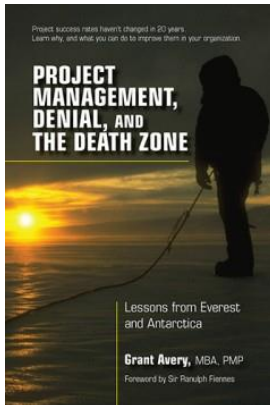


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Project Management, Denial, and the Death Zone***

Author: **Grant Avery**

Publisher: J. Ross Publishing

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Reviewer: **Jan Watson, MBA, PMP**

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Introduction

Good planning, good experience, and good judgment are always valuable but they are critical if the project is extremely complex and hopelessly ambitious. The book looks at lessons learned from Everest and Antarctica successes and struggles and applies the lessons to business today to improve project success rates.

Using the CORA triangle, the book looks at capabilities of delivering, outcomes maximizing, and managing risk appetite to help us deal with risks and improve results.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is composed of 13 Chapters and the 14th chapter is the Epilogue. Real life stories (from mountain climbers to organizational projects) are shared to make the lessons easier to understand, interesting, and memorable.

Read the Introduction to understand the background why the book was written and get a sense of what inspired the book. Experts contributed epigraphs in each of the chapters. Key literature references are added to learn more on key topics. WAV web added value is available for multi-factor tables to test for high risk propensity. Examples from Everest and Antarctica to ICT-EB projects examine how risk appetite, leadership, and complexity impact success or failure.

Highlights

The book looks at risks and constancy of failure due to climbing higher not safer. Everest climbers' failure and death remain constant even with better tools due to higher risk taking to maximizing outcomes at the cost of sacrificing personal comfort. Risk homeostasis occurs when we become comfortable to the amount of risk we are exposed to, then we increase actions that result in higher risks. Risk homeostasis also occurs when we become uncomfortable to the amount of risk we are exposed to so that we decrease actions that result in higher risks. *Normal narcissism* and

Shadow of the Leader principles are drivers of risk appetite and affect decision making.

Denial is a big cause in adding risk to projects. The *Death Zone* occurs when ambitions exceed capabilities excessively, resulting in high failure rates. Risk mitigation judgment is used to avoid failure, winning out over greater outcomes at too high a cost. The CORA (capabilities, outcomes, and risk appetite) triangle model emphasizes managing all three elements for improving the chances for project success.

Level-3 organization maturity is needed for planning structures and processes in order to successfully deliver complex projects. The book provides high-return advice on how to achieve Level-3 maturity, including a test for the success factors.

Heroic leadership is key to success in Level-3 organizations, and the heroic skills sets are demonstrated by real life stories. Ten complexity factors can be used to estimate complexity of projects and the importance of heroism to projects successes. Modern tools such as *business cases*, *quality assurance*, *advanced basics* high return tips should be used to improve complex project success. The misaligned circle of project management ethos and poor leadership fit can result in high-risk conflicts. Servant leadership can produce strong outcomes in difficult and complex situations. The last chapter examines how intuition, self-awareness, metacognition, mindfulness, and *social pain* impacts how leaders approach projects. A seven-point table describes the ideal behaviors for leaders and managers of complex projects.

Highlights: What I liked!

I loved how the exciting stories from the high risk mountain top explorations demonstrated the CORA triangle (capabilities, outcomes, and risk appetite). Grant Avery then applied modern tools to business high-risk projects and led us down a path for improving project success.

Who might benefit from the Book

Project managers, organizational leaders, board members, and team players can all benefit from the valuable lessons to improve project success by understanding decisions that influence how projects are selected and implemented. Leadership skills and behaviors can positively or negatively influence outcomes in high-risk environments. There are principles shared from a wide variety of recognized organizations and highly regarded experts.

Conclusion

The book examines why project success rates have not improved much over the past 20 years, even though there have been modern tools developed that focus on delivering success. Risk homeostasis results in similar outcomes.

The CORA triangle (capabilities, outcomes, and risk appetite) focuses on achieving balancing in managing high risk complex projects and change.

The book examines how to deal with the circle of project ethos and organizational factors that create risks. Skills and behaviors for leaders and managers are identified to reduce project failure.

For more about this book, go to: <http://www.jrosspub.com/project-management-denial-and-the-death-zone.html>

Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the publisher, PM World and the [PMI Dallas Chapter](#). Authors and 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. PMI Dallas Chapter members can keep the books as well as claim PDUs for PMP recertification when their reviews are published. 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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Jan Watson is a strategically-minded difference maker who improves business results through people, technology, proven LEAN Six Sigma DMAIC process (Design, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) and full project life cycle management utilizing Project Management Institute – PMBOK, Scrum, and Agile methods. She is a passionate senior project manager who blends solid planning, communication, leadership, and organization skills with proven consulting skills to achieve throughput objectives. Jan is a successful researcher and strategist focused on leveraging new processes and innovative thinking to champion oversight and monitoring of projects; leverage positive work relationships to foster high performing teams and unite senior management on objectives; and identify areas of opportunity and streamline processes to provide the highest level of service to customers at 100% client satisfaction. She is a strong Change Agent, using Kotter and other methods with adoption and realization.

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