



Berlin  
2025

IPMA<sup>»</sup>  
34<sup>th</sup> World  
Congress

# Leading in the Dark Lessons from Cave Divers

Michael Ryba, IPMA 34<sup>th</sup> World Congress, September 18, 2025, Berlin



Cave diving is a form of High Reliability Organization.



# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

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Lessons from cave divers: How to lead like a high-reliability organization

### Navigating the digital vortex

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The challenges of hybrid teams in global transformation projects

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Relevant factors for leading hybrid globally distributed teams to project success

### Concrete action for managers

4

Recommendations for your project for immediate implementation





The background of the slide is a photograph of an underwater cave. Sunlight beams through the water, creating a dramatic effect. A diver is visible in the lower center, holding a flashlight. The cave walls are rocky and covered in some vegetation. There are several teal-colored circles of varying sizes connected by lines, forming a network-like pattern on the left side of the slide.

2

# The challenges of hybrid teams in global projects



# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## Bosch business sectors



**Mobility**



**Industrial Technology**



**Energy and Building Technology**

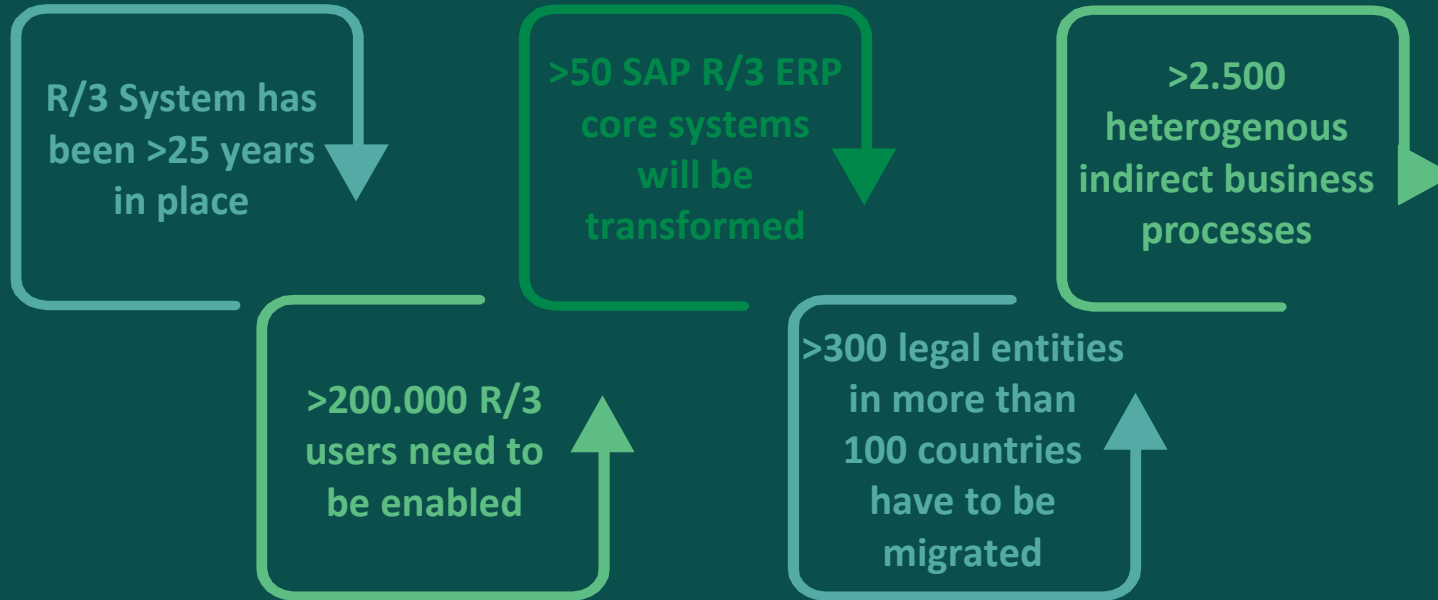


**Consumer Goods**

**Bosch Digital\_** [12,000 associates, +200 locations, 56 countries]

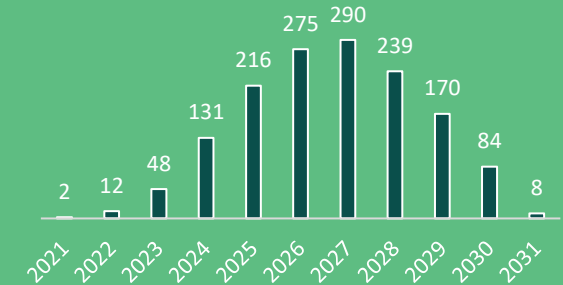
# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## Project example: The Bosch SAP S/4HANA challenge (1/2)



**S/4 Roadmap ramping up until workload peak in 2026-2027**

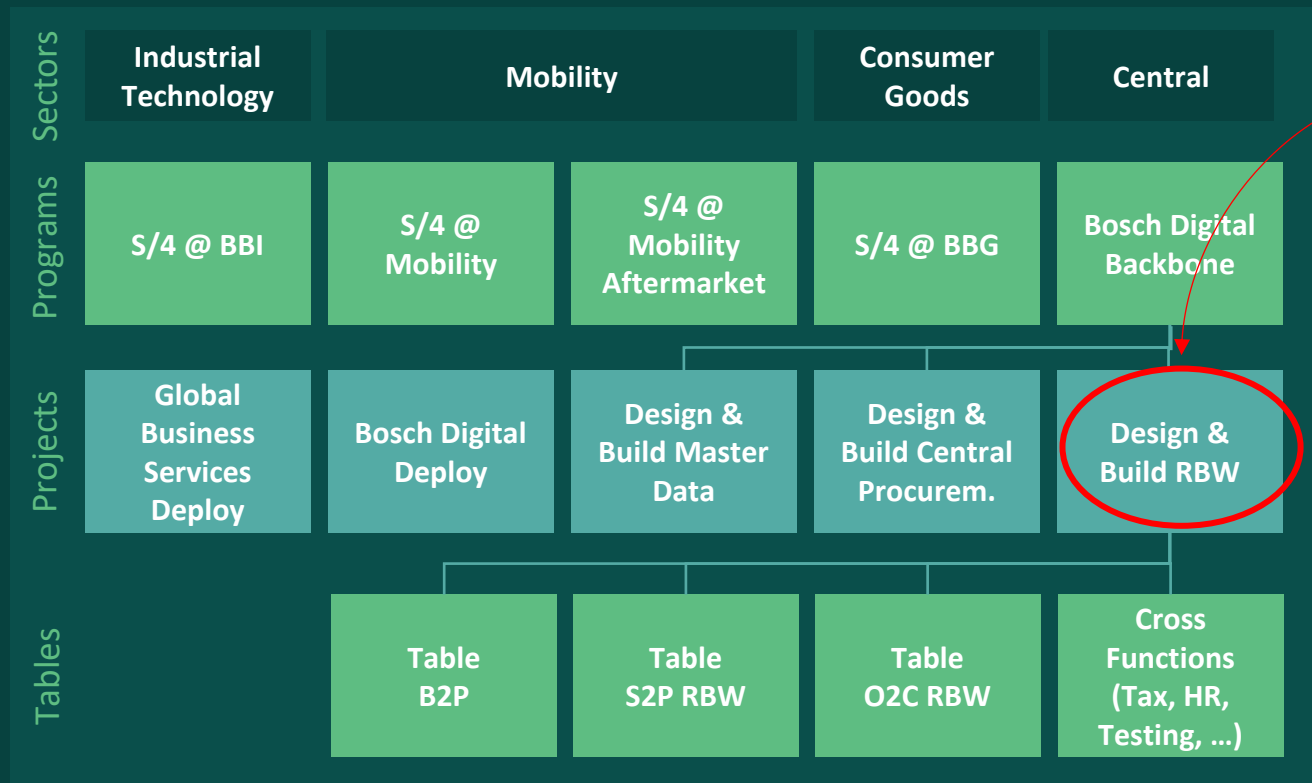
#S/4 projects per year



**The implementation of S/4HANA is the largest digital business transformation ever at Bosch.**

# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## Project example: The Bosch SAP S/4HANA challenge (2/2)



