HANDOUT & Group Exercise: Successfully Managing Complex CI Projects

ABSTRACT

This session will go beyond project management basics to examine CI projects that involve several stakeholders, differing research interests, many internal and external information sources and multiple deliverables. Using group discussion and participant personal experience, we will focus on the skills, tools and best practices that enable successful fulfillment of these high visibility and often career-defining projects.

Steve Schulz and Michelle Brewer

"Successfully Managing Complex CI Projects," presentation for SCIP Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals, Orlando, Florida, May 8, 2019

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> *"The ability to learn faster than competitors may be the only sustainable competitive advantage."* Arie de Geus

DESCRIPTION

Successfully Managing Complex CI Projects

This session will go beyond project management basics to examine CI projects that involve several stakeholders, differing research interests, many internal and external information sources and multiple deliverables. Using group discussion and participant personal experience, we will focus on the skills, tools and best practices that enable successful fulfillment of these high visibility and often career-defining projects.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- A case study based on actual experience illustrating best practices and potential pitfalls
- A guide that incudes examples of tools and techniques for managing the people and processes involved with complex projects
- A deeper understanding of the required skills, and resources for developing those skills

Audience focus: Newer to mid-level CI practitioners with zero to some experience managing CI projects

PRESENTERS:

Steve Schulz, President, Line of Sight Group.

Steve founded Line of Sight in 2002 with a vision to help his clients focus, grow and protect their organizations by making strategic decisions that provide unique and better value than their competition. Previously, he led similar research and strategy efforts at Deluxe Corporation, Jostens Inc. and finally at Optum, a unit of UnitedHealth Group, where he was Director of Market Research and Intelligence

His unique perspective of having been 'in the trenches' as both a CI practitioner and a consultant enables a broad set of knowledge and skills for LoSG clients.

Steve holds an MBA in Marketing and a B.S. in Finance. He has also been an instructor at St. Catherine University teaching courses in Management and in Competitive Intelligence, and is a frequent guest lecturer for MBA classes in strategy at St. Thomas University

Michelle Volesko Brewer, Competitive Intelligence Manager, Wolters Kluwer. In this role she provides research, analysis and expert searching for Wolters Kluwer, Ovid and Lippincott in support of executive strategy, publishing, platforms, content, marketplace and new product development. Prior to joining Wolters Kluwer, she was director of a healthcare association library for 31 years with industry expertise in hospitals, health services research and evidence based medicine, including the library's research services, association's archive, copyright, publications, software training and websites. She founded and directed a multi-state library consortia, licensing 1M$ with major publishers. She has delivered presentations, courses, authored published articles, reports, and developed and awarded state and federal grants and elected to library leadership positions and appointed to boards and advisory groups. Most recently she received the Wolters Kluwer's "2016 Market Insights Award."

GROUP EXERCISE

1. Case Description

Please describe the case…

2. What Went Well About This Project?

Please share what went well about the project….

3. What Challenges Did You Encounter?

Please share key challenges you overcame or what may not have gone as well as hoped

4. How Did/Would You Address the Challenges?

Please share how you overcame the challenges or what you might do in the future to address them

5. What Challenges Did You Not Have a Solution For?

Describe the challenges that you would like to share with the group.

DEFINITION: COMPLEX COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE PROJECTS HAVE MANY MOVING PARTS INCLUDING SEVERAL STAKEHOLDERS, MULTIPLE KEY INTELLIGENCE TOPICS AND QUESTIONS. THEY REQUIRE RESEARCH USING MANY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES, USING MORE THAN ONE METHODOLOGY AND ANALYST SKILL SET ALONG WITH EXTENSIVE ANALYSIS. COMPLEX CI PROJECTS ARE OFTEN INFLUENCED BY INTERACTIONS AMONG THE PARTS AND AMONG OTHER INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS. IT IS THESE INTERACTIONS THAT CAN CONFOUND THE EVEN THE MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE, EXPERIENCED, AND DEDICATED COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE MANAGER.

(STEVE SCHULZ AND MICHELLE BREWER, ADAPTED FROM SOURCE 8 FOR COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE)

INTRODUCTION: There are many articles and resources discussing best practices and/or competitive intelligence for both simple and complex competitive intelligence projects. There are various methodologies, scenarios, industries, perspectives and trends. Some best practices and challenges are for CI teams, some for one-person operations, while others fit global enterprises or small business. There is no one 'set' of CI best practices or challenges to fit and inform all situations.

