Book Review

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Project Management Theory and Practice
by: Gary L. Richardson and Scotty Jackson
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Project management operates where technical systems, human behaviour, and organisational decisions intersect. Richardson and Jackson's *Project Management: Theory and Practice* (4th ed.) addresses this intersection by presenting established methods and showing how real organisational and behavioural conditions affect their results. The book works both as a university textbook and as a practical reference for project managers. This book review summarises each chapter and ends with comparisons to the *PMBOK Guide* and *Project Management: A Managerial Approach* and two current popular project management books.

Part 1 – project environment

The authors define project management as balancing time, cost, quality, scope, risk, and human judgment in Chapter 1. They outline the book's objectives and overall structure. In Chapter 2: evolution of project management, the chapter traces the field's development from early engineering approaches to modern iterative and hybrid models. The authors argue that new methods emerge in response to rising complexity and uncertainty. Projects vary by context. Chapter 3 categorises several types – construction, R&D, IT – and explains why planning and governance must adapt to each type.

Chapter 4 covers organisational environment. organisational structures shape project behaviour. Functional, matrix, and projectised forms are explained along with cultural and governance factors that influence coordination and decision-making. Project life cycle is introduced in Chapter 5. Predictive, iterative, and adaptive life cycles are compared. The authors stress that selecting a life cycle is a strategic choice tied to uncertainty and stakeholder needs. The authors present project success strategies in Chapter 6. Success includes more than schedule and budget adherence. The chapter highlights value creation, stakeholder alignment, sustainability, and knowledge retention as components of long-term success.

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Part 2 – project foundation

In Chapter 7: project initiation, authors demonstrate project selection, charters, business cases, and stakeholder identification as the basis for a viable start. Chapter 8 focuses on project scope management. Scope sets boundaries for work. Techniques include requirement gathering, work breakdown structures, and scope control practices that limit ambiguity and prevent scope creep. The authors concentrate on developing the project schedule in Chapter 9. Scheduling involves sequencing, duration estimates, and critical path analysis. The authors also note common causes of weak or unrealistic schedules.

In Chapter 10: project cost management, key topics include cost estimation, budgeting, baselines, and linking cost to schedule and risk. The chapter underscores the need to account for uncertainty. The authors explain resource planning, levelling, and conflict resolution in Chapter 11: project resource management. Attention is given to how workload distribution affects productivity and team stability. Chapter 12 deals with risk management. Risk identification, qualitative and quantitative analysis, and response planning are presented. The authors promote integrating risk awareness into routine decisions.

Part 3 – project foundation extended

In Chapter 13: communication management, communication planning, channel choice, feedback, and behavioural factors are covered as core elements for effective coordination. The authors explain contract types, vendor selection, and performance monitoring, noting how poorly aligned incentives create risk in Chapter 14: procurement management. In Chapter 15: quality management, the authors describe quality planning, assurance, and control methods, including audits, checklists, and continuous improvement tools. Chapter 16: project integration covers maintaining that alignment during execution. Integration links scope, schedule, cost, and risk into a unified plan. Furthermore, leadership styles, motivation, conflict resolution, and managing distributed teams are discussed as key influences on team performance in Chapter 17: project team management.

Part 4 – project performance monitoring

As the authors indicated in Chapter 18: project execution and control, execution includes translating plans into work, reporting status, and applying corrective measures without creating unnecessary bureaucracy. The authors describe change control systems and how to assess the impact of proposed changes on scope, schedule, and cost in Chapter 19: change management.

Chapter 20: earned value management describes earned value metrics, variances, performance indices, and common interpretation errors.

In Chapter 21: project metrics, the authors emphasise selecting metrics that support decisions rather than simply reporting activity. In Chapter 22: tracking project status dashboards, reporting intervals, and using tracking data to guide action – not just documentation – are explained. The authors link closing activities to organisational

learning in Chapter 23: project closing process. Closing includes verifying deliverables, documentation, acceptance, and lessons learned.

Part 5 – advanced techniques

In Chapter 24: project model variability and reality, the authors examine where models diverge from real conditions and how to adjust them. Adaptive life cycle models are the theme of Chapter 25. Adaptive and agile-influenced models are presented as approaches for high variability and evolving requirements. In Chapter 26: critical chain model, critical chain scheduling and buffer management are explained and compared to traditional critical path methods.

Approaches for managing tasks with uncertain or fluctuating durations are presented in Chapter 27: variable tasks planning and control model. Simulation techniques (e.g., Monte Carlo) are shown as tools for analysing schedule and cost variability in Chapter 28: project simulation. The authors propose a hybrid model that blends predictive and adaptive methods for complex environments in Chapter 29: a conceptual hybrid model. Finally, the authors explore digital tools, AI, data analytics, organisational change, and the continued need for human judgment in Chapter 30: the future of project management.

Synthesis and comparative context

The book provides a full progression from foundational concepts to advanced modelling. A recurring theme is the difference between formal methods and real organisational constraints. This focus makes the text useful for both academic scholars and experienced practitioners.

Compared with the *PMBOK Guide* (Project Management Institute, 2021), the book is more interpretive. PMBOK defines standardised processes and terminology, while Richardson and Jackson emphasise reasoning, adaptation, and understanding system complexity. Compared with *Project Management: A Managerial Approach* (Meredith et al., 2021), which stresses quantitative models, this book integrates technical tools with human and organisational factors.

Overall, *Project Management: Theory and Practice* teaches not only how to use project management methods but also how to select and adapt them in changing environments. It is appropriate for academic courses and for practitioners who need both structure and contextual awareness. This book's main strength – relative to the Meredith et al. (2021) and Kerzner (2022) texts – lies in its integrated balance of technical rigor, human behaviour, and organisational context. While the Meredith and Mantel and Kerzner works emphasise strongly structured methods (quantitative models, scheduling, cost, controls) or managerial frameworks, this book explicitly embeds human judgment, social dynamics, organisational decision-making, and cognitive factors as central to project success. This gives it flexibility and depth in dealing with real-world complexity. Rather than seeing project management purely as following a fixed set of procedures or optimising metrics, this book treats methodology as contingent – meaning what works depends on context, stakeholders, culture, and the unpredictability of human systems.

That makes it more realistic and adaptable than books that treat management as mostly a technical exercise.

At the same time, this book retains the systematic structure and methodological coverage that make classic texts like Meredith and Mantel and Kerzner useful. It covers scope, scheduling, cost, resources, risk, quality, communications, procurement, performance monitoring, adaptive/hybrid life-cycles, simulation, and advanced techniques – giving readers a full 'toolbox'. This duality (conceptual depth + concrete tools) means the book works both as a theoretical guide and a practical manual: the readers not only learn fundamental ideas about when and why methods work (or do not), but also get actionable, well-defined techniques. That breadth, combined with contextual awareness, is a strong advantage over texts that lean mostly on models or best-practice checklists, making this new edition especially valuable to project managers who operate in complex, dynamic environments.

References

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