

Book Review and Interview



Book Title: ***Harvard Business Review Project Management Handbook: How to Launch, Lead and Sponsor Successful Projects***

Author: **Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez**

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Reviewer: **Yasmina Khelifi** Review Date: October 2021

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We're now living in the Project Economy, a world driven by projects. Organizations need to pivot, reskill their workforces to tackle tomorrow's challenges. For project managers, it represents an invaluable opportunity and a competitive edge to shape the future. But, every leader, including senior leaders, needs to develop project management skills to lead better.

That is what "The HBR Project Management Handbook" published by Harvard Business Press and written by Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez, Thinkers50, 2021 PMI Fellow Award, former PMI Chairman will teach you. Grounded in more than 25 years of working as a practitioner, as a professor, as a researcher, Antonio will share with you his knowledge in a non-technical way.

The book contains graphs, summaries, key questions to ask, checklists to equip you with a practical toolbox to put into practice right away. Thanks to case studies, and real stories from top leaders, Antonio disrupts the project management concepts taught so far and reinvents what modern project management shall be.

He has developed a new framework, the [project canvas](#), a one-page visual representation of the main components of a project that will become your compass to manage any project, regardless of the size or the industry.

You may think: 'I'm an experienced project manager, why would I need this book?' I am an experienced project manager with 3 PMI certifications, and it has made me think a lot and push to question my assumptions.

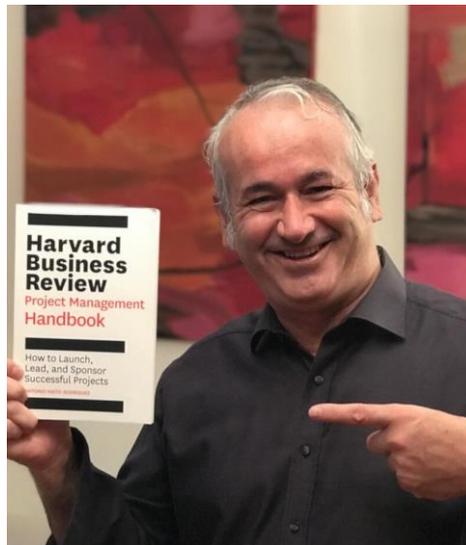
Senior leaders, seasoned or aspiring project managers, will discover reinvented methodologies and mandatory skills to be successful modern project managers; I hope you will enjoy this book as much as I did.

For more about this book, go to [the book's HBR webpage](#) or visit <https://antonionietorodriguez.com/hbrprojectmanagementhandbook/>

Following the [publishing news](#), we've decided to interview Antonio to know more about his book.

Interview with Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez

World Champion in Project Management | Thinkers50 | Director PMO | PMI Past Chair |
Professor | HBR Author | Executive Coach



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

International Correspondent, PM World Journal
Paris, France

Introduction to the interviewee

[Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez](#) is a leading expert in project management and strategy implementation, recognized by Thinkers50 with the prestigious award "Ideas into Practice." He is the author of the [Harvard Business Review Project Management Handbook](#), four other books, and hundreds of articles, including "The Project Economy has Arrived" HBR magazine, Nov/Dec 2021, one of the first articles on project management in their printed magazine. The former Chairman of the Project Management Institute, he is the founder

of [Projects & Co](#) and cofounder of the [Strategy Implementation Institute](#). Antonio has been teaching project management for more than two decades to senior executives at Duke CE, Instituto de Empresa, Solvay Business School, and Vlerick. He has held executive positions at PricewaterhouseCoopers, BNP Paribas, and GlaxoSmithKline. The Project Management Institute announced on 7 October 2021 that Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez has been awarded its highest honor, the PMI Fellow Award for 2021.

Antonio can be followed through his LinkedIn newsletter, [Lead Projects Successfully](#), or antonionietorodriguez.com.

Interview

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Q1: Thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. You have written 4 books about project management, numerous articles in HBR; why have you written another book about project management?

Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez (Nieto-Rodriguez): First of all, thank you for the interview, Yasmina and PMWJ. That is correct, I've written four books, two of them published in 2019. To be honest, I didn't expect to write another book for a while, but then Harvard Business Review asked me if I could write for them a new version of their HBR Project Management Handbook; it was an offer I could not refuse for two reasons. First, Harvard Business Review is still the most influential brand in management and leadership. It was a unique opportunity to share my views under the most regarded brand in this space.

Second, their previous Project Management Handbook was not a good book; it was a compilation of articles, which were put together in 2013. In my quest to elevate project management within senior leaders, upgrading the HBR book was one of my most important targets. I wanted to provide senior leaders with a good pragmatic refreshed book on projects and project management so that they would appreciate it more and implement it in their organizations. So, I am curious to see if this works out, to see if project management is more valued in organizations and by senior leaders around the world.

Q2: Can it be considered as the encyclopedia of your project management experiences?

Nieto-Rodriguez: The HBR book certainly includes some of my experiences as Project Leader, PMO, and Portfolio director over the past 25 years. But it also includes extensive research and analysis of the things that don't work in traditional project management, in the methodologies that we've been taught and learned to use over the past decades. I've

put special emphasis on the need to reinvent project management. The book brings new concepts and simplified tools that challenge some of the long-standing concepts that we use in the profession like the project lifecycle or the triple constraints. It's more than just an encyclopedia. It's a vision of projects and project management adapted to the current reality, which is what I call a world driven by change, also known as the Project Economy, a term I coined in 2017.

The book's main target audiences are senior leaders and nonprofessional project managers, but it is also great for experienced project managers that want to learn beyond the traditional concepts. That's what makes the book more unique. I believe that today everyone needs to learn modern project management.

Q3: Can we say that his book is about the project canvas?

Nieto-Rodriguez: The book is more than the Project Canvas. It's an important piece of course because I've seen how the Business Model Canvas from Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur has become in a few years a tool that more than 5 million people use. I think that's something that we were missing in project management. Something as simple as a one-page, a canvas that people could use regardless of the project they're embarking on, ensuring that all the fundamentals are in place. So, the canvas is essential but like I was saying before, the book provides a new vision of the project economy and a reinvented version of traditional project management concepts.

Also, a very important section in the book is the new competencies required to become a modern project manager, what I call a strategy implementation professional for which I established the Strategy Implementation online course and a global certification in partnership with APMG International. These areas are gaps, and great development opportunities, for project managers and anyone that wants to succeed in the Project Economy.

Q4: How do you define the project canvas? Is this a model, a framework? What is the difference between model and framework?

Nieto-Rodriguez: I always believed that there had to be a way to develop a simplified version of project management concepts and tools that would be easy to understand and to apply by any individual, business, official or organization, to any kind of project. In my career of over 20 years as an executive educator, I have worked with hundreds of leaders who don't understand, or are not interested in, the day-to-day aspects of managing a project. The trouble is that the existing methodologies and courses are too complicated and train project managers to talk in technical terms about matters that don't interest the majority of stakeholders. Leaders, and those impacted by a project, primarily want to know the 'why' – the purpose, the benefits, the impact and the key elements that will make a project successful – and 'how' they can contribute to it.

Faced with the challenges of teaching project management to executives and MBAs, I developed the Project Canvas. If I wanted to keep them engaged and interested for days, I had to move away from the expert jargon – I had to simplify the language and the project management tools and techniques so that everyone was able to understand and apply them. The Project Canvas is based on another premise. Every project – regardless of the industry, the organization (profit or non-profit), the sector (public or private), or whether it is personal or professional – is composed of exactly the same elements, which determine whether the project is a success or failure. If individuals, leaders and organizations focus on these elements and apply the techniques behind them, project success will almost be guaranteed.

Q5: You wrote 'people are not machines. Beware of language that advocates efficiency improvements, performance enhancements, or productivity gains when you are framing a rationale for business transformation. But do you accept if I say 'I'm more productive now than before' for example?