you are  
here

### Project “Design & Build Robert Bosch World”

- ▶ Design group wide processes and build in SAP S/4HANA
- ▶ Large scale project with >500 team members
- ▶ duration: 2022 – 2028
- ▶ budget: very large
- ▶ teams in 10 countries
- ▶ hybrid approach (scaling: approx. LeSS Huge)
- ▶ no “Deploy” (separate)



An underwater photograph of a cave interior. Sunlight rays stream down from an opening at the top, illuminating the water and the rocky walls. A diver is visible in the lower center, holding a flashlight. Three teal circles are overlaid on the image, connected by lines, forming a partial circular path. The number '3' is inside the largest circle on the left.

3

Three success factors  
that determine project  
success



# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## #1 Clear and Consistent Communication



### Stakeholder (external, management)

bi-weekly program meetings (face-to-face),  
stakeholder boards

### Team leads and sub team leads

weekly “Jour Fixe” for cross topic alignment (hybrid),  
quarterly “Connect Days” for strategic alignment (on site)

### Core Leadership Team

weekly leadership calls for strategic topics  
(on-site, hybrid)

### Project teams (“tables”)

weekly individual team meetings (hybrid)

### Stakeholder (user, employees)

information sharing by Teams channels, videos and  
online formats



We implemented a “Communication Flight Plan” with clearly defined communication channels and feedback loops for each decision-making level. Consistency beats chaos, especially under pressure.

# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## #2 Common clarity of purpose and alignment

### S/4HANA @ Bosch Digital

To build the digital engine for our future.

#### Why?

#### What?

Look behind the scenes of Bosch Digital's part in this transformation.

#### How?

Learn more about how BD contributes to implementation of S/4HANA

**FOR ENTHUSIASTS**

You want to **Support the Transformation?**

**FOR EXPERTS**

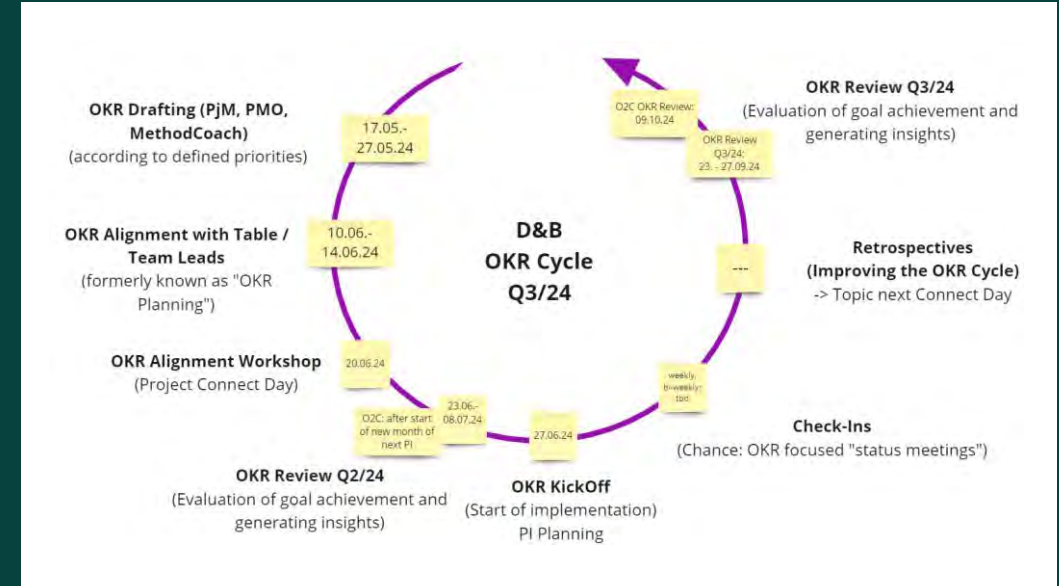
You want to get a **Deep Dive on S/4HANA technology?**

