

“Simple” Project Management: For Noobs to Pros

Ng Wei Kwan

PartridgeSingapore

(122pp)

978-1-5437-8156-4

Drawing on extant wisdom, “Simple” Project Management is a streamlined guide through the basics of project management.

Ng Wei Kwan’s guidebook *“Simple” Project Management* introduces novices to the art of project management.

Projects exist beyond business as usual, the book says, as the enriching “extra” tasks undertaken to improve one’s circumstances or achieve a goal. But, it notes, studies show that nearly 30 percent of personal projects, such as learning to play guitar, fail, while for professional projects, failure rates are estimated to be up to 80 percent. Building upon the Project Management Institute’s *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK) and personal experiences, the book explores the elements that contribute to a project’s success or failure, guiding project managers through steps including initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing the process.

Catering to those new to project management as well as those striving toward Project Management Professional certification, the book boasts a low barrier to entry. It expects no prior knowledge and is made up of succinct, direct chapters. Its longest and most illuminating chapter covers the steps of planning and executing a project in concise but insightful terms. For example, it recommends measuring and evaluating key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with an organization’s mission and advocates for a realistic schedule (one that is clear, within budget, and allots some buffer time). Its instructions are specific and direct, encouraging audiences to “conduct a brainstorm session with 3-5 persons” and “develop a task description in verb-noun form.”

While built upon other works, the book is not afraid to contradict its sources or share its own wisdom. For example, it deviates from the PMBOK to discuss the importance of emotional intelligence in project managers, and from standard project management advice by recommending that project kickoff meetings be conducted after the planning phase rather than before it. But these unique recommendations are the exception rather than the rule in a book with a general dearth of original insights. In addition, the book’s rapid-fire pace risks giving complex topics short shrift, as when conflict resolution is handled in a few paragraphs and reasons for project failure are handled in a mere three pages. Clunky language also detracts from the book’s delivery, as with “for those who are wondering if the Apollo project is successful, the safe landing date for all three astronauts Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins was July 24, 1969.”

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HANNAH PEARSON (September 18, 2024)

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