

# Book Review

DWYER J, STANTON P. & THIESSEN V. (2004)

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

CROWS NEST, NSW: ALLEN & UNWIN, 200 PAGES,  
REFERENCES & INDEX. PAPERBACK \$45.00

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Project Management is continuing to emerge as a recognised management discipline and working its way into the curriculum of many post-graduate university courses. Then why is Project Management in the health & community sector any different?

As the authors have recognized, much of the research into Project Management was developed in the manufacturing or infrastructure-type industries, not complex service sectors like health and community services. Hence, the multidimensional stakeholder relationships, level of regulation and role our sector plays in the community differs significantly. Accordingly, the authors have sought to distil and blend relevant peer reviewed research and the collective knowledge of successful Project Managers and Industry Leaders into this book.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the framework and sector specific aspects of Project Management, with the second part providing a very practical 'how to' guide on Project Management.

In Chapter 1, the evolution and current literature on Project Management is explored. Consideration is given to success factors that are specific to achieving the desired outcomes in the health sector. The model of project success factors provides a very usable checklist for project planning and development.

The authors share their collective experiences from interviews, a survey and provide insight into the drivers of funding bodies and agencies about the challenges of developing support for, and implementing projects. The section titled the 'seductions of project funding' is a salient reminder of how in the pursuit of funding we can become blinded to what is required as an outcome and also discusses why so many government grants are offered on this basis. Chapter 2 also offers the first of the cases studies - good tips and stories on projects that went right and sometimes, wrong. Building on the project success factor model, 'Criteria for Choosing the Project Portfolio' a framework to evaluate if a project fits your organisation (resourcing, capability, fit, sustainability etc.) is provided.

The complete toolkit to Project Management including models, journals, books and tools is outlined in Chapter 3. A brief overview of Project Management software packages is also provided including a website that offers free downloads and trial versions of the software.

Having looked over the various resources available, Chapter 4 takes you to the first (Concept) phase. The importance of collecting ideas and then exploring if they are realistic, align with organisational strategy and consideration of resource implications is discussed. Again the authors have included example documentation and case studies of how situations have been addressed. I would have liked to have seen a little more exploration of the economic evaluation, but the authors have referred readers to other dedicated texts on this subject. The section on the literature steps the reader through basics of undertaking and interpreting research or information on a project topic and fits well with the type of research required. Succinct summaries are provided on getting support for your project, funding and tendering. The section on opportunistic timing provides sound advice on the right time to put forward a proposal/project for consideration (i.e. if it can be leveraged on government

policy or organisation imperatives this strengthens the need for progressing your project). Now, is not always the best time.

Planning is the next major step and starts with defining the scope – what is included and excluded in achieving the project goal. Many organisations use business planning templates that compliment Project Management principles, however for larger or more complex projects, a comprehensive project plan should be prepared. Dwyer et al leads the reader through potential planning blackspots and also suggest how to engage and manage stakeholder relationships. The tools mentioned earlier in the book are employed to demonstrate how to fulfil necessary planning requirements. Risk considerations are addressed through familiar formats (i.e. AS/NZS 4360 and HB:228:2001) and there is brief recognition of managing the quality aspects of project planning.

With preparation and planning now behind us, we now turn our attention to implementation in Chapter 6. While project management frameworks discuss execution, quality assurance, team development and information distribution, Dwyer et al recognise the contextually valid aspect of stakeholder management. This is a sensible approach as it is an effective way of dealing with the unexpected/unpredictable and assists in managing expectations. Creating a culture of involvement also enables stakeholders to engage in project ownership. For the intrepid Project Manager with good people skills and a solid grounding in change management principles the challenges may only just be beginning.

The next focus is on dealing with resistance, politics and in some cases getting the project back on track. Again the authors come to the rescue with solid advice on how to identify and effectively manage the psychology and motives associated with these behaviours. It is with some amusement that I reflect on these behaviours being directed at me in previous roles.

Having reached the end of the project, one of a number of endings is possible. The authors take a pragmatic view and suggest a number of alternative endings and consideration of reflecting on project outcomes. I have, with some artistic license oversimplified and re-badged these - the good, the bad and the ugly:

The good - a project that delivers on time and on budget. In fact, the outcomes were surpassed and ground-breaking outcomes have been achieved, including a small cost saving (yes, even the Finance Director is thrilled). The telltale signs of success can be felt - a number of fringe players are now 'heavily promoting' their involvement with the project. This is clearly the basis of a good peer reviewed journal article or conference presentation. The Project Team is punching the air and the continuous mutual back slapping will seem nauseating to the causal observer.

The bad – the project went off the rails, had limited success or provided some secondary value. Not the proudest moment for all involved, but may still rate a mention on the CV as an achievement. It is still occasionally mentioned in the odd e-mail, but rapidly fading into obscurity.

The ugly – the project failed to deliver (the technical term I believe is - 'dud'), the Executive quietly killed it off due to 'financial constraints' and anyone naïve enough to mention it is cut down by the intensity of silent, seething stares. The project plan and documentation are sealed in an archive box and deeply buried in the hospital basement. The sticker on the box reads, 'career/employment hazard inside – open at own risk' and in many cases will not wait the mandatory number of dust gathering years, before being sent for destruction.

While I have clearly gone to extremes with these project outcomes, there are times when a project may end earlier than expected for very good reasons. The evaluation, final report and its integration into the organisation's sum of knowledge are recognised as being important final steps for any project.

The authors have worked hard to provide as many practical resources as possible, many of which could be used straight off the pages and on this basis alone the book is good value for money.

I am pleased to recommend this book to my colleagues in the health and community sector. It is a useful reference that will probably become as well thumbed as my own copy. The irony of writing a book about Project Management did not escape me - a project in itself! Clearly, the authors have practiced what they preached and the outcome is what you'd expect.