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Book review:

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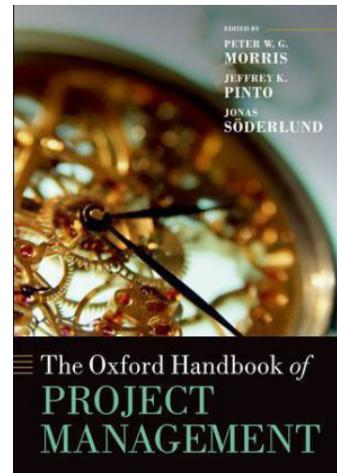
Book review

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Some Basic Facts

This edited book features contributions by 42 different authors; it contains a total of 22 chapters, including the introduction by the three editors, and these are spread across 550 pages including illustrations and indexes (by author and subject). The text is supported by a total of 25 figures and 28 tables. From the very outset, the editors set the stage for the book by naming the introduction “Towards the Third Wave of Project Management” and argue for the appropriateness of describing the contents of their volume thus. The bulk of the work consists of six parts (each containing three to four chapters): I) “History and Foundations”, II) “Industry and Context”, III) “Strategy and Decision-making”, IV) “Governance and Control”, V) “Contracting and Relationships” and VI) “Organizing and Learning”.

The Main Contents

What are we to understand by “handbook”? One meaning of the word is similar to that of “manual”, where the reader is provided with information about how to perform a particular task. A related property of a handbook is that it supposedly contains everything that can be said or there is to know about a particular subject (which might account for the verbosity to be found in many examples thereof). In the preface the editors define their contents in negative terms by saying that their handbook “is not the definitive compendium on the complete intellectual base to the management of projects”. Instead, the work is intended to “discuss many of the leading ideas in the domain”, which in a way means the same thing as “the book contains what it contains”. It certainly covers a lot, but the editors appear rather uncertain as to what its top mission is and, as a corollary, what omissions may have been made in its content.

The main initial message to be gleaned about the “third wave” is to be found in the introduction. Inspiration for the label appears to have come

partly from Alvin Toffler's book on "The Third Wave" (in which the first wave is described as the agricultural revolution, the second is about the industrial revolution and the third about the information age). Without a direct statement of what the first wave in project management (PM) was, the impression is that the first wave consisted of the search for optimal project performance in terms of planning, tools and techniques. The editors use the words "execution management" as a household expression. The second wave is about researching projects as temporary organizations and in utilizing a relevant set of theories to understand them (organizational and behavioral theories). The third is said to grow out of the second wave by moving it in "several new directions". These directions are summarized or, more appropriately, described under the book's seven quite different headings, where findings and concerns from waves one and two seem to have been amalgamated; the content moves from the historical development of PM to viewing projects as complex organizations.

This means that the conception of the third wave is in a way similar to Toffler's third-wave arguments. The specific contents of the information age were indeed a little unclear when Toffler's original book came out, but the reader's impression of that book was still that it formed a pattern, if not an altogether coherent one. In comparison, the current book covers many fairly disparate areas in an eclectic way. This view of the handbook is supported by the editors' assertion that it "presents the latest cutting edge theory on current areas of interest in Project Management". In other words, the contribution made by the current book does not appear to be constructed using pieces forming a discernible pattern in a conceptual and logical way; rather, the book appears to be somewhat fragmented. The pieces are interesting *per se* but they do not form a whole.

The Chapters

Part I (on History and Foundations) starts with a chapter on PM history written by Peter Morris, a true veteran in the field. Even though the initial sentence of the chapter is "Project management is a social construct", its emphasis is on the instrumental and normative aspects of PM, covering a time period from the dawn of civilization to the first decade of the current century. Neighboring areas like supply chain and concurrent engineering are also alluded to towards the end, giving the impression that the author thinks of the traditional development as path-dependent. As a possible consequence of this, the section on "academic research" covers only half a page.

The second chapter is written by another of the editors, Jonas Söderlund, who represents another type of contributions to the field. That chapter is about theoretical foundations and is subtitled "Suggestions for a pluralistic understanding". That pluralism is evident not only in the story about the seven "schools of PM research" that Söderlund named in a previous publication, but also in a multitude of other dimensions. The focus is still on the project as an entity. Interestingly enough, the final part is labeled "fragmentation with progress", nurturing the idea that it is becoming increasingly difficult to grasp the entire development

of the research field.

