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Project Recovery: Cases Studies & Techniques
Author: Harold Kerzner
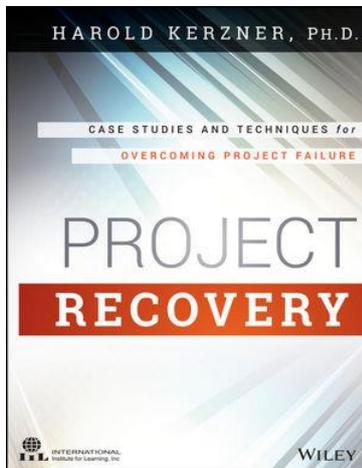Book Review
Reviewer: Kate Rohm

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: ***Project Recovery: Case Studies and Techniques for Overcoming Project Failure***

Author: **Harold R. Kerzner**, PhD

Publisher: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc**

List Price: $75.0   Format: Hard cover, 336 pages

Publication Date: March 2014

ISBN: 978-1-118-80919-8

Reviewer: **Kate Rohm**, PMP, CSM

Review Date: October 2014

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Intended Audience: Project managers who are managing struggling projects, have been asked to recover a failing project, or who want to simply gain information to help guide project teams to success. **Business leaders, program/portfolio managers**, and **project teams** who seek to understand what factors cause projects to fail and how they may contribute to ensuring project success.

On more than one occasion I have been asked to turnaround a stalled or struggling Information Technology project. I'm always interested in the root causes associated with these troubled projects and also in finding the most viable methods for recovery and prevention of recurrence. I've discovered over time that the definition of a specific project's success or failure depends, to a great degree, on stakeholder impact, perception, and expectations. Ensuring clear alignment is key to knowing if a project is successful or if it has failed to meet common goals and objectives. When I discovered this book by Dr. Kerzner was available for review, I was intrigued and hopeful to learn new information on how others recover and even prevent failing projects.

Harold R. Kerzner, PH.D., has spent 50 years involved in project management and is a global leader in project management and Senior Executive Director at International Institute for Learning, Inc. Dr. Kerzner has instructed over 200,000 professionals in his "Kerzner Approach" to project management excellence. The Kerzner Scholarship Endowment Fund and the Kerzner Project Management Award are managed by the PMI Educational Foundation.

Project Recovery: Case Studies and Techniques for Overcoming Project Failure delivers benefit to the reader by examining critical causes of project failure through examples of real-world case studies that highlight root causes and then align key lessons learned to specific PMBOK® Guide sections where additional or supporting information may be found.

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The book establishes a basic framework with a comparison of both historical and modern definitions of project success and failure. Chapter 2 explores categories and causes of project failure including but not limited to schedule, unknown technology, staffing, planning, risk identification, management mistakes and the failure to recognize early warning signs. In chapters 3-8, Kerzner uses case studies such as the Space Shuttle Challenger, Denver International Airport, Sydney Opera House, DMV – California and Washington, FoxMeyer Drugs' ERP implementation, and Boeing 787 Dreamliner battery to dive deep into key causes of failure including business case, sponsorship/governance, project politics, software, safety considerations, and scope creep.

While I was interested in the case studies, what I found most valuable was the actionable information provided in chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 discussed the need for project health checks as validation for project progress and/or indicators of looming trouble spots. Chapter 10 provided insight on the difference between project recovery versus project rescue and techniques for guiding stakeholders through the process of deciding whether recovery is feasible or whether the tradeoffs no longer maintain alignment with strategic goals and objectives.

Going forward, I plan to use both periodic audits and health checks and to ensure my sponsors and project team members understand the value in both. Audits typically evaluate a snapshot in time and are usually conducted internally by the project team to assess the present state of the project; possibly for progress or status reporting. The intent of an audit is usually focused on determining whether the project is executing within the project management methodology and is meeting scope, schedule and budget targets. It's important to note that meeting scope, schedule, and budget does not always mean the end product or service will be a success.

As Kerzner notes in chapter 9, "Periodic health checks, if done correctly, eliminate ambiguity such that true status can be determined." A health check is focused on the bigger picture, can be conducted by an external consultant through one on one interviews, and is based on assessing value, requirements, and quality.   A health check should be conducted immediately when a project starts to experience a great deal of scope creep, missed deadlines, budget overruns, and team member turnover. Conversely, incorporating health checks at phase gates or time-boxed checkpoints, will allow sponsors and project teams to proactively verify that work products are not only executing within scope, schedule, and budget targets but that the expected quality, value, and benefits will be delivered as well.

Project Recovery: Case Studies and Techniques for Overcoming Project Failure, Harold R. Kerzner, PH.D., published by Jon Wiley & Sons, Inc, ISBN # 978-1-118-80919-8 ; $75.00 USD; 336 pages, hard cover. More information at:
http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-111880919X.html

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Editor's note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World 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.

About the Reviewer

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Kate Rohm, PMP, CSM is a Senior-level IT Program/Project Manager with over 20 years of experience leading high-profile programs and projects in the manufacturing, direct-to-consumer retail supply chain, and US Department of Energy power utility industries.

A summary of her work can be found on LinkedIn at http://www.linkedin.com/in/katerohm