**FOR LEADERS**

You want to **Share information with your team?**

#### Voices

Meet the team & get insights on what our Bosch Digital experts share about the S/4HANA transformation.



We created a shared "vision map" - a visual board showing goals, milestones, and success criteria. This way, everyone knows "This is what we're working toward", regardless of location or time zone.

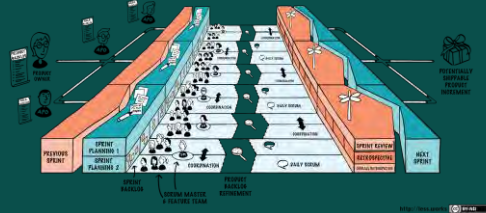


# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## #3 Trust and self-responsibility

### Project Management Framework

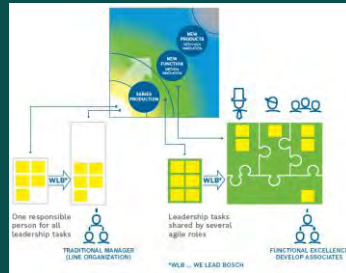
*Trust by methodology*



01

### Shared Leadership

*Trust by organization*



02

### Management Support

*Trust by management*



03

### Open Communication

*Trust by leadership*



04

Psychological safety doesn't happen by chance. Trust needs a face, not just a title.  
Strengthening self-responsibility within the team leads to mutual trust.

An underwater scene inside a cave. Sunlight rays stream down from an opening at the top, illuminating the water and the rocky walls. A diver is visible in the lower center, holding a flashlight. The scene is filled with natural debris like sticks and roots.

4

Concrete action for  
managers



# Leading in the Dark – Teams in Transformation

## Concrete action for managers

Build trust  
before the  
lights go  
out.

