

Interview with Olfa Hamdi



Interviewed by İpek Sahra Özgüler
Istanbul, Turkey

Olfa Hamdi is an international researcher in the field of project management, independent consultant, founder of the Advanced Work Packaging Institute, co-founder of The Institute of Management and a tech entrepreneur in project management technology solutions. She holds a Master of Science in Capital Projects' Management from The University of Texas at Austin, a Master of Science in Engineering from Ecole Centrale de Lille, and a graduate degree in Alternative Dispute Resolution for construction disputes from Texas School of Law. She is a fellow of the State Bar of Texas Construction Law section. Olfa has numerous publications in prestigious academic and professional journals as well as media outlets. Olfa speaks four languages and is a firm believer in the role of interdisciplinary research in driving capital projects effectiveness and project management knowledge sphere expansion.

İpek Sahra Özgüler (Özgüler): *Good morning Olfa Hamdi. Could you present yourself for the PMWJ readers?*

Olfa Hamdi (Hamdi): My name is Olfa Hamdi. I am an independent researcher and a consultant in the field of capital project management and construction dispute resolution. I am the founder of the Advanced Work Packaging Institute (AWPI), currently, the first and the only organization that dedicated to advancing the implementation and research on the Advanced Work Packaging system.

My thesis, published by The University of Texas at Austin, entitled: “Advanced Work Packaging (AWP): from project definition through site execution “ was the first

academic thesis of its kind on the subject of AWP for industrial construction projects. I have continued ever since working on the subject of improving the effectiveness and reducing and controlling the risks associated with construction capital projects in the U.S. and internationally.

My academic background is diverse, matching the diversity seen in construction projects. In fact, I hold a Master of Science in Capital Projects' Management from The University of Texas at Austin, also a second Master of Science in Engineering from Ecole Centrale de Lille, and a graduate degree in Alternative Dispute Resolution for construction disputes from Texas School of Law.

I have authored and co-authored numerous publications in prestigious academic and professional venues covering topics ranging from project cost management related issues to legal implications of project management practices.

I am a firm believer in the role of interdisciplinary research in driving capital projects effectiveness and project management knowledge sphere expansion and in a way, as a professional of the construction sector, I feel a sense of duty toward the younger generation and the role of each one of us in attracting new young talent to our industry.

Özgüler: *What is the mission of the AWP Institute?*

Hamdi: Founded in 2013, the Advanced Work Packaging Institute's mission has been to advance the global development and implementation of the Advanced Work Packaging system for construction capital projects primarily through multidisciplinary research and development work.

Advanced Work packaging (AWP) is a disciplined project management approach for field planning from project conception to project delivery.

Capital projects are multidisciplinary in nature, involving different parties with different industries and backgrounds. This is what drives the AWP Institute work which, through its research, implementation, education, and other initiatives, is an industry organization with the capacity to develop knowledge and information on topics currently under-developed in our industry. These topics include the IT and legal aspects of AWP and project governance in general.

So far we see that the market responding to this new approach of conducting business in the construction sector. AWP implementation is something we expect to grow over the coming years especially from the owner companies and contractors with a capability to conduct large and mega projects in an EPCM contracting strategy.

Our goal is to educate as many project professionals as possible around the about the potential of AWP in improving the cost effectiveness of the capital facility project life cycle, from front end planning through completion and commissioning.

Özgüler: *What is a construction capital project?*

Hamdi: Capital projects are the backbone of the economic development of any country covering various facets of the economy from the energy sector, to infrastructure and manufacturing. They do encompass a considerable amount of risk, especially with an increasingly globalized economy. Managing the commercial value throughout the lifecycle of a capital project is key to maximum return on investment. In fact, successful project management systems for capital projects are the ones that allow the optimization of the project by minimizing costs for the public and private sector and maximizing project revenue through the management and mitigation of the risks of delays and extra costs. Best safety, time, cost and quality management practices are the main ingredients in successful capital project delivery.

Özgüler: *What are the differences between construction capital projects and IT projects?*

Hamdi: In comparison to construction projects, IT projects are more homogenous in terms of stakeholders involved and type of activities. In fact, construction projects, parties involved come from different backgrounds, deal with different services and commodities and in most cases do not speak the same technical “language”; meaning, for instance, the engineering for construction looks at the project from a “system” lense while the procurement side sees the project from a “commodity” perspective, at the same time, construction people see the project geographically and physically. These very different perspectives, combined with the various business considerations changing from a project to another, form a complex unstable environment in which there are too many variables to manage.

