

30+ Years of Project Management

Interview with Michel Operto¹

Marketing PMO and Blogger
Co-founder of PMI France 25 years ago
South of France



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Michel Operto has managed IT projects for the past three decades for computer manufacturers and telco companies. Coming from an IT background, he has worked for renowned international companies such as Thomson, Digital Equipment, NCR, Nortel Networks and Orange. Many of his projects involved extended periods working abroad: USA, England, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Japan, Switzerland, Poland... Michel currently runs an offer development Project Management Office (PMO) for Service Management Innovation using Agile approaches. He obtained the Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification in 1998 and cofounded PMI France-Sud which he leads for several years. Additionally, he has explored Prince2® and Agile approaches (Scrum, Kanban, Safe...). Professionally, his passion is project management and he runs a renowned francophone blog on project management best practices for 10 years: <http://DantotsuPM.com>

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Interview

Q1: First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You are running a French-speaking blog about project management for 10 years. What changes did you notice in the project management world in the last years?

Michel Operto (Operto): A dozen years ago, a lot of project managers (PMs) were already running projects with agility and following quite a lot of Agile principles as common-sense practice. However, the Agile Manifesto approaches like Scrum and Kanban were not mainstream. There were some "rolling waves" and prototyping methods but, most projects were predictive with a lot of controls on changes and, scope creep avoidance was one of the key issues for PMs. Nowadays, changes are more welcomed, the "tunnel effect" is caused by long project duration before the customers could see any results are gone. The PMs have become more "trust and verify" oriented than "Command and control". They are more focused than ever on the business benefits that their project will bring to the business and how fast they can rip some of the main benefits without necessarily having all the "bells and whistles" requested by some stakeholders, the "nice to have" requirements that cost a lot but generate little concrete returns.

Q2: What changes did you notice in the questions, the interest of your readers in the last few years?

Operto: I have witnessed more and more interest from project managers and Agile leaders in Soft Skills, team facilitation, servant leadership and practical experience sharing that they can apply to their projects. They are also curious about the latest approaches and ideas in domains such as Artificial Intelligence, Emotional and Collaborative intelligence or cognitive biases.

Q3: In the era of social media, videos, how can you explain that your blog (like project management journal) is popular and visited?

Operto: The regularity and variety of publications are what readers tell me they like about my blog DantotsuPM.com. The variety of topics and also formats with images, videos, pointers to useful materials and books they can discover. The monthly agenda of events related to project management is also very appreciated to enable them to deepen or widen their knowledge and accumulate Professional Development Unit (PDUs) for PMI certification holders.

Q4: you are also working as a project management office (PMO). Has the role of PMO changed? How will you define the role of PMO in the future?

Operto: The P of PMO can stand for Projects as well as Programmes and Portfolios. I have had the chance to run all 3 kinds of PMOs and, they are different while all aiming to improve the way we select and run projects to deliver the desired outcomes. I see all these PMOs become more Agile and, they are structuring themselves to be more Agile. In particular, they develop and implement light governance processes to accept changes and manage their evaluation and integration as a standard activity in programmes and projects. I have also seen more PMO Managers having the direct management responsibility of the PMs managing the projects in the scope of the PMO. That facilitates coaching and education planning of the PMs. It also enables more collaborative work among the PMs to develop templates, gates milestones checklists, standardization of presentation and structure of steering committees, training curriculum...

Q5: You also manage a community of certified project managers at Orange and, you organize the annual event with a team of volunteers. How did you come up with the idea of this community?

Operto: like many good communities, the need for more sharing, education and networking has existed for a long time. One of the Orange divisions had started an annual get together a session for their PMs. They quickly realized that this was not only relevant to their division but all of Orange. So, they looked for participants from other Orange entities based on people's reputation in project management and names they had heard. That's how I joined the volunteers' team as I had already created my blog and some visibility within Orange in the Project Management domain. We rapidly enrolled key people in other Orange entities and, launched value-added services for certified PMs in the group: Annual event, of course, but, also monthly news, webinars of various project management topics, opportunities to collect PDs and maintain their project management certifications.

Q6: How long have you been running this community?

Operto: 11 Years! And it's a great experience. Volunteers on the board change over time and bring new energy, ideas and visibility.

Q7: What are the activities planned in this community?

Operto: Of course, the annual event remains a big activity and, it evolved. We started with a one-day in-person event for the first 5-6 years when the community was in the 100+ members range. As we grew bigger to about 400 members, we started to hold the meeting still in person but at several locations on the same day and all connected in real-time via video presence. Great use of the tools we sell to our customers! Since the Covid-19, the day was split into 4 webinars of 2 hours each spread over a month. Still between 300 and 400 PMs participate at each session. We also issue monthly newsletters; we have shared space on the Intranet for exchanges among community members that we recently opened up to anyone interest in project management at

Orange. We organize 5 to 6 webinars with internal and external speakers on various project management topics each year.

Q8: What are the benefits of a corporate project management community?

Operto: Enrich the capacity of each PM by sharing experiences with others. Discovering new topics and keeping up to date with Project Management evolution (Agile, hybridization, new PMBoK, Disciplined Agile...). It also facilitates the renewal of certifications as many PDUs can be earned each year as members contribute to the community, attend events, share experience...

Q9: As a passionate professional in project management, how do you envision the future of project management?

Operto: While I read many flashy titles around the death of project management and project managers with the arrival of Agile approaches, I still think that in fact, project management is a flagship skill to master and a profession to embrace. More than ever, every initiative is run as a project. Successful Agile projects require strong governance, stakeholders' management, benefits tracking, risks management and, all of these are supported by specific techniques, skills and training that PMs possess. So, I see a very bright future for PMs in all industries and countries.

Q9: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Operto: Volunteer as much as you can to share your expertise and knowledge with others. Help others to grow and, yourself, you will grow and benefit!

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

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Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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