

Book report

on

**”Critical Chain”**

by

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Written by

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## *Introduction*

The subtitle of this book is “A business novel”, and that is what it really is. When I was choosing the book for this book report and I picked up this book, I was a little sceptical about the form of the book. It appeared to be a lot of conversations written down and very few figures or pictures. At the same time the subtitle with “novel” appealed to me as a fresh way of presenting a “theoretical” subject. Well, I picked the book and was not disappointed.

I will give a short introduction to the story and the concept of the book and then give my review of the book and how the presented topic fit into my every day work.

## *The story*

The main story in the book is about an associate professor named Rick Silver who is struggling to make it in the academic world. He is a very good teacher, but he wants tenure and is in need of publications. His area is project management and he wants the articles to make a difference in this field. The fact is that the theories applied to project management are not effective and projects are running late at high expenses. The work is moving very slow, but he gets the inspiration when he is assigned to teach a course in an Executive MBA course.

During the course professor Silver and his students develop the concept of the “Critical Chain”. The teaching style of professor Silver is conversation with the students about different topics. The students get homework to do and in this course the homework tasks becomes case studies for the theories that they develop in the classes. He is also helped by the fact that three of his students are involved in a project at their company to develop a way to cut product development time.

Through out the book the theory is developed, and different concepts of project management are covered. The inspiration for the critical chain comes from the “Theory of Constraints” (TOC), which is taught by another professor in production management. TOC identifies the bottleneck or constraint, exploits it and then subordinates all other activities to that bottleneck. The same concept is shown throughout the book to apply to project management as well on several levels.

As mentioned above the teaching and development of the “Critical Chain” theory is the main story. At the same time small stories about Rick Silvers personal life, problems with economy at the university and some cases from the companies where the students apply the theory, run in parallel. The economy problem almost makes the promotion of Rick impossible, but the new discoveries he makes in the course and the support it gets from the industry, supports his “survival”.

## *Review*

I will divide the review into three categories review of the form of the book, review of the content and review of the impact on my work.

As I mentioned in the introduction the book is written as a novel with a lot of discussion. This form makes it very pleasant to read. The topics of the book are presented to the reader through the conversations and the discussion professor Silver has with his students, colleagues and people from business. Also the discussions concern a lot of examples and analogies, which

makes it easy for the reader to see the application of the theories. The parallel stories make the story more enjoyable and they do not disturb the “real story”. I also mentioned in the introduction that it was few figures. The figures that are there are vital, but on some occasions I think there should have been some more figures.

Concerning the content of the book it is I think, good to have some knowledge about project management and critical chain theory before reading it. By that I mean that the background from the Project management course was enough to understand the problems and enjoy the book. Through the classes of professor Silver and the problems of the students the reader is introduced to the TOC, critical path and critical chain. Different topics are explained through the answers to questions that the students address. Other concepts such as the “Triple Constraint” of project management are covered.

In the lectures the class identifies the problems their projects are having, and from that the theory is developed. The classes usually ends with some consensus about the problems often stated as professor Silvers summary of the lecture. These statements I think are conceptual errors that occur in project management and may work as warnings or helpful tips within ones own project if one bears them in mind. An example is:

“There is no way to achieve good throughput performance through good local performance”

By that one means that one must optimise the system as a whole, which implies identifying the bottleneck.

The book will not function as a reference book, because of the form of the book, but it serves it’s purpose as an inspiration and introduction to the problems and solutions (at least according to this theory).

How will this affect my work? Well what I can say that it was very inspiring to read after dealing with the topic in our classes and I look forward to learning more in our coming lectures. The method appears effective and with the additional tools we have learned about on how to discover when the project is eating into the buffer, it appears even more suitable. As my PhD-project is moving towards it’s end I will use the method to try and keep myself on track to reach the degree at end of next year. At least I will be able to structure my work in such a way that I identify the necessary tasks to reach it. Hopefully I will also be able to use this when I start my career in the future.

What I also found very interesting was the teaching method of professor Silver in the book. This discussion forum appealed to me, in the way he was able to include his students into the lecture. Now I do not give many classes, but it should be able to use as a tool in presentations.

## *Conclusions*

As a summary of my impression I will say that it was fun to read, it covered and explained the topics in an elegant manner and it was inspiring for future work and also future reading of the books by Goldratt.