Book review

Managing Project Competence by Rolf Medina
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Introduction

Authored by Dr Rolf Medina, who is a boundary spanner working both as independent consultant and in academia, this book makes a highly welcome difference to the wealth of practitioner-oriented books in the field of management. The difference lies in balancing both the generality of the wide range of existing research literature on the subject with the particularity of real-life cases experienced by the author, obtained in his many years of consulting in and for organizations of various sizes and industries. Through this, the book allows leveraging research findings of general nature, stemming from hundreds, if not thousands of companies in published studies, with the situational specifics of real-life situations in organizations, written with a sense of "usability" that allows readers to apply the book's subjects directly onto their organizational reality for operational implementation. This makes the book an outstanding reading for those who look forward to "learn" new insights, instead of just being entertained by the success stories of a single author or well-known name, as done in most of the popular "airport bookshop" type of management readings.

"Managing Project Competence: The lemon and the loop" is a compelling and powerful contribution to the field. Written by someone who "is passionate about people's growth," the book builds on author's many years of experience in consulting for large organizations like IKEA or Sony in various aspects of management and competence development, combined with his academic research in organizational behavior and innovation, his doctoral work at SKEMA Business school in France, and his visiting faculty work at Umeå University, Sweden.

In a book like this, readers typically look forward to be guided by new insights that can be implemented into their corporate reality. For these readers, Medina's book will not disappoint.

The book starts with an in-depth introduction into the different dimensions of knowledge and fits them into a tangible "lemon" model which includes performance related, as well as knowledge renewal related aspects, under special consideration of context, culture and time. This lays the foundation for Chapter 2, which goes on to explain how to manage competences in an organizational context. For that Medina develops a process, which he terms the "competence loop," and deepens the understanding of this process by introducing the mechanisms that make this process work and describing how they relate to the social and organizational reality in corporations.

In chapter 3, he bridges from knowledge intensity in organizations to projects as arenas for learning. Through a thorough review of existing theoretical perspectives, such as the project-based vs project-oriented organization, he develops a granulate picture of the context contingency of the various characteristics of knowledge in organizations. This is backed-up by three case study organizations with nine embedded cases, which underscore

and explain the different contextual influences that impact the similarities and differences in managing competences in different organizations.

This is put in practice in chapter 4, where the learning model reflection, elaboration, participation/practice, investigation is introduced and described in terms of its different uses in organizations and the benefits arising from its use. This leads to Chapter 5, where Dr Alicia Medina provides an invited chapter on the "does and don'ts" of Project Management Offices (PMO). Using the allegory of a kite, she describes some of the pitfalls, which often lead to premature termination of PMOs, such as ignoring the need for a context and management in support of project work, or an overly bureaucratic approach of PMO members to their task.

Chapter 6 addresses competence management in practice. For that Rolf Medina develops an approach to finding and developing suitable project managers by using a matrix approach. The matrix consists of context dimensions and project characteristics dimensions. By mapping the characteristics, he identifies the individual profile of a manager for a project in its context. Overlaying this profile with the profiles of existing project managers identifies the development needs of project managers in an organization. Hence, the content links full-circle back to the beginning of the book, where the dimensions and processes for developing people are described. Thus, it builds a comprehensive and exhaustive framework for managing competences in projects and organizations. Finally, the book bridges from managing competence to managing performance by clarifying some long standing confusion in terms and providing guidance in managing toward better performance through deliberate knowledge management, as well as an agile performance management approach.

The particularities of different types of projects, such as agile vs waterfall driven projects, are addressed from Chapter 3 onwards. Moreover, throughout the book, a number of tools are provided, such as those for competency mapping, distinguishing between organizational and social processes, or between management and leadership activities. These tools are immediately usable and valuable in the reader's day-to-day work.

Technical aspects of the book
The book is easily accessible in terms of language and pedagogics, the references reflect academic rigor and currency. Tables and figures were used appropriately with its salient points clearly laid out. The chapters are structured using appropriate headings to allow readers covering the material at various levels of detail. The writer of this review appreciated the clear introductions and conclusions in each chapter, as well as the attention taken to connecting each part of the book to the prior and subsequent part. A glossary of terms provides an authoritative set of definitions.

Given the breadth of subjects covered by the book, it would have been helpful for the reader to include a final chapter which draws the various topics, processes and models into an overall reflection or theory that briefly outlines the interaction of all the mentioned elements.

Recommendation
Medina's book provides a robust, conceptual and practical guide in managing competence in the context of project-oriented and project-based organizations. Using well-established theory, lots of case studies, examples and own experiences, the content of the book is reinforced and practically "tangible." More such practical, but theory driven books are needed. Medina clearly raises the bar by carefully integrating academic research findings with practical applicability into a well-rounded concept of competence management in organizations. This qualifies the book for both reflective practitioners and well as graduate students.

Rolf Medina posed a question in the preface: Why is it important to write a book about competence today? The book provides a clear answer. Managing competence is a complex, multi-faceted undertaking, strongly context dependent and often under-valued in

day-to-day work. This book provides a robust and practical guidance for managing competence successfully. The book is definitely value for price. It should be found on the bookshelf of graduate students in the field of organization and management, practicing managers and organizational developers, as well as consultants and trainers in these fields. I highly recommend this book.

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