

Interview with Teresa (Terri) Knudson¹

2019 Board of Directors Project Management Institute



Interviewed by Ipek Sahra Ozguler
International Correspondent
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Teresa (Terri) Knudson, MBA, PMP, PgMP, PfMP, is senior director of Strategy Management Services (SMS) for a major for-profit area at the Mayo Clinic, the largest integrated nonprofit medical center in the world. In this role she is responsible for the full spectrum of strategy services including planning, execution, and benefit measurement and delivery for the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology (DLMP). Prior to this role she was director for the Enterprise Portfolio Management Office (EPMO) for Mayo which she established in 2008. The EPMO provides methodologies and standards, education, resources, consulting, systems and reporting to advance project, program and portfolio management (PPM). Terri has served Mayo Clinic for more than 30 years in various business areas, including strategic planning, finance, information technology, audit, business management, and operations administration. During these assignments, she led some of the largest initiatives at Mayo Clinic, many earning Excellence in Teamwork Awards. Prior to joining Mayo Clinic, Ms. Knudson held positions at Deloitte and Cenex.

Ms. Knudson holds an MBA and Bachelor's Degrees in accounting and computer science. She has obtained her Project Management Professional (PMP)®, Program Management

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Professional (PgMP)©, Portfolio Management Professional (PfMP)©, and is a certified board director. She is also a certified public accountant, is certified in change management, and has bronze and silver quality awards.

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): [Teresa Knudson, thank you for accepting the interview invitation of the PMWJ. Please introduce yourself to the PMWJ readers.](#)

Terri Knudson (Knudson): Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this PMWJ interview!

After securing degrees in both finance and information technology, I began my career in accounting, becoming a CPA. After a few years, I decided to change focus and pursue my interests in IT. Interestingly, the combination of these two seemingly disparate skills sets ultimately led me to the Mayo Clinic and a career in which project management has played a defining role.

I have been at Mayo Clinic for almost 35 years. I've had a dozen different careers within Mayo Clinic as it has grown and changed over the years. It's been a fascinating journey, and I enjoy helping serve patients around the world.

Ozguler: [Tell me about your relationship with PMI. How did it start? Where are you today?](#)

Knudson: My relationship with PMI is an exciting story. Over the course of my career here at Mayo Clinic, I've been involved in many different projects. About 14 years ago, I started hearing about the Project Management Institute and I met a PMP who shared some information about PMI.

What sparked my interest was when I was leading a major ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) implementation that was having some struggles. I was working with a consultant and they introduced me to project management. The framework and standards were immediately relevant to the work I was doing and served as a roadmap for navigating the complex strategic initiatives in which I was engaged.

Given the instant value this introduction to project management provided, I was anxious to learn more. As my knowledge expanded through my engagement with PMI, so did my perspective on how well-established project management practices could be applied across

our organization to advance strategic objectives. As a direct result of my association with PMI, I recommended Mayo Clinic form our first EPMO, or enterprise portfolio management office.

Mayo Clinic leadership recognized that PMI is the international standard for project management and delivers tools, processes and approaches to complete projects. As a result, people throughout the organization were trained to secure a PMP certificate and it is now a requirement for all senior level project managers.

After establishing the EPMO, I become more involved in the local PMI chapter. Through this growing relationship with the organization, I was invited to join the PMI Global Executive Council. This opportunity further broadened my perspective, as I saw other organizations around the world dealing with the same issues as our teams. It was increasingly apparent how much value PMI provided in support of our professional objectives. I was able to interact with people who were contending with the same challenges that I was and that could provide innovative solutions based on their considerable expertise.

I was encouraged to become part of the PMI Board of Directors and was honored to be elected to the Board by our members. My first term concludes this year, and I was recently reelected for a second term, which will start in 2020.

Ozguler: How did you become part of the Mayo Clinic, which is the first and largest integrated, non-profit medical practice group in the world?

Knudson: As I was pursuing new career opportunities, I assumed a role at Mayo Clinic as a programmer in our IT department. As my interests and skills continued to grow, I was able to transition to a number of other positions throughout the organization and have since held a variety of different leadership roles over the years.

During this time, I've developed a reputation for identifying solutions to complex issues – often related to major projects. In order to expand the organization's capacity to address strategic challenges, we realized that we needed to train others in project management. PMI has been essential in this regard. PMI has provided the knowledge and tools necessary to help guide Mayo Clinic's considerable framework and infrastructure.

My start in IT has provided a platform from which I was regularly introduced to new opportunities. In the years since, I have enjoyed the privilege of working on many critical initiatives that continually improve Mayo Clinic's ability to provide world-class care to patients around the world.