Thus, each CI practitioner should consider their institution's unique needs and culture and select from the many strategic and tactical approaches to best support the program. The following is a checklist to help you accomplish that. It is only a starting point. Further develop this checklist by personalizing it for yourself and your institution based on continued evaluation of your CI program.

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects	
Best Practices	**Major Challenges**
OVERALL – BEST PRACTICES	**OVERALL – MAJOR CHALLENGES**
☐ **Don't be afraid to start small** even with a complex project, you can't boil the ocean ☐ **Have an internal champion** who can advise you; be proactive. ☐ **Invite stakeholders to participate,** draw them out ☐ **Get organized with your work and with your stakeholders:** planning, methods, tracking etc. ☐ **Communicate, communicate, communicate!**	☐ **Complex projects have many moving parts.** There may be many stakeholders, KITs/KIQs, information sources, human and other resources, deliverables, etc. ☐ **Complexity can foster confusion.** ☐ **Complexity can increase the risk of failure** ☐ **Complex projects are often highly visible**
DEFINING THE CI PROJECT – BEST PRACTICES	**DEFINING THE CI PROJECT – CHALLENGES**
☐ **Needs assessment:** Understand the real business need and strategic or tactical implications of the competitive intelligence project for the internal customer. Keep the big picture in mind and be clear with your CI work and the key stakeholders regarding what actions will this project inform? Have your eye on the outcome (strategy, business action, or other) when managing any	☐ Defining the project up-front including objectives, scope, timeline, deliverables, etc. *(e.g. sponsor doesn't have a clear understanding of project objectives, multiple sponsors have different objectives, project scope is larger than available resources, etc.)*

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects

Best Practices	Major Challenges
project and the profusion of information. ☐ **Listening:** Talk to stakeholders and use listening skills, uncover concerns. Document them as assumptions or unconscious bias in your scope of work as needed. ☐ **Scope of Work:** Commit in writing a plan/'Scope of Work' (SoW), which identifies the 'key intelligence targets' (KITs) and 'key intelligence questions' (KIQs) about the targets, as well as what was agreed upon to NOT include (if anything). Are the KIQs appropriate to the targets? Set a timetable for deliverables. ☐ **Sponsor/Stakeholder learning style analysis and plan** – A list of the key stakeholders, how they learn with a plan for communicating with them during the project. (Are they more visual and like graphs, charts and images? More analytical and require numbers? More verbal and require a phone call? etc.) ☐ **Select appropriate methodologies/heuristics (mental models/shortcuts). Select the best CI tools and techniques for the scope of work.** The following list is not meant to be comprehensive, but serves as an examples, create your own checklist of your methodologies. **Consider:** SWOT, win/loss, customer segment analysis, secret shopper; value chain analysis, financial analysis, organizational analysis like success/failure, or technology analysis with patents, R&D; or environmental analysis like STEEP; forecasting, quantitative, qualitative or scenario analysis, industry analysis, with strategic maps, structural and trend analysis, share/growth matrices etc.	☐ **Managing the project budget** (e.g.: it may come out of your department's funds, the sponsor's funds, or another source.) ☐ **Defining tasks, assigning responsibilities, aligning and managing human resources at the start and during the project** (e.g. allocating your time as a project manager as well as responsibility for one or more tasks, finding and coordinating human resources for other tasks, communicating status updates, etc.) ☐ **Identifying risk factors and uncertainties and planning for them** (e.g.: understanding a project's 'critical path' and estimating the likelihood of breakdown at each step. Creating contingency plans)

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects

Best Practices	Major Challenges
COMMUNICATION & MANAGING SPONSORS/STAKEHOLDERS – BEST PRACTICES	**COMMUNICATION & MANAGING SPONSORS/STAKEHOLDERS – CHALLENGES**

