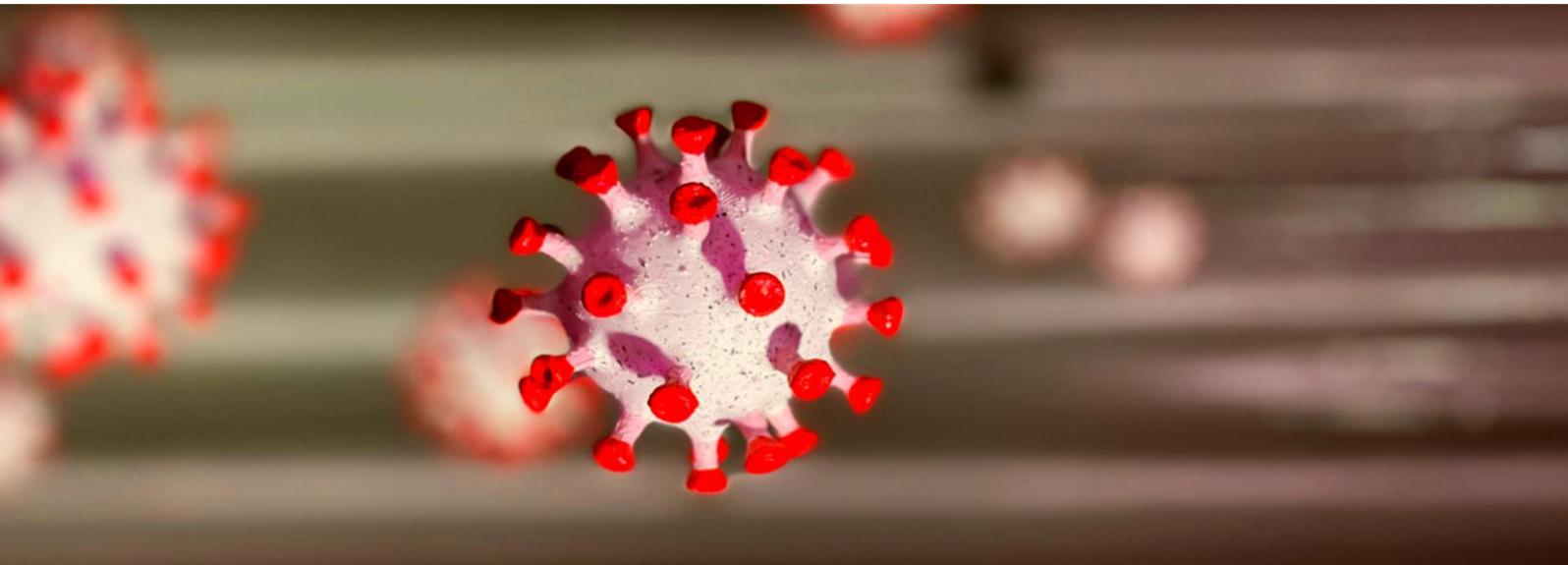

***Project Business Management*¹**

A Letter to Covid

Oliver F. Lehmann

“Crisis reveals character.”
— Helmut Schmidt



Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world of project business and of training. What can we expect for the future?

Dear SARS-CoV-2 virus,

Wow, the Covid-19 pandemic that you caused changed the world. You are such a small thing; your diameter is just 100nm. One has difficulties making you out even in the best light

¹Editor's note: This series of articles is by Oliver Lehmann, author of the book "[Project Business Management](#)" (ISBN 9781138197503), published by Auerbach / Taylor & Francis in 2018. See full author profile at the end of this article.

microscopes, so electron microscopy is necessary to make you visible. You are unable to reproduce yourself, so you need body cells to do the job for you. In our case, human body cells, of course.

You are only not a living being; you also have zero intelligence. All you can do is, while corporate cells reproduce you, wait for mistakes in the process that will lead to mutations, and further hope that some of these mutations will be even more contagious.

