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Mastering Software Project Requirements
Author: Barbara Davis
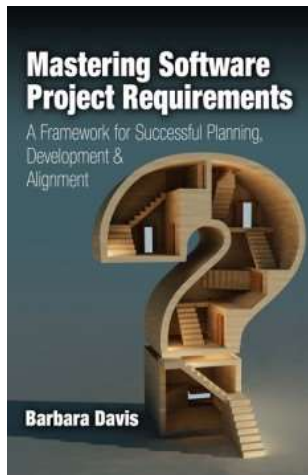Book Review   Reviewer: Jimmy Godard, PMP

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: ***Mastering Software Project Requirements: A Framework for Successful Planning, Development & Alignment***

Author: **Barbara Davis**

Publisher: **J. Ross Publishing**

List Price: US$ 54.95   Format: hard cover; 296 pages

Publication Date: September 2013   ISBN: 978-1604270914

Reviewer: ***Jimmy Godard, PMP***

Review Date: April 2014

Why should you read this book?

There are so many books on software requirements, how is this one any different from the rest? I asked myself this question until I took the time to read the book from cover to cover. Yes, other books may provide adequate information on requirements. However, I recommend this book because it highlights a simple approach that many of us can follow, on how to consult with stakeholders to manage and develop requirements.

Overview

This book is easy to read. If you have a choice of only one book on this subject, I would recommend this one. It is not heavily technical and can be read in about a week. Allow about 12 days if you are reading a chapter a day.

The author walks the reader through the maze of requirements. She starts from the initiation of a project to requirements validation and sign off. She provides a roadmap to identify and understand a business solution. She included a pit stop at planning and managing the requirement process, which is an often overlooked step. Business/project managers usually have a solution, then jump in straight into requirements elicitation without having an agreed upon process with stakeholders. I am guilty in this arena and this pit stop is convincing.

The author takes the reader through the dry land of requirements in Chapter 3 and 4. You may need to focus once you reach the middle of the book as she provides an overwhelming amount of information and less real life examples in this section. The

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book ends by explaining how various methodologies can embrace the requirement process. The author discusses Agile, Waterfall, TOGAF, and DO-178C in this section.

The author, Barbara Davis, has been a champion for technology standards and infrastructure for over 13 years. She created the world's first university-accredited Business Analysis diploma program. She has managed and grown business analysis portfolios from $500K to over $8 million.

Why did I read this book?

I perform the function of change management where I oversee projects/programs that interlace people, process, and technology. The journey of gathering requirements from various stakeholders for various systems was similar to having a root canal. Therefore, I needed to increase my knowledge in software project requirements. This book highlighted vividly some of the mistakes that were made in our program in regards to the process of managing and developing requirements.

How close is this book from reality?

My apprehension in reading this book was the fact many other books on requirements are boring and contain much theory than what one may face in real life. Barbara does a great job including some extracts from her experience that materializes the theory. I find myself saying, gee, I have been there before. I could relate vividly to her experiences, her warnings, and recommendations.

What is missing?

The framework that the author lays out is not perfect by any means. However, she is the first one to highlight that. She wrote the book from the perspective of a business analyst, confessing, "There is little in the way of industry standard".

Her picture of a business analyst may appear to have more authority than what may be considered typical. She argues, "The analyst is the one resource with the information, details, and knowledge to implement solutions that align to long-term strategies." Some projects do not even have a business analyst resource.

A program or project manager often performs the functions assigned to the business analyst profile in the book. This is not to say she is wrong. I believe she is describing what it should be; rather than what it is. In addition, it could be that the reason so many projects fail is because the resources that support the duties of business analysts are not competent.

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Conclusion

The author cites that "only 32% of software and technical projects are successful, and of this successful 32%, only 20% of the implemented features are used all the time, and 40% are never used at all." Where are your projects today? Where do you want them to be tomorrow?

This requirement process is simple. Its application is not so easy. We make it complicated by taking shortcuts, being preoccupied by politics and hidden agendas and failure to stand for what is right.   We need a framework on how to manage and develop requirements correctly. This book is a bridge that can take you there. I recommend you put it to use, for what has always been simple will soon become easier.

Mastering Software Project Requirements: A Framework for Successful Planning, Development & Alignment, by Barbara Davis, published by J. Ross Publishing, ISBN 978-1604270914 ; $54.95 USD; 296 pages, hard cover. More information at http://www.jrosspub.com/mastering-software-project-requirements.html

Editor's note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World Journal and the Portland, Oregon, USA Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI Portland Chapter – www.pmi-portland.org). Publishers provide the books to the PMI Portland Chapter, where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. Reviewers can keep the books and claim PDUs for PMP recertification. PMI Portland Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books. If you are an author or publisher of a project management-related book, and would like the book reviewed through this program, please contact editor@pmworldjournal.net or asst_newsletter_dir@pmi-portland.org.

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About the Reviewer

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Jimmy Godard, MBA, PMP, is a seasoned change manager. His work focuses on implementing global enterprise wide changes that impact, people, process, and technology.