Book Reviews #2: In brief
By R. Max Wideman, FPMI
The views expressed in these introductory reviews are strictly those of Max Wideman.
The contents of the books under review are the copyright property of the respective authors.
Published here July 2013

Introduction

As we noted in our first set of Book Reviews #1, we have not been able to keep up with our previous customary and in-depth critical reviews of technical books that we have undertaken in the past. So, to catch up, we have now simplified our approach. That is, we no longer highlight "What we liked", nor the "Downside". Nevertheless, we examine the whole book to get a "feel" for its total scope, objective and our view of its most suited target audience. We also try to comment on the quality of writing and style, level of reading from "introductory" to in-depth to "academic" and how realistic and sound that we feel the content is.

We hope that potential readers will find this helpful. Why do we do it? Because over the last decade we have been able to track the general direction, and advancement of the broader vision of project management and where we think it is likely to go in the future. This should be of particulate interest to those attempting to map out their future careers.

The following reviews cover the latest books that we have examined and briefly describe our general impressions and recommendations.

Books discussed in this Review

1. Project Management: Achieving Competitive Advantage Second Edition, by Jeffrey K. Pinto, 2010
2. 101 Project Management Problems and how to solve them, by Tom Kendrick, 2011
3. Rescue the Problem Project: A Complete Guide to Identifying, Preventing, and Recovering from Project Failure, by Todd C. Williams, 2011

~~~~~~~~~~

Project Management:
Achieving Competitive Advantage Second Edition
By Jeffrey K. Pinto, 2010

Introduction

This is one of the best books that we have read in a very long time. This hard cover book has an unusually large footprint at 8.75"x11", uses a small font on thin, high quality paper stock. At 460 pages, it covers an immense amount of ground. It is also comprehensive, thorough and genuinely encompasses all of the well-known Areas of Project Management Application.

It is designed as an instructional companion to an advanced training course in project management. As such, it presents an exciting view of the subject by providing an extensive array of real case studies, several profiles of project managers in practice, and examples and studies culled from the media and

knowledgeable sources. Many of the case examples are illustrated with photos that bring the subject to life, not to mention the odd Dilbert cartoons to add a touch of humor. While the book is designed for class instruction, it also makes an excellent source of reference for professionally engaged project practitioners.

The case studies illustrate the application of project management at its best – and its worst. Students are expected to analyze these examples and discuss how they relate to the preceding subject material, what might have been done for the better, and why.

In his Preface, Jeff observes that:
> "This text takes a holistic, integrated approach to managing projects, exploring both technical and managerial challenges. It emphasizes not only individual project execution, but also provides a strategic perspective, demonstrating means to manage projects at the program and portfolio levels."[1]

He adds that:
> "Students in project management classes come from a wide and diverse cross section of university majors and career tracks. Schools of health, business, architecture, engineering, information systems, and hospitality are all adding project management courses to their catalogs in response to the demands from organizations and professional groups who see its value for students' future careers. Why? Because we now live in a 'projectized' world. In fact, project management has become an integral part of practically every firm's business model."[2]

To those just beginning their study of project management, Jeff observes:
> "Most of you will be running a project long before you are given wider management responsibilities in your organization. Successful project managers are the lifeblood of organizations and bear the imprint of the fast track!"[3]

About the author

Dr. Jeffrey (Jeff) Pinto is a Professor of Management at Penn State University and has a long history of association with project management. He is the author or coauthor of a large number of books on the subject. In 1997 and 2001 he received the Project Management Institute's Distinguished Contribution Award and in 2009 PMI's Research Achievement Award. At an earlier time he acted as Editor of the Project Management Journal. In those days, all PMI publications were assembled by voluntary effort. Jeff may be reached at "Dr. Jeff Pinto" jkp4@psu.edu

Table of Contents

The contents of this book are set out in fourteen chapters as follows:

9. Project Scheduling: Networks, Duration Estimation, and Critical Path
10. Project Scheduling: Lagging, Crashing, and Activity Networks
11. Critical Chain Project Scheduling
12. Resource Management
13. Evaluation and Control
14. Project Closeout and Termination

This book has 460 pages. Each chapter starts with a Chapter Outline, a list of Chapter Objectives, a Profile of an actual project, followed by the Chapters Introduction. Further, each chapter concludes with a Summary of the chapter's coverage, Key Terms introduced, Discussion Questions, further Case Studies, Internet exercises and Foot Note references used in the preceding chapter. The copious text is supported by ample illustrations, figures, tables, charts and diagrams. The book also includes MS Project exercises where relevant and sample PMP type multiple-choice certification exam questions.

We were very glad to see that this book includes an extensive Glossary of an estimated 350 project management-specific terms. These are preceded by a list of Common Acronyms that appear in the text. But of particular interest is the author's introduction to the Glossary describing the reasoning for the *Inclusions and Exclusions*. The author's reasoning is briefly paraphrased as follows.[4]

> "This glossary includes terms that are: Unique or nearly unique to project management. Not unique to project management, but used differently from common usage. This glossary does not include: Application area-specific terms, terms used in project management that do not differ in any material way from common usage, compound terms whose meaning is clear from the combined meanings of the component parts, and variants when the meaning of the variant is clear from the base term.
>
> As a result of the foregoing, this glossary includes:
>
> - A preponderance of terms related to Project Scope Management, Project Time Management, and Project Risk Management, since many of these terms are unique or nearly unique to project management.
>
> - Many terms from Project Quality Management, since these terms are used more narrowly compared to common usage.
>
> - Relatively few terms from Project Human Resource Management and Project Communications Management since their meanings are similar to common usage.
>
> - Relatively few terms related to Project Cost Management, Project Integration Management, and Project Procurement Management since many of these terms have narrow meanings that are unique to a particular application area."

We cannot help observing that it would be nice to see other authors adopt such a professional approach.

General observations and recommendations

This book is well written in a straightforward and understandable style, notwithstanding the occasional needlessly long paragraphs and unnecessarily long sentences.[5] The content is also nicely balanced between text, photo examples, illustrations and explanatory tables. At a very detailed level, we were delighted to see that wherever you open the book you can see at the top left which chapter you are reading.

Also the graphic at the start of each chapter is "bled to the edge" so that you can see where each chapter starts by looking at the right edge of the book. These provisions are invaluable for those doing homework or seeking references, and they illustrate the care with which this book has been assembled. Although an academically rigorous text, all of this makes for much easier learning and hence understanding, than most comprehensive texts of this nature.

Interestingly, this book opens Chapter 1 with a Project Profile Case presenting an exciting description of Walt Disney World Resort's newest thrill ride project celebrating their 50th anniversary. In this description of some 850 words, we counted just sixteen words referring to project management, or about 2%. We think that this in itself is possibly a reasonable reflection of the correct amount of project management in a project when compared to the effort and cost of executing the project's technology.

Nevertheless and in our opinion, the book provides sound and realistic advice at a reasonably in-depth level. In particular, students and established practitioners alike should enjoy reading the author's numerous project-oriented case study profiles of some of the most well known projects of recent years. Some examples of these include: Dubai – Land of Megs-Projects; Airbus 380; Ferris Wheels (including London and Beijing); and London's Millennium Dome.

As author Jeffrey Pinto observes in a section titled: Text Organization:[6]
> "This book was written to help create a new generation of effective project managers. By exploring the various roles of project managers and addressing the challenges and opportunities they constantly face, we will offer a comprehensive and integrative approach to better understanding the task of project management. [That is] one that explores the full range of strategic, technical, and behavioral challenges and duties for project managers."

We whole heartily concur and recommend this book accordingly.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

~~~~~~~~~~

101 Project Management Problems: and how to solve them
By Tom Kendrick, 2011

Introduction

As the title of the book suggests, author Tom Kendrick describes 101 Typical Project Problems and suggests ways to solve them. As he says:[7]
> "When you're responsible for a project, things go wrong. Even if you're a skilled veteran with a solid pan, things will happen that you least expect. And if you are less experienced, there is a startling number of ways that your project can get into trouble. Despite your best efforts and intentions, there are plenty of problems and challenges that can – and often will – arise at any step from any angle to derail your team's work.
>
> What you need – right away – are field-proven fixes, practical answers to urgent questions and simple strategies for navigating around the unforeseen obstacles you'll

encounter throughout your project.

