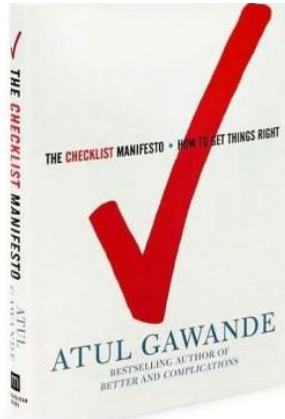


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: **The Checklist Manifesto: How to get things right**¹

Author: **Atul Gawande**

Publisher: Metropolitan Books

List Price: \$12.89 Format: Softcover, 224 pages

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ISBN: 978-1846683145

Reviewer: **Manuel Ancizu**

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Introduction

Complex projects, many activities performed in parallel, simple steps but that must be executed consistently one by one following a certain order not to cause any damage, the need to ensure that teams spread in different parts of the world are acting correctly and according to the guidelines, how to know that all the key points have been covered to take the right decision under pressure...

Yes! all that can be successfully overcome with a solid yet simple easy-to-use tool: A standard checklist.

Through inspiring real-life practical examples covering global health, emergency rooms, hospitals, airplanes, development countries and more, Atul Gawande and his book “The Checklist Manifesto” enlighten us with the benefits and the power of checklists to manage complexity, stay focused, eliminate mistakes and save lives.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The Checklist Manifesto is divided into nine chapters; each of them can be independently read and covers a specific topic: from the problems caused by extreme complexity to the power of checklists to face them and a final chapter describing a real-life example where a checklist helped the author to save the life of one of his patients. An impactful evidence that checklists work!

The Checklist Manifesto is not a technical book giving step-by-step advice of how to design the most effective checklist; Instead, it’s an easy-to-read book, full of personal reflections interwoven with graphic examples in different fields that the author has

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experimented as a surgeon, as advisor for the World Health Organization or as a result of meaningful interactions with people he had the opportunity to know and interview.

At the end of the book, the reader can find a complete list of sources and references used to write each of the chapters in case the reader would like to go deeper.

Highlights

The Checklist Manifesto explores the power of checklists to manage complexity, to perform proper risk management and to eliminate recurrent mistakes that eventually can save lives and financial costs.

In a world full of complexity, the author has noticed that people might have all the necessary knowledge to perform an activity but fail to apply it in situations of uncertainty, working under pressure, having to cope with requirements from different stakeholders at the same time, multitasking, among others. Therefore, he concludes that it is not about knowledge, it is about aptitude: the ability to perform in a solid consistent way under conditions of pressure, uncertainty or even in those days when we don't feel 100% at work.

In this complex context, mistakes can come from experienced and knowledgeable people that forget a step not because they don't know it or because it is their first day at work but because they are so skilled that they don't pay enough attention to the details anymore or they underestimate the difficulty as they have done it so many times, increasing the probability of failure.

Sometimes there are several activities to perform but they are not complex, they are simple but need to be executed following a certain order. Or it is necessary to ensure that all preparatory tasks have been completed prior to our operation to start, even if we were not there or were not involved.

For all these cases, the author proposes a standard checklist to provide certainty, a simple way to guide the work and avoid mistakes by following written steps: zero cost and big rewards.

Moreover, checklists allow to focus on the important things and remove all the routines that need to be done, freeing-up space for the brain to focus on the key aspects where we can add high value; we don't need to know everything and remember it by heart, it is all written. And if we don't feel at our best or someone is not there, we just need to follow the written checklist.

The author continuously shows many examples (mainly related to health and activities with impact in people's lives) to illustrate the benefits of checklists as a framework to follow prior, during and after the activity: a surgeon prior, during and after surgery, planes during take-off and landing or a World Health Organization program intending to reduce deceases in operations in developing countries with limited resources, just to name some of the examples mentioned in the book.

