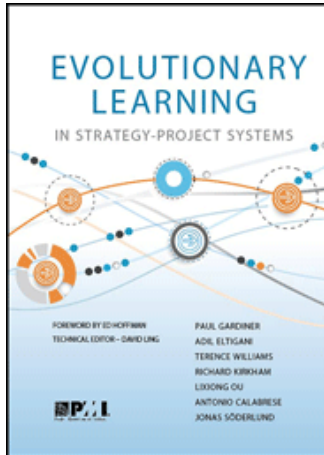


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***EVOLUTIONARY LEARNING in STRATEGY-PROJECT SYSTEMS***

Authors: Paul Gardiner, Adil Eltigani, Terence Williams, Richard Kirkham, Lixiong Ou, Antonio Calabrese, Jonas Soderlund.

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Reviewer: **Jorge Galvan, PMP** Review Date: July, 2018

Introduction

This book is an international research project sponsored by the PMI. The research was first envisioned during an event organized by an oil and gas company in United Arab Emirates where one of the authors of the book was invited as a speaker to help the company to learn how to do projects better.

The research takes on the challenge to explore and understand how learning takes place in project-based organizations. Such organizations are chosen to be of different size and project-based maturity as well as located in different countries with different cultures.

The authors try to find out how learning and knowledge is acquired and used during projects and how they can lead to “Evolutionary Learning” in those enterprises, they call for an integration of traditional project management with other disciplines of an organization especially strategic management. With this in mind the authors focus this research on learning evolution within strategy-project systems (project management and strategic management) in an organization and how this evolutionary Learning together with existing organizational capabilities contributes to a sustained growth of the organization by adding value by creating new capabilities.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The structure of the book is very formal as of any research document. It starts with a forward, where a former Chief Knowledge Officer at NASA gives some insights about how knowledge and learning takes place in NASA and calls for a more direct link between theory and practice. NASA’s most successful knowledge-sharing strategy is

by the use of forums where people share stories and conversations so in order to be able to accomplish this, the CKO states that there must be a suitable landscape where the learning, knowledge and the sharing of them can flow smoothly, such landscape must have full leadership support as well as a flexible governance framework

Chapter 1 is an introduction where the authors tell us about how the research started and what motivated it. Here they search for ways to understand the mechanisms by which evolutionary learning takes place in strategy-project systems and how it contributes towards a sustainable competitive advantage of an organization.

Chapter 2 covers an overview of the literature on project management and different theories on learning and knowledge management that build the basis for evolutionary learning. There is discussion whether project management satisfies the conditions to be considered a strategic resource in an organization. Here they develop the organizational construct of the strategy-project system. This chapter contains all the literature references used to shape how evolutionary learning and knowledge management can be used in project management to create new capabilities in an organization to sustain competitive advantage.

Chapter 3 is a Pilot Study performed with the idea to test the initial methodology of the research and to establish a conceptual framework. This pilot study was performed on few organizations on three different sectors of the industry by means of interviews using semi-structured questionnaires. Main focus of the Pilot study is to explore how learning and knowledge is developed inside different types of organizations and how it promotes if any development of capabilities.

Chapter 4 refines the conceptual framework from where the research is based. From pilot study the research shows that such framework must be built from a practice perspective and thus it is composed of 2 parts: The “Structure” part which consists of the rules, resources and organizational capabilities (dynamic capabilities) and the actual practice part named “Activity Configurations” that are the human actions within the system.

Chapter 5 deals with the methodology used for the research, including the selection of organizations and the people to interview as well as the types of questionnaires and the tools and instruments to use. Here it is specified how the data was recorded and analyzed.

Chapter 6 brings the results post data analysis. Different modes of learning are identified from the analysis and the emergence of capabilities as a result of these learning modes. The analysis resulted in 13 learning modes being used, and additional findings from the analysis (after cross checking these modes of learning with the type of organization) seemed to show a pattern of how the learning process takes place depending on the project-based maturity of the organization, being the most mature enterprises the ones that use more variety of modes of learning and promote a sustainability capability creation.

Chapter 7 is a discussion of the 13 learning modes identified during the research as well as 2 new modes that emerged as meta-capability analysis of the learning itself. Different topics are discussed in here that relate to the findings of the research.

