

A Trilogy of Books on Project Management
Book 2 - What Functional Managers Need to Know about Project Management
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(Book reviews)
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In Part 1 of this paper, we discussed all three books under our *Introduction*, and went on to look at *What Executives Need to Know* in some detail. In this Part 2 we will look at *What Functional Managers Need to Know*. From the title, it is evident that **functional managers** are the target audience, those who are associated with the management of one or more projects. If you have not yet read the Introduction to this series, please go back and read it now.

Book Structure

Each chapter is divided into sub-topics consisting of one or more pairs of pages. These chapter headings are as follows:

1. Project Management Principles – 20 topics
2. Benefits of Project Management – 1 topics
3. Some Implementation Complexities – 3 topics
4. Role of the Major Players in Project Management: The Project Manager – 23 topics
5. Role of the Major Players in Project Management: The Project Sponsor – 2 topics
6. Role of the Major Players in Project Management: The Functional Manager – 44 topics

What we liked

This book opens with a Preface that states in its opening paragraph:

"When project management first began [when was that, by the way?] the only industries that readily embraced project management as a way of doing business were aerospace, defense, and heavy construction. These industries were identified as project-drive industries, where each project had a profit target. The prime objective of project management was to generate profits, and the project managers had the responsibility for profit and loss. The survival of the company rested in the hands of the project managers."¹

This introduction clearly refers to those private sector companies providing new product or facility delivery services under contract, or those companies necessarily involved in letting contracts for those services. Thus, these contracts provide the basis of reference for the work that follows, and the signing of such contracts are thought of as the "start" of the project. And indeed, in this case, they are.

Although just an introduction, this perspective sets the framework for the rest of the book. Later on, the Preface observes:

"As project management matured and the projects became more sophisticated, it became extremely difficult for project managers to maintain their technical expertise and continue to possess a command of technology. Many were no longer considered to be technical² experts. Most project managers today have an understanding of technology rather than a command of technology. The technical expertise resides in the functional areas. As a result, the accountability for the success of the project is now viewed by many executives and project sponsors as shared equally between the project manager and all participating

line or functional managers."³

This is a very important statement for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, the authors draw a distinction between "technical expertise", which refers to the "art and science" of project management, and "technology", the applied science necessary to produce the product of the project. That is to say, the special expertise embedded in the particular type of project, or what we call the "Area of Management Application". The second point that should be recognized by both parties is that project managers must have sufficient understanding of the technology involved, in order to "understand" the work on the project, but not a "command" of the technology. Indeed, it is often better for project relations that they do not! (Executive management please take note!)

Chapter 1, one of the longer chapters, deals quite extensively with the typical issues confronting the relationship between functional managers and project managers. For example, the difficulties in non-project driven firms include, in part:⁴

- Projects may be few and far between
- Not all [of these] projects have the same project requirements
- An enterprise project management methodology does not exist
- Executives do not have sufficient time to manage projects themselves, yet refuse to delegate authority
- Projects tend to be delayed because approvals most often follow the vertical chain of command
- Only a portion of the organization understands project management
- There is a heavy dependency on the use of subcontractors and outside agencies for project management expertise.

Chapter 4, also a long chapter, sets out to provide the information to resolve these issues by first describing the role of the project manager as one of the major players. It is introduced with the idea of the three-legged stool shown in Figure 2, the three legs of which represent the project manager, the functional manager and senior management.

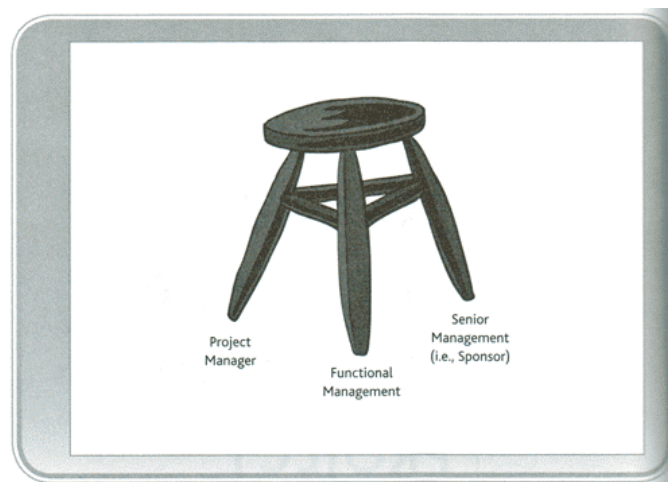


Figure 2: The Three-legged Stool

The figure is explained as follows:

"To ensure a solid, balanced approach and that project management functions as planned and achieves the expected benefits, all three legs of the stool must understand project management and how it should function. If only two of the legs understand project management, it is impossible for the stool to stand."⁵

Thus, the three-legged stool is a very interesting analogy.