You can put that dry, unhelpful tome of academic theory back on the shelf. *101 Project Management Problems and How to Solve Them* shows you how to:

- Keep your project on track despite unavoidable interruptions
- Prevent unreliable outside collaborations from jeopardizing the entire project
- Manage project teams who have little or no project management experience
- Make up for lost time without cutting corners
- Succeed in the face of threatened budget cuts"

As most readers will know, on our web site we have assembled over 550 "Issacons"[8] – answers to questions that arise when you are ***starting and planning*** a project. In a way, the objective of Tom's book is the corollary of Issacons; with answers to the risk events that inevitable occur when you are ***doing*** the project. In reviewing this book, we can say that we empathize with almost all of Tom's recommendations – "been there done that"! Of course, what you actually decide to do in your case depends on the particular project circumstance. Here, in most cases, Tom also notes what your response "Depends on:" at the start of each two-page recommendation.

All of Tom's recommendations are essentially "generic", so the contents will be valuable to any project manager or leader in any area of project management application.

About the author

Tom Kendrick MBA, MSEE, PMP, is a project management consultant and former project management executive for Hewlett-Packard and for Visa Inc. He has nearly 30 years of project management experience, managing a wide range of engineering, information technology and networking projects. He has also directed projects in the United States, Europe, and Asia for Visa Inc., General Electric, DuPont, and ADP Network Services. He is also the author of several other books. He lives in San Carlos, California and can be reached at tkendrick@failureproofprojects.com.

Table of Contents

The contents of this book are set out in eight Parts and, as readers will observe, generally pursues the natural life span of a typical project as follows:
1. General – 21 Problems
2. Initiation – 12 problems
3. Teamwork – 13 problems
4. Planning – 18 problems
5. Execution – 11 problems
6. Control – 20 problems
7. Tools – 3 Problems
8. Closing – 3 problems

Each "Problem" typically occupies two pages, and is presented in the form of a question, followed by what the issue depends on. For example, one of the briefer responses reads as follows:[9]
> **"Problem 9. How rigid and formal should I be when running a small project?**
>   **Depends on:**
>   ⌃ Past experiences

▴ Background of your team
▴ All aspects of project size"

Two sections follow this introduction titled: "*Determining Formality*" and "*Establishing the minimum*".

All together, the book has 260 pages, including an index, but no glossary of terms.

General observations and recommendations

This book is well written in a clear and understandable style. It is essentially a reference book and does not require illustrations of any sort. Seasoned professionals may easily read it through from cover to cover, nodding their heads as they recognize and concur with the advice given. However, as author Tom Kendrick points out in his Introduction:[10]

> "Project management problems frequently arise as questions, and most good project management questions have the same answer: 'It all depends.'"
>
> "The focus here is on real problems encountered by project managers working in the trenches, trying to get their projects done in today's stress-filled environment."
>
> "In all cases, your judgment is essential to solving your particular problems."
>
> "Adapt the ideas offered here if they appear helpful. Disregard them if the advice seems irrelevant to your project."

As just one example, we have selected **Problem #95 What should I do to establish control when taking over a project where I was not involved in the scoping or planning?[11]**

> (**Editor's note**: No, we did not select #95 just to prove we read the whole book. Rather because that was exactly the problem we faced when ordered to fly across Canada on a days notice to fix an important proposal with a four-day deadline. As it happened, by assembling a team to work round the clock, much to our surprise, we won that proposal against two other well established companies. Personally, we rather like rescuing problem projects because it is difficult to do any worse than the last guy, and management is often easier on the purse strings in order to save face.)

