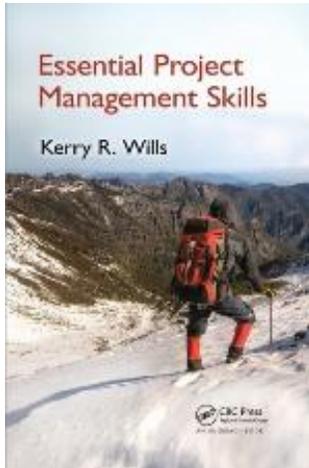

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW¹



Book Title: **Essential Project Management Skills**

Author: **Kerry R. Wills**

Publisher: An Auerbach Book from CRC Press

List Price: \$69.95

Format: Hardcover, 220 pages

Publication Date: 2010

ISBN: 978-1-4398-2716-1

Reviewer: **Phuong Tran**

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Introduction

Since 1995, he has gained a wealth of knowledge as it pertains to project management, especially within the information technology field. Recognizing that as the IT landscape was rapidly evolving; there is a greater need for IT project managers to establish additional skillsets to remain successful. Wills begins with a metaphor comparing an orchestra to the evolution of the project management landscape, “where in the “good old days” of IT projects, the project manager was like the conductor of an orchestra.” (Wills, p.1, 2010) As the music industry is beginning to change, the way the orchestra is managed will need to change also. This can be applied to the evolution of project landscape.

The book will deep dive into illustrating and equipping readers with the essential knowledge, skills and techniques necessary to empower them to “evolve from a project manager to a project leader, whose success is directly dependent on his or her ability to lead the project team members to meet their goals.” (Wills, p. 154-155, 2010)

Overview of Book’s Structure

Essential Project Management Skills is divided into a preface, author, and four chapters: Background, “Changing Project Landscape”, “The New Project Management Skills”, and “Summary.” Finally concluding the book listing references and an index.

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The book's outline of each chapter organized in a way that is easily digestible. In the preface, Willis provides his motivation and insight on the importance for project managers to inquire the management skills featured in this book. In Chapter 1, he laid out the structure of the book and the expectation of each concept.

In Chapter 2, he introduces the trends and explore the challenges created in the current business climate due to emerging IT trends and their implications. Each trend is explored in-depth followed with a relevant case study provided by either Willis or a contributing author.

In Chapter 3, the readers are introducing to new project management skills for project managers in the IT industry. Each skill has several sub-topics that concludes with a case study to bring it back in full circle. Wills provides a relevant case study to help reiterate the positive outcomes that all project managers should strive for with each project they lead.

There are four skills presented in this chapter. Skill number One is "Additional Rigor" and has six sub-topics: Diligent Project Planning, use a Standard Methodology, Use Resources Intelligently, Diligent Project Management, Use Metrics Appropriately, and Improve Competencies. Due to how the business landscape has been changing, Wills explained that project managers need to be more "rigorous in all aspects of managing a project" (Wills, p.58, 2010) meaning there is a need to pay attention to the planning and executing of several domains: Management, Process and People.

Skill number Two "Consultative Approach" and has four sub-topics: Relationship Focus, Influencing, Self-Management, and Political Savvy. Wills explained that more than ever, project managers are not merely managing projects and delegating tasks, but they must develop soft skills "that are needed to manage the people aspects of the project" (Wills, p.102, 2010). He illustrates the challenges in how project managers are struggling to manage people. These challenges are resources do not report to the project manager, resources are fractionalized and have other priorities, project resources may work for different companies, resources are specialized, and resources are mobile and fickle.

Skill number Three "Managing Information" has three sub-topics: Proper Communications Planning, Gathering Information: Visibility, and Presenting and Sharing Information. Wills explained that even if project managers can have a consultative approach, who they are about to manage information in an effective and transparent way is as important. The focal point is about "getting the right information to the right people at the time". (Wills, p.134, 2010) He presents the type of information needed in a standard project: communication of status, escalation of issues, risks, and/or change that can have an impact on the project commitments, interactions with vendors and/or stakeholders, and project goals and context.

And lastly, skill number Four “Leading the Team” has four sub-topics: Motivating Team Members, Empowering the Team, Be a Champion for the Team, and Handling Conflicts and Difficult People. At the end of the day, “the project manager is the primary leader of a project”, but to be able to lead projects in today’s environment “their leadership skills need to focus primarily on the project team with support from the project leader.” (Wills, p.154-155, 2010).

In Chapter 4, Wills concludes the book by tying it all together; solidifying the importance of learning and demonstrating how to purposely apply the skills and techniques in their own projects. Wills summarized the main steps in the evolution as followed: (1) The business landscape has been changing recently due to several factors in the marketplace. (2) As a result of the changing business landscape, there are new trends for delivering technology projects. (3) These trends have impacts on projects that need to be considered when planning and managing them. (4) To successfully manage a project in the new business environment, the project manager’s skills need to change.

Finally, provides a set of checklists every project manager can use in the context of different project scenarios.

Highlights

Wills’ ability to illustrates in depth the benefits project managers can reap from if they learn how to change their perspective on what project management was to what it is becoming. If they are willing to let, go of authoritative management and move towards a consultative approach leaning into their softer skills sets they can influence and motivate teams to WANT to be successful on a project. His conceptual treatment of the subject allows him to include practical tools, checklists and techniques. Providing project managers with a real-life toolkit to lead projects in the current landscape.

Highlights: What I liked!

As a project manager who has not led many projects, it was extremely beneficial to have all the case studies to investigate. It is one thing to read the information provided, but it is another to be able to immerse myself into a real-life scenario that one day can happen to me and my team.

Who might benefit from the Book?

While the book is intentionally written for IT project managers looking to expand beyond the fundamental project management principles. The focus will be to “outline a framework and set of skills needed to successfully run a project given all the recent trends and challenges. (Wills, p.5, 2010)

The experience I had while reading Wills' book is that although there is a specific target audience, any project manager will benefit greatly from the information and skillsets provided. As a manager new to the project management world, I can already see how I can take bits and pieces of each skill and apply them to my current projects. As a professional who started out in the Psychology field, I agree with Wills that if we can capture our team member's heart in a genuine, honest way; they will want to support us in the success of our projects.

Conclusion

I highly suggest Wills' book as a 'Must Read'. *Essential Project Management Skills* provides not just skills that will make you successful in the project management world, but also in the other aspects of our life. Understanding and having self-awareness on how to approach and interact with people is beneficial regardless of the environment you're in. Developing deeper into our technical skills regarding project structure and how we manage our projects will lead to more effective and accurate data and results. This can only strength the purpose and outcome of our projects.

Rather you are a new project manager as me or you have an established position in the world of project management, this book will help open you up to great insight to becoming successful in delivering projects in today's ever changing business landscape.

For more about this book, go to: <https://www.routledge.com/Essential-Project-Management-Skills/Wills/p/book/9781138374317>

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About the Reviewer



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Phuong Tran is new to the project management world. She currently is employed at a non-profit behavioral health provider agency in Dallas County. She runs her own program funded by Texas Health and Human Services to assist the agency's consumers to improve their quality of life. Phuong stumbled upon project management when her program manager needed assistance leading high level projects within our umbrella program. Since then, she has participated and led numerous projects within the agency.

In her personal life, Phuong loves to knit and cross-stitch as her hobbies. She enjoys spending time with her pup, Miso, and exploring the outdoors when she can. Her personal goal is life is to attend every racetrack in the Formula 1 circuit.

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