recognition of performance, is an absolute requirement for the project manager of this century! We need to be prepared for the future because the future is now.

I hope I have been able to answer your questions and, if not, have at least offered some ideas for you to consider. I have enjoyed responding to your interview and have tried to give you some of my personal ideas about where the project management profession has come from and where it may be headed.

Best regards,  
James R Snyder  
PMI Founder

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PMI Turkey works as a non-profit association with support of volunteers. PMI Turkey is focusing on increasing of awareness of project management, supplying project management in every disciplines that accepts it as a profession, spreading out and improving project management practices and theories, encouraging total quality and professionalism in project management, protecting and encouraging standards, ethics and accreditations conditions in project management in Turkey.

PMI Turkey is a reference point for project management knowledge exchange. Thus it completed works on translating PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) and PMP certification exam set into Turkish in order for project managers in Turkey to improve their competency. PMI Turkey has more than 600 members from various sectors in particular Information Technologies (IT/IS), Finance, Telecommunication, defense and public sectors. For more information, visit <http://www.pmi.org.tr/>

PMI Turkey is a chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI<sup>R</sup>), the world largest professional member association serving the project management profession. For more about PMI, go to <http://www.pmi.org/>

The PMI Turkey Chapter newsletter in which Jim Snyder's interview first appeared can be found at <http://pmiturkey.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/PMI-Turkiye-E-Dergi-15-08.pdf>