

Book Reviews #5 – Part 2: In brief

By R. Max Wideman, FPMP

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Introduction

In these reviews, we examine the whole book to get a "feel" for its total scope, objective and our view of its most suited target audience according to the evident area of project management application. We also try to comment on the quality of writing and style, level of reading from "introductory" to in-depth to "academic" and so on. Finally, we make an assessment of how realistic and sound we feel the content is and add our comments and suggestions.

In this set, the first book is quite large while the second is relatively small. However, both are by the same author and, as you will see, the two books are related. That is why there are only two books in this set.

We hope that potential readers of these books will find these reviews helpful.

Books discussed in this Review

Book Reviews #5 – Part 2

2. Naked Project Management, The bare facts, by Dennis Lock, 2013

Naked Project Management, The bare facts, By Dennis Lock, 2013

Introduction

Project management depends largely on common sense and a logical, systematic approach. But it is necessary also to acquire some special skills to organize, schedule and control a project so that it produces the result that everyone wants. Author Dennis Lock presents *Naked Project Management* as an introductory guide to the world of project management. It is for students and managers who need to understand how small projects should be managed but who, nonetheless, do not necessarily intend to become permanent project managers themselves.

In this little book, Dennis has stripped project management down to its bare facts – simplifying everything but trivializing nothing. He explains and illustrates the essential project management skills in pragmatic and jargon-free terms. Everything is carefully laid out and supported with clear diagrams. It covers all the essential aspects of project management using astonishingly few words. Further, an entertaining case study project flows logically through the chapters from beginning to end so that the book covers all the vital topics.

In an Email exchange, Dennis asked us to bear in mind that *Naked Project Management* has been cut to the bone compared to his much larger book *Project Management* (10th edition).¹ So this little book is intended to give only a cursory view of its subject, although of course it has to be factually correct. Nevertheless, there is sound practical advice here on how to organize and manage a small or medium sized project for anyone involved in, or contemplating, such an initiative.

The entertaining case study project just mentioned is called "The Swings and Roundabouts project". About this project, Dennis also told us that:

"I live in the cathedral city of St Albans in Hertfordshire, and adjacent to our cathedral is a large public park with a beautiful lake and wildlife. It's called Verulamium, which was the name of the Roman City that existed here nearly 2000 years ago. There one finds a typical children's playground (complete with swings and roundabouts), so I chose that as my simple model. I decided to take some photos before I began writing. However, as an old man dressed in a dirty raincoat I had to be very careful – people tend to look down their noses at men in dirty raincoats who take pictures of other people's children and are apt to call the police. So I was most careful to go there early one morning, when the park was deserted. The first mother and child arrived just as I left."

St. Albans, UK, is not far from where we were brought up, so we read the case study in the little book rather like a detective novel – anxious to find out how it all turned out in the end.

About the author

Dennis is an industry guru who has been writing on the subject for 45 years. He is a freelance writer specializing in project management. He has held a progression of successful management positions in a variety of industries. He has also filled consultancy assignments in Britain and overseas and more recently has taught project management to master's degree students as an external lecturer at two British universities. He has written or edited over 50 management books mostly on project management.

In an Email exchange,² he says he wrote this book in three weeks, and his aim was to save the time and money of students who are only studying project management peripherally. Therefore, degree and other students, for whom project management is an elective or small part of their course, should love this compact timesaving and reasonably priced study resource. Others will likely find it rather light reading and should invest in *Project Management* (10th edition) that we reviewed previously.

Table of Contents

The content of this book is set out in 8 chapters as follows:

1. Projects
2. Getting Ready for the Project
3. Organization
4. Planning and Scheduling
5. Contracts and Commerce
6. Take Control
7. Task Forces for Special Projects
8. Round up

The book has 112 pages and includes 27 figures. The book does not have a Glossary of Terms.