And you are a true weakling. If a bunch of you is floating in aerosols, 50% of you will vanish in an hour. You last longer on surfaces, but even there, your lifespan is limited to a few days. You are easy to keep off; keeping distance, washing hands regularly and thoroughly, and wearing masks, particularly when inside, is sufficient. And now, we have vaccines that have been proven effective and safe.

You lost.

So, why am I writing this letter to you?

In the two disciplines that I am interested in, training and project business management, you turned the world upside down. Let's begin with project business:

Project Business Management

Cross-corporate performance of projects had become more and more the usual way of doing projects before you came into the world, which was probably in fall 2019. There was a measurable trend from internal projects to projects done with customers and contractors, often with multi-tier project supply networks (PSNs) doing the project for a paying end customer, sometimes called "owner". In project business, projects become the source of income, profit centers, for contractors. For customers, project business means that money is leaving the company, so they want to make sure they get what they ordered and are prepared to pay for.

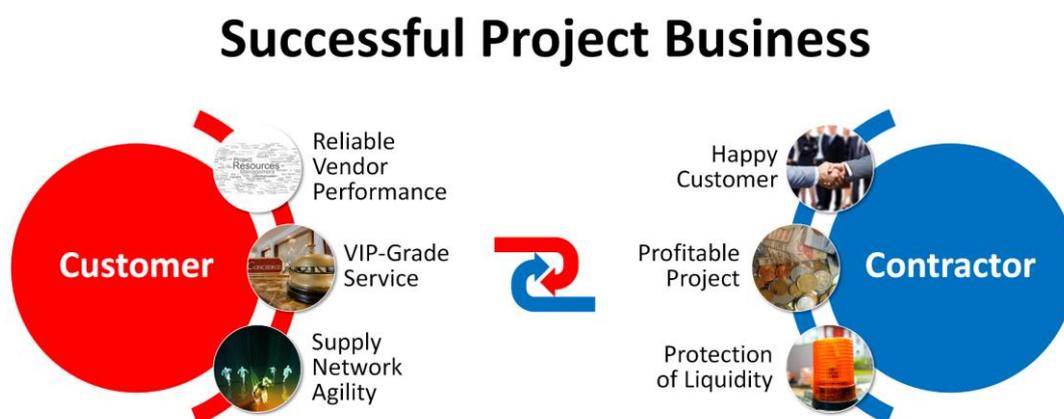


Figure 1: Success criteria in project business management

The Project Business Foundation and the Project Management Institute (PMI) conducted a joint study in June 2020[1] to identify your impact on Project Business. 80% of the respondents reported a negative impact, almost half of them said this impact was “extremely negative”. Talking with practitioners, most had stories of how it became difficult to serve the customer and deliver ordered products and services. They also found timely payments affected.

Another interesting observation is that project business became shiny. A cross-corporate project with US-company Pfizer as the customer and German BionTech as the contractor developed the first effective vaccine and launched it on the market. The German government further supported the project as a co-sponsor, and more support came from a project supply network made of an unknown number of subcontractors.

In the past, internal projects were those to shine. They helped achieve strategic visions and goals, develop new products and services, and change entire organizations. Project business, in comparison, seemed to be paling – Isn’t it all just about money? So what?

The success of Pfizer/Biontech, e.a. shows that project business is more than just money exchanged against deliverables. It is a way for organizations to tap into other organizations’ assets, turning them into project resources and delivering results that one organization alone would not have been able to achieve. I consider this very shiny.

What is the future of project business? In some countries, governments set up programs to help organizations survive and keep jobs intact. However, these programs were credit-funded, and the long-term consequences of over-indebting national economies are still uncertain. Nevertheless, they allowed organizations to survive, restart, and some are now turning into overdrive mode.

It is like a pendulum; project business is bouncing back. The need for organizations to get out of their Covid-based debilitation and rebuild their business has become a race, and the quickest will win. Organizations alone are too slow; they need cross-corporate cooperation to achieve this speed.

