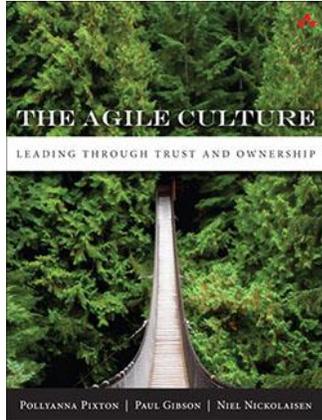


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## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***The Agile Culture: Leading Through Trust and Ownership***

Author: **Pollyanna Pixton, Paul Gibson, Niel Nickolaisen**

Publisher: **Addison-Wesley**

List Price: \$31.99 (£19.99) Format: soft cover; 229 pages

Publication Date: 2014 ISBN: 0-321-94014-8

Reviewer: ***Kaylan Isenberg***

Review Date: May, 2015

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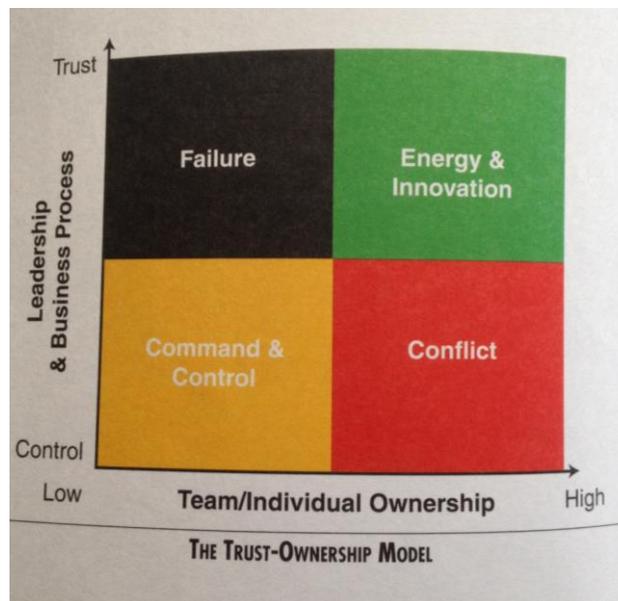
I'll admit that it was the "Agile" in the title of this book that caught my attention. Certainly Agile with a capital A has a lot of buzz right now in both tech and PM circles. While I was expecting to read a book that spoke more to the formalized Agile way, this book can be seen more as a framework for the cultural shifts that need to happen to help teams become more agile, lowercase a, with shifting demands in every type of marketplace, as well as more Agile, with internal/external processes.

The authors are experts in their fields: Pixton in collaborative leadership, Gibson in product development, and Nickolaisen in technical process improvement. As such, they each bring a unique perspective to the topic of healthy team and project dynamics. While there are sections of combined voices, the book also allows for each of them to take turns in exploring different aspects and sharing their experiences with the reader. In fact, the many case studies shared throughout the book are amongst the book's highlights; the authors are not shy about providing details, best practices, obstacles, and learnings that they have encountered throughout their varied careers.

The book starts with focusing on the two biggies in team dynamics: trust and ownership. The authors are adamant that these are the keys to all project success, and they do an excellent job providing assessments, diagrams, and models for team leaders and members to consider as they are evaluating and building their own project teams.

I had a major 'aha' moment thanks to one of their diagrams, a quadrant entitled "The Trust-Ownership Model," which depicts the potential project/team states – Failure, Command & Control, Conflict, and Energy & Innovation – depending on the levels of

team/individual ownership and leadership/business process. I won't give it all away, but I bet you can guess which of those four is the ideal state for a project/team (41-58).



The book then moves through ways to find alignment amongst both internal team members and external stakeholders, including assessments and activities to help with “non-collaborators”- those who either purposefully or inadvertently serve as a barrier to the state of Energy & Innovation. This usually happens because of a resistance to change, a fear of the unknown, doubt about the process, lack of trust, or a combination of all of the above, and these negative attitudes and beliefs can absolutely doom a project's success. As detailed in this chapter, as a team/project leader, it is critical that you work to identify the root of these attitudes and beliefs and course-correct.

The final chapter takes a comprehensive look at metrics, and offers ways to evaluate the ‘right’ metric/s to track depending on business needs. To get started with this evaluation, the authors offer three golden rules (175):

- 1) The fewer metrics, the better.
- 2) Minimize negative side effects.
- 3) People do what they are measured by.

Keeping these guidelines in mind, the best way to find the ‘right’ metric/s is to ask some key qualitative *and* quantitative questions to look at the metric/s from a variety of angles:

What are we trying to achieve?  
Is the Metric useful to the team?  
What is the cycle time for action?

What is the true cost of collecting and analyzing the data?

There is also a useful Appendix with additional worksheets to supplement the preceding sections.

I found this book to be highly readable and the authors thoroughly credible. My one critique is that there were a distracting number of small grammatical errors that could have been easily avoided, but the content itself is absolutely worthwhile for those interested in organizational and team effectiveness.

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*The Agile Culture*, by Pollyanna Pixton, Paul Gibson, Niel Nickolaisen, published by Addison-Wesley, ISBN-10: 0-321-94014-8; \$31.99; 229 pages, soft cover. Information at <http://www.pearsoned.co.uk/bookshop/detail.asp?item=100000000546624>

*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](http://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.*

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## About the Reviewer



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**Kaylan Isenberg** is a Project Manager at ThinkShout, a digital experience agency that specializes in supporting nonprofits through open source solutions. Prior to web development, Kaylan worked in program and project management at EdTech and SaaS companies.