PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: Managing Conflicts in Projects: Applying Mindfulness and Analysis for Optimal Results
Author: George Pitagorsky, PMP
Publisher: Project Management Institute
List Price: US$ 29.95
Format: soft cover, 132 pages
Publication Date: 2012
Reviewer: Lakshmi Subramanian
Review Date: 10, April 2013

Introduction to the Book

Excellent read! The author has done complete justice to blending the art and science of managing conflicts. The focus is on stepping back and looking at conflicts objectively, and on analyzing the positions, wants, interests and needs of all the stakeholders. The emphasis to understand and analyze the context of the conflict and categorizing the type of conflict, organization and people that one is dealing with, is quite interesting.

An open mind would gain maximum benefits from this book. While it is an easy read, there is a lot of information to assimilate in every page and one will probably want to read it a couple of times, before one can try and test all the wisdom packed in this deceitfully simple book.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The book is laid out in a logical structure, setting the ground for what one can expect from this book. The author clarifies that there is no one formula or a cook book approach to conflict management. He emphasizes on mindfulness which helps maintain relationships and at the same time focuses on resolving conflict for Optimal Performance. This is followed by a detailed view of the different Causes and Types of Conflicts, Project Life Implications and Stakeholders and their Roles. The foundation concepts of keeping practicality in mind, common overriding objectives, Values, Adaptability and Situational Management, Objectivity and Mindfulness, set the stage for the following chapters on Conflict Management Process.
Analyzing the nature of conflict is explained with good analogies and the section on Communications plan emphasizes how Conflict Management hinges on effective communication. This is then followed by Categories of Conflict, the knowledge of which will be useful to address the underlying issues behind the conflict. The Attributes of Conflicts such as Complexity, Intensity, and Reversibility, to name a few, are discussed in great detail. The author challenges the reader to understand conflict styles and approaches, the behavioral models and when to use which mode. One learns that Emotional Intelligence and Cognitive Analysis can be powerful tools in Conflict Management.

The latter part of the book explains the techniques for building rapport and soft skills, how to read and use non-verbal cues and body language. Dialog, Debate, Decision making and Negotiation are listed as approaches to Resolving Conflict. The final chapters discuss ways to close conflicts such as Escalation and Agreeing to Disagree. One would also appreciate the section on identifying false closures and avoiding them. Closure also includes communicating the results from the process, taking action and assessing the conflict management process.

**Highlights: What’s New in this Book**

The Mindful Meditation concept and practice tip was something one would not expect to see in a Conflict “Management” book. However, it is required and the author makes a very good case for it. It is quite refreshing that the book focuses more on the Art of Conflict Management rather than the Science. The focus is more on managing one’s self in the event of conflict and stepping back and looking at it objectively. And this core concept, coupled with a thorough understanding of the context, factors influencing the conflict and analyzing the stakeholder’s positions, wants, interests and needs, make the book a practical guide and passes the reality check.

**Highlights: What I liked!**

The references to body language and how to read into it and use it in conflict management was quite useful as well. The examples and quotes made the book a much more interesting read. For instance the Abilene Paradox was interesting. The Mindful Meditation exercise is not to be missed!

The Conflict Management process chart, the "Thomas Kilman Conflict Mode Model" and the grid for "When to use which mode" were big takeaways. One can use those as cheat-sheets to guide the Conflict Management Process.

**Shortfalls: What was Missing!**

I would have liked to see more examples and Case Studies not only because they were narrated well, but stories can often drive home the message more effectively.
Who might benefit from the Book

Like the author says, anyone old enough to have been in a conflict will benefit from this book. The book leaves one with a feeling of understanding of what to look for in a conflict situation and how to analyze the factors and manage the conflict. There are useful tips that can be put to use right away.

Conclusion

The book stands out because it is based on Conflict Management (the means) and not just on Conflict Resolution (the end). This ensures long term healthy working relationships and instills an attitude of problem solving and being in alignment with common objectives and goals and looking for a win-win approach where possible. The value system that the book stands on is commendable.

While conflicts are unavoidable; in the event they happen, this book will serve as an excellent resource to help manage and resolve those conflicts.
About the Reviewer

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Lakshmi Subramanian, PMP, has 10 years of varied and valuable experience serving the IT and IT Enabled Services industry. She has a Bachelors in Commerce, Masters in Computer Applications and Diploma in Business Management and is a proud member of the Dallas PMI Chapter. Lakshmi is currently working for a Telecom Major in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas, USA. Lakshmi can be contacted at slakshmi1505@gmail.com.