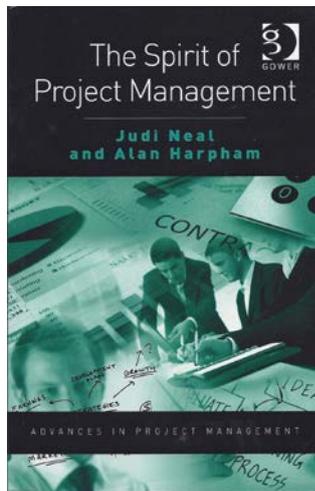


Book Review



The Spirit of Project Management. Authors: Judi Neal and Alan Harpham, 2012, Gower Publishing, Surrey, England, ISBN 978-1-4094-0959-5

Reviewed by Anne Matheson.

It is unusual for the topic of project management and matters of spirit to be discussed conjointly. However, a subtle and significant shift has been occurring in the management arena in the past decade: the rise and rise of project management. So what has project management or PPPM (P3M or Portfolio, Program and Project Management) got to do with leadership, with management and with spirituality, and why would someone write a book about it?

The rise of project management (PM) has run in parallel with the emergence of global work teams, cross-organisational teams, virtual teams and constant change within organisations. To a large extent these team-based approaches to working are based on management principles that are inherent in the project management world view. For those unfamiliar with the growth and change in PM, Neal and Harpham's book provides a good summary. During the 1990s and 2000s there was a rapid expansion in PM from engineering, mining and IT to "management by projects" (conducting business activities through PM principles) through to encompassing the strategic framework that organisations need to undertake with the Portfolio Management approach.

PM in the 2010s is not about filling out forms; rather, it is about the responsibilities and accountabilities for making work happen, it is about the fundamentals of leadership and management. In his recent paper to the 26th International Project Management Conference, Rolfe reflected on Thomas (2006, cited in Rolfe, 2012, p.2), commenting that PM is really the manifestation of European Enlightenment thinking and that the principles of the "scientific mode of organisational thinking" are what has become "project management" today. The "enlightened" values (equality, individualism, autonomy etc) sit in opposition to the traditional forms of bureaucracy which is seen as inappropriate for modern organisations. Rolfe goes on to say (p.2):

The fundamental paradox in the conceptualisation of formal project management appears to be that projects are constituted for the purpose of delivering change within a disembodied, disenfranchised and semi-structureless corporate world, whilst at the same time utilizing a paradigm cherished for its predictive capacity.

The "scientific mode of organisational thinking" represented by PM with its focus on delivering "on time, on cost, within specification" is under pressure as much as the organisational type that it is seemingly replacing. Research shows again and again that it is the people component that often leads to failure in projects as much as it does in normal "business as usual" work (Rolfe, 2012; Cicmil, Williams, Thomas & Hodgson, 2006; Cooke-Davies 2002). Hence it is not surprising that there is currently greater emphasis on understanding the people aspects of PM. It is this thrust of "understanding people" that is the main focus of Neal and Harpham's book.

Dr Judi Neal is the Director of the Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace at the Sam M. Watson College of Business at the University of Arkansas, and one of the co-founders of the Management, Spirituality & Religion Interest Group at the Academy of Management. Alan Harpham is the Chairman of the APM Group (International Accreditor of the UK Cabinet Office Best Management Practice Methodologies) and

has held and currently holds a number of positions within organisations focusing on spirituality in the workplace.

This is a book written for the practitioner – consultants, managers and so on. The book contains an overview of the people-centred and human developmental issues within project management. Neal is an accomplished academic in this area. Although the book is not written for an academic audience, there is a sufficient weight of references and prominent writers to give the academic reader a sense of its depth and authenticity. The experience of Harpham and Neal in dealing with groups is evident in the range of activities on offer, and in their suggestions for personal and group reflections. Harpham's extensive experience as a project manager and working directly with project managers is evident in sample anecdotes throughout the book, which adds to its value as a book for practitioners.

After providing a grounding and context for their understanding of spirituality (which they depict as the evolution of humanity and corporate consciousness, pointing towards something that is greater than self), they discuss topics as varied as values, virtues, wisdom, diversity, respect, freedom, deep listening, creativity and trustworthiness. They go on to discuss the different types of intelligences, personal development, typologies and the different aspects of self. They then present five aspects which constitute a spiritual approach to managing project teams (alignment, spiritual leadership, esprit de corps, communications and creativity). This is followed by a discussion on a range of tools and techniques to assist in understanding within organisations.

Towards the end of the book they cover the issues of sustainability and the future health of the planet, and the wisdom needed to become who we need to be. The final chapter of the book gives a brief outline of the growth and development of PM as a discipline.

For those readers involved in organisational change, human development or coaching, this is a handy book, as it addresses the "traditional organisation" mindset. Similarly it is a revealing read for those who are eager to foster the growth of spiritual intelligence in organisations, relating the concepts to organisational practices.

Neal and Harpham remind us that in ancient times, for example, in Egypt and China, many a successful project manager and their team were killed in order to preserve the burial secrets of Pharaohs and Emperors. History rarely tells us what happened to project managers and their teams when projects failed, although one guesses that outcomes were the same. Today, if a project fails, the project team are not literally burned at the stake, although metaphorically some may feel that has been the case. The authors, and the many like-minded readers of this journal, would like to see that all projects meet their success criteria. The authors propose that it is through attending to the people dimension, to the search for meaning and understanding offered within a spiritual framework that progress can be made to achieve this end.

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Availability: through various online bookstores; available as paperback and e-book.

Reviewer: Anne Matheson has been following the codification and standardisation of management practices and the changing nature of work for the last decade. She works in the organisational change area and is a doctoral scholar at Macquarie University, Graduate School of Management, researching Emotions in the Workplace.