The last big pandemic was the “Spanish Flu” 100 years ago, in 1918 to 1920. After that pandemic came the Roaring Twenties, a tumultuous time in both business and culture. Could it be that we are on our way into the second roaring decade?

However, here is a warning: The Roaring Twenties were followed by decades of Nationalism and Racism. In their worst expressions as National socialism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, they soon drove the world into World War II.

Training

You also changed the world of project management training. Before the pandemic, there was something like a two-class society, regarding classroom training as the higher art. Online seminars were considered the cheap and less effective solution.

Trainers like me had to develop new skills during the pandemic. We had to learn to transform our methods into a digital setting, where we speak with our audience through a camera, a screen, a microphone, and a set of speakers or earphones. We had to adjust handouts, presentation materials, and everything else to the different platform. I gave away my large car that was useful for long-distance journeys to training customers along the German motorway, replaced it with a smaller one, and invested instead into hardware such as a great camera, expensive microphone, and a green screen.

The most impressive change that I see is the increased reliability of network systems. Two years ago, they were notoriously undependable, and connections lost, videos frozen, and voice transmitted with interruptions was frequent. Meanwhile, I do 5-days/35-hour classes for certification preparation almost without disruptions. Many players are involved in this transmission business, and all of them seem to be doing a great job. Kudos!

What will the future be like? Probably a mixed or hybrid approach. We already do classes where some of the students are in the classroom; others at the same time are attending online through a “fishbowl window”, an online connection kept open over the seminar day. We even have situations when students spent some of the seminar time in the room; at other times, they attend from home or the office.

This change comes as a challenge to the trainer. At the same time, we must ensure the well-being of the physically present students and take care of all technical issues. And we must provide an environment in which no student feels like being treated as second class.

Conclusion

SARS-CoV-2, you changed a lot, and the pandemic that you caused is still not over. You will come in new variants, each more contagious and dangerous than the previous one. However, there is no doubt that through vaccination, behavioral change, and much hygiene, we will finally be able to beat you. But the world will not be the same as before. We will find new challenges for the business I am related to, project business, and training.

See you next pandemic,

Oliver

References

Project Business Foundation, PMI (2020) *The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Project Business*, Sisseln, Switzerland: Project Business Foundation [Online]. Available from: <https://my.project-business.org/resources/Documents/Studies/PMI-PBF-Covid19CrisisSurvey-Report-11June2020.pdf> (Accessed: 30 June 2021).

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Oliver F. Lehmann, MSc, ACE, PMP, is a project management educator, author, consultant, and speaker. In addition, he is the President of the [Project Business Foundation](http://www.projectbusinessfoundation.com), the home association for professionals and organizations involved in cross-corporate projects.

He studied Linguistics, Literature and History at the University of Stuttgart and Project Management at the University of Liverpool, UK, where he holds a Master of Science Degree. Oliver 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.

He has been a member and volunteer at PMI, the Project Management Institute, since 1998, and served as the President of the PMI Southern Germany Chapter from 2013 to 2018. Between 2004 and 2006, he contributed to PMI's *PM Network* magazine, for which he provided a monthly editorial on page 1 called "Launch", analyzing troubled projects around the world.

Oliver believes in three driving forces for personal improvement in project management: formal learning, experience, and observations. He resides in Munich, Bavaria, Germany and can be contacted at oliver@oliverlehmann.com.

Oliver Lehmann is the author of the books:

- "[Situational Project Management: The Dynamics of Success and Failure](#)" (ISBN 9781498722612), published by Auerbach / Taylor & Francis in 2016
- "[Project Business Management](#)" (ISBN 9781138197503), published by Auerbach / Taylor & Francis in 2018.

His previous articles and papers for PM World Journal can be found here:

- <https://peworldlibrary.net/authors/oliver-f-lehmann/>