
PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Reinventing Communication – How to Design, Lead and Manage High Performing Projects***

Author: **Mark Phillips**

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Introduction to the Book

The author proposes methods to analyze, design, manage and lead Project Environments (rather than single projects). It is based upon the centrality of communication in determining project outcomes and the inherently social aspect of all Project Environments.

He asserts that communication is more than a “soft skill.” Communication can be quantified and therefore measured. As a Project Performance Management Tool, it is similar to other commonly expressed performance measurements such as Earned Value Method (EVM), Cost Variance and Schedule Variance.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The book is divided into two Sections.

- Part I (Why Communications Matter) develops the argument for using communication as a Performance Management Tool with chapters on:
 - Communication Determines Project Outcome
 - Elements of Communication Design
 - Communication Objects and Design
 - Observable Behaviors of Project Environment
 - Using Communication as a Performance Management Tool
 - Checklist

- Part II (Communication Manages Project Complexity) develops the argument for the competitive need to use communication as a Performance Management Tool with chapters on:
 - Orientation Towards Uncertainty
 - All Uncertainty is Wicked

Highlights: What's New in this Book?

Communication can be quantified and measured for use as a Performance Management Tool. The author provides the rationale for each chapter's topic with examples. He concludes each chapter with a "What It Means for Us" benefit recap.

Orientation towards uncertainty is a design element of a Project Environment and described using the topology of "tame," "messy" and "wicked." Using only a characterization of either "tame" or "messy" lends itself to prediction and analysis, but limits the Project Environment. The outcome can be project failure when the Uncertainty is "Wicked." He then asserts that all uncertainty is "Wicked." Using an Integrated Communication Strategy that addresses "Wicked" Uncertainty is the more flexible approach increasing the chances of a successful Project Outcome.

Highlights: What I liked!

Nuggets and Gems

- If we spend 90% of our time as Project Managers communicating, it makes sense to determine if we are spending our time wisely.
- Team members observe how they are treated when they act as expected and they observe how other people are treated.
- It is people in the social environment of a project that produce project outcomes.
- Readability, Word Choice and Emotional Tone affect the usefulness of a Communication Object (the artifacts generated in the process of communication).
- Boundaries between groups determine how the members interpret a given piece of information.
- Produce a baseline of planned (expected) communication (P Com) and compare it to actual communication (A Com) to determine Variance of Communication ($A\ Com - P\ Com = Com\ V$).
- Communication can be described in three dimensions: Conceptual, Tactical and Measureable.
- People's behavior directly impacts project performance.
- Several communication methods exist, but generally can be grouped into Technology-based and Traditional.
- Orientation toward uncertainty is a design element of the Project Environment and describes how the environment will react to uncertainty.
- Orientation toward uncertainty has observable manifestations, elements and design considerations.
- Social complexity is the dominant and central complexity within large projects.
- Wickedness is the new Status Quo. Organizations must develop a Solution Delivery Process that is oriented towards "wicked" uncertainty.

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

No shortfalls. The author presents his arguments for reinventing communication, and supports them with examples and checklists. He provides an expanded definition of uncertainty (wicked) and provides an approach to dealing with it.

Who might benefit from the Book?

The approach is applicable to leaders, project members, and those responsible for making organizational decisions about Project Environments.

Conclusion

Good solid framework on converting communication from a mere “soft” skill into a measurable technique as a Performance Management Tool. He introduces Uncertainty as a better perspective than traditional risk assessment.

For more about this book, go to <http://www.gowerpublishing.com/isbn/9781472411006>

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About the Reviewer



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Rodger Martin has a broad background in business, law, engineering and Project Management. He is a retired US Air Force officer with expertise in rockets and National Ranges. His work experiences include government, military, public corporations, small business consulting and high-tech non-profit organizations. For the last 12 years, he has worked on Document Management, Knowledge Management and Process Management/Modeling projects for commercial companies. He acquired his PMP certification in 2007. He is also a certified Mediator.

About the Author

Mark Phillips is an accomplished CEO and thought leader. For over 17 years, he has built a project management software company and consultancy, serving clients including multinational automotive, global telecoms and financial services. He led product development on a cutting-edge US Army Research Lab program.

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