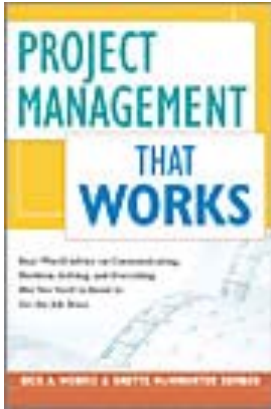


PM World Today Book Review



Book Title: *Project Management that WORKS*

Author: Rick A. Morris with Brette McWhorter Sember

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Reviewer: Earl W. Crisp, D. P. A

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Introduction to the Book

This is a specialty book of approximately 120 pages and is organized into 17 chapters and includes a glossary of terms and a subject index. The authors focused on what they consider to be the major problems in managing projects today. Their premise is that once sufficient knowledge on the theory of project management has been gained that the ability of the project manager to apply the concepts to real world situations has become problematic.

The authors' real-world experience combined with personal observation of other projects identifies a lack of diligence by project managers to follow key concepts of project management that are either not rigorously followed or are purposefully ignored. This approach of "selective" preparation has resulted in numerous project failures or caused many projects to achieve less than satisfactory results. This disappointing experience became a key-motivating factor for the authors and provided the impetus for writing this book to help all project managers achieve outstanding success.

The authors likewise received inspiration author Rob Thomsett's book entitled *Radical Project Management* that provided the necessary stimulus for action and to take on the challenge to compile a "lessons learned" book based on the culmination of the success factors, frustrations, apathy towards excellence through leading projects and by dealing with circumstances they experienced as a team members and leaders.

The authors experience from leading projects enabled them to highlight the gaps between the principles of project management and the application of these principles in the corporate environment. Their primary concern was about project managers who tend to **selectively divide** what the project team will and won't do. They further

describe impediments from top management who want the glory but are not willing to support or fund the project as necessary to achieve unequivocal success. The book takes each principle or concept and develops the theme of each by defining the terminology and then describes its *utility* to a project and how the *lessons learned* are more than a noteworthy section in the final report.

Each chapter essay deals with specific aspects of the project and the author presents real-world situations that may be encountered by both new and experienced managers. These essays serve as “windows” by presenting an integrated view of challenges and best practices that may be of benefit to the project manager at some point especially, during a difficult project when a situation doesn’t seem clear.

Overview of Book’s Structure

Following the introduction of the book the authors begin the first chapter with the statement ***Understanding Yourself*** and then ask a number of questions for the readers to think about and, to truthfully respond to themselves for greater understanding. The authors found a useful tool called the **DISC** profile and describe its functions in helping a project manager gain control, knowledge and wisdom early on before the project takes on a life of its own. The DISC acronym stands for four style dimensions: **D**ominance, **I**nfluence or **I**nducement, **S**teadiness or **S**ubmission, and **C**onscientiousness or **C**ompliance. It should be noted that the terms have varied slightly since the model was first introduced.

As the book progresses into later chapters they suggest several personality measurement instruments such as Myers-Briggs in addition to the DISC profile for increased personal awareness and introspective self-assessment. The authors provide a brief background of the DISC profile that was created by William Moulton Marston who also created the first functional *lie detector* as well as the comic book *Wonder Woman*.

From the authors’ perspective, “We know pretty well what our ***strengths*** are, but we don’t always acknowledge our ***weaknesses*** so that we are prepared to act or react whenever a challenging situation arises.” In the role of project manager, we are left to “break the news” to our team and then to the stakeholders. This can be especially troubling when the news is negative and it places the project manager in a not so enviable position (which may also have residual career effects).

The authors frequently reference PMI’s PMBOK© Guide as a trusted guide and friend that the reader can turn to whenever encountering difficulty or challenges. They acknowledge that the PMBOK does not have all the answers or the specifics for our projects, but the principles provide the structure that we can embellish or diminish as the project dictates. By identifying principle concepts, steps and effective tools the

project manager is empowered and less susceptible to criticism or being driven by the whims of others.

