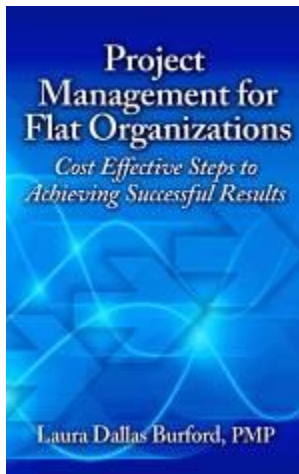


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Project Management for Flat Organizations***

Author: **Laura Dallas Burford, PMP**

Publisher: **J. Ross Publishing**

List Price: US\$ 39.95

Format: hard cover; 310 pages

Publication Date: 2013

ISBN: 9781604270846

Reviewer: **Steven Bagley, PMP**

Review Date: January 2013

Introduction to the Book

Best practices in project management and the Project Management Professional certification are based on the assumption that project management exists in an environment where there are adequate resources, such as a Project Management Office, experienced, expert staff, funds for training, etc. This, of course, is not always the case. Project management exists in a continuum from just being reactive to issues, all the way to best practices, planning, and methodologies that can be offered by a premier international professional organization, such as the Project Management Institute.

Our intrepid author—and I do think she was brave in putting out this book—has envisioned the stark reality of projects in under-resourced organizations, and no doubt lived it, helping some number of small businesses get control of and complete projects. It takes a certain amount of bravery to start out offering a methodology of sub-optimal project management, even if it is optimally sub-optimal.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is essentially a classic how-to-manage-a-project guide, following the lines of the PMBOK and many other project management books. The difference is that her point of departure is that the reader won't have the resources to do it full scale.

She approaches the scaled-down version by assuming the organization is “flat”. By this she means that there are few or no levels of hierarchy. It is a fair assumption that small business are flat and that flat organizations are small, but it feels at times that she is talking around what she really wants to say, namely, that it is appropriate to scale back

project management from the ideal and here is a thorough approach to ensure a certain degree of management, enough to get effective results, not so much as to let lack of resources be an excuse.

Highlights: What's New in this Book

The new idea in this book, somewhat buried between the lines, is that project management can be done even when the structures and resources are not there to support it. She does a good job at making it seem doable. If a functional staff member suddenly has to put on another hat and manage a project, they do not have time to study and train to become a project manager, nor do they need to grope in the dark trying to learn how to manage projects through trial and error. There is another way it is just enough project management to be credible, but not more than a flat organization can sustain.

Highlights: What I liked!

I really appreciated the extreme pragmatism of this book. As a results orient person, I am always pleased to get the sense that an approach will bear fruit in a quick, direct manner. I thought the approach was thorough, well organized, and well reasoned.

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

The biggest shortfall is probably the title. When I picked it up, I was expecting tactics, strategies, or theories of being a project manager in an organization where levels of management had disappeared and large numbers of people found themselves reporting to the same manager. This is a real problem in some organizations and might be worthy of a book.

I understand why the title was chosen. It is hard to find an apt descriptor for the sea of small and medium sized enterprises that are doing what they are doing with whatever level of success with just enough or perhaps not enough resources. Perhaps flatness of the organizations is the most common shared characteristic of these organizations, though it is not the characteristic that defines them. There are indeed many overly hierarchical, and possibly small, enterprises that could benefit from her book.

Who might benefit from the Book

While I liked this book, I think it is oriented toward a non-PMP audience. It could be useful for someone who was accustomed to a fine tuned PMO office and methodology who is looking to do small projects for small companies. I think this would be a good start for someone to begin their journey as a project manager, if they are starting in a small organization or family-run business.

Conclusion

The person who would benefit the most from this book is the leader of the flat organization who might learn that effective project management is possible for their companies even if they cannot set up a PMO or spring for the software. By raising the expectations for how projects are managed, without setting them out of reach, leaders can see the potential of allowing good project management to happen or ultimately the value of hiring an experienced project manager.

Project Management for Flat Organizations: Cost Effective Steps to Achieving Successful results, by Laura Dallas Burford, PMP, published by J. Ross Publishing; 2013, ISBN 9781604270846; 39.95 USD, 310 pages, hard cover. More about the book at

<http://www.jrosspub.com/Engine/Shopping/catalog.asp?store=12&category=189&item=14278&itempage=1>

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About the Reviewer



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Steven Bagley has been helping manage projects since 1996, working on projects in US and internationally, including China, the Philippines, Russia, Brazil, and the United Arab Emirates. Most projects were related to energy and information technology. Mr. Bagley holds a bachelors degree in Plan II from the University of Texas at Austin and a Masters degree in International Trade and Investment Policy from George Washington University in Washington, DC. He currently resides in Dallas, TX and can be contacted at steve.bagley@sbcglobal.net.