

**Rasiel, Ethan M. & Friga, Paul N. – The McKinsey Mind**

McGraw-Hill, 2002, [Business] Grade ★★ ★

This is the second book of a trilogy on the project management methods of the consultancy giant McKinsey. The book presents a project methodology on how to solve business problems in a structured project form and also to manage the project team meanwhile. It does not cover The Firm's strategic analytic models like the 7S Framework etc. Compared to best-selling precursor to this book, *The McKinsey Way*, this text focuses more on the methods former McKinsey employees have implemented where they work after they left The Firm. The chapters are structured around the project process. The first five that handle the analytical process are called: Framing the Problem; Designing the Analysis; Gathering the Data; Interpreting the Results and Presenting Your Ideas. The last three that deal with people management are called: Managing Your Team; Managing Your Client and Managing Yourself. Pretty self-explanatory isn't it?

The authors are two former McKinsey consultants where Ethan Rasiel wrote the previous *The McKinsey Way* and Paul Friga is a business Professor at Indiana University. Compared to the first book this one presents less of the elitist and almost military corporate culture of the author's previous employer but takes a step up in structure and detail covering project management. However, that's all relative and the granularity is still not what the reader probably would wish for. This becomes all the more annoying given for example the many quotes stating how important it is with well-structured presentations and then you only get a quite sketchy description of how to prepare a presentation. The Firm sells knowledge and they charge a premium price due to a mix of quality and mystique. It's not unreasonable that they guard their intellectual property or else the ability to command that full price premium might melt away as a snowman in the summer sun. All those who leave McKinsey also pledge not to reveal confidential information about The Firm. That makes a book like this a contradiction in terms and

by necessity it is thus held at a very general level. However, if you Google various McKinsey related topics or search YouTube you will find further details. You will also get validation that the structure presented in this book is very much at the core of McKinsey's project management.

Two topics linger in my mind after reading the book. First, as the authors describe it, it's in the DNA of The Firm to break down problems into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive ("MECE" in The Firm's lingo) sub issues to be analysed and addressed in a data driven and (overly?) structured way. This reductionist method is very much ingrained in the collective culture of the consultants, what happens when they meet problems of a more holistic nature? Some problems aren't possible to solve by looking at the parts, as they stem from the system itself or the interaction between the parts. Perhaps though this is so rare that the reductionist way is always warranted as the default option?

Second, I've always considered it important not to commit to a hypothesis for a solution to a problem early on, as this undoubtedly will bias the type of information that is gathered which in turn will mean that you might miss the crucial piece of the puzzle. As Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes expressed it: "*The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession.*" Still the most successful management consultant firm does just that. They form an initial hypothesis very early on, gather data to validate or refute it (in which case they go back to square one) and claim that this is the more effective way – clearly something to think about.

McKinsey is surely one of the more capitalistic and competitive entities around. It's then kind of sympathetic to find The Firm's total commitment to finding the truth. Even if it would lower the profitability in the short run it's definitely a brilliant sales pitch in the long run.

Mats Larsson, July 24 2013