

Project Business Foundation

Interview with Oliver Lehmann & Martin Berneburg ¹



Interviewed by İpek Sahra Ozguler
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Introduction to interviewees

Oliver F. Lehmann, MSc, ACE, PMP, is the President of the [Project Business Foundation](#) and the Past-President of the [PMI Southern Germany Chapter](#). Based in Munich, Germany, he has an international reputation as a trainer in project management and project business management. He authored two books, “[Situational Project Management, the Dynamics of Success and Failure](#)”, and “[Project Business Management](#)”. Since the year 2016, he has been a frequent author for the [PM World Journal](#) with a focus on situational project management and project business management.

Martin Berneburg, PMP, PSM, is the Vice-President & CEO of the [Project Business Foundation](#) and ECC Corporate Ambassador at the [Project Management Institute, SGC](#). Having spent most of his business life in North America, he now lives in Munich with a professional focus on Innovation, Project and Project Business Management.

¹ How to cite this work: Ozguler, I. S. (2020). Project Business Foundation: Interview with Oliver Lehmann & Martin Berneburg. *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue V, May

Within this field, international cross-corporate Projects as well as intra- and entrepreneurial endeavors are the backdrop for his evangelizing efforts to promote specialized knowledge and the spread of resources in Project Business Management.

INTERVIEW

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): Good morning Oliver Lehmann, Martin Berneburg. What is the story of Project Business Foundation?

Oliver Lehmann (Lehmann): Good morning Ipek, thank you for giving us the opportunity of an interview.

In the years 2014/15, I had a research project together with a group of 17 field experts about situational aspects of project management. The question was, how a practice, such as a method or a behavior, that was successful in one project may fail in another. The group identified several dimensions as part of a typology of projects, where a project of one type may need certain practices, but another one of a different type needed also different practices.

During this research, one dimension virtually jumped into my eyes – the distinction between an internal project, typically a cost center, and a customer (-facing) project, a profit center. I did more research on that, gathered together with enthusiasts, who had a similar view, and together, we founded the Project Business Foundation in the year 2019.

Martin Berneburg (Berneburg): And good morning from me as well, Ipek.

Ozguler: Who are the leaders of this foundation? Please introduce themselves to the PMWJ readers.

Lehmann: My name is Oliver F. Lehmann, and I am from Munich in Germany. I am a trainer in project management with a focus on methodology training, certification preparation, and now, obviously on Project Business Management, the discipline that deals with cross-corporate projects.

Before my time as a trainer, I acted over a decade managing projects with a focus on automotive projects and in related manufacturing/processing areas.

Berneburg: I am Martin Berneburg, and after some two decades of business life in North America, I now live in Munich as well. Originally with a background in the Music and Entertainment industry, I have always been working in an environment that is highly dependent on and quite unthinkable without cross-corporate relationships. By the end of the millenium I then fully transitioned into the World of Project Management, working as

an independent consultant and coach, with the specific focus on innovation management in the entrepreneur and intrapreneur fields.

Oliver and I met over our individual involvements with PMI, our partner organization, whom we are both continuing to have strong ties to. Both our interests in Project Business, as well as strong support from an industry that had been waiting for someone to lead the way, then ultimately led us to addressing this ever-growing yet previously neglected field by starting the Project Business Foundation.

Ozguler: What are the basics of Project Business Management (PBM)?

Lehmann: The most basic tenets are:

- Completing over competing
- Turning contract parties into project partners
- Mission success first

There are businesses that have low risk, and the degree of conflicts due to different business interests of the involved people and organizations is rather low. In contrast, project business often is rather a battlefield. This is economically damaging for the parties, and of course also for project success.

Ozguler: As two leaders of the Project Business Foundation, you observed a trend from cross- functional to cross-corporate projects, which increases agility of organizations, but also brings new challenges to project managers and their stakeholders. You stated that to make the cross-corporate projects successful, all have to go through a Cooperative Transformation. How is the Cooperative Transformation achieved?

Lehmann: The cooperative transformation places the joint interests, project mission success, over the often-diverging particular interests of the players involved. The project means business, and a great project finished is also a very satisfying thing for all. It is about business, but also about emotions. Positive emotions.

