

**Friga, Paul N. – The McKinsey Engagement**

McGraw-Hill, 2009, [Business] Grade ★★★

This is the latest, best but to be frank - hopefully the last of a trilogy of books on the methods used by the management consulting firm McKinsey (*The McKinsey Way* and *The McKinsey Mind* being the prior two). It offers a methodology, a toolkit to run a high performing project team and to deliver solutions on business problems. I say I hope it to be the last, not because the books are especially sub-par, but because the series have reached the end of the road with regards to what could be squeezed out of the material they present.

If the first book leaned towards describing the culture and process of The Firm and the second picked up on lessons from McKinsey alumni, then *The McKinsey Engagement* focuses on practical examples instead of theory. The book is the result of six years of conducting interviews, developing concepts and synthesizing ideas. Business Professor and McKinsey alumni Paul Friga pitch his book as “[...]a field guide for busy professionals [...] who are facing a team problem-solving situation but don’t have much time to get to the main point or recommendation.”

Also, the author has taken the liberty to deviate from pure McKinsey material and the main model presented is not from within The Firm but is instead the authors own modified version of the same type of process. This is actually a good thing. When employees leave The Firm they make a vow of silence regarding their previous employer’s business secrets. This had hindered the previous two books. By constructing his own so called TEAM FOCUS-model Friga escapes this trap and still presents essentially the same thing. This makes the third book the most interesting of the trio.

“TEAM” covers the interpersonal parts of a project, “how to handle the team” and stand for Talk, Evaluate, Assist and Motivate. Compared to previous books this model focuses less on how to handle the client and your boss. “FOCUS” deals with “how to perform the analysis” in a broad sense and the acronym stands for Frame, Organize,

Collect, Understand and Synthesize. Framed by an introduction and an afterword, one chapter is dedicated to each letter. It’s clearly visible how the tenure at McKinsey has formed the author as the chapters themselves are structured according to Barbara Minto’s pyramid principle as used by The Firm when they present to clients. First three “rules of engagement” for each letter are presented. These constitute the quintessence of the action that should be performed by the project manager. Then follows advice on practical implementation and finally a large amount of war stories that validates the rules of engagement.

It’s up to the reader’s individual taste if they prefer more of theory or more of case studies. The later brings concepts to life, but I personally would have wanted the balance tilted somewhat more towards theory - case studies probably makes up two thirds of the text on the 176 pages. First you often get a case study showing how things fall apart if you don’t follow the rules of engagement and then two success stories when they are implemented and then throughout the book each chapter is ended by one of Friga’s students presenting on a pro bono project done at the Kelly School of Business at the University of Indiana for Johnson County, Indiana. It’s a bit too much and at times gets tiresome.

After reading the trilogy I’m slightly torn when it comes to my opinion on The Firm. On the one hand there is definitely something machine-like, military and unimaginative about the organization that isn’t overly attractive but on the other hand the level of professionalism is impressive. Take for example the situation when a project team is assembled and where a well thought out balance is made between the people who are needed for the job and persons who need to learn specific tasks. The long term improvement of the consultant’s skill sets and hence the on-going competence of The Firm is deliberately weighted against the immediate needs of the client. Many small but crucial steps like these are all around. The Firm will continue to engage and fascinate.

Mats Larsson, August 12, 2013