

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***HBR Project Management Handbook – How to Launch, Lead, and Sponsor Successful Projects***¹

Author: **Antonio Nieto-Rodriguez**

Publisher: Harvard Business Review

List Price: \$50.00 (hardcover)

Format: Hardcover, 330 pages, softcover and kindle available

Publication Date: October 2021

ISBN: 978-1647821265

Reviewer: **Ermioni Takou**

Review Date: March 2023

Introduction

Project management (PM) skills are more relevant in today's project economy than ever. Even though many companies invest in developing talents with PM skills, either formal or informal, the statistics show a low project success rate, which consistently has a substantial economic loss. This easy-to-read book provides tools, techniques, and a simple visual framework, known as Project Canvas. It is written in an enjoyable way that captivates the reader to put these insights into practice right away.

Overview of Book's Structure

The HBR Project Management book is broken into four parts:

- "Project Fundamentals for Everybody" introduces the reader to the concept of projects, from small ones to megaprojects, and the reasons behind the author's view of reinventing project management.
- "The Project Canvas" framework for any project (agile, traditional, or hybrid) with well-equipped examples is introduced in the second part.
- "Individual and Organizational Project Competencies" stresses the importance of project leadership, prioritization, and agility.
- "A Better Future through Projects" talks about future innovations from technology, to crisis management, to the diversity of thinking through project management.

¹ How to cite this review: Takou, E. (2023). HBR Project Management Handbook – How to Launch, Lead, and Sponsor Successful Projects, book review, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XII, Issue V, May.

Highlights

Nieto-Rodriguez's long experience in project management and HBR's guidance resulted in creating a well-structured and fun-to-read book that extends and reframes the traditional PM methodology to deliver value and success.

We live in a project economy where change is constant due to digital transformation, customer expectations, industry regulations, environmental disasters, etc. This constant change affects how we manage projects. The PM methodology developed by the Project Management Institute (PMI) is still relevant but would benefit from a less technical and complex language used by PMI experts.

The author, who served as PMI's chairman, has been troubled by the low success rate of projects (60-70% of projects fail). He created the Project Canvas, a simple but robust project management framework based on the Business Model Canvas developed by Alex Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur. The success of Project Canvas lies in shedding light on three domains: the project manager's role, the senior leaders' role in sponsoring the project, and the organization's structure and culture. The book challenges us to rethink how we monitor and assess project success, not only via the traditional triple constraint / golden rule but also by introducing two new constructs, namely the "Engagement Triple Constraint" and the "Benefits Triple Constraint".

On the methodology aspect, we usually hear about the Agile vs. the Waterfall approach, but how about considering a hybrid approach where all methodologies are examined (6sigma, agile, ideation, lean startup, mega projects, program management, project management)? This approach increases complexity but brings value and benefits that will lead to project success.

Nieto-Rodriguez talks about expanding the reach of the project life cycle by adding the project's ideation and benefits phase, i.e., investing the time to identify the project's benefits before the project's initiation phase. If the project doesn't bring any benefits, why invest money, effort, and resources in it?

Finally, the author, building on the established success of many simplified business frameworks, such as Porter's 5 forces, 7 P's of Marketing, Business Model Canvas, Agile Manifesto, etc., created a visual and simplified nine-box Project Canvas framework broken into three domains and three building blocks in each domain:

- Foundation domain: Purpose (5 Whys), Investment, Benefits
- People domain: Sponsorship (Senior Leaders or CEO's support), Resources, Stakeholders
- Creation domain: Deliverables, Plan (decision on the PM method to follow), Change (risk and change management)

Highlights: What I liked!

I enjoyed reading this book as it is a good refresher on the project management methodology acquired through the PMP certification and the Project Canvas framework is a brilliant framework that looks promising and worth exploring. This book is an excellent resource for those studying for the MPMP exam. Unlike the PMBOK Guide, this book is written in simple and professional language, is well-structured and persuasive, and has a plethora of interesting project examples from around the world. The Project Canvas framework, the Engagement Triple Constraint and the Benefits Triple Constraint, are great additions to the PM methodology.

Who might benefit from the book?

The HBR Project Management Handbook is excellent for anyone involved in project management in any industry, whether in the corporate world or small business. The reader of this book can be a CEO, a senior leader, a project manager, a project manager candidate, and anyone planning a personal event.

- A senior leader will benefit from learning how to prioritize a project that leads to 100% success
- Project managers and project manager candidates will benefit from improving their PM skills by utilizing a visual technique that is easy to communicate with all stakeholders and inspires the team to deliver great work
- The Project Canvas framework can also be used for personal projects such as small or big lifetime events

Conclusion

Project management is a complex and challenging endeavor because it involves prediction and includes unforeseen events that make it challenging to manage. The HBR Project Management Handbook takes into consideration these risks and solves for the root causes behind project failures. Stressing the role of the project sponsor in the success of the project increases the probability of overall success. Emphasizing benefits realization early on and combining different methodologies in a hybrid approach allows for (partial) self-funding even before the project finishes. This book gives hope and inspires the reader to do great and meaningful work.

For more about this book, go to: <https://store.hbr.org/product/harvard-business-review-project-management-handbook-how-to-launch-lead-and-sponsor-successful-projects/10494>

About the Reviewer



Ermioni Takou, MBA, PMP

Plano, TX, USA



Ermioni Takou is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) experienced in managing various transformational projects. She helps blue-chip companies manage change on the people side of the business. Ermioni earned her MBA at the University of Dallas. Before that, she was directing a family-owned business. She has been privileged to work on one of the world's most famous monuments, the Parthenon of Athens, Greece. She has been a PMI Dallas Chapter member since December 2022.

Email address: ermtakou@gmail.com

Editor's note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the PM World Journal and the [PMI Dallas Chapter](#). Authors and publishers provide books to the PM World Journal Editor; books are delivered to the PMI Dallas Chapter where they are offered free to PMI members who agree to provide a review within 45 days; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. Reviewers can normally claim PDU's for PMP recertification (or continuing education credits for other certifications) upon publication of their book reviews.

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@pmworldjournal.com.

To learn more about the PMWJ book review program, go to <https://pmworldlibrary.net/book-review-program/>