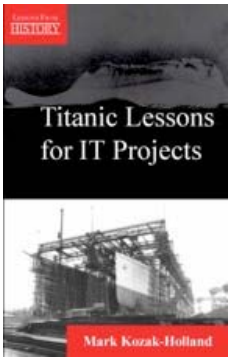
PMF Book Review



Book Title: Titanic Lessons for IT Projects

Author: Mark Kozak-Holland
Publisher: Multi-Media Publications
List Price: $ 27.96 USD or $17.95 (eBook)
Publication Date: 2005
Reviewer: Chris Patrick, PMP
Review Date: November 2006

Introduction to the Book:

Most Project Managers admit to going through at least 1 catastrophic failure in their career. This book focuses on those projects that fail after production is completed. The Titanic project was unpredictable, unexpected and extremely costly. This book gives a high level correlation between IT project failures and the Titanic story. The author, Mark Kozak-Holland is a Senior Business Architect/Consultant with HP Services. Mark has over 20 years of systems integration and services experience gained internationally in all phases of project development from conception to implementation.

The purpose of this book is to identify what we can learn from the Titanic project that we can transfer to today's information technology projects. There are many reasons I have elected to review this book. Mainly because I have a fascination with both the Titanic story and IT related projects. I thought both of these areas of interest running parallel would make for interesting subject matter.

Overview of Book's Structure:

The book covers topics relating to both the Titanic project and IT projects leading up to implementation and beyond. The book is constructed to tell the story of the Titanic (planning, testing, and implementation), how this relates to IT projects and what lessons we can learn from the Titanic failure. Each chapter begins with a story of the Titanic project and extracts relevant lessons for IT projects. Topics include cost structure, design and construction, testing, implementation and operations, implementation mistakes, how a manageable situation turned worse, how officers reacted, disaster recovery, and Titanic's final minutes.

Highlights: What I liked:

This book looks at IT projects beyond implementation. What happens after implementation can only be measured based on work performed before the project is implemented. Some of the positive features and special features of interest are as follows:

- There were a lot of compromises in the Titanic project. The author does a great job of identifying how the impact of compromises (in relation to both the Titanic and IT projects) may not be apparent as a problem until weeks or months after the project is completed and in production.

- The book points out that success of IT projects should not be measured at deployment but rather after the solution has been in production for a while and carefully measured. In my experience metrics should be closely tied to the overall impact to the business. The author does a great job of correlating metric use in the Titanic project as well as metrics used in IT projects.

- There was a particular feature in the book which I could relate to my own work experiences. Too often organizations launch a project with the view that any problems will be flushed out by the user or client in the short term. I think the author did a great job in identifying how the Titanic project took an extremely risky approach through benchmarking a similar project and failing to look at other processes and procedures.

- Many IT projects fail to properly identify service level objectives. In the example of the Titanic, the author mentioned that operators received eight warnings reporting icebergs. The operators only sporadically relayed these messages to the bridge because there SLO was to transmit commercial radio messages for wealthy first-class passengers.

- In my experience when an organization experiences downtime, they fail to capture what impact the service loss had to the organization. The author does a great job in introducing a process called Mean Time to Recovery and explaining how this concept can help organizations gather metric data and establish SLA.

- The author did a great job in explaining not only the importance of a disaster recovery plan but invoking the disaster plan. If the Titanic had a disaster plan, this would have brought everyone onboard to the lifeboat deck, safely loaded the passengers with places to spare.

Shortfalls: What was missing!

I would like to have seen further explanation regarding the “repercussive effects.” I think every Project Manager would agree that there are other factors to consider in order to get an accurate picture of ROI for an IT project. The author points out you need to factor in total unavailability cost, user outage minute, absence effect value

and repercussion value to make ROI meaningful. The ability to measure the impact each minute an operation is unavailable to your customers and organization is an invaluable metric. I would like to have seen more examples regarding this interesting concept.

Who might benefit from the Book

I think that just about anyone with a management background could benefit from this book. The book primarily targets those working in the IT field as a Manager, however this book could benefit Sr. Executive's and Mid-Level Managers. This book does not contain a lot of technical jargon so much of the content could be understood by anyone with a business background. The content of this book could benefit all organizations that see technology as a critical component to the success of their organization.

Conclusion

I found this book to be an easy read with interesting concepts and ideas. The author successfully captured my interest by incorporating the most notorious "failed project" in recent memory with the difficulties IT Project Managers face on a daily basis. I found the topics to be insightful and I could relate my own project experiences with the examples provided by the author. I feel anyone with a management background could benefit from this intriguing book.

Short bio of reviewer:

Chris Patrick

Chris Patrick is an IT Project Manager at AltaOne Federal Credit Union. Chris is PMP certified with over 6 years of experience in planning, coordinating and implementing IT related Projects and over 7 years of intensive IT leadership experience. Recently, he has successfully planned, managed, implemented, tested and deployed 60+ IT related projects in a 4-year span. Chris received his Bachelors of Science degree in Management Information Systems from California State University, Chico, USA. He received a Certificate in Project Management from the University of Texas at Dallas in December 2005 and anticipates graduating from the University of Texas at Dallas with an MBA in December 2007. Chris can be contacted at cpatrick@altaone.net.

.