IT projects, without undermining the complexity that characterize these projects and the challenges that come with their execution, do present the advantage of being executed in a stable physical environment with relatively homogenous groups of people from a technical standpoint. The technical and project language spoken in IT projects is pretty much common to all stakeholders and it’s a matter of time before it becomes a standard.

The major difference is in that ability to connect the different parties and ensure a flawless flow of information. AWP is a project delivery system that aims at standardizing the interactions between the different parties in construction projects. In that sense, at the Institute, we see the interaction between IT community and capital projects community as a core element in the journey of the AWP implementation in our industry.

The AWP Institute has chartered the Society for Worldwide Interorganization Project Information Exchange (SWIPE), which consists of a global effort for compiling and establishing an AWP based common protocol for exchanging project management related information in construction capital projects.

Özgüler: *What is the impact of AWP and how did you determine the impact?*

Hamdi: The AWP system has been implemented across projects worldwide with documented promising results. The beginnings were in Western Canada where implementation of AWP has focused on the field aspect of construction projects. In such projects in the oil and gas industry, improvements in field productivity reached 37% increase in tool time. Evidence of AWP implementation benefits include over 25% savings in chemical project construction and engineering costs. Of course, with AWP implementation comes initial investment costs. The proper implementation costs are to be controlled and wisely spent based on a deep understanding of one's organization capabilities and clear improvement goals. This way, a company's leadership may well budget an AWP transformation on the short and medium term.

The way the capital construction sector has been doing business is no longer sustainable. Constantly changing market conditions have put more constraints on cash flow for both contractors and owners. In this sense, change is an ultimate thing. AWP is one of the choices available for companies to improve their way of conducting projects and probably, it is the number one choice for now.

Özgüler: *How could we implement AWP? What are the steps?*

Hamdi: One of the very first steps to ensure a successful implementation of AWP is for the organization to thoroughly assess its Project Management organization maturity using an AWP maturity assessment tool. Regardless of where an organization is in the process of implementing AWP, it may proceed with its current configuration and tailor the AWP process to suit specific needs and performance improvement targets.

Implementing AWP in an organization is a transformation. For an organizational transformation to succeed, few pre-requisites need to be in place in the buy-in of the organization's leadership is critical.

Özgüler: *Last month PMI TR Chapter organized an event and you shared Advanced Work Packaging knowledge with the capital projects professional community in Turkey. How did you find the project community in Turkey?*

Hamdi: As you all know, Turkey has one of the most booming economies in the world. No surprise, there are brilliant people behind this outstanding success. Among them, are the ones I met during my seminar. I found everybody I interacted to courteous,

knowledgeable, and curious to learn more. I think the AWP knowledge once implemented in different areas of the Turkish capital investment landscape would bring a great benefit.

Özgüler: *What do you think about the future of the construction sector in Turkey?*

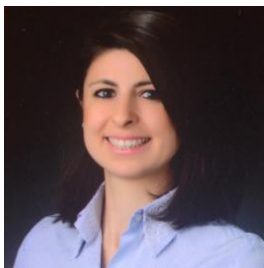
Hamdi: As the Turkish economy moves from being a growing economy to a mature one, the future of the construction sector will be determined by 2 major factors: first, the construction projects community at the domestic level needs to become more aware of the effectiveness of its spending and second, Turkish construction companies, especially the ones that have developed the expertise of executing large projects need to expand their operations outside Turkey to remain more competitive in the region.

The construction sector future will then benefit from adopting a mechanism, that could serve as a check and balance system, which has to be put in place to enable an even more sustainable growth. This mechanism includes among other things the framework to measure performance aspects of capital projects from productivity to predictability. And in this regard, I think Turkey is in a great position to embark on such path.

Özgüler: Thank you for your time.

About the Interviewer

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İpek Sahra Özgüler graduated from the Istanbul University with the Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014. She works as international correspondent at PMWJ. Before joining PMWJ, she worked for global multinational companies and leading local companies such as Coca Cola, Deloitte, Turkcell Superonline, Havelsan and TAV IT. Over the years, she has gained extensive experience in managing various medium and large scale projects, programs and portfolios.

Her article named “When I Decided to Develop Multi Processing Project Manager’s System” was published in the book “*A Day in the Life of a Project Manager*”. She has published several articles in the *PM World Journal* and one in PMI’s *PM Network* magazine. İpek is actively involved in sailing, writing and discovering new cultures. She can be contacted at ipeksahra@gmail.com.