A Trilogy of Books on Project Management:
What Executives Need to Know; What Functional Managers Need to Know; Value-Driven PM
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(Book reviews by R. Max Wideman)

Introduction and What Executives Need to Know - Part 1
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Introduction to the Trilogy

In 2009, the International Institute for Learning, Inc. (IIL), New York, released three books on project management. The books are published by John Wiley & Sons in partnership with IIL and form a part of *The IIL/Wiley Series in Project Management*. They are titled respectively:
- What Executives Need to Know About Project Management
- What Functional Managers Need to Know About Project Management, and
- Value-Driven Project Management (a book written for project managers).

We will look at each book separately. However, because all three are by the same authors, are published by the same company, are obviously intended for related audiences, and follow a very similar format, we will first pass some observations on all three together.

At the top of the hierarchy is "What Executives Need to Know" and at 287 pages it is rather larger than the other two. In this case, as the authors observe:

> "As an executive today, you need to become more involved in project management. That doesn't mean you need to become a project manager, but rather you need to know how to set the stage for a project's success, oversee its execution, and intervene directly at key strategic moments. "[1]

Well said! Project managers generally will find that heart warming and will be able to point to it when the need arises in their own companies.

The text continues on with:

> "Based on the principles set forth in the bestselling *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling,* Tenth Edition, this easy-to-follow guide focuses on the pivotal role you play as an executive in project management. It introduces the acclaimed Kerzner Approach®, demonstrating how it empowers you with skills needed to ensure that projects are completed successfully, on time, and on budget."[2]

Very similar statements appear on the fly covers of the other two books, suitably edited of course to match the individual contents. And further:

> "The International Institute for Learning/Wiley Series in Project Management features the most innovative, tested-and-proven approaches to project management, all explained in clear, straightforward language. The series offers new perspectives on solving tough project management problems as well as practical tools for getting the job done. Each book in the series is drawn from the related IIL course and is written by noted project management experts." [3]

From this we may learn that while the books do contain valuable information, they also serve as promotional pieces for IIL's training courses. As such, any tendency towards exaggeration in these claims can be forgiven.

Inside each book under the heading "Acknowledgments", the text goes a little further with:
> "Some of the material in this book has been either extracted or adapted from Harold Kerzner's *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling*, 10th Edition; *Advanced Project Management: Best Practices in Implementation*, 2nd edition; *Strategic Planning for Project Management Using a Project Management Maturity Model*; *Project Management Best Practices: Achieving Global Excellence*, 1st edition (all published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) Reproduced by permission . . ."[4]

So you understand that you are in good hands with all three books.

About the authors and their books

For those who may not know, Harold Kerzner is Senior Executive Director at the International Institute of Learning, Inc., a global learning solutions company that conducts training for leading corporations throughout the world. He is a globally recognized expert on project, program and portfolio management, total quality management, and strategic planning. Frank Saladis is a Senior Consultant and Trainer for IIL and editor of the allPM.com newsletter, a popular online regular project management publication.

All three books have an interesting format. Almost wherever you open the book, on the left hand side is an illustration of some sort while on the right hand side is a corresponding explanatory text. For the executives, the illustrations are mostly black and white photos with an explanatory caption. For the functional managers, there are rather more charts or just plain texts, while for the project managers, these pages display charts, tables or plain texts. The explanatory texts vary in length from less than half a page to about three quarters. Interestingly, on average the texts for the functional managers tend to be the longest.

At this point, we cannot help being reminded of the hoary old joke, the conversation between a pessimist, optimist and a project manager discussing the proverbial glass of water. The pessimist felt it was half empty. The optimist felt that it was half full. The project manager, on the other hand, felt that the glass was twice as big as it needed to be.

Although these observations may seem somewhat petty, it does suggest to us a reflection of the state of development of our understanding of each of the three realms. In other words, our understanding of what executives really need to know is limited, while at the other end of the scale, project management (i.e. as described in the value-driven book) is much better understood. In turn, this suggests that there should be considerable opportunities for research into what simple graphical content would be most valuable for the tuition of executives.

Given the extent of project management terminology, and the lack of consensus over the meanings of specific terms, we were disappointed to find that all three books lacked a relevant glossary of terms appearing in the respective works.

Nevertheless, the design of these books provides fast access to essential project management wisdom. Indeed, all three books provide an excellent reference for project management consultants wishing to brush up or augment their training course slides when presenting to their respective levels of management.

From here on in, we will take a look at each book separately.

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Book #1
What Executives Need to Know about Project Management
Published April, 2012

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From the title, it is evident that the target audience is ***executive management*** either already involved in, or intent upon being involved in the management of one or more projects. However, the type or types of project will be discussed later. 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 – 2 topics
2. The Evolution of Project Management – 13 topics
3. The Benefits of Project Management – 2 topics
4. Three Core Best Practices – 3 topics
5. Role of the Executive as a Project Sponsor – 2 topics
6. Special Problems Facing Executives – 19 topics
7. New Challenges Facing Senior Management – 15 topics
8. Additional Responsibilities for Executives – 7 topics

What we liked

Chapter 3 only displays two topics, however, the first topic addresses "Benefits" in some detail and over a number of pages. It makes a good case for executives to adopt project management for their various initiatives. The second topic goes even further. Although only very brief, it clearly states that typical benefits [of project management] may appear as:[5]
  • A reduction in the number of nonproductive meetings due to better teamwork and communication
  • More efficient execution of projects due to the processes contained in the EPM[6] methodology
  • Getting closer to the customer, possibly resulting in sole-source contracting and lowering bidding costs
  • An improvement in quality, resulting in greater customer satisfaction

Some of these suggestions will be controversial, but nevertheless worth making.