Here follows some extracts from Tom's text:

> "Some times you must assume leadership for a project that someone else started. To do this well, you must keep things going while you maintain (or establish) team cohesion, review and update the plans, and get to know your stakeholders.
>
> **Keeping the Plane in the Air**
>
> When you are tossed in the middle of a running project, your first order of business will be to keep it going. Some projects needing a new leader are in good shape, because the former leader's departure had nothing to do with the state of the project. Other projects, however, may need serious attention to correct problems, and this can be true even for some projects that appear on the surface to be running smoothly. Whatever your initial impressions, you will need to rapidly assess what people are doing and, unless you detect serious issues, keep them doing it.
>
> If there are adequate documents and plans available, quickly use them to do a thorough cycle of status collection to identify any significant variances. If the planning information is thin or nonexistent, meet with each project team member to discuss what he or she is up to and plans to do next. Document what you learn and prepare a status report

summarizing the state of the project.

Establishing Relationships and Teamwork

Schedule time with each assigned contributor to meet one-on-one and get to know each other. Discuss roles and responsibilities, and begin building trust. When you inherit a project team that's already in place, you'll want to do this fast. . . ."

"Making the plans your own

Regardless of how good the project plans appear to be, you will need to thoroughly review them, and update them as necessary to create plans that you understand and believe in. . . ."[12]

"Adjusting Expectations

If you detect significant problems in your requirements analysis or plan review, meet with your sponsor to discuss them. If you find that significant changes are necessary, use your data to negotiate them and reset your project baseline to be realistic. . . ."[13]

