

The Spirit of Project Management

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by Judi Neal and Alan Harpham

■ reviewed by Eve Poole



The Spirit of Project Management? Isn't that a bit like writing a book about the meaning of cornflakes?! It says a lot about the field of workplace spirituality that such a practical book has now been written, after many years of publications obsessing about nomenclature and legitimacy.

This book is ground-breaking. It brings together perhaps the US's best-known workplace spirituality guru, and the UK's own well-known champion in this field – Alan Harpham will need no introduction to many readers of *FiBQ*. Dr Judi Neal is the Director of the Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace at the University of Arkansas, and one of the co-founders of the Management, Spirituality and Religion Interest Group at the Academy of Management. Following a rich career in Management Consultancy, Alan Harpham is now Chairman of the APM Group, which accredits the Cabinet Office's Best Management Practice Methodologies, and was the inaugural Chairman of MODEM (Managerial and Organisational Disciplines for the Enhancement of Ministry). Their collective experience fuses together in depth the theory of both project management and spirituality, as well as practical experience of both in the workplace.

Alan himself explains 'spirituality' in this context as 'that which gives meaning and purpose.' He differentiates between little s and big S – the former he uses to refer to a person's essence, while the latter he takes to refer to God or some kind of higher power.

So you can read this book as being about how to stop projects making people and organisations 'dispirited', or you can read it as a way of ensuring that the Spirit is allowed to breathe life into the basic discipline of managing projects. Alan himself is Christian, and sees the label 'spirituality' as a way of reaching both the church and the unchurched in the secular world of work.

Many of us have worked on projects, or been party to them. And I'd like to bet that many of them have been dispiriting, so there is a good case for this book. The authors are at pains to 'make explicit' the historical links between spirituality and project management. However, I'm not sure I buy their argument, or how necessary it is that they make it. Given our current understanding of the importance of purpose at work, the notion that project management should take seriously spirituality as it is defined here stands as an argument in its own right.

The book falls into two parts. Part I contains background material on the history of project management and the evolution of spirituality in the workplace. Part II contains practical tools and models for integrating spirituality and project management. The authors describe four levels for the work: individual, team, organisation and planet. Questioning project managers will naturally evolve their own understanding and practice through these levels, taking their projects, teams, and organisations with them, harnessing their activity for the greater good. Individually, the project manager and team members need to have a developed sense of their own meaning and purpose. At the team level, the



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▶▶ project manager should pay particular attention to the alignment of the project's vision with meaning and purpose; they should exercise Servant Leadership; they should honour the collective spirit of the team; they should use communication to build trust and openness; and they should solve problems by allowing the spirit to inspire creative solutions. Organisationally, larger dynamics will be at play, and the canny spiritual leader finds ways to influence these in a positive way. At the planetary level, projects should contribute to human flourishing, and a spiritual approach aims to make this an explicit goal.

While none of this is rocket science, the book is a useful primer for spirituality as well as for project management. It contains a range of tools, techniques and anecdotes to guide the novice, and lists of resources for those wishing to take it further. Because the authors acknowledge that using the 's' word in this context may frighten people off, they even

offer a practical exercise about word association to surface a discussion on the topic. The book includes a substantial session on virtues – or values – at work. They draw on biblical material as well as resources from other wisdom traditions to establish a list of these, which agree with those long championed by the ICF, Faith in Business and the Christian Association of Business Executives.

The Christian reading this book might well feel that money has been left on the table as regards biblical resources for excellence in project management. The secular reader might want more argument as to the business case for taking all of this fluffy stuff so seriously. But the dutiful project manager, scarred with the experience of too many failed projects, will grab it with both hands, and use it to add a new dimension to their work. The authors sign off: 'may all the projects you are a part of be full of meaning and purpose for you, and a blessing for future generations.' Amen to that! ■

Most boredom is self-inflicted!

Being in sales, marketing, and customer service for 28 years, I've been exposed to plenty of motivational speakers and programmes. My wife tells me that I'm an oddball, but frankly I've never needed other people or programmes to motivate me at work. I am extremely self-motivated. Boredom rarely, if ever, exists in my words, attitudes, or actions.

And yet, as I look out at the landscape of today's workplaces, boredom seems to be rampant—even among Christians! I believe most of this boredom is self-inflicted. To a large degree your job is what you make it, whether you're the janitor or the CEO.

In the big picture, Christians should be the least-bored, most-enthused workers in the world! You are a child of the Creator, and His Spirit dwells within you. Do you think God gets "bored?" If you are bored, ask God for the creativity to make your job more interesting! You'd be amazed at how fresh, exciting and creative the most mundane of jobs can be, when you allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

If you're bored at work today, before you expend all that time and energy to go job-hunting and job-hopping, why not deal with the core issue first? Once you're happy, content, satisfied, and enthusiastic about your present position, God may then open a door of opportunity for greater challenge, growth, responsibility, and rewards. But if you can't be trusted with little, how can He trust you with more? *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."* (Luke 16:10)

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