Contrary to what one might expect from the Table of Contents listed earlier, in fact Chapters 4 and 5 together make up the largest part of the book. These chapters cover in detail what executives must do to establish and maintain a valuable project management presence if they are serious about conducting their projects effectively and efficiently. In this the major message is that executive level sponsors should be appointed for the oversight of the organization's projects. And further, that these sponsors must have specific responsibilities towards their projects and a clear understanding of the project management process.

Given the predisposition for large organizations to establish corporate policies and procedures to cover

almost anything and everything, one particular section in this part of the book caught our attention:

> "It is almost impossible to design company policies such that they cover all possible situations that can exist on each and every project. In addition to these issues, company policies are subject to interpretation and misinterpretation.
>
> The role of the sponsor is to assist the project manager and team with this interpretation. The sponsor also serves as a 'safety net' for the project manager should any of the policies require a specific interpretation for the benefit of the project."[7]

We wish we had known that a long time ago.

Chapters 6 and 7 elaborate on the challenges facing corporate sponsors of projects as well as some of the difficulties that project managers may have with ineffective sponsors. The final Chapter 8 advocates for a Project Management Office and a career path for project managers.

Downside

We did not find in the book any indication of its intended audience, that is, who is it that would most likely be interested. Of course, it would be nice to sell as many books as possible to anybody and everybody. But, from the contents, our impression is that the authors have in the back of their minds those executives who are responsible for projects resulting in tangible products such as in manufacturing, engineering and construction.

In other words, those executives of companies either providing project management services under contract to owners, or of organizations that are obtaining their "products" by means of letting contracts. If that is true, then the book appears to assume that the project starts with the terms laid down in some form of contract. The corollary is that the contents will be of less interest to those in the Information Technology sector where the terms of reference for the project essentially starts with a Business Case.

Given the extent of focus of the book on what executives should do with respect to project management, we felt that rather more emphasis could have been placed on **why** they should do it. True this is covered in Chapter 3, but it might have been better for the book to introduce this information as chapter 1. In other words, sell the product first before getting into the fine print! By the same token, as a long-time member of the Project Management Institute, we found *The Evolution of Project Management* information in Chapter 2 quite interesting, but it might just as well have been relegated to the back end of the book.

We cannot fault the authors for displaying Harold Kerzner's iconic logo, a triangle within a circle. This is displayed at the start of Chapter 1 on Project Management Principles as shown in Figure 1.

However, we were disappointed that the associated text still talks about:

> "From an executive perspective, the figure illustrates the basic goal of project management, namely, meeting the objectives associated with the ***triple constraint*** of time, cost, and performance while maintaining good customer relations."[8] (Our emphasis added)
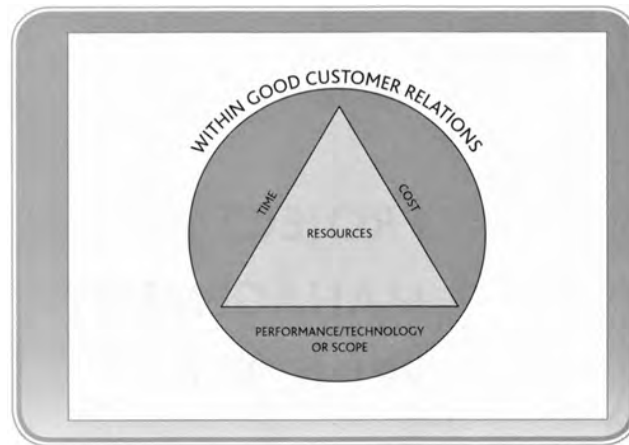
Figure 1: Dr. Kerzner's iconic logo[9]

And further on the last page of the book:

> "The basic principles of project management associated with planning, executing, and controlling have remained relatively constant through the ages. These principles have driven the definition of success that is associated with the triple constraint."[10]

As the only "principle" referred to in the chapter (project management has a number of well established principles), we feel that this is particularly misleading when the diagram itself includes up to seven so-called constraints. Indeed, the diagram on the following page elaborating on "Resources" shows a further nine types of resource constraints.[11] As we have tried to establish many times before, time and cost are directly related to the extent of the product's scope and quality, a relationship that is subject to risk events and performance, e.g. productivity. Thus the underlying relationship is not a triangle but at least a quadrangle.

But in any case, surely an executive lacking any basic knowledge of project management would first be interested in more direct issues, certainly at the start of Chapter 1. For example: How soon will the proposed product be available for operational use? How much is its estimated cost? And how can we be sure that it will produce the intended benefits?

If executives were going to really understand the principles of project management, it would be well to expand this chapter considerably. A good place to start on this expansion might be here: http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/first_principles/meaning.htm

Summary

This book provides a wealth of useful project management information and advice in crisp straightforward language. The Table of Contents provides an easy source of reference for the various available topics and the index provides more in-depth assistance.

It is a quick and easy read and quite possibly of most value to those project managers with considerable practical experience but who aspire to join the executive suite. It may be of less value to existing busy executives because the problem is that if they don't know what they need to know, they probably won't bother to find out.

R. Max Wideman
Fellow, PMI

Coming Next

In Part 2 of this paper we will discuss the book: *What Functional Managers Need to Know about Project Management* and in Part 3, *Value-Driven Project Management*.

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[1] Kerzner, H., Ph.D., & F. P. Saladis, PMP, *What Executives Need to Know About Project Management*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., NJ, 2009, back fly cover.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid, p xiii

[5] Ibid, p61

[6] EPM: Enterprise Project Management

[7] *What Executives Need to Know* p105

[8] Ibid, p3

[9] Ibid, p2

[10] Ibid, p282. Actually we are inclined to disagree. The "basic principles of project management" may have "remained relatively constant" but our understanding of them has advanced enormously.

[11] Ibid, p4