In Chapter 15 ***Project Manager: The Strategic Resource*** the authors discuss what Chief Information Officers need to know and they immediately follow with pertinent suggestions of what Project Managers or the PMO needs to provide. They encourage the reader to develop a proactive approach in applying governance to the project organization identify all the necessary steps that includes metrics and measurements for all initiatives. This leads into the next Chapter entitled ***Making Positive Change in Your Corporate Culture***.

The authors purport that the culture of the organization can either help or hinder project success especially where the organization deals with ***change***. Managing change and communicating the direction the company is being taken by top management is where the Project Manager or PMO is often the last to find out. The authors provide an interesting example where new software was unilaterally purchased and was to be installed within 4 months. This sounded great until various departmental managers asked questions and discovered that the vendor of the software could not provide accurate estimates for their organization that included testing and full implementation. More information and departmental involvement was required.

The authors' example permeates the issues of organizational culture and the management of change and how it is to be governed. The example clearly relates to the earliest chapters of the book where ***communication*** and ***trust*** create the foundation of the corporate culture and demonstrates how the organization acts or reacts to change.

The ***Conclusion*** chapter of the of book reiterates the authors' desire to create a chapter-by-chapter road map for improving project management skills for resolving common project issues. This collection of theories, ideas, systems and practices offer a path for the development of solid project management strategies with the full intent and purpose of bringing about positive change at all organizational levels. The reader is challenged by the authors to apply these theories, tools and practical techniques and to invest the time, effort and courage to achieve excellence in project management and to settle for nothing less.

Highlights: What I liked!

The book captures the intense desire of the authors to present pearls of wisdom from years of experience as a project manager. The intent of each essay is to break down the five basic elements of the project management process and expound on what can go right or what can go wrong in each phase. The authors combined experience unfortunately includes their witnessing of many low achieving projects that could

otherwise have been hallmarks of excellence had the project management guidelines been followed more closely.

I particularly liked Chapters 2 and 3 that set the tone for the rest of the book. Chapter 2 places the ego in check by stressing the theme of **Communication at all levels**. The authors start by getting to know “your sponsor”. This is deemed extremely important since the sponsor is often the one who provides the funding or supports the funding of the project. They note that if the sponsor is on the C-level (chief financial officer, chief executive officer or chief information officer) and if your project goes well, then the direct visibility is priceless.

The authors assert that the most difficult hurdle in working with an executive is determining his or her communication style. This is where the authors re-introduce the DISC profile described in Chapter One. The authors frankly acknowledge that the probability of an executive filling out a questionnaire is not likely, however, the executive’s style can be observed and as the project manager, you can ask certain questions that can help discern the dominant style and communication expectations.

Throughout the book the authors provide sample questions and scenarios to assist the reader in understanding the intent. In this chapter they provide four questions that also apply the DISC codes that distinguish the manager’s personality type as well as helps to establish the sponsor’s level of interest and decision making style. The authors further encourage the reader to develop the communication relationship throughout the project and not rely solely on the initial meetings.

The authors conclude the chapter by reinforcing the *key* to communication – **TIMING!** They stress that issues and risks are pertinent to the success of the project and should be communicated as quickly as possible. Also, they encourage the reader to allow the audience to determine the way in which they prefer to receive communication as an important step in *Team Building* such as general reports versus detailed reports or even, just the highlights citing the progress and any relevant issues. As a project manager, the authors emphasize that the reader should be empathetic to “how busy” the other key members are and that the right amount of information should be communicated at the right time, showing everyone that “you care about them as much as you do about the project”.

The following chapter carries the communication theme a step further by encouraging the project manager to **Be Trustworthy**. The authors quickly establish the necessity for the team, stakeholders and peers be able to rely on you. They strongly emphasize that **Trust is not given right away; it is earned!** They counter with current accepted practices in the corporate world that *truthfulness* is not always taught! After several examples of unpleasant situations where the truth is maligned, the authors take special care to explain proven steps to ensure that information is being presented in a trustworthy manner.