In the Email mentioned previously, author Dennis Lock had this to say about project management books in general:

"I want to put before you another of my beliefs, which is that the project management fraternity (and other project management writers) seem to despise the commercial aspects of projects. Pick up any project management book and you will usually be hard pressed to

find anything about purchasing and the supply chain – yet bought materials and services can account for up to 80 per cent of the total project cost.

Look at any book on project risk management, and you will find all about project identification, classification, assessment matrices, risk logs, risk managers and risk mitigation steps. But what about insurance using an underwriter or a broker, which is an important part of risk management. Most construction managers, for example, have to face the daily (or rather nightly) risk of having plant and machinery stolen from the site and that's an insurance issue.

Here's another thing, whilst I am fired up. That is the general confusion between analysis and reporting of progress and costs (including earned value analysis) and actual project management (the taking of decisive action). In my youth I used to be guilty of sitting behind my desk, studying schedules and results, issuing memos and expecting the project to correct itself. I soon learned my lesson."

In *our* youth we had the vision that we could have our project so well organized that we could sit at our desk with our feet up, while the project ran itself from end to end. Needless to say, it never happened. Instead, we learned another valuable lesson – bosses like to see activity. In their mind, lack of physical activity by an individual suggests someone that is surplus to requirements. Perhaps that is why some project managers have been known to deliberately create crises that they then solve – to justify their existence.

General observations and recommendations

This book is well written in a clear style and covers the essential practical activities involved in successfully conducting a small to medium sized construction type project. The descriptions of the various essential activities and responsibilities of the project manager are well supported with graphical illustrations. In general, we think that the book provides sound practical project management advice at an introductory level. The text is light and easy reading and the reader is drawn along in following the progress of the illustrative "Swings and Roundabouts Project" case study.

The Swings and Roundabouts Project

The Swings and Roundabouts Project is a small project that is first scoped out in Chapter 1 and is shown in Figure 1. It is followed through in each of the subsequent chapters. As mentioned earlier, it is based on the layout of an actual playground in the author's home city, but what we don't know is whether the actual project was brought about as successfully as the case study will prove to be!

Here are the successive steps of the case study.

In Chapter 2: Work Breakdown and Cost Estimate for the Swings and Roundabout Project

In Chapter 3: Organization of the Swings and Roundabouts Project

In Chapter 4: Planning the Swings and Roundabouts Project

In Chapter 5: Contracts and Purchases for the Swings and Roundabouts Project

In Chapter 6: Controlling the Swings and Roundabouts Project

Chapter 7 extols the virtues of "Task Forces for Special Projects" but questions whether or not the Swings and Roundabouts Project is in fact just a task force. The answer is maybe, depending . . .

In Chapter 8 we learn the results of the Swings and Roundabouts Project at a Final Project Meeting of the Swings and Roundabouts Project Team.

Here is a part of the record of that final wrap up meeting.³

"Theresa [Green] began by thanking everyone who had helped to make the project a success. She then asked some of the people, in turn, about their personal experience of the project and the way in which it had been managed. One universal answer that emerged was that everyone at the site in the park had been impressed at the regularity with which everything seemed to happen. Unlike previous ventures, there were no panic days and all the materials and services appeared at the right time. Theresa explained that the critical path network had much to do with that.

Penny Wise remarked that it was good to see a project that had finished almost exactly on budget . . . Theresa explained that working to a sensible schedule, with everyone clear about what they had to do, coupled with controlled purchasing, was the reason for that success. Ize Wong commented that having such a detailed work breakdown structure (WBS) had helped him to make the original cost estimates, and had also enabled him to record actual costs as they arose and compare them with the estimates.

Chief executive Richard Croesus now spoke up. He congratulated the team and said that their project success would create a good impression with the public, and with users of the new playground . . . As everyone dispersed, Richard took Theresa aside and said he would like her to train people from other council departments and show how they might improve the management of their projects. He asked the beaming Theresa if there was anything she needed to help in future projects. 'Well' she replied, 'we would need some more advanced software.

