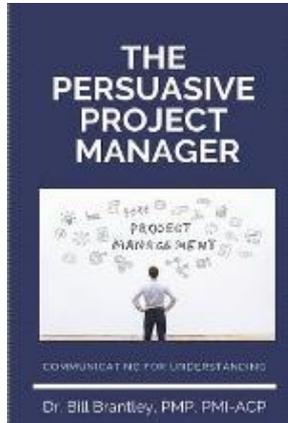


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## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***The Persuasive Project Manager: Communicating for Understanding***

Author: **Dr. Bill Brantley**, PMP, PMI-ACP

Publisher: Self-published

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### Introduction

Dr. Brantley describes why he wrote this book: “In my study of what makes good project management communication, I discovered something important early on. Even though it is widely recognized how important communication is in project management, project management practitioners are not taking advantage of the latest findings in communication research.” (p3)

He refers to his “lifelong quest to understand communication.” This quest is evident from the in-depth research he presents. Dr. Brantley has an undergraduate degree in Speech Communication and Paralegal Science, earned an MBA in Project Management in the 1990s, was certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP) in 2003, and has been a project management practitioner and scholar for twenty years.

### Overview of Book’s Structure

In Chapter One the author establishes that the purpose of communication is to understand and how understanding in communication contributes to the success of projects. “When things [click] together on a successful project, communication flows effortlessly, and no misunderstandings.” (p2) In Chapter Two he summarizes two long-standing models of communication that apply to project management and in Chapter Three parallels those models to Aristotle’s classic three elements of persuasion (ethos, pathos, logos).

Dr. Brantley refers to Chapter Four as the “core of the book.” He introduces Dr. W. Barnett Pearce’s *coordinated management of meaning* (CMM) theory (1970s). This practical application of the emergent communication model aids in better understanding communications between project team members and stakeholders. In

Chapter Five the author explores the vital role of a project manager as the hub in project information flow. He revisits the importance of basic information transfer in managing the complexity of a project's multiple communication channels, the volume of information being exchanged (and how to tell the story around it), and the risk of missing vital information in time.

In Chapters Six and Seven Dr. Brantley reminds the reader of the importance of cultural and emotional intelligence in project management and the importance of recognizing and considering cognitive biases when communicating project information.

Chapter Eight offers leadership models and tools to aid in addressing the added challenge as project work becomes more virtual and more leaders, team members, and/or stakeholders work remotely. In Chapter Nine, as Dr. Brantley highlights this increased understanding of project management communication, he suggests "The project manager is more than just a traditional manager; the project manager must become a leader." (p69). Chapter Ten is a summary of practical steps to being a persuasive project manager.

## Highlights

The Shannon-Weaver Model presents communication as *information transfer* (based on Claude Shannon's work as a Bell Labs researcher pioneering improvement of the telephone network). The Luhmann Model of *emergence* adds to the concept of information transfer the act of "understanding" and consideration of the process by which information is sent – "utterances." It recognizes the feedback loop whereby the sender and receiver interpret information based on individual knowledge and opinions. "Understanding comprises three components: know-what, know-how, and know-why." (p16) This is Luhmann's Communication Triad. The author goes on to parallel that triad to Aristotle's classic three elements of persuasion – ethos, pathos, and logos. Dr. Brantley loosely translates from the original Greek that ethos is the speaker's credibility and stage presence which builds the audience's trust, pathos is the emotional component of a persuasive message, and the logos persuades the audience.

One tool that illustrates *coordinated management of meaning* (CMM) is SEAVA. "SEAVA is an acronym for **S**toryboarding, **E**nriching, **A**nalyzing what holds the pattern together, **V**isioning preferred alternative patterns, and **A**cting intentionally." (p27) Storyboarding is a process to help participants in a crisis understand how their communications and actions led to the crisis. Enriching (understanding that participants' have varied social worlds), Analyzing, and Visioning, are key to establishing effective communication. Acting Intentionally results from identifying and agreeing on how to take action to bring about the desired communication patterns.

Cognitive biases can lead to organizational failure and can impede the decision-making process. Dr. Brantley notices a pattern that he refers to as his "general framework for project failure ... how failure occurs in organizations has three levels –

leadership, team, and organization. Surrounding the three levels are the organization's culture, communication methods, and accountability processes." (p55) He observes that failure can occur at three levels – leadership, team, and organization. These levels, influenced by organization's culture, communication methods, and accountability processes can help generate latent conditions. These latent conditions can build up over time to generate active failure.

### **Highlights: What I liked!**

As Project Leads and Project Managers we probably don't have to be reminded that we serve as the hub of information flow on a project.

What I've appreciated most as I've read Dr. Brantley's book is an opportunity to take the time to reflect on all that that means ... and to be guided by the breadth of the author's research, experience, and analysis / observations.

### **Who might benefit from the Book?**

This book will be beneficial to all project managers as well as to anyone in leadership roles. The insight Dr. Brantley's research and observations offers is definitely worth the 87-page read!

### **Conclusion**

In addition to sharing the breadth and depth of his studies, research, and career experience Dr. Brantley offers many tips, checklists, and tools throughout the book, which makes it a valuable reference resource. Thank you, Dr. Brantley, for sharing!

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For more about this book, go to: For more about this book, go to:

<https://billbrantley.com/books/> or [find it on Amazon here](#)

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## About the Reviewer



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**Mary Jane Quandt**, PMP has extensive contract and consulting experience as a Senior Project Management, specializing in IT application upgrade, IT Service Management (including ITIL), business process improvement, and IT Governance, Risk and Compliance (GRC) across multiple industries including banking, government, airline, utilities, manufacturing, logistics, electrical engineering, and direct sales.

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