The authors provide insight in several key and often-difficult areas such as:

- Coping with Questions
- Qualifying the Question

They encourage the reader to not be intimidated with the following sections:

- Don't Lie!
- Dealing with Fear
- Admitting You are Wrong

They bring the chapter to a close with two sections on truth-telling in order to set the record straight and/or clean up the mess:

- How to Fix Things If You Haven't Told the Truth; and then he concludes with
- Sometimes It Can't Be Fixed

Managing the information during a project is the Project Manager's responsibility. The authors close the chapter by stating *"If you are caught in a situation in which you have not revealed all of the information or have not told the truth, there is only one thing you can do. Admit what you did and take the punishment, what ever it may be, and allow it to be a personal scar."* This is the end of the lesson or as we call it in project management – LESSONS LEARNED!

Shortfalls: What was Missing!

The book has few shortfalls that need to be identified. The length and style of the book makes it very compatible for travel and it reads in a logical manner. It is not burdened down with technical diagrams and tables other than its general depiction of the DISC profile and its narrative description of the individual communication styles.

I was able to find Ms Sember's website that gives more background on the author than what the book cover offers. However, I was unable to locate a website for Mr. Morris other than a listing of his books with Amazon.com and with the publisher - American Management Association (AMACOM). Highmark Technology's website only provides a general contact number and does not feature any of its star employees. Most of the authors I have reviewed have included their contact information somewhere in the book or at least have it available on their website. Most likely, Mr. Morris is moving in this direction.

The structure of the book is fine except that it is missing a bibliography of resources used to write the book. The Glossary and Index list some of the supporting works though both are minimal at best.

Who might benefit from the Book

The author has designed the book to appeal to professionals at all levels and who work at various levels within the organization, who want to impact the way they manage projects. The intent of this book is to enhance the corporate culture by applying practical theories that have been proven and continue to work in nearly all environments.

This book is intended for project managers who have accepted the challenge to follow the principles of project management without selectively excluding those steps that might initially appear as unnecessary in order to accelerate the project by creating a shortcut. The book is written to help those project managers who have had some success in their careers, but would like to do better on current or future projects. The book provides a chapter-by-chapter road map for improving project management skills and gives insight to leaders and decision makers who have the responsibility of resolving both common and complex issues.

This book provides a spark of energy (*borne out of frustration*) to help project managers overcome obstacles and constraints that impede success. There is something of interest for nearly everyone who reads and applies the principles of this book; the expectation is that the final destination will be nothing short of success!

Conclusion

The authors have taken their vast experience and knowledge and combined them into the chapters of this modest book. Their frustration with projects that were not going well or as planned are captured in these essays of wisdom. Identifying what to avoid and what are the best practices are excellent pearls of wisdom. The book is filled with many of the authors' insights and personal experiences that enlighten the reader and emphasize keeping the sponsor and stakeholders informed throughout the life of the project. The authors support their successes with personal comments and stress the corporate culture of the project; this insightful wisdom should be taken seriously.

I would highly recommend this book for anyone who is interested in improving their understanding of how to organize a project in a *step-by-step approach*, improve their *communication skills* and enhance the *level of trust* with their sponsor, stakeholders and employees throughout the life of a project.

For purchase information:

<http://www.amanet.org/books/book.cfm?isbn=9780814409886>

About the Reviewer:***Earl W. Crisp***

Earl W. Crisp, D. P. A., is employed by the U. S. Department of Education, Post Secondary Education for Eligibility and Oversight of Guarantors, Lenders and Servicers. He is also an adjunct instructor for the Management Department at the University of Texas at Arlington and for the College of Business at Dallas Baptist University. He is a former Navy C-130 pilot and he enjoyed collateral assignments in Administration, Training, Quality Assurance, and Human Resources. His Doctorate in Public Administration is from the University of La Verne and his M. S. in Management is from Troy University. He is a certified mediator, private pilot and radio announcer. He completed his Project Management Professional training in the Executive Management Program at the University of Texas at Dallas and is a member of PMI.