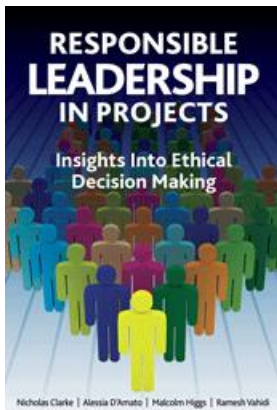# PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: ***Responsible Leadership in Projects: Insights Into Ethical Decision Making***

Author: **Clarke, D'Amato, Higgs & Vahidi**

Publisher: Project Management Institute

List Price: $24.95   Format: Soft cover, 150 pages

Publication Date: 2018   ISBN: 978-1-62825-476-1

Reviewer: **Shawn Waghorn**

Review Date: March 2018

Introduction

A snapshot look into how those who serve as project leaders can use their experience to respond to ethic problems within the project world. Team members and stakeholders often do not realize how their behavior affects the project and those affected by the project. The authors conducted a 12-month study to learn about inter-relationships among conflict, ethical issues and decision making as they observed an organization transform a massive transformational change in the United Kingdom.

The authors conducted interviews with several members of the project team to include the project manager, the project sponsor and several subject matter experts as they worked through the change process within this organization. This study is fascinating as it takes us through a yearlong observation and learning experience with the project team as they struggle to make decisions on how to reduce the employee population as the company transitions into a new business model.

Overview of Book's Structure

This 150 page book is broken down into 13 chapters. It starts by taking a quick look at previous research done on similar subjects to establish a basis for comparison. It also starts by describing the organizational culture, which in this case was "paternalistic" and "caring". The book is laid out nicely as it takes the reader through the study in a way that is easy to follow and logical as it flows from introduction to conclusion

The authors clearly establish enablers and constraints as they observe the selected organization for a year. The interviews with subject matter experts provide practical and relatable experiences for almost any project manager. The authors clearly describe the dilemma they observed as the project team in the United Kingdom struggled to make ethical and responsible decisions throughout the course of a year.

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Highlights

The business transformation required potentially major changes, such as laying off employees or offering the employees a new job in a different area. The company wanted to change the business model and work towards making a profit, which required a study to decide where efficiencies could be made. One area in particular was cutting out insurance sales people who could offer discounts on life insurance policies, a clear reason why the company was not making a profit. Insurance sales people were allowed to offer incentives to customers who had been using this firm for multiples years.

The major highlight of this book is the exclusive interviews with project team members as they face daily struggles to make decisions. The interviews take a harsh look at how project team members, who were made up of employees from within the company looking to downsize, felt about making life-changing decisions to lay off employees.

It is fascinating to get the inside story on how project team members felt about revealing information about possible loss of jobs to people they had worked with for many years. The authors clearly observe the forming and storming phase of the team as they struggle to understand what they need to accomplish and the struggles they encounter as they realize the long-term impact they can have on people's lives.

Highlights: What I liked!

The subject matter interviews were quite fascinating. It was interesting to watch and read how subject matters moved through this project process. Initially, they knew what the company needed to do (cut staff and use technology to help make a profit), but as they go through this year long process, the ethical dilemmas comes to life. It was interesting to read the perspective of the team members who did not want to notify people who might be at risk of losing their jobs. They justify their decision and actions by placing themselves in the shoes of those who may need to start looking for a new career.

It was also interesting to read about the project manager, who was brought in from outside of the company, and how he dealt with the team as the moved through the project. The team was co-located away from the business to help team members move through the process. This book also looks at how open discussions among team members can clearly establish transparency.

Who might benefit from the Book?

This book might benefit project managers facing a consensus building issue. Many different thoughts and insights are provided by the authors as they work through four major issues in this study. Anybody who feels they may be facing an ethical dilemma may also benefit from this book. This research feels new and provides recent

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experience regarding ethical issues and the factors that influence decisions within a diverse organization.

Additionally, any project managers facing past change management failure could reap rewards from this book. The case of needing to reduce the number of employees to help increase profit takes a look how the change management process can work. The insight from subject matter experts is fascinating as the reader gains critical perspective from team members who must help decide whether or not to cut jobs.

The authors look at projects through a "sensemaking perspective" which seeks to understand the organizational culture and its role in projects. There is a need to focus on relationships to build trust as they move through projects, especially those that affect many of the employees within the organization.

Conclusion

This book is a bit tough to read within the first few pages. However, once the authors start to describe the study and the research they have obtained, the book becomes fascinatingly interesting. Clearly, the authors establish the need for responsible leadership plays an important role in managing large and complex projects.

Project managers may or may not realize how moving forward with a "sensemaking approach" enhances understanding on dilemmas and the decisions that must be made when such dilemmas exist. Many project managers can benefit from reading on how this experience affected members of the project team as they initially did not realize the impact their decisions would have on others within the organization. The perspective provided from project team members is quite insightful and gives the reader a difference idea of how project decisions, dilemmas and ethical issues affect the project overall.

For more about this book, go to:
http://marketplace.pmi.org/Pages/ProductDetail.aspx?GMProduct=00101606601

Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the publisher, PM World and the PMI Alamo Chapter. Authors and publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Alamo 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 Alamo 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@pmworldjournal.net.

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About the Reviewer

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Shawn Waghorn is a recently retired Air Force member with 10+ years of project management experience. Currently Shawn works as a Program Manager within the Department of Defense, working on web-based applications to improve customer (military members) ability to quickly locate personal information, such as new assignment information, retirement eligibility, personal data for promotion boards and information regarding personal finances.