Practical Project Management Tips, Tactics and Tools, by Harvey A Levine

A Book Review by Ian Jay

Harvey Levine has written many articles relating to project management, and these have been published in the media and as white papers on a variety of internet sites. Much of this wisdom is now available in one book.

Often when faced with a practical problem like "what should I use to manage enterprise resources?" The conventional texts tell you to manage them but not always how. Where they do tell you how, they do not tell you with what! Nor do they address some of the more obvious practical issues of implementation.

The root cause of the problem is a lack of integrated organization systems. Ideally project support systems should provide input to the program and portfolio management aspects of projects. This is not often the case in practice.

The main problem lies in deciding what considerations should be taken into account when trying to control, and improve, project performance across the organization. These considerations need to include the limitations and practicalities relating to the tools that are available.

This book offers practical insights into the integration of project controls. It identifies a variety of tools and examines them in terms of usefulness for solving control and integration problems. For this reason the book is of value to anyone who is seeking additional knowledge relating to enterprise wide control of project costs and resources.

In his discussion Harvey has included a wealth of practical observations relating to various tools that are available; this includes descriptions of their strengths and limitations. The coverage is very modern and has a chapter on Enterprise Resource Planning systems and their integration with more specialized project management tools. This is the link between project control information, and the program and portfolio management process.

He goes on to take the reader through some assessments of the latest ideas in project management; he explains their pedigree which is often surprisingly long. In these latter instances, the book is an invaluable source of key words that can be used to find additional material on the internet.

The overall message that comes through in the book is the need for integrative practices in project management. This is a foundation upon which Harvey has woven a fairly detailed discussion around the strengths and varieties of software that are available to meet this integrative need.

The scope of coverage in the text is broad, but the main themes are cost control and resource management with management information as a third topic area. All this is explained in some detail and woven into the discussion are tips relating to setting up and managing a project.

There are detailed sections that cover some of the pitfalls of resource leveling functions in various tools. There are also several areas where Earned Value Management (EVM) is addressed. These discussions cover important details of the application and use of EVM (Called EVA in the book) and it is clear from the book that this is the preferred method of control reporting.

If you are in the process of setting up a project support office, or are responsible for projects within the enterprise this book will interest you.

The style of writing is very easy to follow. The structure of the book allows the reader to 'dip' in at any point and read a short essay. Each essay covers some aspect of the project management discipline. The essays, though short, hold a wealth of interesting and generally new information or insight. This
gives the reader good reason to pause for thought. The book is ideal reading for people pressed for time.


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