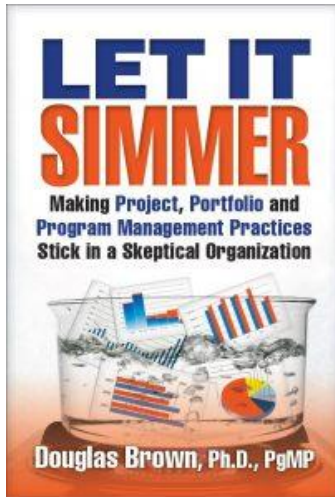


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## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***LET IT SIMMER: Making Project, Portfolio and Program Management Practices Stick in a Skeptical Organization***

Author: **Douglas M. Brown, Ph.D., PgMP®**

Publisher: Caltrop Press

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Reviewer: **Margaret Shoults, PMP**

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### Introduction

Rather than simply defining governance concepts, Dr. Brown leveraged his personal experience in different types of organizations to define an approach to standing up a governance process. *The Simmer System*<sup>SM</sup> focuses on a necessary shift of the organizational culture and establishment of working practices. Adoption of best practices is considered to be a future effort once a foundation is in place.

An underlying premise is the need to integrate *Project, Program and Portfolio Management (PPFM)*. Key components of a defined PPFM governance process include:

- A Governance Board, which provides oversight of all organizational investments, and
- The PPFM Office (PPFMO), which gathers data regarding each investment, facilitates the activities of the Governance Board, and assists projects as needed.

### Overview of Book's Structure

LET IT SIMMER presents a step-by-step approach to building a PPFM governance process. The book begins with a summary of the differences between *The Simmer System*<sup>SM</sup> and other approaches and an overview of the concepts that will be covered.

Chapter 1 explains the underlying set of five integrated components of the governance framework:

1. *Four guiding principles* to help maintain focus and avoid confusion: The Pasta Principle, Zero-Sum, Integrity, and Purposeful Humility;
2. *Seven sets of data* necessary for PPFM to operate effectively;
3. *Eight collaborative agreements* to enable build of a robust process;
4. *Build high-level support* that is necessary for success; and
5. *Operate a governance board* that will provide oversight.

Each chapter concludes with a practical exercise that enables the reader to consider and document how to apply the concepts just presented to the challenge at hand of establishing PPFM governance. The first exercise challenges the reader to envision the future PPFMO in their organization. Fast forwarding through the book, the last exercise focuses on measuring progress in the implementation of PPFM governance.

## Highlights

The comprehensive approach is divided into manageable components to define a governance process. A key component of the approach is gathering and analyzing existing information, such as organization charts, strategic plans, budgets, and projects/activities. Numerous templates are included that illustrate how the information may be consolidated to facilitate building the governance process.

Throughout the book, Dr. Brown shares lessons learned from his own experience in a variety of different types of organizations. The successful, and less successful, examples help the reader to understand some of the challenges that may be faced along the way and how such challenges might be addressed. Analogies throughout the book facilitate understanding a specific concept. Many of the analogies are related to cooking, but others are included, such as the seven “monsters” that can derail an effort to establish PPFM governance.

Dr. Brown’s thoughts regarding use of best practices are very clear: Introduction of best practices is not the best starting point for introduction of PPFM governance in an organization. Once a governance foundation is built, best practices should be considered.

## Highlights: What I liked!

*The Simmer System*<sup>SM</sup> presents a practical approach to the introduction of PPFM governance. There is no illusion that each step will be implemented without challenges or data gaps. It is also clear that project, program, and portfolio management must be integrated. Dr. Brown noted that “Results will vary based on the needs of your organization, its executives, your sponsors, staff (if any) and peer managers. And also, your ability to build relationships, a critical skill for any governance manager, and even more so with the collaborative aspects of *The Simmer System*<sup>SM</sup>.”

Key concepts that are the basis for successful implementation of a governance process include:

- Cooperation between managers and top management support are critical success factors to the organization reaching a point where governance operates effectively.  
*Note:* Suggestions are provided regarding the best way to reach the required level of cooperation based upon eight agreements.
- A signed charter for the PPFMO is required.  
*Note:* The PPFMO consolidates data provided by the projects and activities, providing the basis for the Governance Board to review and make decisions regarding each investment.
- Establishment of the Governance Board requires a signed charter and operating procedures, followed by training.  
*Note:* Only the Governance Board provides oversight.
- Operations within an organization requires resources and must be considered when project resourcing decisions are made by the Governance Board.  
*Note:* Operations is treated as a single activity that requires resources. Resources for each project are tracked separately.
- Change is difficult.  
*Note:* Actionable recommendations are included on recovery when something goes wrong.

Additional resources to support establishment of PPFM governance are available at [www.simmer-system.com](http://www.simmer-system.com).

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

Individuals assigned responsibility for establishment of a PPFM governance process within their organization will benefit from this book. Following the step-by-step approach will facilitate completion of the assignment and may make the responsibility seem less overwhelming. The numerous templates will facilitate establishment of governance as well.

The book will also be useful to those facing the challenge of improving a governance process that is not functioning in an ideal manner as well as business managers seeking an understanding of effective PPFM governance. For example, the approach may be leveraged to understand potential gaps in the existing PPFM governance process and identify opportunities for change.

### **Conclusion**

LET IT SIMMER provides a cookbook for establishment of effective PPFM governance. The underlying premise of the need for integration provides a solid foundation for the approach. The book is not about theoretical concepts of effective governance. Individuals who are looking for direction when faced with the challenge

of establishing governance will benefit from Dr. Brown's real-world experience that is the basis of *The Simmer System*<sup>SM</sup>. Individuals will gain an understanding of how to implement a process and handle some of the potential barriers to implementation themselves.

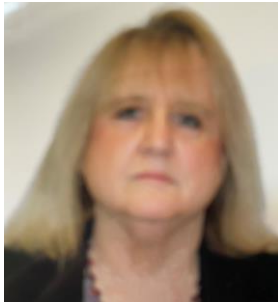
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For more about this book, go to: [Let It Simmer | Caltrop Press \(caltrop-press.com\)](http://Let It Simmer | Caltrop Press (caltrop-press.com))  
<https://caltrop-press.com/let-it-simmer/>

*Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the publisher, PM World and the [PMI Silver Spring Chapter](#). Authors and publishers provide the books to PM World; books are delivered to the PMI Silver Spring 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 Silver Spring 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@peworldjournal.net](mailto:editor@peworldjournal.net).*

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## About the Reviewer



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**Margaret Shoults, PMP®** has more than thirty-years of project and program management experience. She has worked with a variety of commercial, non-profit, and government organizations, ranging from a startup to a Fortune 5 company. As a consultant, she currently provides program management guidance to various clients and shares her project management knowledge and experience through delivery of undergraduate and graduate project management courses. She can be contacted at [shoultsb@msn.com](mailto:shoultsb@msn.com)