

The Project Management Answer Book

**By Jeff Furman, PMP. Published by Management Concepts, Inc. 2011
(416 pages, paperback, \$69.00 at Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble)**

Book Review by James R. Brady, PhD, MPA, MEd

Target Audiences: Mr. Furman has had extensive experience as an IT project manager, consultant, and PM trainer. He currently specializes in teaching classes to help people prepare for the PMI's® [Project Management Institute] PMP® [Project Management Professional] certification examination. His goal in this book is to provide an experience-based reference on common project management questions to assist both PM tyros and more experienced hands. The initial chapters are thus sequenced to help the reader understand the usual PM processes (planning, contracting, executing, monitoring, procurement, risk management, evaluation, etc).

Other chapters cover more general management or leadership issues facing many project managers (e.g., communications, ethics, and team-building). The final chapter is entitled: "How to become PMP® Certified" and provides 30 pages of advice on passing the PMI tests. A few tidbits of information are included on non-PMI certifying organizations, but I found no mention of *asapm*® or the International Project Management Association. Two appendices to the book provide additional information related to the PMI examination. A third appendix passes on some professional networking tips for Project Managers.

Organization of the Book: Most of the content in each chapter is presented in a Q&A format. All of the 417 questions are listed in the 28-page Table of Contents. The reader can thus proceed through each chapter in sequence or just look for specific questions of interest. There are also various checklists and suggestion sheets throughout the book. I first focused on Chapter 9: "Ethical Considerations PMs face on the Job," since this area is often omitted from PM books. I was also reflecting on my personal experiences in evaluating projects where questionable practices of project managers and/or contractors were often glossed over or ignored. I think some of the problems I encountered might have been avoided if the organizations had applied some of Mr. Furman's suggestions for clarifying, formalizing, publicizing, and then enforcing ethical standards and guidelines.

Mr. Furman uses the *PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* and his personal experience to provide suggestions for dealing with ethical issues which may harm the integrity and effectiveness of a project. He notes that some unethical actions may not be illegal, but can still seriously impact on project progress. A project manager may also encounter actions which appear to be both unethical and illegal, such as bribery, kickbacks, or biased hiring of implementing staff or contractors. However, he cautions potential "whistle-blowers" to be aware that their view of such issues may differ from that of their superiors, depending on the organizational culture. Consequently, the critic may be the one who suffers, if his/her superiors or colleagues fear being harmed by negative publicity.

General Assessment of the Book: I think Mr. Furman has done a first-rate job of preparing a readable reference which should be useful to PM newcomers, as well as many old-timers. It could serve as a general textbook, but the Q&A format also makes it a handy desk reference. Given his current job focus on preparing people to become certified by PMI, it is understandable that much of the content is linked to PMI's PMBOK® references. However, he does avoid the narrower dogmatism of some other PMP trainers/prophets I have recently encountered in classes and meetings. In the chapter on "Project Management Basics," Mr. Furman stresses that a project manager often has to deviate from the original plans and procedures to adjust to internal and external changes. As suggested in the book's Q&A #20, the Project Manager thus needs to hang loose or be "agile":

"Q20. What is *agile* project management, and how does it compare to or replace more traditional approaches, such as PMI's?"

"A20. *Agile* is a new project management method that is now in vogue. It's thought of as a faster, leaner way to manage projects. Agile project management is intended to be quicker, cheaper, less process driven, and more results driven." (page 13).

Mr. Furman then describes a few of the strategies used in the "agile" approach to project management:

1. Make less detailed and shorter plans and focus on the short term, since conditions are likely to change and this may require revising the plans and documentation.
2. Try to have project staff located in the same place, to facilitate communication and decision-making (as opposed to exchanging long e-mails to discuss issues).
3. Assume from the beginning that clients may change requirements, so be prepared to shift course when deemed necessary.

Editor's Note: Thanks Dr. Brady! Readers, if you would like to make a comment about this review, please [contact us!](#)

Overall Rating: 4.5 (out of 5):  James R. Brady, PhD, MPA, MEd.