Nieto-Rodriguez: I am not sure that project managers have become more efficient over the past decades. There is one thing that upsets me and we should pay much more attention to it: project success ratios continue to be very poor. Every research that you read says that approximately only 3 out of 10 projects fully deliver their stated goals, despite all the methodologies, millions of certifications, and hours of training. It is unacceptable. That is why I have tried to adapt project management and call for project managers need to step up. We cannot accept this high failure rate anymore. And this means that we need to become more productive, more effective, more reliable.

We shall also use technology in projects which is something that we have not done in the past decades; we still run projects with Excel sheets or MS project or a PPM tool but where is the technology, whereas artificial intelligence and automation could help us to speed up some tasks and concentrate on more valued ones. I think there's a huge room for improvement by introducing new concepts - like I have done with this new book - and new technologies - like Artificial Intelligence - into project management. I'm hopeful that this will happen in the next few years.

Q6: You also dare to highlight issues in the workplace. "Executives often see leading a high-profile project as a development opportunity for high potential managers." Why do you expect but tell this truth?

Nieto-Rodriguez: I've seen some companies where senior managers were asked to lead a transformation program for two years. If they were successful, they would be promoted to vice president level, they needed to leave their operations jobs. Take this programming assignment for a couple of years, to experience the challenges of dealing with a matrix, a team of people that don't report to you, working in uncertain environments, and delivering strategic value for their organizations. It was a key competency required

to become a senior executive in those organizations, which showed a high level of project management maturity. In the Project Economy, more organizations will be using projects to develop senior leaders in this way.

Q7: I have a provocative question: How can you write articles, give interviews for podcasts, presentations, develop LinkedIn courses and manage an institute? do you have some advice to give about time management?

Nieto-Rodriguez: Interesting question. It seems that I produce a lot and that I must be great at time management, but I am not completely sure ;-). Many of the thought leaders I know do indeed have someone or a team behind to do research, draft articles and run their social medial.

So far, I've been doing it all myself. I think there are learning aspects that I enjoy when I do research for an article. It expands my perspective and helps me evolve as a thinker, as a professor, and as a professional.

In terms of time management, I am quite strict in terms of prioritization. I only take assignments that are in line with my purpose and the niche I want to be known for, which is convincing senior executives and business influencers of the value of project management. If I get a request to write something about a topic that is not aligned with that, I say "no, thank you". Then another important point is that often when you think about writing an article, for example, you are worried that it will take you too much time. So, you get stuck for days and weeks without doing any progress. In reality, it is easier if you get started right away, write whatever is in your mind, you will be surprised that often your first draft is already good.

Cervantes, one of the most famous Spanish writers, wrote "Starting is 80% of the work". When I do this, I often get into what I call a bubble, or flow, that makes you super productive.

Q8: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Nieto-Rodriguez: I remember when I joined the Board of Directors of the Project Management Institute in 2013 that our envisioned goal was "*Worldwide, organizations will embrace, value, and utilize project management and attribute their success to it*". Well, I am happy to say that by now, we have enough evidence that we are close to reaching that goal, if not already done. In fact, I am happy to announce that after lots of convincing, the Nov/Dec issue of Harvard Business Review magazine, the most influential publication in the business world, has put project management in the spotlight. This is the culmination of the work of millions of project managers and the infinite efforts from members and volunteers, as well as the Project Management Institute, IPMA, APM, and other professional associations.

However, as mentioned above, we need to exponentially increase our success rate. Imagine the benefits, both for organizations and society at large, if we could increase the current rates — the additional trillions of dollars and social, environmental, educational, and other benefits that would represent. And the impact could be almost immediate. Here is a smart objective I would like to set for our profession: to double the project success rate (from 30% to 60%) by 2025.

About the Interviewer



Yasmina Khelifi

Paris, France



Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP, and a PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE and a member of the PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and [projectmanagement.com](#) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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