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BlogEntry

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## Reinventing Project Management

*Diamond = Triangle++;*



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# REINVENTING PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Aaron J. Shenhar • Dov Dvir

*The*  
**DIAMOND APPROACH  
TO SUCCESSFUL GROWTH  
AND INNOVATION**

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS



If you wanted to reinvent a subject that has much of its literature underpinned by a(n iron) triangle, how would you get beyond that? Add a fourth dimension and call it a diamond?

My initial reaction to [Reinventing Project Management](#) by Shenhar and Dvir was mixed. I was initially super-thrilled to see a publisher as prestigious as Harvard Business School Press publishing a book that openly talked about the need for a new model of project management. I was also impressed that the authors were from a solid academic background - respectively, the Management School at Stevens Institute of Technology and Management Department at Ben Gurion University School of Management. It was also important to see that the publisher was confident enough to get this book shelved in the "management" and "business" space in the bookstores and not in the "technical" space with the other project management books. However, the concept of getting one beyond the triangle with a diamond turned me off. It left me thinking - "ho hum, just another couple of guys with some consulting buzz words."

Thankfully a quick skim through the book - I haven't read it cover to cover - proved that my fears were ill-founded.



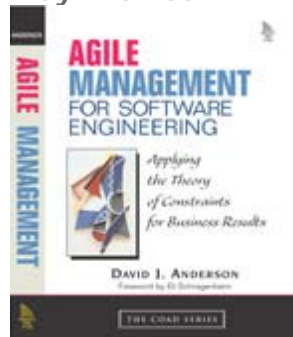
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The authors actually espouse much of what *we* captured in the **PM Declaration of Interdependence** that formed the basic principles and foundation for the Agile Project Leadership Network (APLN). Particularly the concept that project management solutions need to be situationally specific. The *diamond* from the subtitle actually refers to a four axis spider-chart that helps to identify different types of project and different management approaches that are appropriate for them. Those four axis are: Technology; Novelty; Complexity; and Pace. The technique reminded me of work by **Jim Highsmith** or **Alistair Cockburn**, but with a different slant. I really got the impression that Shenhar and Dvir would be at home (intellectually) with the founders of the **APLN**, while their solid academic and management science credentials might open up the APLN thinking to a much wider audience.

While this isn't a full review of the book, I do want to bring it to our collective attention and ask you to consider it as your next project management book purchase. To help you decide, I'll summarize the main lessons from the book (paraphrased from pages 206-208).

- Project management is not about being on-time, on-budget, within requirements but rather about serving customer needs and creating business results
- Project management is not a linear, predictable process
- Project planning should involve early identification of needs
- Project management is not a universal activity with one set of rules and processes for all projects
- The right management style for each project needs to be selected to help identify risks and benefits appropriately
- Novelty represents uncertainty of the goal and uncertainty in the market
- Technology represents task uncertainty
- Complexity is based on the complexity of the product and the project being undertaken
- Pace represents the urgency of the project
- Project portfolios should be selected based on business goals
- Innovation should be managed according to its type
- Applying an adaptive approach to a project need not be difficult
- Projects with high uncertainty may require pilot projects to help reduce uncertainty
- Projects should be planned at three levels: milestones (in quarters or years); mid level goals (in months); and detailed plans (updated for the next month)
- Rolling wave planning (use of option theory and delayed commitment) is the correct approach for the more detailed levels of planning

Much of this will sound familiar to those of you aware of the work of the APLN and its founders. So it is hugely validating to see a different set of folks from different backgrounds come to similar conclusions based on solid academic study. [Note to self: Must invite the authors to get involved in the APLN.]

Technorati tag: APLN, Project+Management