Microsoft Project is fine for small projects, but I would like to do things like incorporating the work breakdown codes in all project task identifiers, and have a timesheet facility for recording costs.' . . . Richard was somewhat taken aback, but asked Theresa to submit a proposal and cost estimate to him. Theresa suggested Primavera or Deltek's Open Plan, as two of the many competent software packages that might be considered . . .

She thought the initial cost would be in the region of £5,000 to £10,000 . . ."

The resounding success of the project brought tears to our eyes. But Theresa's estimate for the suggested software did not mention the need for a trained and project savvy technician to operate the suggested sophisticated software. This would undoubtedly increase the departmental cost considerably!

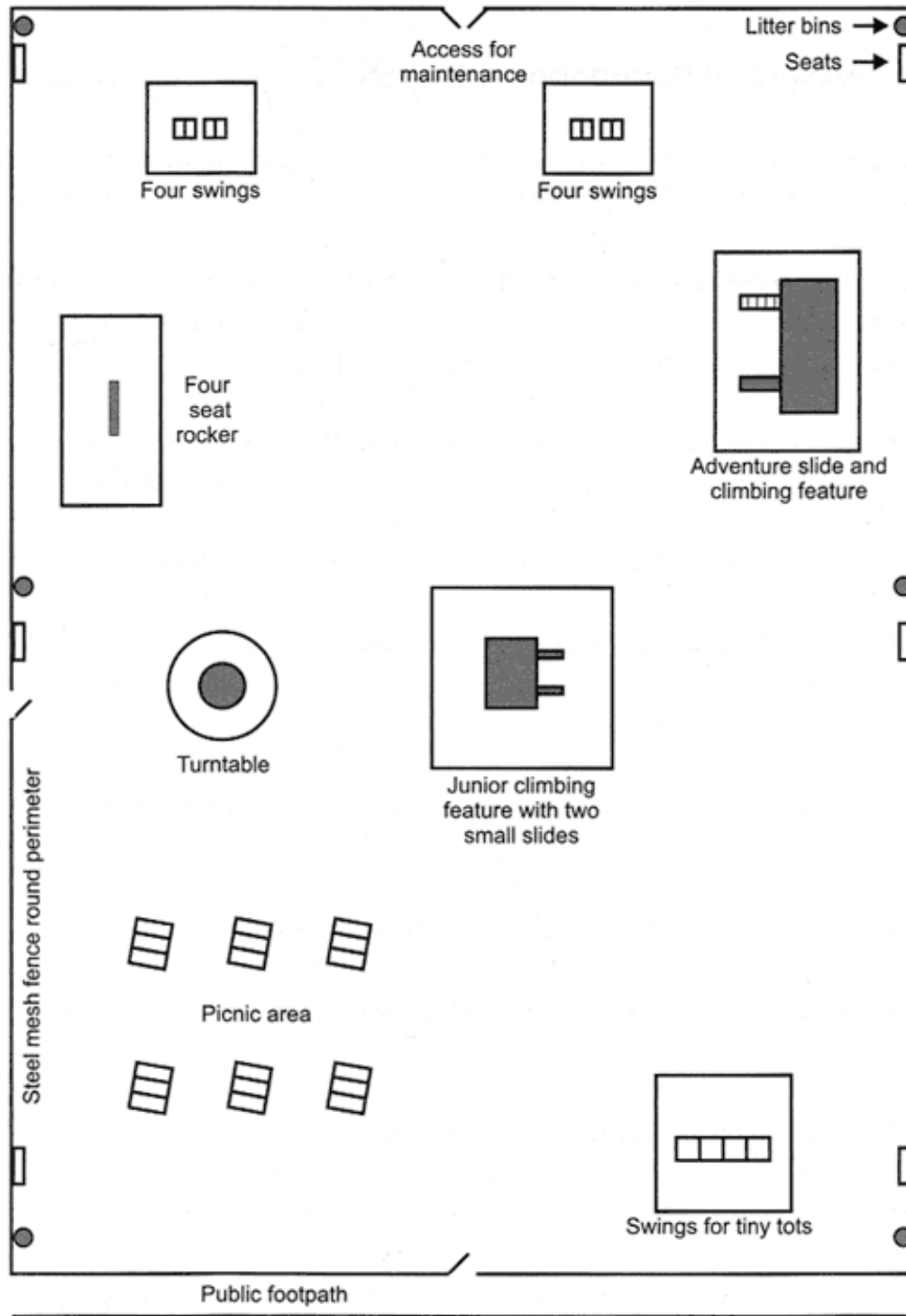


Figure 1: A site plan of the proposed playground

Quibbles

First, we take issue with the author's idea of a typical project life cycle – see Figure 2. We have no difficulty in recognizing the sequence of phases illustrated. However, for an instructional manual, we disagree strongly with some of the labeling. First and foremost, the "Total conception-to-death project life cycle" arrows at the top should more accurately be described as the *product* life cycle. It is true that

in casual parlance the word "project" is often used to refer to the "product", as indeed the author has also done in the text, but this is very misleading for new project management learners.

Somewhere in, or between, phases 1 and 2 should be the delivery of the project's **Business Case**. The **Business Case** is one of the most important milestone documents of a project. That's because it sets out the intent, scope and cost of the project in such a way as to justify the project in terms of its cost versus its expected benefits.

