
PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Project Think: Why Good Managers Make Bad Decisions***

Authors: **Lev Virine and Michael Trumper**

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Reviewer: **Brad Hermanson, PE, PMP, MBA**

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I have had a steady interest in project decision-making and uncertainty for over 20 years. I studied that subject as part of my MBA special project, keep-up-to speed on behavioral decision theory, have taught courses on project risk management and decision-making, and have actively incorporated methods such as decision analysis and risk management on my projects. So this book caught my eye. There is little information on issues related to decision-making on projects, and I was excited to see how the authors would develop the book.

The book is organized around four parts: (1) why good project managers make poor decisions, (2) traveling inside the project manager's mind, (3) project analysis versus mental errors, and (4) choice engineering. There are appendices that are critical to obtaining maximum value out of the book; there is a significant amount of important detail there. They style of the book is generally lively, with entertaining examples.

The authors have published another book on a related topic, "Project Decisions: The Art and the Science". Virine is an engineer, project manager, and speaker on decision analysis, risk management, and decision-making. Trumper is partner at a vendor for risk management software and specializes in project risk analysis.

The book covers a number of subjects in some detail. One subject is the general nature of decision problems, which tend to be mental errors. Appendices A and B provide exhaustive lists of the common errors, and the main body of the book does a good job providing an overview. Coverage is quite broad, but not necessarily deep. It is primarily an overview. The book also introduces the concept of "choice engineering," which contrasts with policing to encourage people to make better choices on projects. The concept is introduced in the beginning of the book and reinforced later in a discussion of choice engineering in organizations.

The book also discusses the importance of happiness on project teams, and deals extensively with risk management. The risk management portion of the book concentrates more on the mental aspects and choices that can be made, and less on the analytical approaches. The analytical methods are covered more extensively in the author's other book. Graphics are used primarily for entertainment, with a small number illustrating a specific concept. The key strength of the book is to introduce and emphasize through repeated discussions the importance of mental errors in decision-making.

The book is a relatively fast read and written in an entertaining style. It is bringing to the table something I believe is critically important in project management (and management in general) and sorely needed: the issue of poor decision-making as a source of project problems. In my own teaching I talk about the origins of the project – particularly poor framing, but also over-optimism and overconfidence, as major sources of project risk and poor project performance. Although this topic is covered extensively in behavioral economics and operations research, the coverage in project management literature is quite sparse. The authors have done an admirable job outlining the issues.

The phrase “choice engineering” was new to me, and a valuable insight I gained from the book. I think in many cases, both on projects and within organization, enforcement-oriented approaches to achieve certain goals and requirements are viewed by team members as heavy-handed and can backfire. The concept of encouraging positive choices that achieve desired endpoints is a good one, and I will definitely be turning to the book again for more enlightenment in that area.

As I completed the main body of the book I felt like the coverage had been a bit shallow (but again, quite broad) on a number of areas. However, the Appendices, which provide quite a bit of detail, filled in some missing items and left me with the impression of the book being a coherent whole. If anything I would have liked a bit more detail on many areas, but realize that exhaustive depth of many of the subjects could have brought the book to a grinding halt for the reader. I look forward to more in-depth discussion from the authors or others in other books or website discussions.

This is a very useful guide for any project manager who is ready and willing to explore the impact of decision-making on project origination and performance. I think that for many the first step is to be aware of the issues involved, and the book does an outstanding job conveying the breadth of decision and risk issues that can affect project performance.

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About the Reviewer



Brad Hermanson, PE, PMP, MBA

Portland, Oregon



Brad Hermanson, PE, PMP, MBA is a project manager with over 30 years of experience in the consulting engineering industry. He has been an enterprise leader for project delivery and quality for several large consulting firms, and is a frequent speaker and trainer on a variety of topics on project management. A summary of his work and experience can be found at <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/brad-hermanson-pe-pmp/b/a05/846>.