

Interview with Randall T. (Randy) Black ¹

Chair, 2019 Board of Directors
Project Management Institute



Interviewed by İpek Sahra Özgüler
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İpek Sahra Özgüler (Özgüler): Please introduce yourself to the PMWJ readers.

Randall Black (Black): First, thank you for this opportunity to participate in this PMWJ interview.

My name is Randall (or Randy) T. Black. I was born in Toronto, Ontario. I have lived in Ottawa, Ontario and now live in St. Albert, Alberta.

My background is probably similar to that of many of your readers. I was trained as an engineer at the University of Waterloo (Civil Engineering – Class of 1977) where my major focus was in water engineering.

My first 23 years of my career were spent doing projects for a telecommunications company in central Canada. I had a variety of technical engineering roles, as well as roles in finance, economics, and strategic planning. In 1997, as part of a corporate downsizing, I left that organization and moved to an IT services company. I later moved to a software company, where I was the VP of Professional Services.

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Upon that company being closed by their angel investors, I moved into e-learning and in 2003 I moved to western Canada to lead the project management training division of a project management consulting organization. Since 2010 I have also worked for an electrical transmission corporation and for an architecture / engineering firm.

I now run my own consulting firm specializing in strategic operations and project management consulting and training.

I have also been a volunteer for most of my life. I started volunteering with my local YMCA, teaching gymnastics and other athletics. I was both a member and the leader for my local Church Servers Guild and also volunteered with the University of Waterloo Alumni Association (Ottawa Chapter), where I served as the VP of Events and the President of the Chapter.

The majority of my volunteering has been with the Project Management Institute (PMI). I started serving as the VP of Education with the Northern Alberta Chapter in July of 2004. Since then I have served the Northern Alberta Chapter as;

- VP Certification – 1 year
- President – 2 years
- Past-President – 1 year

I have also served as a PMI Region Mentor for Region 1 (Northwest North America) from April of 2012 to December of 2013. In addition, I have served with the Chapter Members Advisory Group for two years and with the PMI Global Board of Directors from January 2016 through the present. Last year I served as the Chair of the Strategy Oversight Committee and this year, I have the privilege to serve as the Board Chair.

Özgüler: *You have been elected as a chairman of the PMI board. What are your key objectives for the Board to achieve in 2019?*

Black: 2019 is truly an exciting year for PMI. Our year began with the Board naming and welcoming a new President and CEO. This was our top priority for the first quarter of 2019 and we are delighted with our choice, Mr. Sunil Prashara. His global leadership, expertise in transformation, and passion for PMI's purpose made him a natural fit as our next CEO. As the year continues, our most important priority is to support him in ensuring his success as we continue to grow and develop our Board relationship with him.

Our second objective is related to our ongoing transformation of PMI. In 2016, the Board began a journey to transform PMI from the very successful organization it had been into an association with enhanced relevance for the profession, our members, our certification holders, and for those organizations that our profession serves.

This transformation started in early 2018 and we have established a sound plan and foundation from which we can truly transform the organization. 2019 is our first full year

of implementing this transformation. The Board is focused on ensuring that the work being done aligns with the outcomes we established in our strategy - and that it truly meets the needs of our many stakeholders.

2019 is the 50 th anniversary of the founding of PMI. Therefore, our third key objective in 2019 is to recognize and celebrate our first 50 years in a way that is meaningful to our past, our present, and our future. We have set out to acknowledge those who created PMI and to also build towards a new future for both the profession and PMI alike. We have already held a number of exciting events that are building towards our “birth date” of October 3, 2019. We will be holding an entire week of celebrations in Philadelphia as part of our global events that will be held starting on October 3rd.

There are many other key objectives that the Board will also accomplish this year, but these are the “big three” for 2019.

