

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Project Management in Extreme Situations: Lessons from Polar Expeditions, Military and Rescue Operations, and Wilderness Exploration***

Author: **Monique Aubry / Pascal Lievre** (Editors)

Publisher: CRC Press

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Reviewer: **Rudy Rodriguez**

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Introduction

Project Management in Extreme Situations reviews how project management tools and principles apply in non-business situations. From polar expeditions, to military commando exercises, to climbing Mount Everest, Aubry and Lievre show how project management principles are applied. I was surprised to learn how the project management issues faced in these scenarios are similar to my project management challenges. An interesting perspective on how the tools we learn (both techniques and people skills) are transferrable to all situations.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book has three major sections with multiple chapters per section. Part One is Polar Expeditions, Part Two is Extreme Situations, and Part Three is Lessons to be Learned.

The chapters tell specific stories of how project management principles apply across different scenarios. The authors did an excellent job of describing in detail what the challenges were and how teams approached each challenge. Not all approaches were successful.

Highlights

One of the reoccurring themes in this book is the emphasis on the uniqueness of every project. How you successfully handled similar projects may not work in a different environment. The same type of project you dealt with in the past will have different stakeholders (personalities), different agendas, different funding criteria, different political background, and different timelines. The book reinforces the need to apply your skill set as a project manager differently based on each unique project.

With extreme situations as the backdrop, this book exposes the flaws and successes of applying project management skills. In two different polar expeditions, both achieved their objectives but only one was successful. When a project meets its objectives, you need to identify the definition of success. If the team hates each other but meets the project objective, was it really a success? Being able to reutilize the same resources for new projects is a key success factor. Chapter 12 on The French Special Forces shows how having the same support group enhances the ability to communicate and resolve situations, literally in flight, become essential to success.

Highlights: What I liked!

The major takeaways from this book:

1. Treat each project as unique. Do not assume what worked in the past will work here and now. You must verify all assumptions and continually apply the tools for planning, risk, communication and stakeholder management. There is no cookie cutter approach.
2. Your project may achieve its objectives but still fail. If you burn your team to achieve project success, how will this help you on future projects?
3. If correctly applied, your project management tool kit of skills and experiences can help you achieve your objectives in any environment.
4. Remember, as you recruit your team, no one has ever done what you are attempting. Just because they were successful in the past does not guarantee they will be able to excel in your specific environment. New people, situations, project funding, political environment, pressures, agendas, all have a unique impact on every project.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Project Managers, Staffing and Human Resources, Executive Management, and Resource managers would benefit from the lessons in this book.

This book might explain why some projects succeed and others fail even if the same team is used. Project goals and objectives viewed from different perspectives exposes the financial cost to projects that meet their objectives but still fail.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I enjoyed reading this book and found it very enlightening. Reading about how project management applies in “extreme conditions - conditions that are knowledge-intensive, constantly evolving, high-risk, and filled with unknowns” (Preface) felt like I was reading about my every day situation.

This book reminded me that “developing a plan based on rules and standards alone is no more effective than mechanically following a plan that may not necessarily lead to the project’s success, especially in circumstances of great uncertainty”. (Part Three of book).

This book reminds us “the task of project management is ambiguous and complex, requiring much judgement and maturity”. (Chapter 17) There are no guarantees to success and each project will present its own set of unique challenges.

The more we apply good project management principles the more we increase our chances for success. *Project Management in Extreme Situations* reminds me there is always a possibility for failure (in many ways) but if we apply our team and ourselves appropriately, we have a chance for success.

For more about this book, go to: <https://www.routledge.com/Project-Management-in-Extreme-Situations-Lessons-from-Polar-Expeditions/Aubry-Lievre/p/book/9781482208825>

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About the Reviewer



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Rudy C. Rodriguez is a highly accomplished PMP Certified Project Manager with extensive experience managing cross-functional teams and providing client service, customer support and software solutions in high-profile financial and healthcare environments. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University and a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Southern Methodist University.

Rudy currently works in Dallas for UT Southwestern Medical Center managing projects in the Business Affairs department; collaborating with Financial, IT, HR, and other departmental representatives at all levels to access, initiate, prioritize, refine, and drive technology solutions. He is also involved in Process Improvement projects dealing with both departmental and inter-departmental initiatives. In past endeavors, he has developed and implemented complex technical projects and is experienced in SDLC: Waterfall, Agile, and Hybrid with over 5 years of software development experience. He has extensive experience in Operations, Sales, Customer Service, Risk Management, Scheduling, Cost Control, and Quality Management.