

Book review: Project Management for Information Professionals

Author: Chelcie Rowell

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Project Management for Information Professionals. Margot Note. Waltham, MA: Chandos Publishing, 2016. 212p. \$78.95 print book (ISBN 978-0-08-100127-1); \$78.95 ebook (ISBN 978-0-08-100133-2).

In a rapidly changing information environment, where resources are also scarce, more and more often memory institutions meet strategic goals by means of project-based work. *Project Management for Information Professionals* reaches out to the accidental project managers working in libraries, archives, or museums (LAMs) — people who are asked to lead projects without formal project management training due to their competence, experience, and ability to win others over to their cause. For those tasked with leading critical projects, such as installation of compact shelving or a large-scale collaborative digitization effort, Margot Note distills project management techniques more common in industry but just as relevant in a cultural heritage context into a pithy handbook accessible to information professionals.

Throughout the book, Note emphasizes that project management techniques are not “burdensome techniques to be performed because some projects require it,” but instead “a way of thinking, communicating, and executing” (xx). She situates principles of project management within actions that are roughly sequential, from inception through implementation to conclusion. Chapters are organized by skills that are demanded of project managers throughout the life of a project: selection and prioritization, leading and managing teams, planning and scheduling, budgeting and performance, and communication and review. As the organization of chapters suggests, in addition to technical skills and modicum of subject expertise, project managers worth their salt possess considerable soft skills. In her conclusion, Note observes with characteristic concision that “Project managers bring chaos to order and blurred vision to clear reality.”

As a book whose primary goals are summary and translation of project management methodologies from industry to memory institutions, *Project Management for Information Professionals* squarely achieves its objectives. Terms often expressed as acronyms in the business world (IRR, SMART, MoSCoW) are spelled out literally and conceptually (internal rate of return; specific, measurable, accurate, realistic, and timebound; must, should, could, will not). A thorough glossary also helps readers to grasp and retain unfamiliar terminology.

Clearly delineated contrasts also aid the work of translating project management into a cultural heritage context. Whereas in the for-profit world, project managers are known by that title, in LAMs many people lead projects that draw upon their expertise but take place outside of their day-to-day job responsibilities — for example, a director of technical services leading a task force to identify and implement a new ILS. Another common difference between project management in the business world and project management in the cultural heritage world is a project’s motivation: rather than generating revenue, the purpose of project in a library, archive, or museum is more likely to be improving services or reducing costs, outcomes which require different metrics to demonstrate. Note deftly draws these distinctions while underscoring the applicability of project management techniques to industry and cultural heritage, large and small projects alike.

The book does not necessitate linear reading in order to derive value from the reading experience. Each chapter is preceded by apt epigrams ranging from lyric to comic. For example, Chapter 6 on “Communication and Documentation,” opens with the observations that “Much unhappiness has come into the world becomes of bewilderment and things left unsaid” (Dostoevsky) and that “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” (George Bernard Shaw). These delightful epigrams invite readers to follow their curiosity, finding a starting place wherever their attention is captured. By the same token, trenchant figures that summarize crucial concepts and appendices that articulate key questions and provide document templates facilitate quick reference in the midst of a project.

Throughout, project management concepts or techniques are often illustrated using a LAM example. For instance, Note points to installing shelving before shifting collections as an example of a mandatory dependency (81). However, these illustrations tend to be parenthetical. More vivid, in-depth explorations of project management principles at work in LAM contexts would bolster her case that individuals and organizations ought to adopt a project management approach. For example, in addition to enumerating elicitation techniques, Section 2.4 on “Gathering Requirements” might also have provided sample responses to structured stakeholder interviews, drawn from Note’s extensive experience, and paired these responses with a discussion of how what was elicited reframed project goals and better positioned the project to succeed. Without impact stories punctuating deep summary of project management methodologies, even the crispest prose becomes difficult to penetrate, except to search for the answer to a specific question.

Though dry on occasion, as a whole *Project Management for Information Professionals* is clearly envisioned and executed as a handbook for librarians, archivists, and curators who find themselves leading project-based work. By empowering individual information professionals to manage projects more effectively, this work may play a part in shifting the organizational culture of memory institutions: from taking a defensive stance within an information environment in constant flux, to embracing project-based work as a way for libraries, archives, and museums to learn and grow and vitally engage the communities they serve.

Margot Note is the consummate project manager, and it shows in her handbook of project management for information professionals. This book knows what it is, and what it is not; it remains true to its project scope. It achieves its objectives, and delivers what it promises to its readers. Novice project managers will keep it close at hand; more experienced project managers will consult it when they feel themselves becoming stuck and look back at past projects with a sharper eye for what they might do better.

—Chelcie Juliet Rowell (rowellcj@wfu.edu), Wake Forest University