Last Chapter 8 is the Conclusions and implications of the findings, the authors point out the extend of this research is limited so more research needs to be done on the matter and thus encourage knowledge management practitioners and scholars to do further research on it.

Highlights

As a research document the book is not that easy to follow at first since lots of literature remarks are inserted in the chapters and more specifically in the “Literature Review”. Also, for the beginner in project management the use of acronyms and concepts are somewhat elevated. As the lecture advances there is more rewarding understanding and encouragement to finish the book.

The topic “Evolutionary Learning” is of great interest for people and more specifically for organization that strive for survival in a world full of fierce competition and constant change triggered by the speed at which technology advances. Evolutionary learning can be seen as a capability of an organization for adding value by creating new capabilities and opportunities for enterprises while providing full support for competitive advantage.

The findings from the research gives us a good understanding on how enterprises build and act on their dynamic capabilities and what they can do in terms of learning and knowledge management to remain competitive. Even though the research is done in only 23 organizations, they were chosen to be so diverse in terms of size, industry, project-based maturity, culture and context so that they could somewhat generalize the findings from such diverse sample. Still, one could not generalize a hundred percent as it is the case of much of research done in any field.

This research shows by cross-checking different modes of learning are associated with project-based maturity of organizations and thus serves as a guide for organizations to implement new learning capabilities in order to sustain competitive advantage.

The integration of project management with strategic management on a so called “strategy-project system” seems to be a natural path for the evolution of project management. Interesting in the book is the suggestion to update project management bodies of knowledge with new processes and roles specifically for learning activities during a project life cycle.

Highlights: What I liked!

I liked very much how a research on a subjective concept such as learning can be carried on.

As can be seen in the research the methodology is as simple as interviews but with a huge background understanding of what needs to be asked, from whom and where as well as the creation of knowledge and a learning concept model in a strategy-project system from a theory-practice and practice-theory perspectives.

Also, I very much enjoyed the different modes of learning identified during the research and how it seems to show a pattern between modes of learning and the project-management maturity of the organization.

Two concepts that I pay much attention to are “dynamic capabilities” and “resilience” of an organization. I am interested in those topics since I pretty much enjoy risk management activities during a project and both concepts are closely related to it.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Anybody can benefit from this book but I should warn that it is not an easy lecture as it is a research document and one might feel disappointed during the first 2 chapters. Afterwards the lecture is much clearer and enjoyable.

Researchers and students in the field would benefit from the book, also organizations willing to take a look at their dynamic capabilities and learning and knowledge management structures they have currently in place and analyze their competitive advantage. Should they find gaps in their learning and knowledge management areas they might need to redefine their strategies and this lecture would for sure be a good start.

Conclusion

This research is an interesting entry point towards the much unexplored field of learning and knowledge management.

It seems that most organizations don't have processes in place for good knowledge management and learning processes, but as modern project management practices such as agile are taking place to cope with a much more demanding and competitive world there seems to be a need to consider project management as a strategic asset of any organization and by promoting different and efficient learning practices and knowledge sharing processes enterprises position themselves in a competitive advantage by increasing their dynamic capabilities.

Identifying different types of learning inside an enterprise and tailor them according to their maturity and needs provides competitive advantage and sustained growth.

Seeing project management as a strategic resource that adds value to an organization and contributes to the creation of capabilities through the learning and knowledge management inherent to the project is a discipline that needs to be explored deeper.

Evolutionary learning serves as means to build resilience in an organization.

For more about this book, go to:

<https://marketplace.pmi.org/Pages/ProductDetail.aspx?GMProduct=00101612301>

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. 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.

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Jorge Galvan has extensive experience in the telecom industry working as a software, hardware and infrastructure Engineer for both Core and Radio systems. He has a bachelor's degree in Telecommunications and Electronics Engineering with a minor in Control. He has over 10 years of experience working with projects in different parts of the world and performing different roles such as project team member or technical engineer, as well as project coordinator and SME.

Extensive experience includes different phases of software development projects from feasibility to testing and deployment. Jorge is a member of the Project Management Institute, Dallas Chapter and obtained his PMP certification from PMI in July 2016. He can be contacted at iamJorgeGalvan@gmail.com.