



## Interview with Olivia Antelmann on Project LEO

a-connect is thrilled to be executing its second largest project in its history: legal entity optimization (LEO) following a large pharma acquisition. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, our PMs have successfully executed LEO so far in 16 countries of this truly global project that staffs 30+ PMs in 60+ countries on 6 continents, alongside an a-connect PMO, over 2 years in 6 “Waves” of countries. Today we are excited to share some insights on this project from our IP, Olivia Antelmann, who ran the legal entity optimization in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in Wave 1, completed in January. She performed so well that she continues on the project now as part of the a-connect PMO, having supported our PMs with the completion of Wave 2 and now currently Waves 3 and 4 and 5 in progress.

### **How did you work with a-connect on this project, and what worked well?**

Apart from the administrative things that I will not mention because they always work very well – there was a very helpful pre-onboarding call with plenty of information on the project, on the companies, do’s and don’ts, and what the project expectations are, in detail. During the kick-off meeting, your personal participation was also very helpful. During the course of the project, we had regular calls with you: short status updates – short but still gave us the opportunity to raise anything we wanted to discuss. There were also knowledge-sharing calls and a WhatsApp group between the other a-connect PMs on this project, facilitated by a-connect. This was considered by the entire group of a-connect PMs extremely helpful, to be connected and to have the quick possibility to exchange ideas and knowledge.

### **With hindsight, what would you do differently if you were to do Wave 1 again?**

For many of the PMs, including myself, the very first time we got in touch with the local team was at the Kick-off, and I think it would have been even better if we were on-boarded by the client team a couple of days before.

How did your time as a local PM help you with your new PMO role on this project?

I think it is definitely crucial to have the on-the-ground experience to really understand what the local teams are worried about. This enables me to act as a link between the global PMO and the local PMs. It is a natural fact that there is a disconnect, as the global team does not participate in all of the local meetings. So, I think my role is especially valuable; it was the intention of the global PMO to have a better link to the ground level.

### **What impact do you feel we are having on the client?**

From my experience, and also from reading and hearing the feedback: I think we are really helping the client navigate through this integration. We support and help the local teams stay focused, stay structured, and untangle issues. What I have seen with my PM colleagues is that it is really a plus that we have strong PM skills and the seniority and experience level to build relationships, as well as to calm people down to be able to focus. I have seen this with many of the other PMs, and I hope this applies to myself as well! It is really a-connect’s contribution here that we provide one approach and that we PMs have similar biographies and similar skills. Yet still we are very flexible because each country is so different. This is not only because of the country, but because of the people who are running the countries. You can see that each country is a bit different, and each PM adapts to what is needed from the country. This is truly a positive thing about this kind of a-connect set-up.

## What have you learned as a result of this project?

I have learned that the practical implications of a merger/acquisition is not to be underestimated. The devil is in the details. I have once again experienced how important internal communication and management support is for excellent project execution. The local teams need to be informed timely and with the appropriate level of detail on the project timeline, definition of a successful outcome, and what is expected from them in terms of input. It makes employees feel much more comfortable and also more efficient if they can prepare for additional workload during the course of a project. We saw good and bad examples of top management support in this project and how they were able to create a certain atmosphere in teams. On the positive side, it was so inspiring to see the immense difference 30 minutes of a General Manager's appearance in a kick-off meeting makes for the success of the 6-month Wave.

## What advice would you give to the other consultants on or will be on this project, or to others embarking on a similar project?

I would advise them to take advantage of this interesting set-up, working as an IP, but also in terms of organization, in that you are working on your own in your local country, while being part of a bigger team. You can exchange with the other PMs, and with the a-connect PMO, who helps you and facilitates and encourages you to exchange ideas with the others. Make the most out of this! Another piece of advice would be: with the a-connect PMO reflecting the client PMO, use the client PMO, because it is especially set up for this project: Reach out to the client PMO, discuss, escalate if it is necessary, or even if you are not sure if it is necessary. Reach out to them!

## Is there anything else that you would like to add?

It was a really fun project. You are independent. You do not have a heavily overhauled organization, but you are also part of this bigger group, and you see some known faces or names around. You remember that you worked on this and that project in past... Even though I did not meet the other PMs in person, we really felt like a peer group, which was a great atmosphere.

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