The third chapter contains an analysis of what has appeared in the three established journals in the field (all three are connected to an association; the three authors, Turner, Pinto and Bredillet cover one journal each, and they also happen to be editors of those three journals: *International Journal of Project Management*, *Project Management Journal* and *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*). The years 1987, 1997 and 2007 were covered when issues were available. The data consist of three dimensions that have been followed consistently, namely: topics, methodologies and citation patterns. The main finding is that diversity has been increasing over the years in several ways. The contents of the journals have not changed dramatically, however.

The final chapter in part I covers professionalism in PM. It is written by Hodgson and Muzio and examines the professional ambitions of project managers by comparing them with various other expert groups. One interesting thing with PM is that the ambitions and the accreditation to be accepted as a certified project manager have an international component supporting the notion that the field is generic in nature and that it is not necessarily culturally dependent qualifications that count.

Part II, which is about industry and context, starts out with a chapter on Project Business – a concept nurtured and fostered mainly by a group of researchers predominantly from Finland (the principal author is Arto). The logic is that project business covers four cases emanating from a number of projects (one or several) and a number of firms (one or several), which leaves us with a chart of four fields. In that way, management concerns in the project area are contextualized and this provides different frameworks for research.

The next chapter (by Bresnen and Marshall) is about partnerships and projects. An institutional theory approach has been applied to emergent practices within the construction industry in the UK. The industry is well known for its traditionally adversarial approach between the parties involved, but there is now a shift towards partnering. This leads to tensions and contradictory behaviors and emerging practices, similar to the way in which cooptation in the marketing area leads to emergent practices.

The seventh chapter contains a contextual view of temporary organizations. Grabher and Ibert discuss project ecologies as a conceptual framework for project-based learning. They look at the team level, the firm level, the epistemic collective and personal networks in relation to cumulative and disruptive learning. These two ways of learning are driven by opposing logics when it comes to creating and storing knowledge.

Part III (on strategy and decision-making) sets out with a chapter about the P-form corporation (P = project-based), contrasting it with the M-form. The main focus of the chapter (written by Söderlund and Tell) is on challenges facing the P-form. The main challenges described are (not unexpectedly) on decomposition, temporary decentralization, time orientation and reintegration; in other words, they are in line with the demands that a project inclination puts on the corporation housing the project(s).

Chapter 9 has been written by Loch and Kavadias on “Implementing Strategy through Projects” and is relatively long. In the chapter an alternative view of PM is put forward in relation to strategy – either strategy shaping or execution. The approach used is very similar to a traditional PM model from the first wave, but the chapter also contains empirical illustrations.

The chapter on “Program Management” takes another step away from examining a particular project and towards dealing with a group of projects. Three authors (with Pellegrinelli as principal author) argue the case for program management research and publication since programs are actually in place when projects are being run. In particular, the authors point to research opportunities related to organization theory, organizational change, strategic management, leadership and competence development.

“Projects and Innovation” is the title of chapter 11, and the similar subtitle, “Innovation and Projects”, indicates that the authors, Brady and Hobday feel that those two words are of signal importance. The authors describe five generations of innovation models and discuss the links between them and project work. This is used as a background for innovation in Complex Product Systems (CoPS). CoPS industries are ones in which customers’ needs cannot be specified in advance. These kinds of systems constitute an under-researched area according to the authors. Merely viewing them as temporary organizations is not enough.

Part IV (entitled Governance and Control) includes chapter 12, in which Mueller writes on project governance. The chapter begins by covering general governance issues, since the view of the authors is that project governance is a subset of a more general governance theme. Thus, the chapter starts out with general concerns based on transaction-cost economics and agency theory. The limitations of governance are also discussed before the focus is put on project governance. The text touches upon issues like PM offices and portfolio management and concludes with a research agenda for the future.

Chapter 13, by Flyvberg is about major (or mega) projects. The title chosen submits the major contents of the chapter: “Over Budget, Over Time, Over and Over Again”. Thus, the chapter treats underperformance and its causes. The author points to optimism bias and to politics, which are factors at work when projects are to be approved, and this paves the way for future disappointments. Towards the end of the chapter some of the pessimism apparent in the title is dissipated by referring to improved incentive schemes, accountability via competition and market control.

The classical issues of managing risks and uncertainty on projects are alluded to in chapter 14, by Winch and Maytorena. The authors give an overview of risk research covering several classics and primarily cognitive approaches to risk. They do settle for a subjectivist position on risk as compared to an objectivist or pseudo-objectivist one. The final contention is that “projects are fundamentally about states of mind”. They – the projects - come true with the help of faith.

