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Project Management, Denial and the Death Zone
Author: Grant Avery
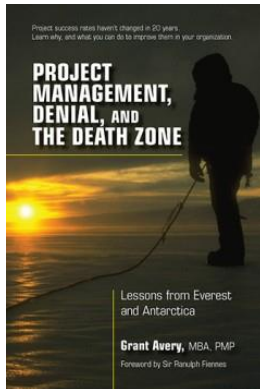Book Review   Reviewer: Sara Piracha

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

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

Author: **Grant Avery**

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Reviewer: Sara Piracha, PMP Review Date: January 2016

Introduction

Project Management, Denial, and the Death Zone is an excellent publication that focuses on the outcomes of information and communication technology (ICT) enabled business (ICT-EB) projects. Plenty of books are published every year about project management, some focus on PMI framework while others are geared towards industry specific projects.

What sets this book apart is that it examines a subject not reviewed often enough. With all the framework that has been established to help practitioners manage their projects better in addition to the new tools that are now available, why are our projects failing at the same rate they were 20 years ago? Where is our focus and why are we not seizing opportunities to reduce these failures? The author has spent a significant amount of time exploring the Arctic and uses his own and the experiences of others to help readers recognize the importance of accomplishing goals safely and wisely.

The introduction of the book communicates the author's intent to make the material interesting and instructional at the same time. This beautifully sets the stage for the discussion that follows in the succeeding chapters.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is very organized and provides a chapter-by-chapter summary in the introduction. This provides preview of the entire book but gives away highlights of the following chapters prematurely.

Chapters 1 and 2 explain risk and how it is mishandled. The key is to understand that despite all efforts to minimize risk, it will always exist no matter what. The author comprehensively explains that even with more knowledge and information, good judgement is the key to survival in unpredictable environments.

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In Chapters 3-6, author combines educational and anecdotal approach to keep the content interesting. CORA triangle is one of the main takeaways from these chapters along with the understanding of risk appetite and its effective management. Risk homeostasis theory explains our level of comfort that fuels our risk appetites. The acceptability of risk to a healthy or unhealthy extent is what signs the fate of our professional and personal endeavors.

Impact of narcissism and other personal traits impact the choices made by a leader sometimes resulting in denial. Some of us have greater risk appetites than others depending on our unique experiences and goals. Chapter 7-9 emphasize that recognition of projects operating in the death zone is essential for saving them. Denial and comfort in the death zone are dangerous behaviors. List of factors that can assess if a project is operating in the death zone is a very helpful tool for quickly determining the state of the project. Often, denial is what kills a project because risks and signs of failures are ignored due to an ambitious leader's belief that my project is indestructible. This topic flows into Chapter 9 that is aimed at educating individuals and organizations and teaching them how to handle complex projects with maturity.

The last four chapters that are followed by an epilogue focus equally on two areas: the use of modern techniques to manage project complexity and the importance of choosing the right leader to manage projects. It is without a doubt very important to keep up to date with the latest tools and techniques that continue to evolve constantly. Preparing business cases, completing quantitative risk analysis and incorporating independent quality reviews are all vital steps in the management of complex projects.

The selection of the right project manager is essential because complex projects require leaders with heroic qualities. Knowing and practicing the art of servant leadership is a highly desirable characteristic in a project manager. Having the right person to lead a project is paramount because influential leaders create cohesive and motivated teams. These teams give their absolute best to the project.

Highlights

The highlight of the book for me was the revelation that despite having more knowledge, people act negligently. Instead of treasuring the wisdom available to us from past experiences, we make choices that subject us to more risk and therefore, unconsciously increase the chances of failure. Being aware of this propensity will definitely assist me in becoming more self-observant and making careful choices. Our goal should not be to accomplish more, but to accomplish more wisely and cautiously.

Highlights: What I liked!

I particularly liked the checklists at the end of certain chapters. These checklists serve as a quick test for the reader to determine if specific conditions are present in their projects. For example, being able to determine if a certain extent of denial is present in gauging the project performance can save it from moving irreversibly in

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the wrong direction. Similarly, knowing and recognizing the symptoms of a project operating in the death zone, is key to preventing it from becoming a total fiasco.

Another noteworthy accomplishment of this book is the balance between instructional material and the use of examples that support it. The content is divided sensibly and covers all necessary topics in detail. With our strict focus on maximizing output, our priorities are not always what they should be. The example of David Sharp in this context will touch every reader's heart.

Who might benefit from the Book

Organizations that are striving to reach P3 level maturity and corporations that routinely launch large scale projects will definitely benefit from the content of this book. Anyone specializing in risk management will also find the information very useful. This book recommends use of ideas that can lead to success in personal and professional life.

Conclusion

Reading and reviewing this book has been enjoyable and thought-provoking. Most literature in the area of risk management is designed to be technically rich and fulfills the needs of professionals and organizations. This book, on the other hand, is written for anyone who wants to be more aware of the reasons behind their success and failures regardless of their background. The advice is simple, realistic and easy to apply. This book is a must read.

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 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@pmworldjournal.net.

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About the Reviewer

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Sara Piracha, PMP has worked as a project manager and senior analyst for several Fortune 500 companies. In her past roles, she has served in various industries including Aerospace, Transportation and Banking. She has an extensive background in finance and accounting. Her project management experience includes a variety of areas ranging from software implementation to auditing and compliance. She is a member of several professional organizations such as the Project Management Institute and Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants. She can be contacted at sarapiracha@hotmail.com