And checklists are not a static tool; as long as we apply a checklist in real environments, its effectiveness can be measured and tested; thus, we can progressively include new checkpoints or remove not effective ones to gather all the learnings, continuously improve the effectiveness of the checklist and, as a consequence, maximizing the probability to perform successfully.

A checklist can also serve as a learning tool to be used to teach newcomers on how to do things right.

Highlights: What I liked!

I liked the real-life graphic examples that illustrate very clearly the benefits of checklist and the personal reflections of the author along the book. These two aspects combined with an easy-to-read book have inspired me to think about my own projects and how I could apply this tool to standardize activities, manage risks, ensure that I am performing properly and focus where I can add high value.

We might think than to solve complex issues we need complex expensive tools; or that we must use our memory, be fully concentrated and focused to remember and execute all steps successfully.... Not at all; Atul Gawande proposes in his book a different approach: a simple standard checklist as a robust consistent solution that compiles in written all the knowledge available and the necessary steps to follow.

And the good thing is that it is not a one-time tool, it can be updated to cover and register new learnings gathered along the way.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Projects are all about people working together to make ideas come true.

Therefore, it is a book that can be useful for anyone aiming to improve at any activity; but in the context of project management, I think *The Checklist Manifesto* can specially benefit:

- 1) Project managers managing complex projects with lots of activities and interfaces.
- 2) Program managers that lead different people and projects all interconnected.
- 3) Portfolio managers that take decisions on project prioritization and need to ensure that have covered all the variables in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

In a complex world, people might have all the necessary knowledge to perform an activity but fail to apply it in situations of uncertainty or working under pressure. Thus, it is not about knowledge, it is about aptitude: the ability to perform in a solid consistent way under conditions of pressure, uncertainty or even in those days when we don't feel 100% at work.

To perform successfully, Atul Gawande and his book *The Checklist Manifesto* propose and encourage us to use a standard checklist that can be applied following a five-step approach:

- 1) Define a goal.
- 2) Put every step to be done into a standard detailed easy-to-follow checklist.
- 3) Follow each of the steps consistently and in the same order as written.
- 4) Measure and test its effectiveness.
- 5) Continuous improvement: update the checklist accordingly and when new knowledge is available.

About the author

Atul Gawande is a renowned surgeon, writer and public health leader. From January 2022, he became Assistant Administrator for Global Health at USAID.

As an author, he has written four books: *Complications*, *Better*, *The Checklist Manifesto* and *Being Mortal*. He is a member of the US National Academy of Medicine and the winner of several awards related to healthcare and science.

To know more, you can visit Atul Gawande's website at: <http://atulgawande.com>

For more about this book, go to: <http://atulgawande.com/book/the-checklist-manifesto/>

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About the Reviewer



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Human leadership, Global Sustainable Projects, Renewable energy, Story-teller, Keynote speaker, Lifetime learner, Risk management, Standardization

Manuel Ancizu is passionate about human leadership, sustainable projects and people's motivations. Enjoys working in international multicultural environments and wants to have a positive impact in society.

Manuel graduated in Economics from University of Navarra and obtained an MBA from IESE Business School (Spain); he has also studied in CEIBS (China) and University Anahuac del Sur (Mexico). He holds a number of professional certificates such as the PMP by Project Management Institute, Lead Auditor in ISO 9001:2015 by IRCA Association and has also received training in Management of Development Projects and Risk Management by Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

Manuel has lived in Spain, France, UK and Mexico; he currently works in the wind energy sector leading the quality management of Offshore projects. Manuel has been involved in wind energy renewable projects developed in different parts of the globe with external customers, as well as in internal projects of cultural transformation, IT and global processes.

Thanks to his experience, he has delivered training sessions, lectures and keynotes to a different number of institutions.

Manuel is a qualified member of the Spanish Standardization Body (UNE) and has been involved in the development of Standards and Norms in Projects, Programs and Portfolios; he has also participated in the translation of different ISO 21500 to Spanish language.

Manuel loves smiling, storytelling, dreaming and making ideas come true in a sustainable manner.

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