Özgüler: *How have the fields of responsibility of board members been split? What are your responsibilities?*

Black: The PMI Board of Directors is split into 4 permanent standing committees that provide oversight on behalf of the Institute for the work that is primarily carried out by PMI’s approximately 400 staff members. Those committees are;

- Audit Committee – 3 Board Directors, plus a Chair of the Audit Committee
- Strategy Oversight Committee – 3 Board Directors, plus a Chair of the Strategy Oversight Committee
- Compensation Committee – 3 Board Directors, plus a Chair of the Compensation Committee
- Executive Committee – The Chair of the Board, the President and CEO of PMI, the Corporate Secretary and General Counsel, the Treasurer and Senior VP of Finance, plus the three Standing Committee Chairs

My role in all of this is very much like the conductor of an orchestra. I don’t see my role as primarily about making decisions myself; rather, my role is to facilitate harmony between staff, the Board, and our many stakeholders.

I work with my Standing Committee Chairs and the staff members of the Executive Committee to bring recommendations and information to the Board for discussion and decision. I also ensure that the Board is addressing key topics in our Board meetings through issue identification and through a process designed to ensure that the Board Directors are efficiently well-informed to participate in those discussions and to make necessary decisions.

I've commented to many who think the Chair role is the "top job" that it is, in fact, truly the supporting foundation in that you are there to support everyone else so that they can be efficient and effective in their roles.

Özgüler: *This year, PMI will celebrate their 50th anniversary. Tell our readers about any special events that are being planned for this 50th anniversary.*

Black: As I mentioned earlier, this is the 50th anniversary year for PMI and we will be celebrating all year long. We started at the beginning of the year, launching what we call the Made Possible campaign. This effort is designed to tap the passion of professional project managers in driving social good around the world and is focused on engaging all PMI stakeholders – from members and certification holders to chapter leaders and volunteers – and rallying them around a common vision of making a positive impact on society through project management. As part of Made Possible, we challenged professionals from around the globe to pledge hours that will utilize their project management expertise to help local organizations and give back to the people in their communities as part of a year-long Celebration of Service.

We continued in January at our annual Global Volunteer planning meetings in Philadelphia with a big celebration that engaged all participants with compelling videos acknowledging our founders, a local service project to give back to the community and even a little dancing.

The next celebration was held as part of the Asia-Pacific Volunteer Leader meetings held in Penang, Malaysia involving 200 participants from across Asia-Pacific. This event featured a video shot on the shores of Penang from a drone, a fantastic piece of content given the location.

Our most recent celebration was held in Dublin, Ireland as part of our Europe, Middle East, and Africa conference. At this event, we held our first ever collaboration with TED, the world renowned nonprofit devoted to spreading great ideas through short, powerful talks. This is a perfect partnership in that TED spreads great ideas – and project managers make ideas a reality. In Dublin, TED facilitated a series of project management-centric presentations featuring 5 leading speakers. This session was recorded and the talks will also be posted on TED.com.

Our year of celebration continues throughout the rest of the year with additional TED events, local celebrations at many of our more than 300 Chapters worldwide, and at our Global Congress being held in October. There are many of the "fine details" of these events that are currently being completed so I won't spoil any of the surprises here. Suffice it to say, I believe that our celebrations in Philadelphia will set a new standard of fun for the industry!

Özgüler: *Throughout your 40-year career, what has been the greatest lesson learned? What have you been some of your memorable moments?*

Black: I think that the greatest lesson I have learned has been to “just be yourself.” Take the skills and competencies that most strongly define you and enhance them as part of what it is you do each and every day of your career. The weaknesses I had when I started my career are, regrettably, still my weaknesses.

I have learned that in order to succeed I had to emphasize what I could do and do well. That is a hard lesson to learn, but one that I learned fairly early in life.

My most memorable moments have stemmed from the people I have worked with. From my first student projects in Brampton to my most recent projects here in the Edmonton area, I have worked with some great people. I could name them, but the list would be long and probably not fit into an article such as this!

Özgüler: *As the world changes (technology, artificial intelligence, new delivery methodologies) what new skills and capabilities do you believe project managers need to develop or enhance?*

Black: As most project managers know, being a great project manager means knowing how to manage the processes of project management. I can't emphasize this enough with my peers. In repeated studies, we can point to a reoccurring source of project failures - technical project management standards not being followed.