So, if the ideas in this case fit your situation, then use them. If not, as Tom modestly suggests, disregard them if the advice seems irrelevant.
But in our view, the majority of Tom's Problem suggestions are both reliable and realistic, if applied with a healthy amount of your personal judgment, as he suggests.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

~~~~~~~~~~

Rescue the Problem Project
A Complete Guide to Identifying, Preventing, and Recovering from Project Failure
By Todd C. Williams, 2011

Introduction

Review of this book, *Rescue the Problem Project* by Todd Williams, seemed to us to be a natural follow-on to our review of the previous of book: *101 Project Management Problems* by Tom Kendrick. Indeed, it did not come as a surprise that Tom wrote the Foreword to Todd's book. If the problems are that bad and the project is in imminent danger of complete failure, then stronger medicine is required. In fact, the subtitle of Todd's book says it all: ". . . Recovering from Project Failure".

Such medicine as Todd prescribes is likely best suited to the large, long and complex project, often swathed in political acrimony, and yoked by the legal terms and interpretations of various contracts and subcontracts. Yet, the advice that he offers follows the same pattern of any typical project life span, in the form: Recognize the problem, Determine the Issues, Analyze and develop a solution, Negotiate new authority, Execute New Plan, and Apply Lessons Learned. With these steps in mind, project practitioners can learn valuable lessons from this book even for projects that are significantly smaller than those categorized above.

Interestingly, Todd observes:[14]
"Of all the goals I went after in life, recovering projects was not one. Instead, recovering 'red' projects[15] came after me. Bosses or cohorts would call about a project in serious

need of attention – it was behind schedule, losing money, confronted by an unhappy customer, or experiencing some combination of all three. Many times the conversation simply started with: 'How current is your passport?'.

Soon I was on an airplane. Upon arrival, I would go through contracts and deliverables, talking to everyone on the project to try to understand what was working, what was missing, and what should be happening. I would put together a plan of action and sell it to management. I never really thought of it as a forte or specialization; red projects were the norm, and they needed fixing."

Notwithstanding Todd's modesty, it does take a certain kind of individual to tackle such situations. It needs strict discipline to follow a concerted plan of research; careful analysis and negotiation to extract the optimum solution from the project participants; determination to extract the necessary resources to execute the agreed plan; and the ability to acquire the necessary authority to make it happen. Stressful it may be, but actually it's a lot of fun. After all, and as we've said before, if management and the stakeholders are not willing to go along, they can always be told to look elsewhere.

While the book is valuable in rescuing any large complex project of whatever area of project management application, we rather suspect that the book is written with information technology or high technology projects in mind. That view seems to be supported by the author's background.

About the author

Todd Williams, PMP, is an experienced Senior Project Audit and Recovery Specialist with over 25 years of international experience in project recovery. His experience includes managing the development of large-scale business systems integration initiatives throughout the world. He is an active supporter and contributor to a number of relevant organizations.[16]

Table of Contents

The contents of this book are set out in twenty chapters, divided into seven parts as follows:

Each "Part" of the book is introduced with a brief scenario of the ensuing chapters. Each chapter concludes with a "Chapter Takeaway" summarizing the chapter's key points. These Takeaways are useful summaries as memory joggers if you are intent on learning the art of project rescue and recovery from beginning to end. However, if you are already well into a "Red" project and are looking for recommendations in a particular situation, then these Takeaways are a useful adjunct to the Table of Contents.