Chapters 5 and 6, cover the other two roles with chapter 6 being the largest chapter by far. And so it should be because it directly addresses the title of the book. It ends rather nicely with the observation:

"Functional managers have the power to drive a project to success or point the project in the direction of failure.⁶ The working relationship between the project and functional managers is important. Today, the authority and responsibility for project success is shared between the project and functional managers, rather than a single-person total accountability in the hands of the project manager."⁷

Downside

Chapter 1 starts off with a little bit of humor. It suggests that:

"Project management is the art of creating the illusion that any outcome is the result of a series of predetermined, deliberate acts when, in fact, it was dumb luck!"⁸

We like that, but the reproof is given as:

"Most people will agree that project success is accomplished through a structured process of project initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and control, and finally closure."⁹

Unfortunately, this is most likely true, especially of those who were brought up on earlier versions of the Project Management Institute's Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge and its lack of a satisfactory distinction in project management terminology. The first term: "project initiation" and the last term "finally closure" imply that this string of terms refers to the "governance methodology" that is applied to the project life span¹⁰ and is selected appropriately for the technology in question. Whereas in fact the sequence of "Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling, and Closing" are the five groups of processes¹¹ identified by the Project Management Institute as necessary to manage the work in any phase of the project.

Our presumption above is further reinforced by a description of these five domain areas that includes these statements:

"Many project managers are not brought on board the project until the end of the initiation process. Executive management, marketing, and sales may take the lead during project initiation . . . During project execution, much of the work is accomplished by the project team and the functional managers . . . During project closure, the project manager is expected to make sure that all project documentation is complete and ready for the archives."¹²

To us, these are clear references not to the five project management process groups but to the phases of the project life span. Confusion reigns supreme.

Summary

This book provides a wealth of useful project management information and advice in crisp straightforward language. It is probably most suited to functional managers grappling with the issues arising between project management needs and the needs of traditional management. The Table of Contents provides an easy source of reference for the various available topics and the index provides further assistance.

It is a quick and easy read and quite possibly of most value to those managers with some project exposure and who are grappling with current issues arising between project management needs and the needs of traditional management. That's because the problem is that if busy executives don't know what they need to know, they probably won't bother to find out.

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Coming Next

In PART 3 of this paper we will discuss the book: *Value-Driven Project Management*.

¹ Kerzner, H., Ph.D., & F. P. Saladis, PMP, *What Functional Managers Need to Know About Project Management*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., NJ, 2009, p vii

² To be consistent the word "technical" here should be read to mean "technology", an unfortunate but pervasive confusion in the use of terminology and want of consistent definitions. Regrettably, this confusion tends to reoccur through the remaining text.

³ Ibid, p viii

⁴ Ibid, p25

⁵ Ibid, p79

⁶ The authors might have added: "Depending on the vested interest of the functional manager concerned!"

⁷ Ibid, 239

⁸ Ibid, p2

⁹ Ibid, p3

¹⁰ Project life span, aka project life cycle.

¹¹ Known as "The Process Groups", each of these five are described at length in the Project Management Institute's *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge*, ("PMBok") Fourth Edition (2008), Chapter 3. Unfortunately, and for far too long, there has been a lack of appreciation of the difference between the Project Management Process Groups that constitute management applied to the project work, which is cyclic, and the generic sequence of major phases in the project's life span. These major phases are here described as "Concept, Development, Execution and Finishing" and are essentially linear in time as described in Chapter 2 of the PMBoK. We believe that the confusion arises over the obvious similarity of the terms used for the two very different aspects of managing a project.

¹² Ibid, p5