Project Management Leadership, by Rory Burke and Steve Barron

A book review by Ian Jay

The need for a basic text for teaching the ‘soft skills’ aspects of project management are met by this book. It is one of a series of books by the author that introduce project management at a basic introductory level. Its strength lies in the accessibility of the contents and the ground that it covers.

The early chapters of the book explain the different organisation forms that project teams may be located in. The strengths and weaknesses of each are discussed. These are followed by explanation of how the organisation and work breakdown can be used to frame job descriptions for the team. Included here is a generic job description for a project manager.

One of the chapters of the book relates to the roles expected of the project manager. A four part model is explained that takes the role beyond what is termed ‘project management. The other three roles or skill sets described are Technical Management, Project Leadership and the Project Entrepreneur.

A large part of the book is devoted to teams and different aspects of managing teams. The series of chapters on teams begins by explaining the advantages of using team structures over more traditional functional departments. With a multi disciplinary team a certain amount of concurrency is possible which accelerates the development process. From there the text leads one through the benefits of teams for the team members, and then the issues relating to the size of teams. The team theme continues by examining reasons why teams fail or succeed. A team lifecycle model is presented and various team building strategies are also explained.

The team coverage includes a synopsis of the work done on team roles by Meredith Belbin. This is not normally included in project management texts, despite its firm research foundations. For ten years Belbin studied manager’s behaviour. Based on what he saw, he concluded that there were a number of roles that team members fit into in order to succeed. This text describes these roles and explains how they interact in both a positive and negative way with one another.

In the section on motivation, the theories of Maslow and McClelland as well as Herzberg are explained. The motivation section concludes with a set of seven rules of motivation for project managers.

The chapters on leadership encompass the work of McGregor, Adair, Hersey and Blanchard and the more recent work of Goleman. Particular attention is paid to the work of Goleman whose theories revolve around the concept of emotional intelligence.

Other topics in the book include delegation, motivation, coaching, and conflict management. In addition change management is addressed with focus on the emotional or reactive stages a person transits through when confronted by change. In the chapter on coaching there is a good explanation of how to give constructive feedback and how to receive feedback.

There is an interesting thread that ‘permeates’ the text relating to starting a new venture. On a number of occasions this subject arises, for instance in describing the life cycle of teams. It is of interest as this ext may provide a person whose interest in project management is restricted to getting a new venture going with valuable soft skills input to achieve that goal.

Where appropriate, reference is made to relevant internet web sites so that readers can use the tools described in the text. An example of this relates to self assessment of team role in the Meredith model, there is a web site where individuals can go and complete an assessment instrument.
The presentation of the material in the book aids rapid assimilation of the content. There are numerous tables setting out the salient points and technicalities in each section. Each chapter has a header setting out the learning outcomes of that chapter. Within the text are embedded definitions of the key terms being used, these are drawn from the PMBoK or the APM BoK in most cases. These aspects make the book an excellent quick reference and a good ‘prop’ for lecturers providing more detailed content on these topics.


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