The total number of pages in this book is 277. There is no *Glossary*, but there is a short list of *End Notes* listing several references, a list of further *Recommended Reading,* and an *Appendix* containing a list of files on the author's web site.

General observations and recommendations

This book explains to the reader how to " Rescue the Problem Project". However, to do that we must first understand what is a "Problem Project"? Author Todd Williams' answer to that is:[17]

> "A project [that] has a problem that needs corrective action. The team is aware of the trouble and is frustrated. The members have tried to describe the issues and their negative implications to senior management, but their concerns have gone unheard. This problem will continue until management acknowledges it.
>
> Before a project can become a candidate for recovery, senior management must:
> - Recognize that the project is in trouble.
> - Make a commitment to fixing it.
> - Establish recovery guidelines.
> - Assign a recovery manager.
>
> Unless management commits to these four steps, the project will continue to flounder and failure is inevitable."

But what is (project) failure? Since failure is the converse of (project) success, what then is project success? Here, the author explains that:[18]

> "All projects are actually two projects – the customer's and the suppliers'. And, depending on the structure required to build the product, there may be numerous other project perspectives; for example, [that of] a subcontractor selected to work on some part of the project. Figure 1 illustrates the varying perspectives that are possible for a project."
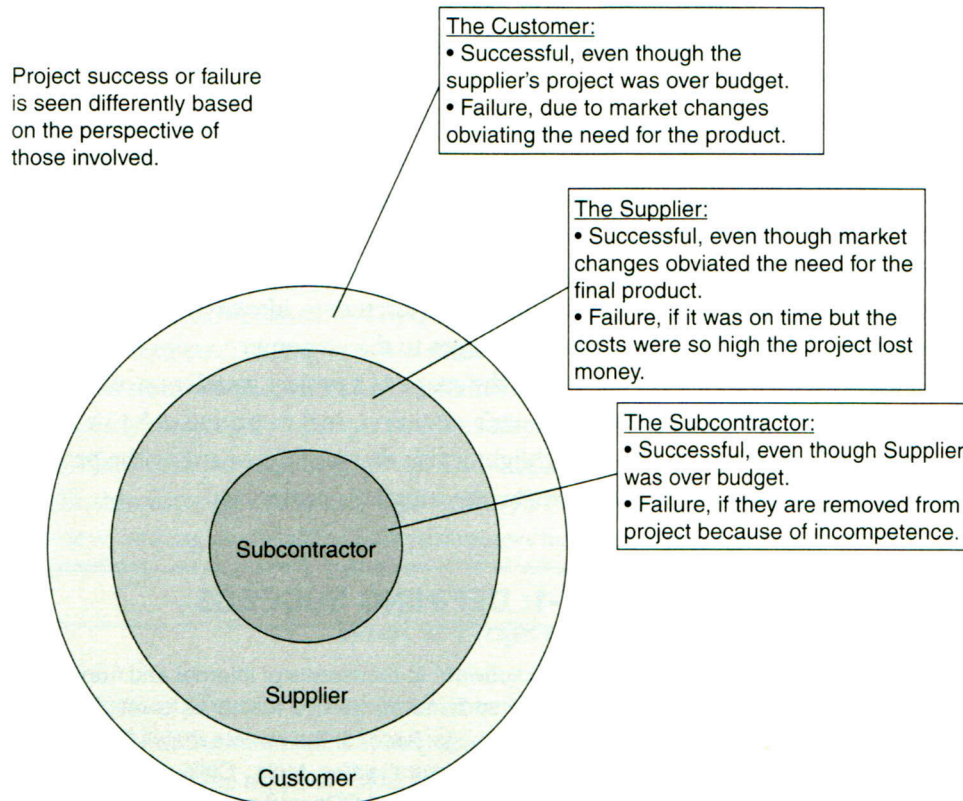
Project success or failure is seen differently based on the perspective of those involved.

The Customer:
• Successful, even though the supplier's project was over budget.
• Failure, due to market changes obviating the need for the product.

The Supplier:
• Successful, even though market changes obviated the need for the final product.
• Failure, if it was on time but the costs were so high the project lost money.

The Subcontractor:
• Successful, even though Supplier was over budget.
• Failure, if they are removed from project because of incompetence.

Subcontractor

Supplier

Customer

Figure 1: Perspectives on a Project[19]

Hence, in Todd's judgment:[20]

"The definition of project ***success*** is:
  •   The project delivers value to all parties in the project
  •   The project maintains the scope, schedule, and cost established by the original definition, as well as any before-the-fact change orders.

Delivering value to all parties means that both the customer and supplier get what they need; the project's original definition is irrelevant in determining whether that has happened."

It follows that:[21]

"A project is a failure when its project is unsuccessful in providing value to all the parties. From the customer's standpoint, the product the project is building provides the value; from the supplier's side, it is likely the revenue. If a project is supposed to deliver on a certain date, no sooner and no later, finishing early will have as negative a result as being late. To ignore an issue and let it continue unabated will result in failure."

We are not sure that we entirely agree with that last statement. We suggest it depends on by how much.

In our view, this book is well written in a clear and persuasive style. It includes a number of short illustrative case studies, summary bullet-point tables, and computer-generated illustrations. However, it is not "light reading", especially for those who may not be familiar with the project environment that is the subject of this book.

Nevertheless, we found it reliable and realistic and conclude that it is a valuable reference for those involved in complex projects.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