Best Practices	Major Challenges
☐ **MESSAGING:** Execute effective and regular communication and meeting management for the needs assessment but for regular updates throughout project. The key stakeholders are the focus of your communications.	☐ **One group (the Sponsor) may be paying for the project while another (the CI or Insights team) may be managing it, introducing potential for conflict.**
☐ **MEETINGS:** Great meetings do not happen, they must have the proper anatomy including: ○ **Pre-meeting:** key attendees identified, objective determined and communicated, time appropriate to task, communication in advance with agenda, expectations, context and framing. ○ **During Meeting**: During meeting start and finish on time, assign note taker, summarize and review next steps. Manage the discussion by making 'asks,' prevent topic wandering, shorten longer conversations by parking topics for future discussion, use active listening to keep engagement, seek input from quiet attendees either during or after meeting. SAY THANK YOU, ACKNOWLEDGE contributions. ○ **Post meeting:** send brief meeting notes and follow-up responsibilities. Get follow-ups accomplished.	☐ **Managing high or unrealistic expectations of sponsors or stakeholders.** (e.g. an engineer may expect highly detailed technical documents that could only be obtained using illegal or unethical means or sources, directional or incomplete information may be the best available, a Senior Executive provides expectations only after seeing preliminary data and near the completion of the project) ☐ **Managing several stakeholders across multiple groups** (e.g. Marketing, Engineering, Senior Leadership, etc.) ☐ **Managing timing expectations and schedule changes during the project.** (e.g. stakeholders may have unrealistic expectations of the time involved for human intelligence work, the schedule accelerates due to a meeting scheduled by the CEO, etc.)
☐ **Standing meetings.** These might be weekly 30 minute call-in meetings to update the group, answer questions, etc.	☐ **Managing changes in the stakeholder group during the project** (e.g. a department's representative may move to a new responsibility)
☐ **HUMIT:** Human intelligence. Cultivate external and internal primary sources, human intelligence for key intelligence needs	☐ **Managing ambivalence by a stakeholder or group**. (e.g. they don't participate at meetings, don't provide input, not supportive of the project)
☐ **WRITING:** Use writing skills that are situational to fit the needs of the key stakeholders. Use executive summaries, with in-depth reports or other formats as needed	☐ **Managing different levels of strategic knowledge and skill among stakeholders** (e.g. stakeholders have different understanding of how to execute a SWOT analysis, the organization may not have a common language of strategy, etc.)
☐ **Gantt Chart:** Use a simple MS Word-based tool to track and communicate on tasks and responsibilities and project status. See screen shot at end of document	

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects

Best Practices	Major Challenges

Project Name - Project Overview_[Date]

Week # Milestone	Respon-sible	0 Date	1 Date	2 Date	3 Date	4 Date	5 Date	6 Date	7 Date	8 Date	9 Date	10 Date	11 Date	12 Date
Kickoff meeting		✓												
Task 0		✓												
Task Category 1 OR Phase 1														
Task 1.1		✓	✓	✓	✓									
Task 1.2				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Task 1.3			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Task 1.4							✓	✓	✓					
Task 1.5								✓	✓	✓				
Task Category 2 OR Phase 2														
Task 2.1								✓	✓	✓				
Task 2.2								✓	✓	✓				
Task 2.3									✓	✓	✓	✓		
Task 2.4										✓	✓	✓		
Task Category or Phase														
Write final report										✓	✓			
QC + revisions												✓	✓	
Send report													✓	
Presentation of Findings														✓

Shaded cells = plan, ✓ = actual. Weekly standing meetings every[Day], [Time]

☐ **RESULTS:** Deliver results, hold a meeting to present results, capture follow-up needed and answer. Get a catchy headline, report title, PowerPoint slide header or quote and use it to capture attention and then retain it with the research, recommendations and data.

☐ **ACTIONABLE AND LEARNED INSIGHTS:** Present results in a format that provide actions or from which key stakeholders can derive actions. No need to "boil the ocean," be prudent and effective with findings that can build credibility and validity, drive insights for key business needs, and lay the foundation for further CI work by segment, region, product, etc.

   o **Insights can also provide learning for key stakeholders. While learning often can't be measured it should not be underestimated.**

METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH – BEST PRACTICES

☐ **Keep a list of all your primary and secondary sources** and use to check off what is needed in your 'plan' for a complex project to avoid inadvertently missing one.

☐ **Be creative** in approach, depending upon need

☐ **Document ALL your sources as you use them, especially primary contacts and tips, with name,**

METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH - CHALLENGES

☐ **Assembling and managing non-human resources** including information sources or subscriptions, software, etc.

