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Recommended Reading

List of books that I have found useful as I work with people and try to understand how to improve my effectiveness. Additional books (and limited information on them) is at Reading List

Business Novels

Inspired by Eli Goldratt's “The Goal”, a number of people have written books aimed at introducing key ideas of lean and agile through a story where the protagonist has a serious issue and then needs to work through a number of problems aimed at improving the business result. These are usually good books to start if you don't have a lot of time to get into serious research mode.

- "The Rollout: A Novel about Leadership and Building a Lean-Agile Enterprise with SAFe" by Alex Yakyma. Talks about moving an organization that has had success with agile and lean at a team level, but are finding it hard to see success at an enterprise level.
- The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement by Eli Goldratt. Aimed at helping you understand the “Theory of Constraints”, a set of tools aimed at help you identify where problems are with your delivery system and what you can do about it. If you want this thinking applied to project management you might want to try Critical Chain.
- "Rolling Rocks Downhill: The Agile Business Novel" - Clarks Ching. While the approaches reflect modern Agile, Theory Of Constraints, Systems, and Lean thinking, it doesn't require any one particular approach or push on a particular flavor.
- "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" - Patrick Lencioni: Starts with understanding that high-performance teams are built on trust and offers approaches to help you get there. If you want to understand how to build high performance teams, this is a good start.

And on a related note:

- Squirrel Inc: A Fable of Leadership - Stephen Denning. Useful in helping you craft the message (in story form) so that you can engage people's emotions and not just really on dry facts. I found that when “selling” ideas you get more success from well crafted stories than just about any other approach.

The Basics

Scrum Guide - Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber

The definitive source of information on Scrum. Frequently revised and updated based on feedback. The last update included an expanded view of the Scrum Values. Bottom line if you are saying that you do Scrum, and haven't recently read the Scrum Guide then you are probably 1) misinformed 2) out of date.

"Learning Agile: Understanding Scrum, XP, Lean, and Kanban" - Andrew Stellman, Jennifer Greene

Excellent book if you are just starting out down the path of agile. Provides an excellent overview of not only base practices of Scrum, XP, Lean and Kanban, but also offers up the values and principles Values and Principles behind the approaches, and how you can use these tools to address your specific issues.

Essential Scrum: A Practical Guide - Kenneth Rubin.

Probably the best book on ensuring your team(s) are successful using the basic Scrum framework. Covers all the basic practices, ceremonies and artifacts and offers real advice based on real world experience. Also covers relevant quality practices aimed at putting your Scrum implementation on a firm footing.

"Crystal Clear: A Human Powered Methodology for Small Teams" - Alistair Cockburn

If you are a Scrum Master or coach of a team, this is a great book in helping you understand how to work with your team and help them become a high-performance team.

"Agile Testing: A Practical Guide for Testers and Agile Teams" - Lisa Crispin and Janet Gregory

If you have a large scale legacy system, chances are that when you go to Agile / Scrum that you will need to rework how you do testing. To get started you will need to relook at your overall testing approach. This book will help you through the thought process.

"Agile Product Management with Scrum" - Roman Pichler

If you want to become a great Product Owner, or understand what it means to be a great Product Owner, this is the book for you.

"Agile Estimating and Planning" by Mike Cohn.

The canonical reference for the basics of estimating using an agile approach, especially applicable at the the team and team of teams level.

Organizational Change

"Leading Change" - John P Kotter.

Or if you want a “business novel” that will help you understand try Our Iceberg is Melting.

I wish I had this book when I went through our first agile transformation. Fortunately it was there for my second transformation and it really helped me put the first experience in context, offered a model for the new change and tools for going about the process. This made the second transformation a lot smoother.

"Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World" - General Stanley McChrystal

Really good book on the change in management approach that we need to put in place to become a more resilient and agile organization - beyond team agility to organization agility. Or to quote General

McChrystal “Teams can bring a measure of adaptability to previously rigid organizations. But these performance improvements have a ceiling as long as adaptable traits are limited to the team level.”

I recommend this to executives especially who are trying to understand how they and the overall organization will need to change in order to become the organization they want it to be. This book covers the move in approach from the “scientific management” / “reductionist” and “command and control” view of managing an organization to one based on “common purpose” / “extreme transparency” and “de-centralized decision making”. “The role of the senior leader was no longer that of controlling puppet master, but rather that of an empathetic crafter of culture.”

If you are familiar with the agile approach to management the book will cover a lot of ideas that will seem very familiar to you. The benefit of this work is that presents these concepts from an organizational / enterprise level.

Squirrel Inc: A Fable of Leadership - Stephen Denning

There are a lot of books about organizational change. This book helps you craft the message (in story form) so that you can engage people's emotions and not just really on dry facts. I found that when “selling” ideas you get more success from well crafted stories than just about any other approach.

Systems Thinking

"The Principles of Product Development Flow: Second Generation Lean Product Development" - Don Reinertsen

Probably the greatest book ever written on how to improve the creation of products. Also probably the most information packed so the recommended approach to this one is to skim read it the first time for basic content, and then re-read sections as you need it. If you want to understand how to manage risk, how to make decisions of what work to schedule first, on why you should not focus on 100% utilization of your people and so on … you get the picture. This is the book.

