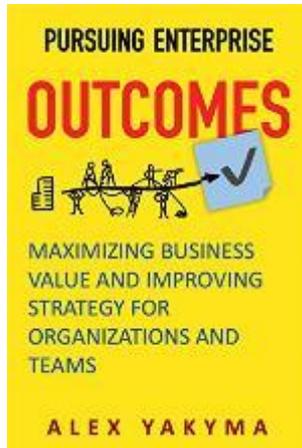

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Pursuing Enterprise Outcomes: Maximizing Business Value and Improving Strategy for Organizations and Teams***

Author: **Alex Yakyma**

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Reviewer: **Ramadevi Lanka** Review Date: October 2021

Introduction

Business units and practices such as HR (Human resources), Finance, programs, and projects will be in constant need to maximize business value and pursue outcomes. This book provides numerous solutions to succeed with such challenging and tough initiatives. Every line in the book is worth a read and a thought to ponder. Many times, enterprise initiatives will not get the desired outcome, despite having a strategy, action plan, resources, and supporting data points. More so, it even gets difficult to spot why things didn't go as planned and makes it impossible to come up with an appropriate retrospective.

Enterprise units and programs alike, resort to training and workshops to arrive at the strategy to succeed in complex initiatives and to come up with action plans. It is amazing to see how the author is able to render such a powerful 'Problem-Tool-Solution-Action' loop, to boost the ability to succeed in a multitude of such scenarios. This is not a book to just read; the book speaks to you, interacts with you, and connects with you.

The book is filled with practical examples. All the concepts are driven through anecdotes and examples, leaving the reader feel light and not get tangled in a whole lot of theory. It also helps in the higher retention of approaches and concepts described in the book. Like how a picture paints a thousand words, a narrative drives a thousand concepts.

Overview of Book's Structure

The content in the book is well-spaced across seven sections. Initial chapters are less loaded with simple business problem scenarios. This helps the reader get glued to the

book. Each section starts with a question or a thought, delving with supporting analogies, detailing new concepts, and suitably ending with specific action points. Each chapter seems complete in itself. New chapters start expanding into deeper concepts with scenarios closer to real life. As it progresses to chapter 4 and beyond, the reader gets into the mode of “I want to keep reading, discovering” – more with curiosity to know what next.

Chapter one introduces *Interaction maps* which are intuitive diagrams to capture the landscape of interaction in the enterprises. Chapters one and two talk about how disconnects in the system tend to reinforce one another, leaving behind limited useful capacity, typically invisible to the organization. Simple concepts such as observation, conversation, asking the same question to different people, are explained with a framework and diagrammatic approach. Subsequent chapters reveal strategies to address the problem of producing less, real value due to disconnects in the system.

Chapter three introduces the crux of the subject – outcomes, how they are different from outputs, and the journey in pursuit of outcomes. Despite all the hard work, quite often, unrecoverable and partial waste gets produced. This chapter is an eye-opener for why that happens. The chapter takes a radical departure from legacy thinking. For example, refuting traditional output-based thinking that scope and time are THE primary success indicators. Looking only at outputs may end up like, the operation is successful, but the patient died.

Chapter four explores some specific ways of probing the territory map of a task, to uncover unknown unknowns. A couple of interesting reads to quote: how propensities of the human mind impact the way we deal with task complexity & effort, accuracy vs. coherency, effort bias, confirmation bias, and organizational impediments to managing unknown unknowns. It also provides advice to the reader, to avoid common mistakes of probing and how to effectively interpret probing results.

Coverage in chapters five to seven. What can be more powerful than a convincing mathematical model to compute the business value of an asset? As the complexity of the situation increases, so do uncertainty and unknowns. Tools such as value moderators prove very promising especially while assessing the business value of assets with different purposes. Further on, fractal value paths for complex assets, applying Pareto Unpacking to select the most impactful paths, helps in the value discovery process. While the ideas will be great and the organization’s vision excellent, unless the bottlenecks are identified and addressed, they adversely affect the outcomes. It is also a very interesting read to understand the distinction between solution enablers vs. the solution itself. Tools and strategies are discussed on the emergence of effective solutions. The book gracefully comes to an end by discussing tools to discover leverage points. These will help strategies, which is a way to route system behavior towards a favorable outcome.

Highlights

The book is filled with examples from various industries such as Information Technology, Construction Industry, etc. Examples are spread across different enterprise verticals such as Software development, Quality Assurance, Talent management, Finance, Sales, and Marketing, etc. Most of these start as simple, solvable problems. As the author unfolds the issues and adds complexity, the reader will reach a dead-end with regards to solutions. With the tools and techniques introduced, readers will be awestruck at how effective solutions emerge. Not only that, each chapter ends with a 'Taking Action' section, catalyzing the acquired knowledge transition to action. Highlights from taking action in complex bottlenecks: Identify them using human behavior, interviewing, and surveying. Go on to identify the paths they take and influence the outcome. Do an iterative inquiry until a good breakdown of the bottleneck into its paths is arrived at. Applying this technique not only helps understand the problem but also comprehends a possible solution.