☐ **Determining the need for a third-party consultant, engaging and managing them through the project.** (e.g. assessing likely information sources and determining the need for a consultant,

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects	
Best Practices	**Major Challenges**
title institution, date and time of conversation. Document secondary sources in a manner that fits your project. *In a complex project you may want to use a spreadsheet.* The goal would be that if 1 year later someone asked you "how did you know xyz in report ABC" – your sourcing rapidly provides you with the answer. If you can't do that, your sourcing is not thorough enough, find a better way.	determining vendors to engage, agreeing on responsibilities, deliverables, timelines, etc.)

☐ **Be persistent; shift approach based on unexpected competitor activity**

☐ **Use interviewing skills with both internal stakeholders and KITs.** Document conversations.
   o Identify strategic thinkers and evaluate them for forward looking mindset, big picture perspective, global perspective or external focus – as needed.

☐ **Use project management skills as required for each project**

☐ **Analyze data including synthesizing and preparing it for the final deliverable.** For statistical work, be sure to have a statistician review if you are not an expert. Choose a good format, summarize large quantities of text. Use a graph or chart to summarize complex spreadsheets.

☐ **Be sure to call out the major insights in the report so it is easy for stakeholders to read and use:**
   o Trends,
   o Show-stoppers
   o Actionable vs. informative (sometimes visual icons help with this)
   o What specifically validates or is contrary to the initial need/hypothesis/assumption)

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects

Best Practices	Major Challenges
RESOURCES – BEST PRACTICES	**RESOURCES – CHALLENGES**
☐ **Budget and resource the project appropriately.**	☐ **Not enough funding.** Budget restrictions often force priority decisions about the scope of the project and/or the depth and precision of the data
☐ **Hire staff with skills and experience required**	
☐ **Select appropriate outside consultants with requisite skills** for the SoW, and when ethically or legally needed to accomplish project needs. Manage external vendors	☐ **Lacking staff expertise, or skill to use a needed tool.** Complex projects may require more staff resources than available. Skills used in one CI project may not carry over to the next.
☐ **Be familiar with the wide range of information sources for your industry** and identify those the project will use and the time requirements of each	☐ **Gaining access to competitive product in an ethical way.** Stakeholders may have different views about ethics or may not be familiar with the ethical requirements of CI
	☐ **New to an industry?** Learning the industry's landscape, resources and strategic perspectives
☐ **Identify and use proper tools for project:** From SPSS to web conferencing for online focus groups to survey software or database access	☐ **Complex projects are time consuming: Ask for help,** delegate and use experts when possible.
MANAGING DISSEMINATION – BEST PRACTICES	**MANAGING DISSEMINATION – CHALLENGES**
☐ **Hold a research highlights meeting and present the key findings** of the project at its conclusion with the key stakeholders.	☐ **Managing information updates during the project**
	☐ **Managing the presentation of findings** and dissemination of the intelligence. (e.g.: stakeholders may have different learning styles and require some different means of disseminating the information)
☐ **Identify questions from the 'research findings' meeting and follow-up with additional research and answers.** Or if the question is another project, state that as a NEW need.	
☐ **What to disseminate?** Can be varied based on needs, institution, and methods, examples include:	☐ **Managing different levels of preparedness (**e.g. if the report of findings has been provided prior to the presentation, *some will have read it in-depth while others may not have opened it.***)**
o Competitive Intelligence 'knowledge base' or portal on SharePoint or other *internal* resource that your users can access 24./7	☐ **Managing information access** (e.g.: some groups may be authorized to have only a limited portion of the full information)
o Competitive "Key Intelligence Topics" List: update regularly	
o Results of non-confidential: analysis, internal studies, projects, answers to questions	☐ **Managing political considerations regarding findings** (e.g.: different stakeholders and groups may have agendas that are unknown or unaligned)
o Copies of licensed third party studies	
o Internal multimedia: decks of your presentations, audio recordings of meetings, podcasts,	