Berneburg: Technically, working on cross-corporate projects requires an adjustment in one's approach and thinking. Internal projects already have their fair share of potential impediments and friction, be they based on silo-based thinking or other internal politics. Ultimately though, they simply serve one master, the own organization.

When we progress into customer-client relationships then, there is an additional, constantly lurking us-vs-them mindset that needs to consistently be overcome in order to be able to yield forecasted results and build long-lasting business relationships.

Project Business Foundation (PBF) is striving to build the community, knowledgebase and the resources to help our members develop this mindset and approach to an ever more complex Project Management World.

Ozguler: After you talked with corporations and individuals engaged in project business as customers and contractors and defined the gaps, the Project Business Foundation was founded. Which gaps are filled by the Project Business Foundation?

Lehmann: Project business has two aspects on top of project management: legal and commercial. A further complication is the necessity for project managers to become connective leaders. Their project does no more take place inside the protective walls of the employing organization. Instead, gates are opened wide, allowing to turn other companies' assets into project resources. These open gates, unfortunately, also come with many new risks. Project business is high risk business for everyone involved.

The largest gap is education. Project managers on both sides, customers and contractors, are poorly prepared for these challenges. They learn project business by trial and error.

However, trial in project business is expensive, and error even more.

There are more gaps, including literature, software, and standards. Our intention is to fill them step by step.

Berneburg: Let me zoom in on just one of Oliver's points: Indeed legal is one central aspect to Project business management. While Project Managers on internal Projects do come in contact with contracts via basic make or buy decisions, negotiations are run by the legal department, more often than not.

In Project Business however, contracts are the foundation for every single activity on the Project. A Project Manager needs to be thoroughly knowledgeable regarding the terms of the underlying cross-corporate contract or she/he is bound for failure. PBF is not only aiming to instill this awareness, but build the resources to convey the necessary knowledge to Project Managers who, of course, seldomly have a legal background.

Ozguler: Which types of partnerships are offered?

Lehmann: For organizations, the Project Business Foundation has three types of Corporate Partnerships:

- Media Partnership for news outlets
- Education & Consulting Partnership for training organizations, academic institutes, and consultancies.
- Sponsoring Partnership for organizations that consider our work important and want to support us financially and otherwise.

Berneburg: Beyond the corporate partnerships PBF naturally embraces the partnerships with our members, as we are living a bi-directional relationship. Building a community, PBF learns every day from input from our members who contribute to the knowledge-base through their individual experiences.

Case in point being PBF's Approved Consultant / Educator (ACE) qualification, which is based on reflecting in an academic way on specific aspects of the Project Business World.

Ozguler: **The aim of the Project Business Foundation is to focus on qualifying experts such as consultants, trainers, coaches, academic educators. How do contract parties turn into project managers?**

Lehmann: Qualification is indeed the biggest gap in Project Business Management. We spoke with other associations, including PMI and member organizations of IPMA, but the statements were clear that they had no interest in addressing project managers involved in project business.

For skill-builders in the field, including trainers, academic instructors, and consultants, we have therefore developed a qualification program called ACE for Project Business Management that helps them develop the skills needed in this market, and also earning a badge that gives them credibility.

Ozguler: **The Approved Consultant / Educator (ACE) is the entry ticket for a high-value market for demonstrably capable experts. Please give detail information about ACE qualification.**

Lehmann: We should first note that this is not a certification program. It does not include a test. Instead, in a standard arrangement, participants go through a self-paced learning process, in which they address fields of project business, develop competency in them and help the discipline grow knowledgewise. It is like a nona-version of a master work.

The basic assumption is that skill builders are auto- didacts. They need support from a mentor and assessor for the process, but mostly do it alone.

We have some other settings, such as a trainer-led process, which is expected to be faster, particularly for groups of candidates.

Ozguler: Thank you for giving detail information about Project Business Foundation.

Lehmann: Ipek, thank you!

Berneburg: Thank you for the interview, Ipek. We are always open for further questions, as well as interest and inquiries on the topic from your readers!

About the Interviewer



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Ipek Sahra Ozguler graduated from the Istanbul University, Turkey with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University, Turkey with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 13 years of experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

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

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, [The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals](#), interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals around the world. The book was published in March 2020 and is available [here](#).

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