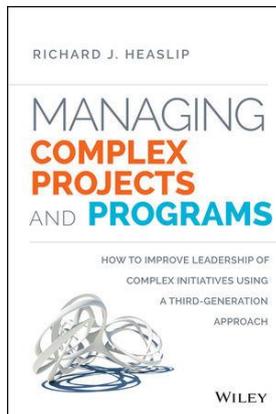


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Managing Complex Projects and Programs: How to Improve Leadership of Complex Initiatives using a Third-Generation Approach***

Author: **Richard J. Heaslip, PhD**

Publisher: Wiley

List Price: \$85.00 USD Format: Hardcover, 336 pages

Publication Date: September 2014 ISBN: 9781118383018

Reviewer: **Jackie Olshack** Review Date: February 2015

Introduction

The author starts the book by sharing that the impetus for writing it emanated from a slow boil of “exasperation” that built up, almost unknowingly, over a 15+ year career in project management at one of the world’s most renowned pharmaceutical companies. This exasperation, which he talks about in detail throughout the book, reached its peak during an interview he conducted, when a program management candidate asked him to articulate with specificity both the skillset he would need to have and the responsibilities he would be required to fulfill, should he be hired for the role in question.

The author realized that he, as Vice President of Portfolio, Program and Project Management, could not provide the candidate with a concrete answer. His inability to answer the job candidate’s questions, along with a serendipitous phone call from Joe Adler, a faculty member at Penn State University, culminated in the author writing this book.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The book is written in a very academic and scholarly format; its prose, verbiage and even its syntax are reminiscent of highly analytic, scientific, journal-like writing. Of course, this is not surprising in the least considering the author **is** in fact, an actual scientist. One major missing ingredient, which prevents the book from being completely scientific in scope, is that the author neither references nor shares any quantifiable data or documented case studies to support his position that the project management industry is strongly in need of a paradigm shift, which he calls “a 3rd generation approach,” if it is to keep those currently employed in the field, and any new arrivals, from becoming frustrated and disillusioned with project management as their chosen profession.

Highlights

As mentioned above, this book is not an easy read. It was not written for those individuals who seek a roadmap or “how to guide” for best practices and ways to navigate with savvy the very murky and turbulent waters within which stakeholder, scope, resource and budget management – the prerequisites for optimal project successes – sometimes reside.

The book’s title: ***Managing COMPLEX PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS – HOW TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP OF COMPLEX INITIATIVES USING A THIRD-GENERATION APPROACH***, gives the impression from its cover, that it is geared towards readers seeking time-proven and thoroughly tested approaches which will help them successfully manage multifaceted projects and programs to completion.

Rather this book was written by a scientist who found himself in a role with the heavy responsibility for managing the project management division of a major Fortune 500 company without the fundamental project management training and exposure his position needed him to draw from and which should have been required to fulfill.

Many of the problems and obstacles the author encountered and laments in his book, will probably leave many readers who have worked as project managers, whether matrixed environments or not, with a sense of unbelief; simply because some of the issues the author faced could have seemingly easily been cleared up provided basic, and very fundamental training in project management had been pursued. Comments by the author such as

My industry’s inability to agree on best practices in the leadership and management of programs (or projects) represented a failure of ...[the project management] profession

Or

[Project complexity] notwithstanding, something was wrong if the most experienced and professional of program and project leaders could not uniformly unambiguously define... [roles and responsibilities] within the industry....

lead me to think such sweeping indictments can only be made when exposure to said industry’s best practices and methodologies are lacking or unknown.

It should also be noted that the author is neither PMP nor PMgP certified. He has however, provided input towards PMI’s PMgP’s Body of Knowledge. At the time of obtaining the book for review, I was unaware of this. I assumed such certifications were requirements to teach in the field and/or provide input to PMI’s BOKs.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Seasoned project managers who already possess a strong foundation in project and program management will appreciate the author’s candor and frustration at how

exhausting, and even “exasperating” it can be to manage people, funds, time and resources, etc. (a/k/a “a project”) when the basic project management fundamentals are missing.

Specifically those who pursuing graduate level studies in project management might find it interesting but I am not sure that it has value other than to reinforce the importance of ensuring that those who hold the role of project manager or more importantly, who manage and coach project managers, need to thoroughly and completely understand fundamentally what both project and program success require.

Conclusion

The book was challenging for me to read not only because of its strong academic bent but also because I got the impression that the author was sharing a myriad of complaints and frustrations without having had exposure to the very education that many of his readers indulge quite often, to prevent the very issues he raises.

For more about this book, go to: <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-111838301X.html>

Editor’s note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World and the Dallas Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI Dallas Chapter – www.pmidallas.org). Publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas 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 Dallas 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@peworldjournal.net.

About the Reviewer



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Jackie Olshack is a program manager currently working in the healthcare field, specifically managing Medicare D programs. She is also actively involved with the Dallas chapter of PMI.

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