The book takes a bold step to question old-school beliefs and conventional measures. And these are done very convincingly, with proper justification followed by alternative solutions. Examples: Generic metrics such as task duration over size, may not reveal the lost time. A huge number of organizations take pride in flow efficiency; whereas that flow, in reality, delivers garbage. Increased focus on conventional metrics, complemented with the shallow interpretation of data, results in more disconnects. Skill improvement doesn't always result in improved productivity. High quality - zero defect delivery doesn't necessarily mean a happy customer. The issue could be with usability, which doesn't get addressed with a high-quality deliverable. Requirements and effort get determined to the pre-decided outputs, with a near-zero focus on outcomes.

Section headings are good enough to intrigue the reader. The book starts with an opening section 'The Killer of organizational performance'. Thought-provoking concepts are introduced under the heading 'How to compare Apples to Oranges?'. Here the author deals with the complex problem of comparing assets that do not have a common denominator. Instead of looking at the immediate outcome, looking at the closest common outcome will be helpful. 'Unknown Answers to Unknown Questions' - the title is captivating enough and needs no explanation. 'Mystery of business value' section unfolds the complexity around value discovery using value paths, scoring, and aggregation approaches.

Highlights: What I liked!

Plans would have got established and approved by higher levels in an organization, with a strong expectation that everything is going well. Any newly discovered unknowns will pose a threat to that expectation. So people think twice before letting them pass up the chain of command. Good news travels effortlessly while bad news gets sieved out at lower levels of the hierarchy. To reverse this dynamic, leaders at all levels must be receptive and appreciative to learn from empirical facts from the front line, regardless of how they align with the original expectation.

“2+1” mapping is a very powerful tool to get multiple dimensions into a single table helping in clarity of thought process and qualitative backing to take right decisions. A product management team can use this to decide on which functionality to be included in the next release. Primary dimensions can be product capabilities and user types. The auxiliary dimension can be the relative value of each capability with each user type. Filling out a table like this triggers a lot of questions, constraints, desired outcomes and reveals leverage points. This can be applied to a whole host of scenarios such as designing marketing campaigns, choice of tool, test coverage strategy, and so on.

I liked the concept of exploring adversity and turning it to our advantage. Instead of getting frustrated with the problems that pop up, we should use them as an opportunity to reveal unknown leverage. In a scenario where employee skill improvement initiatives failed to achieve the expected results, the failure was used as an improvement opportunity. Due to this, it got known that lack of psychological safety was resulting in the team not taking work on new skill sets. The problem brought awareness to an entirely new opportunity.

Who might benefit from the Book?

There is a wide audience who can benefit from this book. It is a very powerful tool kit for business unit heads, organization change management consultants, program managers leading large initiatives, product managers, sales & marketing heads, Quality Assurance Strategists, Finance Managers, cost center heads, and the like. A lot of inputs can be taken from the book while proposing, designing, and/or implementing business initiatives involving high-risk high-returns.

Though at the onset, it feels like this is for executive and senior management profiles, while reading you can realize that it is very beneficial for project managers and execution experts. It encompasses organization culture, people behaviors, understanding the big picture, problem-solving, tools to build quality products and services. So, it is a must-read for leaders at all levels.

Conclusion

Regardless of the reader’s role in the organization, the book is a very easy read, with high retention. Diagrams help in visualizing complexity without getting lost or leaving the reader overwhelmed. Examples relate to everyday scenarios faced and make the reader stay with the book. Mathematical models, as well as conceptual tools provided, make the solutions immediately implementable.

Many facets make this book unique. One such being the knowledge presented here has been extracted from a wide range of disciplines such as graph theory, vector theory, Agile software development, cognitive processes in humans, the evolution of biological species, and so on. The ideas are molded as thinking tools required to face

the myriad of situations that arise in a day in an enterprise. And these tools are presented - in a very practical, implementable way - using a lot of examples and by providing tips & tricks.

Hence this book becomes a one-stop-shop solution for all enterprise initiative hitches. This book should not be “just read”. Organizations, departments, programs & projects have to take relevant approaches to transform the way they are functioning presently. Also, the implementation should be holistic. Otherwise, the outcome owner’s job gets difficult if the boss is incentivized on output. Reading this book at different levels of the organization helps increase the empathy between executive leadership and execution teams.

For more about this book, go to:

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08H2KJ8GP/ref=db_s_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_tkin_p1_i1

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Rama Lanka is a Program/Project/Quality Management professional with 20+ years of enriching work experience in the software industry. Her work execution is driven with a strong customer focus, quality focus, and business value realization focus. Known for Customer retention through on-time delivery of Projects / Programs meeting the requirements with expected quality, she is experienced in designing and delivering training programs, application & product testing, Enterprise Change Management, Software Delivery Centre setup & management for Global Enterprises. Rama enjoys giving back to the community by doing volunteering activities, mentoring, and sharing knowledge.

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