
PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Managing Technology-Based Projects***
Author: **Hans J. Thamhain**
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Reviewer: **Christopher Frost**
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Introduction

For years, my job centered on medium sized database projects that work well with a traditional waterfall approach. However, last year, I was promoted to manage an application solutions group. This group had a wider range of responsibilities - everything from database development to web design and training. The group had some recent informal exposure to Agile methodologies and was trying to get used to new change management procedures. To succeed, I realized that I had to update my project management skills. That is why Thamhain's book appealed to me.

Overview of Book's Structure

The first fourth of the book looks at contemporary project management and the role of project management in modern organizations. After a chapter on project evaluation and selection, it moves into a couple of chapters that focus on monitoring and controlling the project. From there, it delves into different subject areas - with chapters on managing projects through risk management, collaboration, human resources, and conflict management.

The book ends with a chapter specifically on leading technology teams, another on the challenges of professional development, and a last one on the future of project management.

Highlights

One thing that Thamhain returned to at various points in the book was the concept of Strategic Project Management. Coined by Aaron Shenhar (2004), this approach looks at business results and human issues in addition to project management efficiency. Too often, it is natural as project management professionals to become overly concerned with project processes and lose sight of the larger objective. In addition to simply managing projects, the PMO project leader has to deal with the issues of organizational culture, politics, and power (Thamhain, 2012).

Another recurring item in *Managing Technology-Based Projects*, is the Stage-Gate process. Stage-Gate is a framework of phased development developed by R. Cooper and S. Edgett in 1985 and is similar to Agile. In Stage-Gate, projects have deliverables at certain pre-defined stages. These gates allow project managers to get better buy-in because the development is iterative and customer feedback is gathered at each gate.

Highlights: What I liked!

Thamhain emphasizes the importance of human interactions as critical to project execution. The manager sets the tone for the team through team attitude, effort, and commitment. All of which influences the team's effectiveness and overall performance. Thamhain found in his research that the strongest indicators of a project's success, was derived from within the work itself. As team members take a personal interest in the project and derive satisfaction and pride from their work, they build a more unified project team. To maintain this behavior requires recognition of the team's accomplishments and continual challenges for individual growth.

His book also has a sizable section addressing risk. Although many of the organizational tools support early risk detection and management, only one-quarter of managers felt that they could have foreseen or prepared for events that impacted a project's performance. Thamhain blames part of this on time and budget pressures which put a premium on fixing problems only after they have impacted performance. Successful risk managers are involved with the larger social, technical, and economic factors of the enterprise's value and culture system. And because of that, they are able to effectively tackle risks early in the development cycle

Lastly, Thamhain looks at the proper management of conflict as critical to success as a project manager. He divides the conflict into three areas - team disagreements over the work, interpersonal conflicts, and conflicts with other organizations. Then, he asserts that the best way to deal with conflict is to anticipate issues - especially conflicts over schedule or costs. That makes it easier for organizations to collaborate on mutually beneficial solutions and prevents them from getting into uglier types of conflict like forcing or withdrawing.

Who might benefit from the Book?

This might be most useful for technology project managers who are studying the PMBOK. This is a nice supplement to PMP study materials. However, there is a lot of repetition for existing PMP members looking at this as a stand-alone text on managing technology-based projects.

Conclusion

I am glad that I read the book and feel like it was useful. However, it is not very deep on the technology aspect of things. I would have preferred more guidance on project

estimation. Also, additional information on what makes managing technical teams different would have been very useful.

Although Thamhain started each chapter with a case study, the rest of the book read like a scholarly journal. Often, the discussion was high-level and lacked specific details. Since it is a book on technology-based projects, I had hoped for more items on managing software development teams. However, most of the advice is broad and applicable to almost any industry. Even though Thamhain has three chapters devoted to technical teams, it read like a restatement of points served up earlier in the book and lacked specifics.

For more about this book, go to <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470402547.html>

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About the Reviewer



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Christopher Frost, MBA, PMP, works for Columbia Advisory Group as a Senior Consultant and is currently the Director of Student Information Systems for Texas A&M - Commerce. He is also a charter member of the TCC Leadership Council and resides in Richardson, Texas with his family.

Although currently active in higher education, Chris has worked with a number of Fortune 100 companies including UPS, Verizon, and American Airlines. With more than 15 years of experience in Information Technology, Chris has been active in dozens of projects involving enterprise databases, business intelligence, and web-related projects.

In addition to his PMP certification, Chris is both an Oracle Certified Professional and a Microsoft Certified Professional. He has authored a book on Android and spoken at several higher education conferences as a technical expert.

In his free time, Chris volunteers with the PMI Dallas chapter, the Soupmobile, and is on the board of the Dallas Oracle Users Group. He also is passionate about staying fit and recently completed his first half marathon.

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