Brainstorming The PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition
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(A book review by R. Max Wideman)
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Introduction

The PMBOK® Guide, ("the Guide") more properly known as *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* and now in its Fourth Edition (end of 2008), is published by the Project Management Institute ("PMI"). It is touted as the global standard for project management and describes concepts and practices of project management that are considered essential in the "profession" of project management. With more than three million copies sold, the PMBOK® Guide editions have almost instantly become the world's leading project management references. Nevertheless, for those who are not familiar with this work, it is affectionately known by its adherents as "pimbok".

Once again, author Muhamed Abdomerovic has done his "due diligence" on this latest version of the Guide. As you might expect, the Guide is in fact a conceptual collection of information, science, wisdom and practices that are deemed to be specific to the field of project management. In this current edition, the collection consists of nine "knowledge areas" involving forty-two "processes" with each process depicted in terms of inputs, tools and techniques, and outputs. PMI has formally adopted this collection for purposes of establishing its training and certification programs.

However, all of these processes are interconnected to a greater or lesser degree, to form a "system of nested processes" and the first challenge for the Guide's readers is to get their minds around how they all fit together. In the Guide's Chapter 3, it does provide graphical illustrations at the process group level and the process level respectively with each displaying connecting arrows indicating the existence of certain relationships. However, these relationships do not indicate what information is being exchanged.

The second, and perhaps bigger challenge is to see how this system of nested processes can be applied in a practical project environment. Of course, if all you want to do is to pass the PMI certification tests, then perhaps a deeper understanding is not necessary. However, if you are an academic or project management trainer, or any practitioner wishing to apply the body of knowledge to real-life projects, then you certainly do need a deeper understanding. And this is the book to help you gain that understanding.

Muhamed Abdomerovic is a civil engineer with over thirty years of experience in a variety of large projects covering construction, the process industry, the energy sector and information technology. During this time he has specialized in project management and developed a fascination for analyzing the discipline from a systems perspective. Consequently, he has been following the evolution of PMI's PMBOK® Guide since its first edition, and has conducted technical analyses of the contents using tools of his own design. These tools include a set of rules to establish consistency throughout his analysis.

Abdomerovic has written two previous versions of this book. But this version is different. It explains not only what the PMBOK® Guide says, but what it means and how it can be used to manage projects. Therefore, his book delves into the relationships between the Guide's various processes to expose specific relationships between a particular input or output and that of other processes in the PMBOK®

Guide. As a consequence, the book significantly augments the information in the Guide by revealing realistic underlying project management logic. Interestingly, this logic includes the inherent impact of the project management iterative process control loop involved in the related but controversial five management process groups.

Book Structure

At first glance, this book appears very simple in that it lists only two chapters, so the contents are as follows:

      Introduction
      Chapter 1: Project Management Areas and Process Relationships
      Chapter 2: Project Management Processes and Process Sequencing
      Index
      Glossary
      Biography
      Figures

However, Chapter 1 contains separate sections covering each of the nine knowledge areas represented by Integration, Scope, Time, Cost, Quality, Human Resources, Communications, Risk, and Procurement. Chapter 2 contains separate sections covering the five management process groups represented by Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling and Closing. So the two chapters are really two separate sections of the book covering interconnected topics.

But that's not all. The PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition is devoted almost entirely to identifying, explaining, and relating its forty two project management processes. These processes are classified in two different ways to show:[1]

    1. How processes interact within project management process groups.
    2. Which project management knowledge area each process belongs to.

The Guide also illustrates the following three types of relationships:[2]

    1. Relationships between process groups.
    2. Relationships between processes.
    3. Relationships between inputs and outputs within each process.

So the topics in Abdomerovic's book together cover the forty-two "processes" that are interlocked and surface in different areas in his book according to the project management knowledge area or project management process group topic under review. A short Glossary defines the special terms used in the book.

Sounds complicated? Don't blame the author, that's the way the Guide is presented. The Guide is attempting to record a three-dimensional model, in effect illustrating the complexity of project management – and why you need a qualified project manager!

What we liked

While all forty-two processes of the Guide have been analyzed and presented in Abdomerovic's book, his book does not slavishly describe all the relationships of every single one of them. That would lead to a substantially larger volume and make for tiring reading. Rather, Abdomerovic focuses on the Guide's

major processes and provides sufficient explanation for the reader to acquire the necessary understanding to follow the entire *PMBOK® Guide.* His explanations include examples of common tools and techniques, graphical depictions populated with data and short case study examples.

By making a thorough analysis of the whole of the *PMBOK® Guide* and tracking the explicit output/input relationships, together with some evident implicit process and process group relationships, Abdomerovic reveals the Guide's overall logical project management sequence. This sequence is hidden from the eyes of the average *PMBOK® Guide* reader. But by documenting this inherent logic, Abdomerovic uncovers a 36-step "Critical Output" workflow sequence that puts the Guide's forty-two main processes into their proper perspective and into the context of the well-recognized life span methodology of a real project.

As a result of this in-depth analysis, it is not surprising that Abdomerovic has also uncovered a number of issues and/or apparent anomalies. These are described in frequent sets of "Additional Notes" that include the author's interpretation, resolution or recommendations. Of course, it is to be hoped that future editions of the *PMBOK® Guide* will clarify the issues raised. To follow along with the contents of this book, you must obviously have a copy of the *PMBOK® Guide* at hand.