In chapter 15, Whyte and Levitt scrutinize “Information Management

and the Management of Projects". The authors pursue the idea that information management has been underused historically in PM. The development in the dynamic industries of today means that the necessary connections to information-management activities are growing or should grow. When it comes to routine project work, information management definitely has a role and that is also true for the informal mechanisms and the need for real-time interaction. There is a new mode of information management on projects!

Part V, labeled "Contracting and Relationships", begins with a chapter by Cova and Salle entitled "Shaping Projects, Building Networks". The main contents of the chapter center on "external" project marketing and the front-end definition stage of a project. From this perspective, project-shaping via network building is important since projects are born out of social processes.

"Innovating the Practice of Normative Control in Project Management Contractual Relations" is the lengthy title of chapter 17, by Clegg and two co-authors (Bjoerkeng and Pitsis). The thesis of the chapter is that relations rather than formal contracts are important. That contention is supported by an Australian case study of an alliance where unanimity is practiced. That kind of scheme makes decisions very powerful once they are made. The argument is also that this helps innovation since innovation is in need of variation and variation is unlikely to occur if a traditional design-and-construct contract is used.

A seemingly similar theme is raised by Gil, Pinto and Smyth in chapter 18, which bears the title "Trust in Relational Contracting and as a Critical Organizational Attribute". The chapter builds empirically on the T5 project (involving the design and construction of Terminal 5 at London's Heathrow Airport) and the British Airports Authority. The case demonstrates that it is not an easy task to design a relational contract (even though transaction costs might be saved) and that such a contract is not conflict-free. It also illustrates the perceived difference between confidence creation and trust creation.

The final part (VI) on "Organizing and Learning" begins with a chapter by Lindkvist: "Knowledge Integration in Product Development Projects". There are essentially two ways of achieving knowledge integration, either by similarity (or the thoughts of community of practice) within the group or by complementarity, where "who knows what" is open and available information. A contingency approach is applied using a four-field table, with degree of novelty along one axis (conceived as exploitation or exploration) and type of complexity (analyzable and systemic) along the other. The field is discussed via two case studies, one about telecommunications and the other about pharmaceuticals.

Chapter 20, by Hoegl, Muethel and Gemuenden is about leadership and teamwork in dispersed projects. There is definitely a need for virtual project teams when specialized knowledge is involved. The chapter is primarily about leadership in diverse teams, and also points to the need for team members to be able to act as an additional source of leadership. Shared leadership is in fact promoted in the chapter.

"Projects-as-Practice" is the title of the last chapter in the book, authored by Hällgren and Söderholm. The projects-as-practice approach

centers on what is done in projects in terms of actions and actors. It is therefore very descriptive, and applies the notion that it is more important to study things as they are done than to spend all available energy on how they should be done. The way to understand practice is described in a power plant case. The chapter ends with a discussion of the various merits offered by the approach.

Some Impressions from my Reading

Piet Hein, the Danish philosopher, has been quoted as saying: "Life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify!" A slightly more vulgar version of essentially the same idea is contained in the acronym KISS ("keep it simple, stupid"). The quote and the acronym come to me as a reaction to the book at hand and its contents. All chapters are interesting *per se* but they do not really form a coherent pattern. After all, the original Toffler version of the third-wave monolithic idea bears little resemblance to the PM third wave as it is handled in this edited book. The third wave in the current version is more like an exploding nova where the parts go off in all kinds of directions. Personally, I would have preferred a concluding chapter where the editors described where the work took them and how we as readers should benefit from it. Where is the emerging third wave? How is it moving? As a reader I lack a relevant map or some other element that could allow me to grasp that main point.

A similar line of reasoning is that the field of PM research is treated as if it were additive: each new study adds to the corpus of useful research according to what seems to be the prevailing attitude of the editors. Not all readers of the book are likely to share that viewpoint on good research but would like to find scientific Kuhnian revolutions or conflicts that could carry the research field further. One way of understanding waves 1 and 2 is to think of wave 2 as a revolt against the dominance of wave 1, consisting of an engineer way of perceiving project. Is there something similar distinguishing the third wave from the first two? Or is the field to be locked into the nitty-gritty details forever more?

However, one must congratulate the editors for have been able to secure the cooperation of some of the most influential researchers in the world. Practically all the big names are present, and they have delivered high-quality material. One positive feature of the book is that the chapters contains excellent suggestions for and identify avenues for thinking about future research. In some cases these suggestions contain useful food for thought and in fact feed the natural curiosity of any project researcher. Meanwhile, in spite of the critical issues raised above, the book remains a worthy read for any researcher in this field.