"Lean Product and Process Development" - Allen Ward

Another book that really is excellent but a non-trivial read. Helps you understand the application of a lean thinking approach to the problem of new product development (i.e. invention). If you are interested in:

- Reducing your development time and resources use as much as four times.
- Reducing the risk of quality problems, schedule and cost overruns, and failed products as much as 10 times.
- Increasing innovation as much as 10 times.
- Reusing production systems and parts, slashing capital costs and improving quality.

The book shows how to leverage learning and how working multiple design approaches (and deciding as late as possible) will improve solutions. This book combats the notion that phase gate approach to development does not result in improved results and that an approach based on pulling together a total system as an objective milestone makes sense.

The last 1/4 of the book is a series of case studies at the end of the book are really interesting although if you have already read Joy, Inc: How We Built a Workplace People Love then you already have one of the case studies.

As said, an excellent book. It is clear how this booked influenced the thinking at Harley Davidson - see below.

The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement - Eli Goldratt.

Business novel aimed at helping you understand the “Theory of Constraints”, a set of tools aimed at help you identify where problems are with your delivery system and what you can do about it. Easy read, but the concepts uncovered will change the way you look at things in your delivery system.

If you want this thinking applied to project management you might want to try Critical Chain. I suspect I should have read this one first as it is more directly applicable to the issues I was working at the time but enjoyed both of books.

“The Lean Machine: How Harley-Davidson Drove Top-Line Growth and Profitability with Revolutionary Lean Product Development” - Dantar P. Oosterwal.

Brilliant book, just brilliant, if you are trying to understand how to implement “lean” type thinking approach to the problem of new product development. Its an easy read but that does not make it simplistic. There is a lot here that is practical, but more importantly it will help you understand the thinking approach you might want to consider.

"Actionable Agile Metrics for Predictability" - Daniel S. Vacant.

There are two uses of this book:

1. To understand a small set of metrics which, if tracked correctly, will help you improve your process and
2. To understand how to interpret scatterplots, cumulative flow diagrams and so on, what to look for and how to address.

This book is a little “anti-Scrum” (or rather anti point based estimating / velocity calculations) but still a valuable addition to understanding your delivery system.

The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses - Eric Ries.

Great book! Applies agile / lean approach to the idea of working (and importantly) measuring progress on a true innovation by measuring true learning. While written from the perspective of a startup, the approach can be applied to any innovative endeavor.

"This is Lean: Resolving the Efficency Paradox" - Niklas Modig

I thought this was a great book, a fabulous introduction to help you understand what lean is all about and, just as importantly, what it is not. It helps in understanding of Little's Law, Theory of Constraints, and why Flow Efficiency (and therefore “lean”) is changing how we think about things.

The base premise is that lean is about “flow efficiency” as opposed to resources efficiency in how work gets done. Flow efficiency focuses on the amount of time it takes from identifying a need to satisfying that need, whereas resource efficiency focuses on efficiently using the resources that add value within an organization.

Why is this important? For more than two hundred years, industrial development has been built around increasing the utilization of resources. Efficient use of resources has long been the most common way of looking at efficiency. It continues to dominate the way in which organizations in different industries and sectors are organized, controlled, and managed. From an economic perspective, it makes sense to strive for the most efficient possible use of resources. The reason for this is the opportunity cost.

Sustaining Change

"Cultivating Communities of Practice" - Etienne Wenger

Once you have an Agile implementation at scale, you often have a new problem. Whereas before you had silos associated with the disciplines, now you have cross-functional teams, and it you are not careful you lose the ability to improve on discipline specific knowledge or worse, require that every team re-invents the discipline knowledge every time. One way to address this is to encourage the formation of Communities of Practice. This book will help you understand the background.

People and Motivation

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us - Dan Pink

Your first step on a journey on how to really motivate people. Mastery, autonomy and purpose, not money (or at least not directly). For the “condensed version” see Drive: The Surprising Truth About Motivation plus Dan Pink's TED Talk

"The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" - Patrick Lencioni

One of those business “fable” books. Easy read; good lessons. Starts with understanding that high-performance teams are built on trust. If you want to understand how to build high performance teams, this is a good start.

"Slack: Getting Past Burnout, Busywork, and the Myth of Total Efficiency" - Tom DeMarco.

An absolute classic book. This book is a discussion about the counterintuitive principle that explains why efficiency efforts can slow a company down. Fights against the concept that, for example, 100% utilization of people is the most efficient way to get something done and helps you understand why, and what to do about it.

Organizational Change

Implementing Beyond Budgeting: Unlocking the Performance Potential - Bjarte Bogsnes

Just a great book if you want to understand how to work better with finance and HR. There is a lot here, and some of it may not be immediately something to work, but the ideas can be applied to a wide variety of situations.

Book, Learning, Improvement

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Last update: **2020/06/02 14:23**