PM World *Journal*
Vol. VII, Issue VII – July 2018
www.pmworldjournal.net

Responsible Leadership in Projects
Authors: Clarke, D'Amato, Higgs, Vahidi
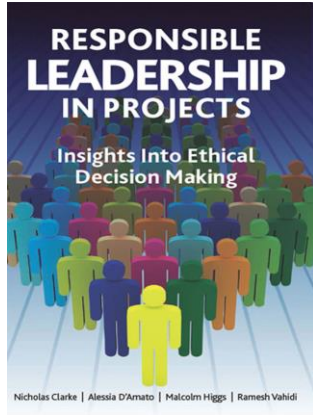Book Review   Reviewer: John Poulos

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

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

Authors: Nicholas Clarke, Alessia D'Amato, Malcolm Higgs, Ramesh Vahidi

Publisher: PMI

List Price: $24.95   Format: Paperback, 150 pages

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

Reviewer: John Poulos, PMP   Review Date: May 2018

Introduction

The authors – Nicholas Clarke, Alessia D'Amato, Malcolm Higgs and Ramesh Vahidi, professors and researchers in human resource management, organizational behavior and project management – present the results of a PMI-funded research study focused on responsible leadership and ethical decision making.

As sustainability and an interconnected business world are growing concerns of leaders, the need for corporate social responsibility and the ethical practice of project management are drawing increasing attention. These factors underpin the concept of responsible leadership. The authors note the paucity of empirical research in this area, and are seeking to contribute to the understanding of ethical decision making and how it can better inform the development of project managers. This qualitative study explores the ethical issues faced by project managers as they interact with team members and stakeholders – and how ethical decision making occurs - in the context of four individual projects undertaken in a major insurance company in the UK.

Overview of Book's Structure

Chapters 1-2 provide an introduction, background and context for the research effort.

Chapters 3-5 provide a review of the literature on the foundational concepts of Responsible Leadership, Ethics in Project Management and Ethical Decision Making.

Chapter 6 describes the design of the research project and the approach followed to analyze the resulting data.

PM World *Journal*
Vol. VII, Issue VII – July 2018
www.pmworldjournal.net
Book Review

Responsible Leadership in Projects
Authors: Clarke, D'Amato, Higgs, Vahidi
Reviewer: John Poulos

Chapter 7 details the findings within each of four project case studies that form the basis for research findings and insights.

Chapter 8 discusses findings and analysis of the four case studies in the context of ethics and responsible leadership.

Chapter 9 summarizes key findings and conclusions, and outlines contributions to both study and practice.

Highlights

The need for responsible leadership and ethical decision making is widely recognized in the corporate world as well as the project management community. To illustrate, the authors cite a poll conducted in Europe and the US that found that between 65% and 81% of adults considered the behavior of their business leaders unethical or irresponsible.

The authors present the results and insights obtained from a qualitative study that examined over a 12 month period four particular projects conducted at a major UK insurance company. The research looked into how project members engage in ethical decision making. The projects and their associated ethical dilemmas were as follows:

- Alpha Project: New technology platforms essential to restore/enhance profitability of the life division but with staff reduction consequences. To what extent and when should staff be informed of likely impact?

- Beta Project: New target operating model to improve competitiveness of the property and casualty division, but with restructuring and job loss implications. How to adhere to the company philosophy of "fair and accurate pricing" while enhancing profitability; additionally, when to inform staff about jobs at risk.

- Gamma Project: Modernize the company's counter-fraud intelligence system. Conflicting needs, expectations and priorities of the three system end user business areas; additionally, conflicting team roles of key project team members.

- Delta Project: Restructuring the telephony system supporting sales to the customer. Selection of the appropriate partner to supply the telephony services while responding to time and cost pressures on the project.

The results challenge prevailing cognitive, rationalist models of ethical decision making built on absolute moral standards and a somewhat rigid sequential process to arrive at decisions. Instead, they suggest that ethical decision making is a dynamic process where individuals negotiate and make sense of moral situations with key stakeholders.

Organizational culture and consensus building among stakeholders are key elements supporting this more intuitive "sensemaking" approach.

Highlights: What I liked!

I appreciated the authors' perspective as they recognize that rational logic provides insufficient support for ethical decision making in real environments governed by uncertainty and broader stakeholder scope boundaries. Instead, their research results suggest that we reach these decisions relying more on intuition, the backdrop of organizational culture and an understanding of issues and dilemmas that evolves during the course of a project.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Aside from other researchers in the field, this book reveals research findings and conclusions that can serve the project management community. In particular, individual project managers, program management office (PMO) functions, and corporate units responsible for leadership development can derive insights into how to address ethical dilemmas more deliberately and effectively, particularly in the context of project management.

Conclusion

The research described in this book supports the notion that employing a sensemaking perspective provides a more effective lens than rational models to explore ethical decision making within uncertain and ambiguous contexts. The outcome of this research is intended to inform the development of project managers' understanding of approaches to handling ethical dilemmas and decision making. It highlights the value of expending significant effort on stakeholder engagement and management, as well as the importance of organizational culture in framing decision making and resolving ethical dilemmas.

For more about this book, go to
https://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 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@pmworldjournal.net.

PM World *Journal*
Vol. VII, Issue VII – July 2018
www.pmworldjournal.net

Responsible Leadership in Projects
Authors: Clarke, D'Amato, Higgs, Vahidi
Book Review   Reviewer: John Poulos

About the Reviewer

John Poulos, PMP

Chile, USA

John Poulos has over thirty years of experience providing guidance on the effective use of information technology while delivering business-driven, technology-based solutions to a wide range of private and public sector organizations. In his current position as Senior Director of Infrastructure, Cloud and Security at NTT DATA Services, he manages strategic projects for NTT DATA/ICS leadership. In addition, he delivers infrastructure and IT strategy consulting services to corporate and government clients.

He is currently leading a global project to migrate 30,000 employees of a company recently acquired by NTT DATA from their original end-user computing environment to the standard NTT DATA PC image and SW configuration. In prior positions, John provided IT consulting services across various industries and geographical regions. He managed complex projects for clients in private enterprise, higher education and government. John holds E.E. and Engineering Management degrees from Southern Methodist University, MIT, and The George Washington University.

Email address: jpoulos539@gmail.com