

Interview with Oliver Lehmann

*Interviewed by İpek Sahra Özgüler
Istanbul, Turkey*



Oliver F. Lehmann, MSc, PMP is a project management trainer, author and speaker. He has trained thousands of project managers in Europe, USA and Asia in methodological project management with a focus on certification preparation. In addition, he is a visiting lecturer at the Technical University of Munich and a volunteer and insider at the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Living in Munich, Bavaria, he is the President of the PMI Southern Germany Chapter and author of the book “*Situational Project Management: The Dynamics of Success and Failure*” (Taylor & Francis, ISBN 9781498722612).

Some consider him the father of a new business discipline, Project Business Management, which deals with the dynamics in seller-buyer relationships and in complex and often very opaque Project Supply Networks (PSNs).

İpek Sahra Özgüler (Özgüler): *Dear Oliver Lehmann. Please introduce yourself for PM World Journal readers.*

Oliver Lehmann (Lehmann): My name is Oliver F. Lehmann. I am a trainer in project management from Munich, Germany. In addition, I write books and articles and preside over the PMI Southern Germany Chapter, a not-for-profit association with a focus on Bavaria and Baden Württemberg.

Özgüler: *Everyone agrees that you have deep knowledge and experience of the project management as a Practitioner (>34 years), a Trainer (>22 years), a PMP Trainer (>16 years).*

Lehmann: Thank you.

Özgüler: *How do you achieve this?*

Lehmann: I believe the main driver is trying to maintain intensive relations with my stakeholders. In the training business, these are training providers and customer companies as well as the students in the seminars. In my not-for-profit work, the focus of my work is on members in the chapter, particularly those who contribute as volunteers. Working with these professionals, listening to them and learning lessons from their problems and achievements is a strong driver for own improvement.

Özgüler: *What is your success secret?*

Lehmann: The consolidation of formal learning, experience and observation. Formal learning provides me with models and terminology that help understand. Experience teaches me how people and organizations respond to my behavior. Observation teaches me lessons from other people's failures; I do not have to make all errors on my own. The world is full of failing projects, and they provide us the best opportunity to learn by observation from a distance.

Özgüler: *You are author of the book "Situational Project Management: The Dynamics of Success and Failure", published by Auerbach Publications, and that mentions that project managers determine the most appropriate methodologies and leadership styles for their projects through Situational Project Management (SitPM). How does a project manager achieve this?*

Lehmann: In order to bring situational project management (SitPM), I put together a group of experts from project management. Together, we developed a typology of projects and project situations that will be helpful in selecting the favorable approaches while avoiding the detrimental. It makes for example a huge difference, whether a project is performed as an internal project, a cost center, or as a profit center for an external customer which must bring money home. Another distinction is between a greenfield project, where something new is developed and the project manager can mostly focus on technical details, and a brownfield project, in which a project manager has to consider a multitude of stakeholders, legacies, and constraints from an already developed environment. There is no "Best practice" in project management; the same approach that was successful in a past project situation may fail in the actual one, and

vice versa. The typology helps to cope better with the Dynamics of Success and Failure in projects.

Özgüler: *You stated in your last article “However: many project managers look at their current jobs and find, this does not apply to them and to the major challenges that there are facing. What these project managers are doing is better described as Project Business Management.” Could you elaborate on this term for the PM World Journal readers?*

Lehmann: When I started digging deeper into project management in customer projects, one of the project types discovered in the development of Situational Project Management (SitPM), I noticed that its very specific aspects like the necessity to be profitable or the entirely different benefit generation for the performing organization, are mostly ignored in literature, training and other forms of education. There are descriptions of simple contract relationships between a customer and a contractor, mostly from the customer perspective, but aspects like profitability of the project are ignored. So far also ignored are the techniques and skills needed to form and manage complex project supply networks and amalgamate them under a “Mission Success First” doctrine to become cross-corporate teams, that are more driven by the intention to completing than to compete.

Another problem in literature, but also in many organizations, is the “over-the-fence” approach from business development over project management to service management or another function that follows the project. The separation of these disciplines may seem efficient on the first glance, but often proves to be highly ineffective. Without an integrated approach that spans the entire project business lifecycle, seller organizations of project work for customers are often not more than “JAMs”, organizations that are just about managing and cannot collect the financial reserves that help them survive major crises in their business.

There seems to be a strong trend towards more outsourcing of project work¹, and it is clear that in order to satisfy the growing demand of educated project business managers, trainers like me should place more emphasis on project business management.

Özgüler: *Please give detail information about your training, consulting and coaching program for Project Business Management.*

Lehmann: My seminars are dedicated to three stakeholder groups:

- Buyers, who become customers at the moment of contract signature
- Sellers, who become contractors at that time.
- “In-betweeners”, who become prime contractors or any other form of intermediate parties in the project business and then act as both customers and contractors at the same time.

I have a 2-day primer for all groups together, which looks at the entire business process including business development and post-project services. Then I have a dedicated class for each of the three groups with a focus on their specific needs.

Özgüler: *In addition, you are President of PMI Southern Germany Chapter since 2013. How did you get involved with PMI Southern Germany Chapter?*

Lehmann: I am not a founding member of the original PMI Munich Chapter, as due to the processing of my membership application in 1998, mostly per snail mail, I missed the foundation day by a week or so. But I was there right from the start and saw the chapter grow continuously from its small and cozy origins to a PMI component association with app. 1,500 members. I contributed as a volunteer, when I developed and mastered the first website in 2001, and was active with the chapter in the following years. In 2013, I was elected as its President.

Özgüler: *What are the main features of the PMI Southern Germany Chapter strategy in 2017 and which initiatives and projects are you planning to implement?*

Lehmann: The PMI Southern Germany Chapter is extremely volunteer driven. This is the success of my board colleagues, who start challenging initiatives and then find volunteers to make them real. Not all activities are as successful as we like, but we have a high tolerance towards errors, and this in turn increases our success rate.

Özgüler: *With the third quarter of the year gone, what has the PMI Southern Chapter accomplished so far in 2017?*

Lehmann: We are about to cross a significant number: 1,500 members, which means at PMI that we will no longer be classified as a medium size chapter but a large one.

More important are our retention rates that are typically over 80%. They are a signal of satisfaction of our chapter members with the work of the board, but also a motivation to go on with the work that they like. PMI Chapter work is work for project managers, but often also just pleasure. As an example, we have a tradition to book tables and have an evening full of fun during the Munich Oktoberfest.

Özgüler: *Thank you.*

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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