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From Projects to Programs
Author: *Samir Penkar*
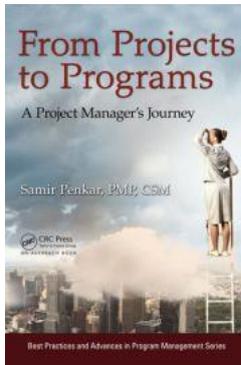Book Review   Reviewer: Chris Wright

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: ***From Projects to Programs: A Project Manager's Journey***

Author: **Samir Penkar, PMP**

Publisher: *CRC Press*

List Price: $34.97   **Format:** e-book

Publication Date: *09/2013*   **ISBN:** 9781466591813

Reviewer: **Chris Wright**   **Review Date:** June 2015

Introduction

Life is full of journeys, some planned and some unexpected. With luck, one can find the marks of a previous traveler, and learn from their experience. Knowing which dangers to avoid, which places are a must-see, and where the best dining is can make all the difference between a pleasant vacation, and a disastrous trip.

In this book, Penkar lays out a fine example of how to undertake the career move from managing projects to managing programs.

Overview of Book's Structure

The overall concept of the book is to tell the story of a young project manager who has been placed into the position of program manager. She has to grow into the role, dealing with new expectations and gain an understanding of what it means to be a program manager.

The idea serves as a platform for basic terms to be explained, ideas to be explored, and as she travels down this path, the reader is engagingly educated as well.

A real treasure awaits at the end, as when the story is done the appendices hold interviews with project managers, a primer for Agile development, and further details of program management.

Highlights

As a new program manager struggling with the differences between her previous experience as a project manager, the protagonist zeroes in on three main domains: governance and oversight, benefits focused, and integration management. As she struggles to learn how to manage each of these at a higher level, the reader gains the benefits of her experience.

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As an example, she shares an exasperation with "bloated governance bodies with a czar-like demand for unnecessary documentation and not enough accountability or transparency" which many managers have encountered, and learns to bring to bear an appropriate level of governance.

She also struggles with understanding how to focus on benefits, a concern that's not usually part of project management. As a project manager, the shareholders are responsible for the benefits of the project, and the manager just brings it in on time, under budget, with a appropriate quality. As a program manager, it's important to focus on what benefits are to be gained, and how to objectively measure those benefits. This is an entirely new level of management to most project managers.

Another example of focus is the importance of the timeline, "An integral element of a roadmap is some sense of a timeline, and, in order to get to a timeline, we need to understand project schedules for the various program components. … Getting to a timeline prematurely can lead to a host of new challenges. Yet, at times, it is by far the most influential component that can propel people into action." Excellent advice for any manager who's encountering people reluctant to begin!

Highlights: What I liked!

As an added bonus, the author interviews Program Managers in the appendices. This makes a nice addition to the fictional tale of the young program manager, by bringing in the very real world experience of people who have walked this trail.

These include Krissy Wolle, a PgMP certified program manager with more than 20 years of experience, who offers insights on how to begin the journey, what to do on the way, and even some suggestions on certifications as well as the world's first PgMP (Program Management Professional), Brian Grafsgaard, and several others.

Who might benefit from the Book

Anyone who is interested in project or program management, especially someone who might be considering transitioning, or simply wondering about possible career development should consider adding this book to their travel bag. As amazing and rewarding as it is to be a project manager, it's good to know what other challenges lurk out there, and what missteps to avoid.

Conclusion

At just 129 pages, this book is light on words, but high on content. An interesting story, excellent lessons, informed metaphors and useful graphics (who would have thought of an infographic for program status?) all make this a worthwhile read.

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For more about this book, go to: https://www.crcpress.com/From-Projects-to-Programs-A-Project-Managers-Journey/Penkar/9781466591813

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About the Reviewer

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During his time at Brainspace, a pioneer in machine learning technology that extracts meaning from unstructured text, Chris has worn many hats – project manager, QA, documentation and lead customer support. He also teaches communication, leadership and personal development to grade school and high school children on Saturdays with thinkandspeakup.com.

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