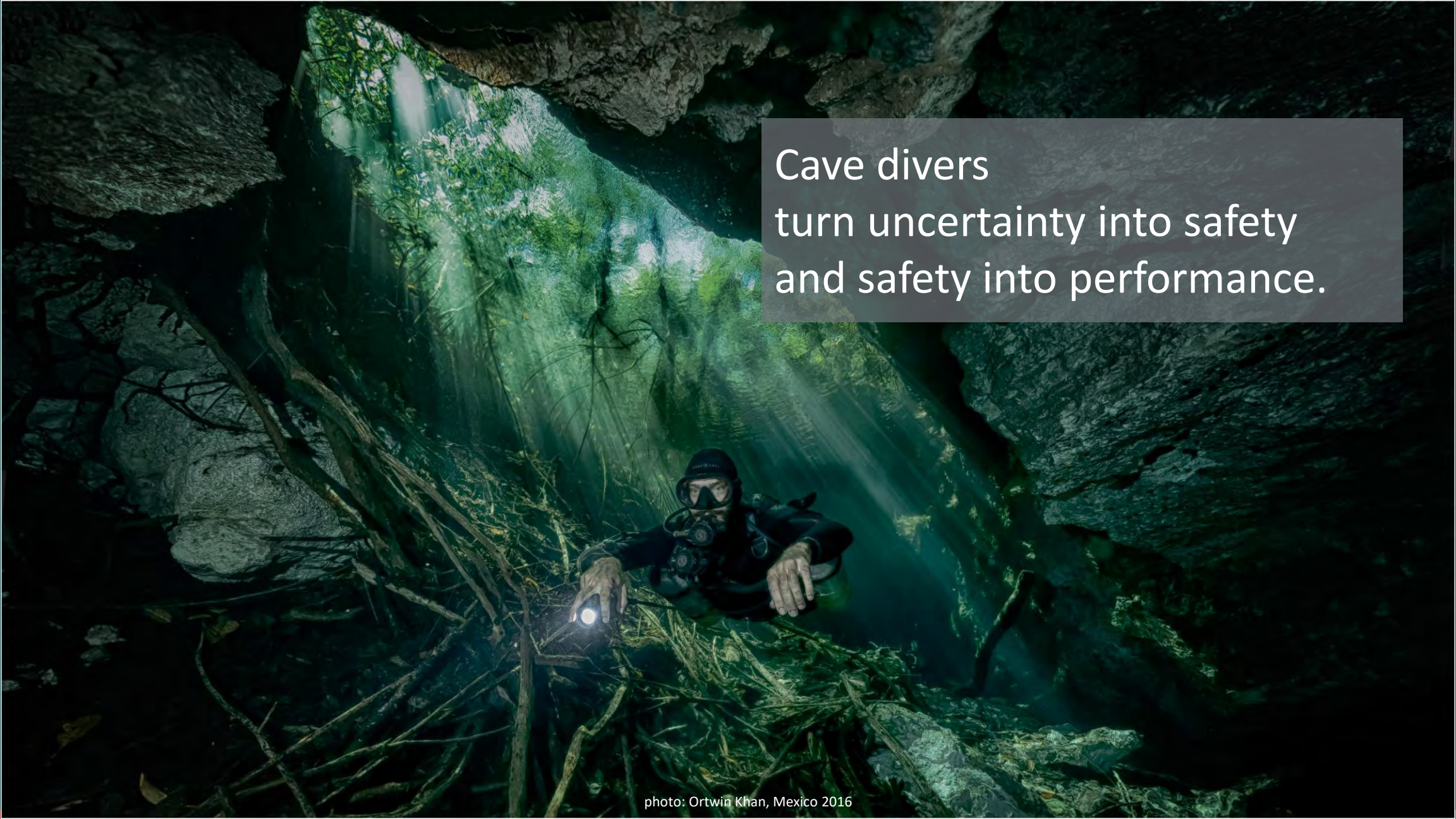
Start your weekly call with a short  
“What’s on your mind?” round.  
Let concerns and ideas surface early,  
before pressure mounts.

Be the  
lighthouse  
in the dark.

Take one critical update  
(e.g., a milestone shift) and share it  
through three channels (email, call,  
Teams board) to make sure no one  
misses the signal.

Cut the  
noise.  
Focus on  
the mission.

Begin the week by stating the #1  
project priority and link each sub-  
team’s tasks directly to it. Remove  
one distraction or low-value task to  
keep focus sharp.

A cave diver is shown in a dark, underwater environment. The diver is wearing a black wetsuit, a diving mask, and a regulator. They are holding a flashlight in their right hand, which is turned on, casting a bright beam of light onto a rocky wall covered in green algae. The diver's left hand is extended forward. The surrounding water is dark and murky, with some light rays visible. The overall scene is dramatic and emphasizes the challenges of cave diving.

Cave divers  
turn uncertainty into safety  
and safety into performance.

photo: Ortwijn Khan, Mexico 2016





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## Projekt Management Survival Kit

20 Project Hacks Project Managers Can Learn  
from Cave Divers

Hardcover, 64 pages, 28 photos,  
ISBN 978-3-00-067857-8

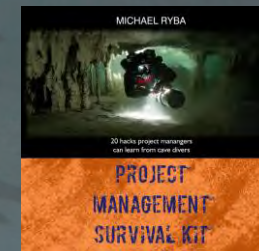


photo: Alison Perkins 2016, Cenote Otoch Ha