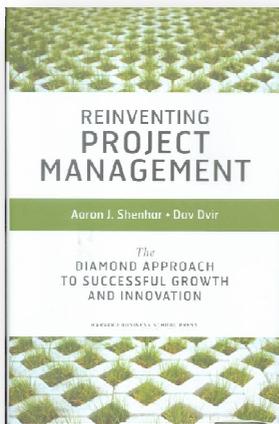


'Reinventing Project Management', Aaron J Shenhar and Dov Dvir

A book review by Ian Jay

Most projects fail, so the authors tell us, even though they are well managed. These failures arise despite the use of experienced project managers in highly regarded organisations. They fail to meet time, cost and quality objectives, and they fail to achieve business objectives.

The problem lies in the conventional approach to project management. Senior managers formulate what they regard as the right strategy and then rely on the project team to get on and do it. The team follow a methodology founded on meeting the triple constraints of time cost and quality; they use standard tools and rules. Yet instances abound of projects that failed on all these counts which nevertheless yielded very successful business results. The most famous is probably the Sydney



Opera House, but it is not unique in this. Ford launched the Taurus in 1986 and this proved to be the best selling car in America and one of Fords most successful cars, yet the project was three months late and because of this the project manager was demoted.

The various 'Bodies of Knowledge' provide a good start for learning about projects. But they are less useful when it comes to dealing with problems of a particular project. This is because many methodologies assume that 'one size will fit all' but in reality projects are all different.

The main reason projects fail is because management fails. This is usually due to a lack of appropriate systems. The traditional view of projects separates them from the environment in which they are being managed. Uncertainty, change and complexity are not taken into account. As a result project failures can be traced back to a failure on the part of management to recognise that problems

arose due to these three factors.

The solution to the problem is to use an adaptive approach to projects. This should include the use of milestones, pilots and prototypes, and sufficient flexibility to adjust to change.

The authors have developed a way to view projects that can assist managers in solving the problems identified above. Based on their research they have developed a four dimensional model. This can be used as a tool to structure and steer projects to success. The framework allows managers to classify projects, and then select the appropriate approach to managing and controlling the project itself.

For example, with a business innovation project they describe four steps to take. First segment the proposals by business goals and customer groups. Then review or allocate resources. Third, map the projects onto the framework, and distinguishing between operational and strategic projects. Finally select from the framework those projects that are attractive to the organisation. This final step involves making an assessment of opportunity and risk, which is explicit in the framework.

The tool can also be used to assess the current state of existing projects. This is useful in cases of troubled projects. By evaluating where a project fits into the framework and then assessing the current management approach, a gap analysis can be completed. By addressing the gaps in the approach it is possible to take action and improve the situation. An example where this approach may have been useful is provided. It is the case of the baggage handling system at Denver International Airport. Here a construction project approach was used to manage a complex technology project. The framework would have aided management in selecting a more appropriate project strategy in that instance.

The text is based on well grounded research, the authors are both well known in the project management field, particularly for their work on project success factors. The text contains useful tables and diagrams to make the framework easily accessible to readers and users. There are numerous cases to illustrate the various situations described and points being made. The research basis for the model is explained in the appendix to the book.

Aaron Shenhar is Professor of Management at the Stevens Institute of Technology, and Dov Dvir is head of the Management Department at Ben Gurion University School of Management. They are authors of a number of academic papers on the various aspects of project management covered by this book. The findings of these various research papers are brought together in a unified way in this particular book.

In summary this is a very practical text that would serve as a handbook in selecting appropriate project management strategies for a variety of project situations.

'Reinventing project management: the diamond approach to successful growth and innovation' by Aaron J Shenhar and Dov Dvir. Harvard Business School Press, 2007. ISBN 9781591398004

Published in the January / February 2009 edition of ProjectNet Magazine

©This Book Review cannot be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the relevant authority at the original publisher, ProjectNet Magazine. Contact the Editor at info@projectnet.co.za.