

# Light up the TEAM FIRE, Social Competence: The Success Factor in Project Management by Christian Majer, Brigitte Schaden, and Luis Stabauer; GD Publishing (2015)

*Book Review by Stacy Goff*

---

I received a copy of this book from recent IPMA (International Project Management Association) President and Chair Brigitte Schaden. Brigitte is one of the three co-authors, lives in Austria, and is the Chair of pma, IPMA-Austria. She has long been an advocate of IPMA's "Eye of Competence," which balances the technical side of project and program management with the leadership and social competences.

Subtitled "Social Competence: The Success Factor in Project Management," this new book (published January, 2015) is great for many audiences in project and program management. As most of us know, the leadership skills, behavioral competences, and social skills are among the hardest part of our discipline for many to master. And yet, those dimensions often account for most of our initiatives' success—or failure. This can be especially true for those of us who began our careers with a scientific background, such as in engineering, information technology, or other areas—where *what we know*, rather than *how we interact* receives the most focus, until it is too late.

The challenge begins even before we begin our careers. In discussions with University deans and department heads, we ask them, "How important are the "soft skills" in a project management curriculum?" They all say those skills are very important. Then we ask, "How do you teach them?" There is usually a long silence, then we hear answers, including simulations, team exercises, and games. The truth, for most, is that there are few excellent methods—especially methods with potential for longer-term retention—for learning the social competences.

## **The Method**

This book cleverly uses allegory (story-telling), interspersed with useful content in preparation for the next story. We have our hero, Walter Pointer, working with a bright young consultant/coach. Walter has several supportive managers in his management chain, and a variety of project team members. The gist of the allegory is for our hero to move beyond past project successes with a very important new, large project or program. And, there will be even greater demand on his social competences. Thus his coach.

## **The Setting**

Walter Pointer is an experienced and accomplished senior project manager in Vienna (while the context is Austria, the book is in well-translated English). He is asked to lead a major reorganization of the global, multi-site corporation. Among his challenges include his relationship with recent young newcomers who have taken leadership positions, and now bring their perspective to the somewhat reluctant "old guard." And, even with a tight timetable, plus the challenges of organizational change, our hero has six months to prepare for the project (we should all be so fortunate!).

## **The ScreenPlay**

This book brings to life, in Walter's interactions with his coach, manager, and team, the range of social competences needed for project and program success on such a massive organizational change project. The blend of content, dialogue, and engaging storyline works well to deliver fairly heavy-duty topics, ranging from leadership styles and motivation to conflict management and ethics (which is rarely presented well elsewhere).

### **The Content**

Over the past 30 years, most professional organizations focused on the "hardside" of project management; while IPMA, the International Project Management Association, has balanced the technical aspect with the behavioral and contextual factors. The coverage of behavioral (softside, or social competences) is well done here. It is broad and deep; surprising for such a small book (239 pages with large print in pdf format). Of course, there is far more to this skillset than any one book can cover. But perhaps this summary of the leadership and social competences will inspire readers to further pursue some of the topics in other readings—but they will have difficulty finding anything this easy to read and absorb.

### **The Culture**

The story takes place in Austria (and around the World), and there are certainly a few caricatures that we need to understand. Our hero is a bit of a male chauvinist, a beer-drinking good-old-boy. We have some like that in the USA, too, and the initial images of Walter make a good foundation (if accelerated in the book) for the transition that is possible for most of us. Those who have had more experience working in Europe and relating to Europeans will notice many little nuances—15 years of working with IPMA nations have prepared me well!

### **The Glossary**

The book is very well translated, but there are still a few words that need clarification for Americans. For example, *Turnover* is mentioned in the book. Often, in the US, that means people leaving their job. In Europe and the UK, Turnover means gross revenue or sales volume. This illustrates some of the challenges project managers in multi-national projects face in cultural appreciation. I'd say the book does a very interesting (perhaps unintended) job of helping one prepare for working "abroad."

### **The Audiences**

I said above that this book is great for many audiences in project and program management. I can see it being useful in undergraduate and graduate university project management courses, especially those that are part of an engineering or Information Technology curriculum—where they may not otherwise be exposed to psychology, social skills, or leadership curricula. I think it could be useful in secondary schools, where I have long suggested (since the 1980s) teaching project management as a life skill. I think this is a useful book for professional training in project management, especially in companies and agencies with international projects.

### **Other Uses**

Those who are preparing for IPMA certifications will find this book to support, to some extent, to IPMA's ICB, the Individual Competence Baseline. It can be especially useful if the ICB introduces aspects of key topics that are unfamiliar to you. Candidates for other pm certifications will likely benefit as well—if not in preparing for their exam, but in their workplace performance. In fact, our hero Walter is asked by his manager to earn certifications from both of the leading project management associations.

### **Getting It**

Light up the TEAM FIRE is available on [Amazon.com in Kindle format](#) for \$9.99. It is available in Adobe Acrobat pdf form or in mobi-format for Kindle [at the XinXii website](#) for \$13.05 (with Value Added Tax included).

**Our Rating:** 5 (out of 5):



Enjoy! Stacy Goff.