Sample Book Review for COSC 305

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Wysocki, R.K. and McGary, R. (2003) Effective *Project Management: Traditional, Adaptive, Extreme.* (Third Edition), Wiley Publishing Inc, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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The third edition of Wysocki’s book, *Effective Project Management*, is intended to be used by experienced project managers—those who already have business degrees and are familiar with traditional project management (TPM) strategies such as the waterfall method or capability maturity model (CMM). In the introduction the author seems to add as an afterthought “Oh, by the way, anyone studying project management for the first time may also find it relevant.” No doubt the publisher prompted him to do so. While experienced project managers may find much to think about from this text, for first-timers it should be used only as a supplementary text, and not the main textbook for a course. The text does not provide enough course material about the principles of management for students in a conventional information technology (IT) program. For many of these students, the project management course will be their only exposure to principles of management, and a more thorough survey of these topics is needed. While the text offers lots of relevant practical advice, the intermediate step of the ‘adaptive project framework’ (APF) is just a tweaked-version that other people would use in their application of the extreme method. Therefore, Wysocki’s APF is another instance of ‘old wine in a new bottle’.

Wysocki provides a review of the traditional method, and near the end a brief discussion of ‘extreme’ project management (the latter presumably matches up with ‘extreme‘ programming and other so-called *agile* methods). In the middle, he attempts to make the case for APF, the bastard-child of the two above methods, calling it the ‘adaptive project framework’. His innovation acknowledges the limitations of the traditional method but the main benefit of APF is the opportunity to cancel a project before it costs too much, and then accept whatever versions has been created in the previous cycles. In other IT contexts his ‘adaptive framework’ is referred to as iterative prototyping… the ‘old-wine’ of iterative prototyping has been placed in the ‘new bottle’ of an adaptive framework. The benefit of his new bottle is not apparent.

**Traditional Project Management:**

The first 250 pages covered traditional project management. Like many other texts in project management, the text has a healthy supply of handy checklists for risk analysis (p. 37), generating the work breakdown structure (p. 84), closing out projects (p246) and various kinds of reporting (p. 212). In the section on *Monitoring and Controlling Progress* (i.e. Chapter 10) which for me is always the crux of project management, Wysocki provides complete coverage on the various kinds of reports that a senior manager can receive. Executives are busy and presenting a milestone trend report in a graphical form is more likely to keep their attention (please refer to the Appendix of for sample diagrams from Chapter 10). I like to tell students that *anyone* can *plan* a project, the difficult part is what to do when the schedule slips, and it *always* slips. These diagrams provide important snapshots of the schedule status, and the pattern of monthly slippage provides an executive with important clues as to when they need to get involved and/or investigate further. Chapter 10 also covers the issues of calculating costs when the schedule slips, comparing planned values with earned values and actual costs. These costs are measured in dollars and make sense when discussed in terms of dollars. This is an excellent review but does not have much relevance to students engaged in a capstone project, where the only real resource item is the ‘cost’ of the time they personally allocate to their project.

**Adaptive Project Framework:**

The next 100 pages reviewed the adaptive project framework. Essentially, the project manager plans for several versions of the solution and engages in a mini-TPM with each cycle, preparing to cancel the project should the team encounter a version where no further progress can be made. The reader gets the impression that there are too many conventional project managers that have been chained to a capability maturity model, and failed to respond to the dynamism of the our new Internet reality—too many projects have relied on tons of documentation, requirements specified down to the last period and then no flexibility to respond to a changing environment. APF is presented as the antidote to TPM, an out-dated way of doing things. Does anyone actually do TPM anymore? Didn’t this approach die out with disco and flared pants? Hasn’t the Rational Unified Process (RUP) received some attention for the last ten years as the *new* way of doing things? Indeed project management has changed, but this discussion of APF gives the feeling that Wysocki is running out in front of the parade carrying the APF-flag and proclaiming himself the leader of the parade. He has worked as a consultant in the Northeastern United States for many years and on many large projects (i.e. including the old spreadsheet program Lotus 1-2-3), and so I do not doubt the veracity of his claims. I can understand why anyone on a government or military contract would have to operate in the old-fashioned TPM way, the emphasis on documentation is meant to assure the stakeholders (i.e. tax-payers) that the resources have been allocated in a reasonable fashion…although the BUSH administration does not give much evidence of following any methodology (reference the 2006 documentary film “*WHY WE FIGHT”* or any newscast about the government effort to rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina). I can also understand why any company that lost a bundle in the last crash of the Internet boom, would subsequently retreat to the “tried and true” methods of the 1970s. Nevertheless, I believe the problems APF is intended to solve, for the most part no longer exist.

