

MANAGING PROJECTS IN THE REAL WORLD

THE TIPS AND TRICKS NO ONE TELLS
YOU ABOUT WHEN YOU START

Melanie McBride

Apress®

Managing Projects in the Real World: The Tips and Tricks No One Tells You About When You Start

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The Apress Business Team

This work is dedicated to all of the project teams I've led over the years—especially to those of you who ended up working long into the night, putting out raging fires, and otherwise cleaning up my messes as I was learning my craft. Thanks for making me look good!

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About the Author



Melanie McBride PMP, is a Technical Project Manager at Intel Corporation. With over 15 years' experience managing projects in the semiconductor industry, she has worked variously as product development project manager, operations project manager, and vendor development manager. McBride is a recognized subject matter expert at Intel, where she writes a weekly blog on project management best practices. She speaks regularly at such professional conferences as PMI's Global Congress. She holds an MS in physics from Texas Tech University.

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Preface

I've heard it said many times that project management is the “accidental profession.” Somehow people across the land have stumbled into this massively challenging, sometimes frustrating career, and no one is really sure how it happened to them. That's how it worked for me. One day I'm a fairly successful engineer who was slowly getting sucked into more and more “management” activities instead of pure engineering. The next thing I know I'm handed a project and told, “You own it!” . . . Uh, okay, thanks. . . this is a good thing, right? By the way, what exactly do I “own”?

Most veteran project managers (PMs) out there came up through the ranks just as I did. We were recognized as people who got things done in a dynamic matrixed environment and were given increasing amounts of responsibility as we got more things done. This was during the Dot-Com Boom and everyone was working like dogs to get cutting-edge technology out the door within companies that were growing by leaps and bounds. Most of us didn't have a clue about project management best practices when we started, and frankly I didn't hear about the Project Management Institute (PMI) until I'd been a practicing PM for several years. All of my early PM training came from the company's training arm and on-the-job rough and tumble. Needless to say, I made a lot of mistakes and mostly learned by doing.

Today there is a superabundance of quality resources out there for new project managers. There are advanced degrees in project management, sophisticated training available within most companies, and innumerable books on the topic for those so inclined. PMI is a treasure trove of best known methods (BKMs) and resources, with local chapters that make it easy to network with other professionals in your field. But for me, project management will always be essentially and irreducibly a learn-by-doing endeavor in which genuine capability improvements come only with experience.

Sure, there are a lot of project management-oriented books available today, and for the most part they are very good—very good, that is, at breaking down the mechanics of the job. Trying to figure out how to put together a comprehensive risk management plan? There's a book for that. How about how to build a dynamically linked schedule in Microsoft Project? Yep, there are more than a few books out there that talk about it. But what if you want to figure out how to get a really complex project kicked off? How about

ways to get into that information loop outside of the formal communication channel? What if you're looking for a discussion on how to avoid getting grilled at your next project review meeting?

Well, those things are much harder to come across, so this book attempts to shed some light on those dark, dusty places that fall between the cracks of theory and best practice out in the real world where irate colleagues, unrealistic product launch dates, and virtual meetings reign supreme. Here you'll find targeted discussions on the common challenges project managers face every day, broken out by project phases to help you jump quickly to solutions for the challenges you have today and can expect to run up against tomorrow.

The strategies, tips, and tricks discussed in this book are all proven techniques. I know because I use them all the time! These are the things I had to figure out the hard way . . . by screwing it up, breaking things, pissing people off, and mismanaging my stakeholders and deliverables. In short, they're what I learned along the way to becoming a competent PM.

I hope they help!