



**SHORT & SWEET**

WHU degree (program/year): **MLB 2014**

Place of residence & work: **Berlin**

Position:

**Founder & Principal of Contextual Solutions, Author**

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**Elif Kocaoglu Ulbrich (MLB 2014)**



**CONTEXTUAL  
SOLUTIONS**

### **Dear Elif, we heard that you have an exciting story to tell! We are glad to introduce you with an interview!**

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Thank you for featuring my story, which is particularly exciting as it marks my tenth anniversary in Germany!

### **So let's start 10 years ago: You worked as a lawyer in your home country, in Turkey. In 2013, you moved to Germany to attend the Bucerius Master of Law and Business program (MLB program) in Vallendar and Hamburg. Why did you choose Germany and the WHU & Bucerius Law School cooperation?**

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I worked as a corporate lawyer focusing on project finance and M&A for several years and needed a change. I applied to many universities in US and Europe, but felt overwhelmed by the range of options and what each would imply for my future. I eliminated English-speaking countries due to high competition in the job market and focused on Germany and BeNeLux due to the quality of education and life. When I realized that the MLB Program could be a way to explore entrepreneurship without sacrificing too much from my lawyer persona, I thought this was it. The scholarship offers were the 'cherry on the cake'. Looking back, it was the perfect choice for me as the WHU & Bucerius reputations opened many doors for me.

### **Today you are an independent expansion and marketing consultant, specializing in tech, living and working in Berlin. You've taken a completely new path with this. Was that your original plan? How did it come about?**

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I moved to Germany in 2013, intending to switch from law to entrepreneurship. I had other venture ideas in mind, touching retail and fashion. In the end, I became an entrepreneur in tech instead of retail. This is what entrepreneurship is about anyway: searching for places you can provide value and pivoting when necessary. So, it all fell into place!

### **What was the biggest challenge for you in this context?**

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After some time in the startup ecosystem in Germany, I fell into the 'comfort zone trap'. I have toyed with freelancing but didn't dare to become an entrepreneur. It took me some time to prepare mentally for entrepreneurship. In 2019 it hit me that I won't be able to continue further due to the entrepreneurial passion in me. I decided to burn the bridges but was scared to give up the titles and side benefits I had fought to reach. Fighting that off took some time. Preparing my friend and family circle was also another challenge. I have seen that people sometimes discourage you because of their limitations and fears, but entrepreneurs must leave

the dead weight behind and keep on going. Overcoming the network barrier is one of the biggest challenges. Also, understanding what is important and who to work with takes time.

### **With Contextual Solutions you run a consultancy specialized in FinTech, LegalTech and tech market-places. Please give us an overview of your business!**

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We are a team of eight, and with our 30+ partners, we help entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs actualize their business ideas or expand into Europe. We build tech companies and have experience in FinTech, LegalTech, MarTech, HRTech, e-commerce, and digital platforms. Sometimes we help with market and user research, write business plans, build product roadmaps, manage tech and BaaS partners, and initiate marketing and localization. Often, we act like interim managers, supporting the entire process. This process can be demanding in practice as we find ourselves contributing to several start-ups simultaneously, but it's also enriching.

### **You are also very active as an author, columnist, and speaker. What do you recommend to interested alumni who want to find out more?**

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The alumni interested in FinTech, innovation, regulation, or tech can follow my articles on Fintech Circle, Fintech Istanbul, Payment and Banking Blog, Fortune Turkey, PSM Magazine or LinkedIn and our blog. For a deep dive, they can check out our joint German Fintech Market Report (available free of charge on our website on contextualolutions.de) or purchase the Fintech Circle books.

### **Do you have any tips for WHU alumna who wants to break new ground professionally?**

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Whenever I bump into former colleagues or classmates, they tell me: "Elif, you are everywhere!". I want the alumni to know this is not a choice but an entrepreneurial reality. To succeed in your field, you must follow the industry, expand your network, attend conferences, and speak at events. Unfortunately, you must do it all at once while maintaining your private life. But once you find your niche and add value to the ecosystem, opportunities start chasing you (instead of you chasing them), and then magic happens. Deliver good work, stay authentic, and do not pay too much attention to competitors, peers, etc. – the rest will happen automatically.

Also, I recommend utilizing WHU's entrepreneurial network and support. I started late and regret not using it earlier, as these networks provide access to like-minded people and resources and can help you avoid mistakes and scale faster.

**Elif, thank you for the interview!**