The approach of APF could be just another version of RUP or indeed, extreme programming. The approach does not deserve yet another name. Nevertheless, Wysocki does introduce some useful concepts: the scope bank being the primary one. A person working on an IT project will inevitably want to express their creativity. This person must be given an outlet. Their creativity must not be stymied, in order to maintain the motivation and commitment of the team member. But, if not expressed in the actual project then where? Wysocki’s answer…the scope bank! In APF, the goals of each cycle (or version) are documented, managed and delivered, much like TPM. Each cycle last between 2-6 weeks. Any person who comes up with a creative idea that diverges from the documented goal, must document their creative idea and deposit it in the scope bank, when the cycle completes then the team will look at all the creative ideas that have been deposited in the bank. This is a novel way of managing change requests, and it is worthwhile considering.

**Extreme Programming**:

Wysocki characterizes extreme programming as ‘anything goes…good luck…hope you make some money’. This is unfair and incorrect. His failure to accurately reflect on the actual nature of extreme programming (and consequent project management), undermines his argument in support of APF. He has set up a false dichotomy with TPM on one side and extreme PM on their other, so that the light may shine brightly on his bastard-child, APF. I am not persuaded that APF is any different than project management for iterative prototyping, and as such is also able to morph into project management for extreme programming when necessary.

**Some Practical Advice:**

Wysocki provides anecdotal information that adds up to a lots of good advice. Get all team members to brainstorm the work breakdown structure, not just the project manager. Use rolls of butcher paper, post it notes and felt markers to position tasks and dependencies, avoid trying to use project management software at this stage. When tracking work done, never ask for reports on percentage completed. People will always say, “Well it’s a six day task and I have just finished the third day and so I must be 50% done”… this is rarely accurate. Instead, always have employees report how many hours they have worked. When people report 100% availability, this usually means 65% availability just due to everyday interruptions, and in some instances it means 50% availability. The text is worth reading just to find these little rubrics of project management.

**Conclusion:**

For students studying project management for the first time, I want a text that discusses Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Hersey Blanshard Situational Leadership, Return on Investment calculations, the difference between uncertainty and risk. Wysocki assumes that the reader has covered these topics elsewhere. This text has some good advice and some new ideas that I was not aware of but it should be available from the on-reserve shelf. I would not ask a student to buy the book.

High Clarity

Low Clarity

Clearly Defined

**NOT**

Clearly Defined

**NOT**

Clearly Defined

A Approaches to managing a project…..

TP TPM

APF

Extreme

How to get it?

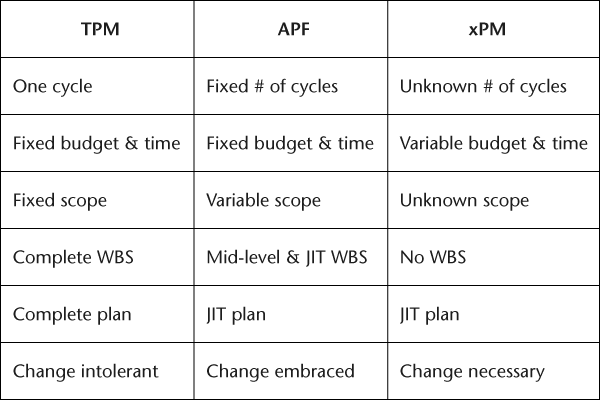
What is needed?

Clearly Defined

TPM

APF

Extreme



Tr Traditional PM

Tr Extreme PM

Tr Adaptive PM