In our view, this is where the project really starts because this is where the expenditure, specifically dedicated to the project, starts being spent. Therefore, the **project life span** stretches from around phases 1 and 2, and extends to the phase 6 shown in the Figure. Including a reference to the **Business Case** in the text and showing this project life span in the illustration would have been helpful. This way, the beginning and end of the project would then be more clearly identified, together with "all the bits in the middle".⁴

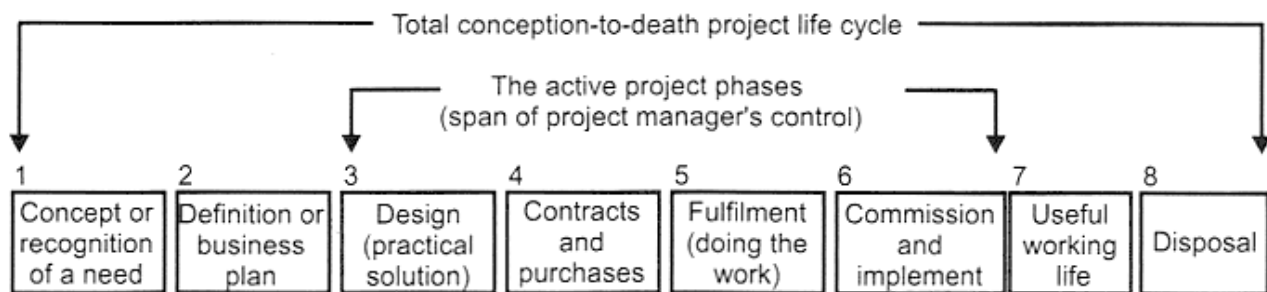


Figure 2: The author's typical project life cycle

Under **business plan** the author suggests that: "Every business plan or study should look at how the main project activities will be funded."⁵ This is followed by a useful list of eight suggestions. In our view, this is one of the responsibilities of the project's sponsor and certainly should be included in the project's business case. The bracketing of "The active project phases", the implementation or fulfillment phases, tends to imply that the project really starts with phase 3 (Design (practical) solution).

Unfortunately, such an assertion is rampant in the project management industry and should be thoroughly discouraged. That's because such an assertion misses the project's "front end" and this is where the source of most project failures can be found.

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¹ See the first review in this set.

² By Email from Dennis Lock, March 8, 2013

³ Lock, Dennis, *Naked Project Management – The Bare Facts*, Gower Publishing Limited, Surrey England, 2013, pp103-105

⁴ Professor Rodney Turner, author and editor of *The International Journal of Project Management*, and Professor of Project Management at Erasmus University, Rotterdam is credited with defining a project as having a beginning and an end "and a bit in the middle", see <http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/linearity/intro.htm>

⁵ Lock, *Naked Project Management* p3