The purpose of identifying the project management body of knowledge is to enlighten project practitioners as to what is involved in managing a project and therefore to improve their chances of conducting a successful project. The purpose of *PMBOK® Guide* is to describe this content in terms of a system, and the purpose of Abdomerovic's book is to shed light on how that PMBOK system functions. Therefore, Abdomerovic's book is an instructive read and an important reference for all those academics, trainers and practitioners who must necessarily have a solid understanding of the Project Management Institute's *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – Fourth Edition.*

Downside

Project management is certainly an exciting and dynamic field of learning. Having a standard body of knowledge as well as standard methodologies that can be taught and practiced and that are constantly improving is a great benefit. By studying the Institute's PMBOK® Guide you can consolidate your project management experience and aspirations. Through your continued reading and practicing, it can help you stay ahead in this challenging field of know how.

It is generally asserted by adherents of the *PMBOK® Guide* that by adopting the standard project management framework, processes, and techniques, you can, effectively:[3]
- Understand the proven concepts and practices of commonly accepted knowledge in project management.
- Demonstrate your talent in following the rules and getting your project under control.
- Convince your client and your team that you know how to measure project performance and understand where your project is and where it is going.
- Gain the knowledge and experience to filter tough decisions and offer ways to successfully complete the project.
- Connect with top-level managers, build your success upon the knowledge of standard project management, and improve the project management business of the company.

We are not necessarily convinced of these assertions, but in any case it does involve having a comfort level with flow diagrams and adopting a "systems" mind set. And it does take time to untangle the

intricacies of the latest Guide. Unfortunately, although Data Flow Diagrams show how each process relates with other processes, the PMBOK Guide Fourth Edition does not have other components of process handling to make Data Flow Diagrams effective such as the processes' project management logic, sequence, or application procedure.

For example, the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition does not cover:[4]

- A set of sustainable rules for the analysis of process relationships that must be used to establish the context for each input, output, and process described in the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition. This could enable the reader to apply a specific method and extract the required project management logic out of scattered process contexts in the PMB OK® Guide Fourth Edition. Consequently, without the definition of complete relationships, the reader cannot understand the logic of the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition, or what the PMB OK® Guide Fourth Edition says.
- A comprehensive procedure needed for transforming the project management logic into a sequence for the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition inputs, outputs, and processes. Consequently, without such a sequence the reader will not be able to understand full meaning of the PMB OK® Guide Fourth Edition.
- A guideline to apply the project management logic and sequence of the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition and reveal the practical meaning of "recognized good practices" portrayed in the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition. Consequently, without directions for applying the knowledge from the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition the reader must ask how to use the PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition in a real project.

That is why the lists, explanations and examples in Abdomerovic's Brainstorming the PMBOK® Guide can be such an asset. However, all this does mean that to follow Abdomerovic's book you must have a copy of the PMBOK Guide at hand, and in our view, a hard copy at that.

Abdomerovic's book contains a collection of thirty-four diagrams and illustrations collected together under the section titled "Figures" at the end of the book. While the figures might have been placed in context to lighten the body of the text, perhaps this was the best solution given the need to reference them from multiple sources in the text. In any case, a good place to start in examining Abdomerovic's book is to study these illustrations first.

Summary

It is said that project management is as much an art as it is a science and some believe more, others less so. But whichever is the case, it is clear that project management, like any management, is not an exact science, the more so because management is about dealing with people. The Project Management Institute's PMBOK® Guide now in its Fourth Edition is the work and input of hundreds if not thousands of PMI members. As such, it represents the collective view based on individual experiences. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to think that the resulting wisdom has advanced over the years. So, a brief summary of the Guide's history seems appropriate. To quote Abdomerovic:[5]

> "A review of past project management history shows that a breakthrough in project management started more then quarter century ago with the publication of the Ethics, Standards and Accreditation (ESA) Report in 1983. The chair of ESA Management Group was Matthew H. Parry and the description of this document provided a guideline for future actions and objectives for the project management community.

This was followed by the publication of the Project Management Body of Knowledge ("PMBOK") of the Project Management Institute in 1987 developed by a number of dedicated professionals. The chair during its development in 1986 Edition was R. Max Wideman, who established the term "PMBOK" and defined its knowledge areas. A few dedicated professionals continued to build on this work resulting in the publication of A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (The PMBOK® Guide) in 1996. The primary author and Director of Standards of the 1996 Edition and its output/input characteristic was William R. Duncan.

Since this more advanced work was completed, its basic concept continues to develop with the support of thousands of project managers. Four years later, the 2000 Edition replaced the 1996 Edition. The 2000 Edition Standard Manager was Steven L. Fahrenkrog and project leader was Cynthia A. Berg. This successful upgrade represented a smooth transition by focusing on a better explanation of the 1996 Edition and changes related to Project Risk Management. "Most of the changes that were made are clearly improvements".

Although the magnitude of changes from 2000 Edition to the Third Edition was massive, it did not bring substantial improvements. The Third Edition Standard Manager was Steven L. Fahrenkrog and Project Manager was Dennis Bolles. However, the analysis of the Fourth Edition shows that a step up from the Third Edition and an improvement on the Third Edition have been made. The Fourth Edition Standard Manager was Ruth Ann Guerrero and Project Manager was Cynthia Stackpole."

Naturally, we think that a document such as The PMBOK® Guide should at least be logical, transparent and internally consistent. Hence the value of author Muhamed Abdomerovic's book *Brainstorming the PMBOK® Guide*. It meets a unique need.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

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[1] Abdomerovic, M., *Brainstorming The PMBOK® Guide Fourth Edition*, Project Management Publications, Kentucky, USA, 2009, p23
[2] Ibid, p24
[3] Ibid, p9
[4] Ibid, p25
[5] Ibid, p11