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects	
Best Practices	**Major Challenges**

o Onboarding: The real competitors, Cheat sheets, Battle cards, etc.
o "Tips" program: formal (incentivized) or informal program
o Maintain list of current sales and other staff who worked at a competitor: helpful to obtain during onboarding
o Sales and product managers info about competitor: Sales comments may need verification
☐ **How to disseminate?** A variety of methods can be used to share the CI findings to the entire enterprise, examples include:
 	
o **Informal Methods:**
  ▪ Report or consult with staff via email, Skype, Telephone
  ▪ Dedicated "in-box"
 	
o **Formal Methods:**
  ▪ Reports, Profiles, SWOT etc.: published and disseminated
  ▪ Newsletters: (InfoDesk product used) Publish weekly, monthly
  ▪ Alerts: Email announcements with insights, delivered within 24-48 hours of competitors' news
  ▪ "Fireside Chats:" Review & Discussion Meetings with Key teams on a regular schedule
  ▪ Webinars: Offered to teams or company. Focused intel for topic, competitor product
  ▪ Research Findings Meeting: For key stakeholders to review report
  ▪ Salesforce: Post links to your reports etc.
  ▪ Company Newsletter: Highlight "intel" via the company's internal newsletter (monthly summary)
  ▪ Onboarding program for Intel: For new staff to introduce key competitors
 	
o **Knowledge Management: Provides 24/7 access, browse, self-help for answers**
  ▪ SharePoint or other CMS or CI software system: Create a competitive portal to help you manage and disseminate multiple complex projects. It takes time to develop but	

Checklist – Activities, Best Practices and Major Challenges for Complex CI Projects	
Best Practices	Major Challenges
pays dividends over the years. ▪ Office 365 is useful for short terms needs, large file storage. Difficult to add metadata and make large quantities of files browsable.	

MANAGING VALUE: PROJECT REVIEW & METRICS – BEST PRACTICES

☐ **Use quantitative and qualitative metrics** to evaluate each project. Can be informal commentary or formal surveys

☐ **Measure volume:** Such as number of research projects for a given time period or searches on a SharePoint site, or email engagement of a newsletter. Show growth or decline over time.

☐ **Qualitative: Capture direct feedback, impact**

☐ Project Reviews: Plot projects during the year on a matrix to ensure your work is balanced. *Do you have enough time to do complex projects?*

MANAGING VALUE: PROJECT REVIEW & METRICS– CHALLENGES

☐ **Understanding the value of final intelligence deliverable** (e.g.: understanding how it was used, impact it made, etc.)

☐ **Lack of feedback** (e.g.: Little or no feedback is provided by sponsors and/or stakeholders)
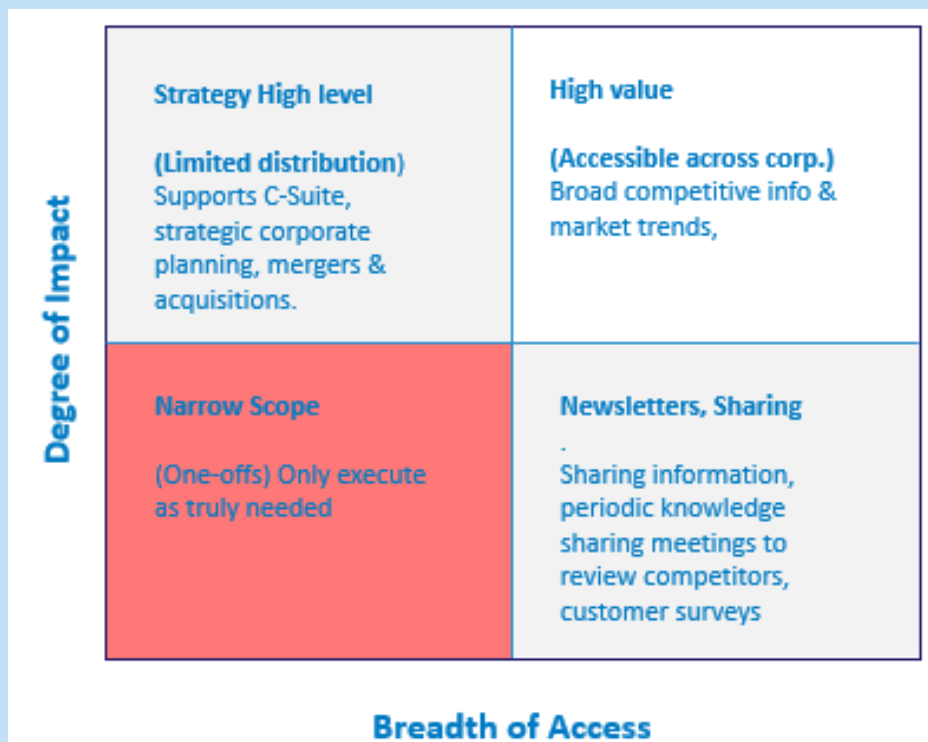
Source: Wolters Kluwer.