~~~~~~~~~~

---

[1] Pinto, Jeffrey K., Project Management: *Achieving Competitive Advantage*, 2nd Edition, 2010, page xv

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid, p xx

[4] Ibid, p439

[5] Ibid, p23, the paragraph beginning "Chapter 5 . . ." has 22 lines containing 16 sentences, one of which has 47 words – a far cry from http://www.maxwideman.com/issacons4/iac1453/sld007.htm

[6] Ibid, p23

[7] Kendrick, T. *101 Project Management Problems and How to solve them*, AMACOM, 2011, back cover

[8] "Issacons" is a word that we coined to stand for "Issues and Considerations", see http://www.maxwideman.com/issacons/index.htm

[9] Kendrick, p23

[10] Ibid, p1

[11] Ibid, p234

[12] Ibid, p235

[13] Ibid p236

[14] Williams, Todd C., PMP, Rescue the Problem Project, AMACOM, NY, 2011, p xix

[15] Ibid, p7, according to author Todd Williams, a project is red when unanticipated and uncontrolled actions cause senior management to determine that it is performing insufficiently, based on agreed parameters. Being red is a subjective quality of a project, an unanticipated variance from the project's current definition based on each organization's rules. Note that the supplier's portion can be red, while the customer's project is under control, or vice versa.

[16] Ibid, fly sheet, back cover.

[17] Ibid, p1

[18] Ibid, p4

[19] This diagram is understandably simplistic. To understand just how complex a large construction project can be, see Figure 1 - *Project management in a corporate environment* on this page: http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/capitalprojects/environment.htm (originally developed in 1987)

[20] Ibid, p5

[21] Ibid, p7