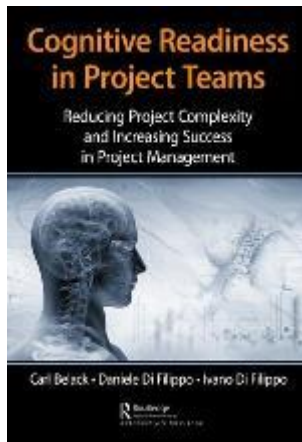


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Cognitive Readiness in Project Teams: Reducing Project Complexity and Increasing Success in Project Management***

Author: **Carl Belack, Daniele Di Filippo, Ivano Di Filippo**

Publisher: Routledge/Productivity Press

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Reviewer: **Susan E. Slawson, PhD**

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Introduction

The challenges that businesses face are increasingly complex. We have gone from simple and then complicated systems to the next level: complex systems. Most of the current approaches to project management are based on Newtonian/Cartesian principles, which work well for simple and even complicated projects. This book discusses a method of combining these principles and adding a neuroscience-based approach to human behavior and ambiguity to address complex systems using cognitive readiness.

Cognitive readiness was first developed by the US Department of Defense; its purpose was to train and develop leaders who were more focused, adaptive and responsive to changing battlefield conditions. *Cognitive Readiness in Project Teams: Reducing Project Complexity and Increasing Success in Project Management* explains a way to apply these principles to complex systems/projects in business. The goal is to reduce project complexity and increase the likelihood of project success.

Overview of Book's Structure

This book is a collection of chapters written by experts in fields such as project management, cognitive neuroscience and psychology, emotional and social intelligence, and mindfulness. Chapters range from complexity in projects, cognitive readiness, bias, mindfulness that leads to action, and emotional and social intelligence.

There are a significant number of resources (books, papers, studies, etc.) which are used to support the conclusions of the authors. This is, however, not an academic treatise; it is written so that it is easily understood by project managers and project

teams. The supporting research strengthens the conclusions of the authors about the benefits of cognitive readiness.

Highlights

The authors explain the need for a new approach to handle increasingly complex projects. Simple and even complicated systems follow Newtonian and Cartesian logic; they are linear and the results are relatively predictable. More and more projects are now complex systems.

There is no universal definition of what a complex system is. However, it is generally accepted that a complex system is composed of many components which may interact with each other. Their behavior is difficult to model due to the many different types of inherent interactions, such as nonlinearity, emergence, spontaneous order, and feedback loops. Complex systems tend to be dynamic, chaotic and have far less predictable results and are governed by quantum mechanics. Cognitive readiness is introduced as an approach to address the complexity and increase the success rate for complex projects.

According to the authors, cognitive readiness “involves understanding and maximizing human behavioral outcomes.” Therefore, cognitive readiness is focused on leadership and soft skills. The Project Management Institute (PMI) has identified leadership as one of the three key skills sets that are part of the PMI Talent Triangle. Several studies cited by the authors identified that leadership skills are now the most important skills for project managers. The focus for this book is on three pillars: mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence.

Highlights: What I liked!

The three pillars discussed in the book may not be what the reader expects. For instance, mindfulness is not part of a religion nor does it entail going somewhere quiet and emptying one’s mind of all thought. Instead, it is “through the act of focusing that one begins to know one’s thoughts, feelings and other sources of distraction.” Once these are acknowledged, one can more effectively return to the task at hand. Thus, mindfulness can help quiet the distractions so one can focus on the high priority issues and tasks.

An intentional change process (from an article in the Consulting Psychology Journal) for affecting social and emotional intelligence is discussed. There are 5 phases: my ideal self, my real self, my personal learning agenda, experimenting and practicing, and trusting relationships. This framework can be used to take “into account the essential components of desirable, sustainable change in people’s behavior, thoughts, feeling, and perceptions.” Unlike IQ, which rarely changes, social and emotional intelligence can be developed and trained.

Who might benefit from the Book?

This book is good for both project managers and project team members. Those who work on complex projects will get more out of the research that the authors have performed. The information about mindfulness, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence are important for everyone, not just those working on projects. Cognitive readiness and complex projects have been discussed in other books but never in the approach and context that the authors have developed.

Conclusion

The topics in this book are only the beginning of the discussion around cognitive readiness, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence. There will be more investigative and quantifiable research to further the approaches that were brought up in this book.

It is interesting to note that there are organizations who have embraced the three pillars and have incorporated them into their daily activities and into mentoring and performance review programs. Further studies will need to be done to see whether the success rate of their projects has increased. Whether or not this evidence is found, soft skills are now replacing hard skills. This book provides a way to increase soft skills and leadership.

For more about this book, go to: <https://www.routledge.com/Cognitive-Readiness-in-Project-Teams-Reducing-Project-Complexity-and-Increasing/Belack-Filippo-Filippo/p/book/9780429490057>

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About the Reviewer



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Susan E. Slawson, PhD, PMP, CSM, is an IT project manager with a distinctive blend of people, process and technology skills. She is committed to developing others through coaching and mentoring to help them excel. Creating order out of chaos is one of her top talents and she loves being a brand ambassador – promoting businesses to their customers.

Susan received her PhD from Carnegie Mellon University and promptly entered the workforce in management consulting. She has a varied background, including starting her own company and working for multiple industries such as professional services, healthcare, telecom, energy, financial services and retail. She currently works for Aprima Medical Software, an eMDs company. Susan is on the Executive Board for the non-profit DFW Alliance of Technology and Women (ATW) and is a member of both the Dallas and Fort Worth PMI chapters.

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