SUPPLEMENTAL & RELATED RESOURCES

Web sites and Consultants

- **1. SCIP – Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals** https://www.scip.org/default.aspx [website]

- **2. SCIP Competitive Intelligence Magazine** https://www.scip.org/page/CIM

- **3. Steve Schulz/Line of Sight** - www.lineofsightgroup.com

Project management tools:

- **4. ASANA. [website].** www.asana.com. This is a work management platform used by teams.

- **5. Basecamp.** www.basecamp.com [website]. A project management and chat app to manage and collaborate.

- **6. Microsoft Project.** https://products.office.com/en-us/project/project-and-portfolio-management-software [website]. A Microsoft Office product that helps manage projects, provides GANTT charts and tracking.

Technical Training for Microsoft, Tableau, Excel, SharePoint, Project Management Professional Certification:

- **7, New Horizons https://www.newhorizons.com/ [website]** The largest independent IT training company with over 250 centers in 35 countries. Microsoft's largest training provider and an official training partner for Microsoft, Cisco, CompTIA and VMware. Offers classes for project management. NH is certified by the Project Management Institute (PMI)® for Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification, with courses to gain or maintain the PMP certification. https://nhlearningsolutions.com/FindTraining/ProjectManagement/tabid/2663/Default.aspx

Project Management Resources ~ Books:

- **8. Cooke-Davies, Terry, PhD. "Aspects of Complexity: Managing Projects in a Complex World." Project Management Institute (PMI). 2011. ISBN: 9781935589303.**
  Description: Explains the difference between "complex" and "complicated" projects. A complicated project may be better understood and managed through the traditional practices of decomposition—breaking in down into smaller parts. Complex projects are more influenced by interactions among the parts and among other internal and external contributing elements. It is these interactions that can confound the most knowledgeable, experienced, and dedicated project managers. Five chapters offer deeper, more detailed investigation and analysis of principal aspects of project complexity, including strategic management and managing project with high complexity and tools for complex projects. It includes several wrap-ups noting further research needed on the topic and "Project Management 2.0" practices that might augment current practice to manage complex projects at organization, governance, and delivery levels.

- **9. Hass, Kathleen B. *"Managing Complex Projects: A New Model."* Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2008. 298 pages. ISBN 9781567262339.**
  Description: Offers a new way of looking at projects and treating them as complex adaptive systems. Applying the principles of complexity thinking will enable project managers and leadership teams to manage large-scale initiatives successfully. • Explore how complexity thinking can be used to find new, creative ways to think about and manage projects • Diagnose complexity on a wide range of projects — from small, independent, short projects to highly complex, longer projects • Understand and manage the complexity of the business problem, opportunity, solution, and other dimensions that come into play when managing large-scale efforts Use the Project Complexity Model to determine the most effective approach to managing all aspects of a project based on the level of complexity involved.

- **10. Heaslip, Richard J. *"Managing Complex Projects and Programs."* John Wiley & Sons. 2014. 336 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1118383018. Description:** Explores the strengths and the weaknesses of "first-generation" (traditional) and "second-generation" (agile, complex, and extreme) project management approaches, to understand their limitations. It asks and answers hard questions about the practice of project and program management in modern organizations. •What is wrong with our current system for managing complex projects and programs? •How could we improve it? •What roles and responsibilities should project managers, program managers, and executives assume in an "ideal" project or program management system? •How can organizations assure that their projects and programs are led appropriately?

- **11. Kerzner, Harold, PhD. and Carl Belack, PMP®. "Managing Complex Projects." John Wiley & Sons. 2010. 416 pages. Print ISBN: 9780470600344 |Online ISBN: 9780470927977. DOI: 10.1002/9780470927977.**
  Description: This book shows how to solve some of the issues facing today's project manager, including: •Dealing with multiple virtual teams located around the world, •Working with partners and stakeholders that may have limited project management tools and experience, •Adjusting to long-term projects in which the stakeholders may change, •Managing projects where stated goals and objectives differ among stakeholders. Examples in various companies are provided.