Book Review

Title: *Program Management*
Author: Michel Thiry
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Program Management is a book in the Fundamentals of Project Management series of short guides published by Gower. Each guide in this series is authored by a leading proponent of the subject. The book has 11 chapters divided into four parts.

The back cover of the book states that it "reflects the recent developments in program management and its connection to business strategy and value realization". It also states that the book emphasizes the importance of specific processes, an iterative lifecycle and managing of multiple stakeholders and their expected benefits.

The author, in his preface, states that he expects the book to appeal to a wide audience, covering executives and program managers, to help them to manage programs and implement them sustainably in their organizations. The author also expects the book to appeal to academics and students.

The author of the book is Michel Thiry, a Managing Partner of Valense Ltd, who has been elected as a Fellow of the Project Management Institute and nominated as a Fellow of the Association for Project Management. He has provided extensive consultancy services to organizations in various sectors around the world.

Thiry is also an Adjunct Professor of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) where he has been teaching Program and Portfolio Management to students of the University's Master of Project Management (MPM) Program for several years. He is considered a leading proponent of program management in the world and is well respected for his teaching of program management at UTS.

This review will provide an overview of the topics covered in the book, discuss its strengths and weaknesses and assess it with respect to the statements made by the author about its scope.

Part 1 of the book titled "The Program Context" is aimed at setting the context for program management within an organization's business context to achieve its strategies. It also discusses the maturity that an organization needs to have to implement programs as well as the organizational culture required to support the implementation successfully. The first chapter explains why and how program management evolved and briefly outlines three major international program management approaches. Figure 1-3 on page 21 provides a useful

comparison of these approaches from professional bodies in the US, UK and Japan. Chapter 2 covers the organizational context distinguishing programs from projects and portfolios and the functions expected of program offices. It focuses briefly on project-based organizations. Chapter 3 discusses program maturity and three configurations — vision-led, emergent and compliance-based programs. Figure 3-1 on page 43 provides a comparison between project and program knowledge areas that clarifies the two approaches to those who are only familiar with project management. The chapter then goes on to discuss program culture and how it differs from a project culture.

In summary, Part 1 discusses why it is important for organizations to embrace program management and the importance of establishing organizational parameters to enable successful implementation of programs.

Part 2 of the book titled "The Program Components' discusses decision management, governance, stakeholder management and benefits management. Chapter 4 discusses these four components in detail. Chapter 5 covers roles and responsibilities of actors required to manage programs. It also examines specific competencies required of a program manager through the program management lifecycle. Part 2 leads the organization a step forward by explaining what is required to lay the foundation for successful program management.

Parts 1 and 2 are essential reading for senior management (executives) in the organization to appreciate the necessity for program management and to differentiate it from project management. It will also help them to recognize the capabilities that an organization needs before embarking on program management.

Part 3 is the "heart" of the book for practitioners, and guides them to set up programs and implement them successfully. Chapter 6 outlines the program lifecycle using five generic stages — Formulation, Organization, Deployment, Appraisal and Dissolution using the acronym FOrDAD.

Chapter 7 covers the formulation stage, which is essentially a preparation stage to gather support for the program. This stage involves establishing the program vision and mission, defining the expected benefits, identifying needs as well as expectations, establishing the critical success factors, and generating potential actions and deliverables, all of which help to set up a business case for the program.

Chapter 8 takes program management from defining to organizing by developing a benefits management strategy and a benefits realization plan. This chapter has several practical tools for the program manager such as the weighted matrix, project achievability matrix, risk analysis, responsibility assignment matrix, and charts to build a program roadmap, to mention a few.

Chapter 9 covers the deployment of programs including the management of the value chain, management of change actions and integration of new capabilities delivered by the program to the organization which will benefit from it.

Chapter 10 deals with program appraisal including program evaluation. There is a good discussion on the conventional assessment of program variation with the baseline as well as "opportunity evaluation". The benefits register included in this chapter will be very useful to ensure that expected benefits are being taken into account. The chapter also highlights the importance of managing program changes, which is an essential aspect of program management. The chapter closes with some ideas on how knowledge creation and learning can take place through programs.

In summary, Part 3 will be useful to both program managers and others who support the program in the organization to get into the nuts and bolts of program management.

Part 4 deals with what happens once a program has delivered its benefits, or closure. Chapter 11 discusses asset value realization, steps used for program dissolution and the capture of program knowledge.

The strength of the book is in its comprehensive coverage of program management within a concise format. What I liked about it is that it is based on the real practice of someone who has been working in this field for several years, helping organizations to implement their programs. It is also not biased towards a particular standard or guideline promoted by professional bodies. Program managers who need a handy guide will appreciate this book. It will also appeal to executives, sponsors and managers responsible for program governance. It does fulfill the requirements of a textbook for a course on program management. Overall, the book fulfils what it sets out to achieve.

The only weakness I could find is the lack of actual cases that could supplement the knowledge applied in practice. This may be due to the size of the guides in this series. For those who want to learn how to apply what is explained in the book a companion site or book with actual applications would be a useful aid.

I would recommend that program managers who want a simple and useful guide to get hold of a copy of the book and keep it handy. Organizations should place a copy of the book in their library along with books on strategy and strategy implementation. For academics teaching a course in program management it would be a good as a textbook or as a reference book from which relevant readings can be suggested to students.

Reviewed by

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