Today, however, the trend is moving towards what are known as PMTQ skills; that stands for “Project Management Technology Quotient” and is a key focus area of PMI's latest report, *The Future of Work: Leading the Way with PMTQ*. (To learn more and to find insights from PMI's 2019 Pulse of the Profession® data, you can find the full report online.)

The TQ here stands for our personal technology quotient. Our question to project managers: How knowledgeable are you about the use of technology in projects and how to use technology to support the management of projects?

TQ skill is made up of three components;

- An always-on curiosity about new technologies and what they mean to our projects
- An all-inclusive leadership style... we could call this a collaborative servant-leader style
- Future-proofing your career by continually upgrading skills in all aspects of leading projects

And, as importantly, there is the people side of managing projects. I find that most individuals who may consider themselves to be “accidental project managers” fail to see that everything that is done in a project is based upon people doing work to produce the desired end-result. Therefore, there are other capabilities that have become just as important as the technical ability to manage a project and include

enhancing leadership, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and change management skills.

Özgüler: *You have been a volunteer for most of your life? Why is being a volunteer so important?*

Black: I have a number of answers to this question that all sound very altruistic. Giving back to the profession, serving new apprentices to the profession, and being supportive could be included in this list.

However, if I quoted these as being my principal reason for volunteering, it could seem as though I'm assessing these opportunities as "what is in it for me." Some may view this as being self-serving, but they would be wrong in that assessment.

My volunteering has allowed me the opportunity to learn new skills that I have then brought into my working life, partially to the advantage of organizations I have worked for and that I have volunteered with. I have learned that influencing is more conducive to building a team than a style rooted in "command and control." I have learned the importance of knowing your team members; not just what they do but who they are, their families, their dreams, and their weaknesses. Understanding who my colleagues are as individuals helps me to be a more effective coach and leader.

Volunteering has also been the gateway to me seeing new and exciting opportunities that I never thought possible. Becoming the Board Chair of a large global association is something that I never thought could be within my grasp. And yet, here I am.

Özgüler: *What do you see changing in the world of project management and what does this mean for project managers worldwide?*

The biggest change I see in the profession is the "expansion of the definition" of the role and accountability for project management.

When I first started as a project manager, the job was focused on delivering projects as defined by success in three key metrics - on-time, on-budget, and on-scope. If you delivered your project outcome within these three aspects, you were moving in a good direction. Other considerations were not as emphasized, including whether the outcome was useful, implementable, and provided a return that was expected.

Well, those days are gone. Today, the outcome is about on-value. The project manager is being given accountability to deliver a result that has been implemented and that is producing the value that the organization desired when it first sanctioned the project. This changes the conversation. It also changes the accountability of the project manager.

The project manager is now expected to do much more, including the following:

- Align their project to the strategy it is intended to serve
- Ensure that a solid business case is in place to justify, support, and prioritize the project within the
- organizations business planning cycle
- Determine the organization's willingness and abilities to implement the outcome that is being
- produced
- Complete the project on-time, on-budget, and on-scope
- Successfully implement the outcome into the operations of the organization
- Prove that the organization has received the value it desired

There are probably a few project managers out there reading this article who aren't enthusiastic about this change. And there are probably many senior managers who are ecstatic that this change is happening and that organizations such as PMI are now speaking this language. I personally believe that this is the future of the profession.

Özgüler: *Do you have any closing comments?*

Black: Oh yes, I always have closing comments!

To those who are considering project management as their future profession, I can't think of a profession that allows you the same variety of opportunities. I have worked in technical projects, events-based projects, information technology projects, and pretty much everything else possible in that triangulation. The breadth of opportunity and meaningful challenge is only limited by your imagination and ambition.

To those who are seasoned professionals, my advice is that you need to constantly re-tool to keep current in the profession. What you know today is not going to be enough in the next 3 years. So, even though continuous learning is challenging and often intimidating (my last examinations were done last fall at 65 years of age... and they were not easy!), accept the challenge to learn! The rewards are well worth it.

About the Interviewer



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İpek Sahra Özgüler graduated from the Istanbul University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 10 years' experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has managed a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, ICT and aviation sectors and gained broader insights. In addition, she has worked as international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* since 2014.

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