That sense of achievement is what has kept me at the Mayo Clinic. Every project is like a new mountain you get to climb; it's always something different. And with every new project, PMI enhances your career journey by providing the skills necessary to solve serious challenges in a field where the customer is a patient in need of exceptional health care services.

Ozguler: **Why did you decide to establish the Enterprise Portfolio Management office at the Mayo Clinic in 2008?**

Knudson: When I was assigned to my first project management roles years ago, we didn't know anything about project management and weren't familiar with some of the basic concepts – like building a project plan, schedule and budget.

After doing a few major projects like this, I realized there must be a better way and learned about the PMI resources that provided a comprehensive framework that we could leverage in support of these initiatives.

I introduced the idea of instituting this framework to our new chief administrative officer who approved the plan and form a workgroup with people across the entire enterprise. Within six months, she had engaged the top leadership at Mayo Clinic to meet with a panel of outside experts that shared their recommendations which included establishing our EPMO. Consistent with PMI's research findings, this was a case in which having an engaged executive sponsor was critical to achieving a positive outcome.

Today, we have more than 300 PMPs trained across our organization. Every project undertaken at Mayo Clinic is in our project portfolio. No project is approved without a charter and every project does a status report.

Ozguler: **You led some of the largest initiatives at the Mayo Clinic. And many of them earned the Excellence in Teamwork awards. How did you achieve this?**

Knudson: What I found, with a lot of the projects, was that it takes people to make big initiatives work. Working with people at all levels is critical to moving a project forward in a coordinated fashion that fosters communication and removes operational hurdles.

As I engaged with these projects, it was important to ensure we had the right governance structure in place and the leaders engaged. This often involved helping our executives understand their role in actively supporting project team members and addressing issues and barriers.

My second priority was to impose a structure and focus. Often, large projects involve cross-functional teams in which communication and identifiable leadership are lacking. Establishing clear lines of responsibility and interdependency was important for the teams to see how they needed to work together.

A third critical aspect of the process was demonstrating the value different perspectives and specialties can bring to projects. In order to properly manage complex projects, a team must have a range of expertise to bring to bear. The key is to coordinate the efforts of these specialized team members to ensure objectives are being met and positive outcomes achieved.

Ozguler: **Why did you decide to work with PMI?**

Knudson: When I first engaged with PMI, it was in the context of establishing the EPMO at the Mayo Clinic. Immediately, our organization saw the value of using PMI's standards and the framework and having our team members certified.

When I attended a PMO symposium and some of the other conferences, the benefits the organization provided were immediately apparent – the ability to tap into a network of exceptional professionals, to continually learn new applications for established project approaches and to leverage critical research to identify ways to improve project outcomes.

Ozguler: **As an active member of PMI Board of Directors, what are your duties?**

Knudson: The Board is evolving, as PMI is evolving, and as the profession is evolving. A primary goal is to continue to facilitate that evolution. No industry or profession is static, which means no organization can afford to rest on its previous successes. While PMI has been here for 50 years, we want to be here for the next 50, the next 100, the next 150 years.

That requires that we look at things differently. Businesses are moving faster. They're looking more at value, advanced training for staff, virtual training and events, and operating on a global scale. PMI is addressing these issues for our membership and profession.

It has been rewarding to be a part of the Board of Directors and to lay out PMI's transformational plan. I am pleased to be part of the 50th celebration, to be looking at a new brand, as well as to be involved in mergers and acquisitions of organizations that will help us advance more quickly into the agile space and achieve additional objectives designed to service members better. We are looking at new credentialing options and new ways of approaching our members that align with the demands of a new generation.

Ozguler: Please tell our readers about your daily routines from a PM standpoint?

Knudson: Each day starts with identifying those items that are the priority and top of mind after a refresh from the previous day. It's important to continue to refocus each day and begin with new energy and ideas. What are the goals I want to accomplish? With whom do I need to engage today? What can I do to help others achieve their objectives?

Ozguler: What advice would you give to project management professionals?

Knudson: Be brave enough to take on the assignments that nobody else will.

When you are asked to do something, don't over analyze it. If it's the right thing to do and needs to be done, do it. Know that you'll figure it out. You have the expertise, you have the skills, and you have the stamina. As you solve the challenge, you will learn so much along the way.

My second recommendation is to learn from others as much as you can. Meet as many people as you can, connect with others across your organization, and make a point to focus outside of your organization.

My final recommendation is to treat others as you would like to be treated. The best way to get people working together is to treat people like you'd like to be treated yourself and to lead by example. Engage with people at all levels of the organization and realize we all need to work together whatever our roles may be.

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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