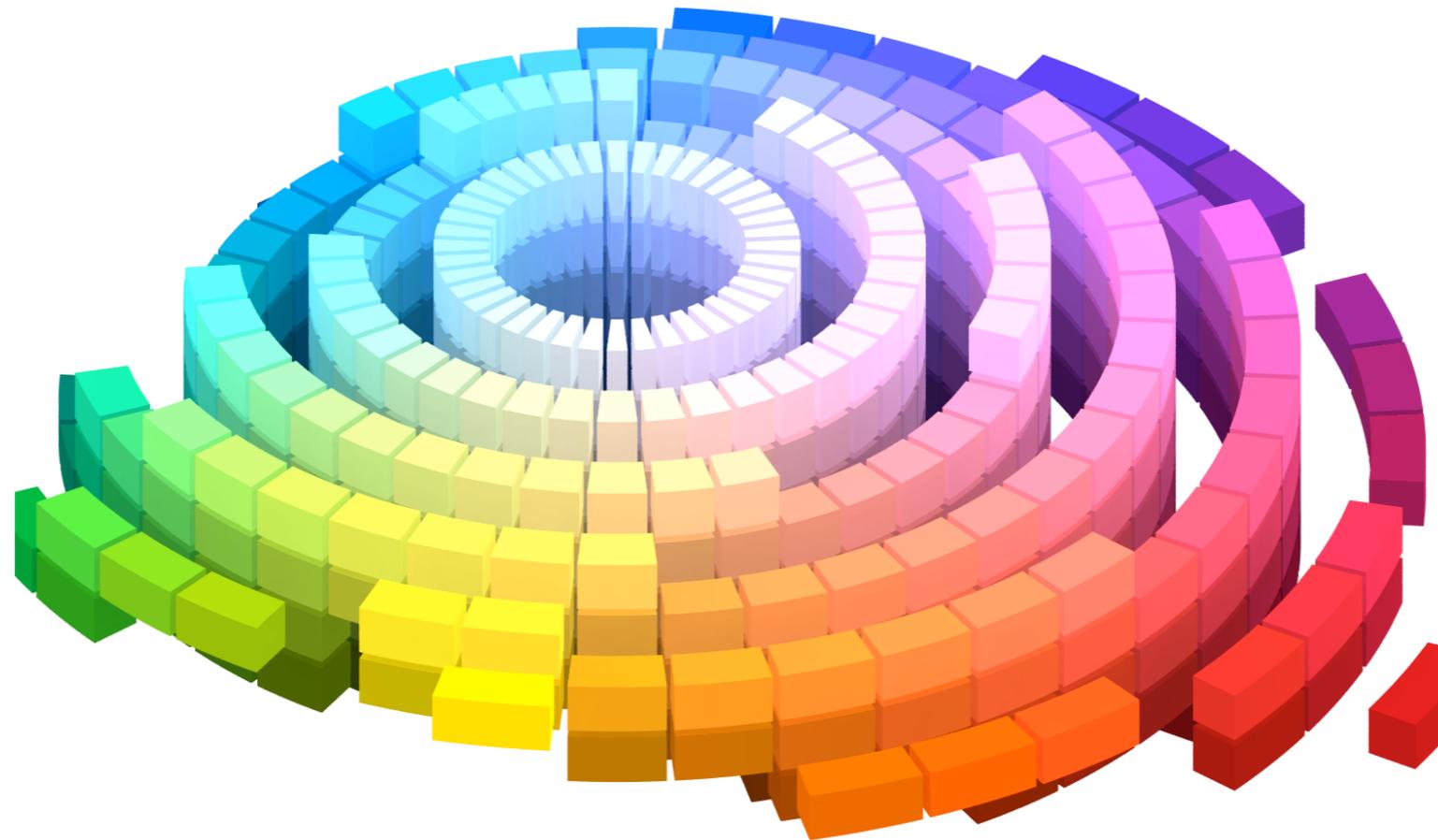

The Third Skillset

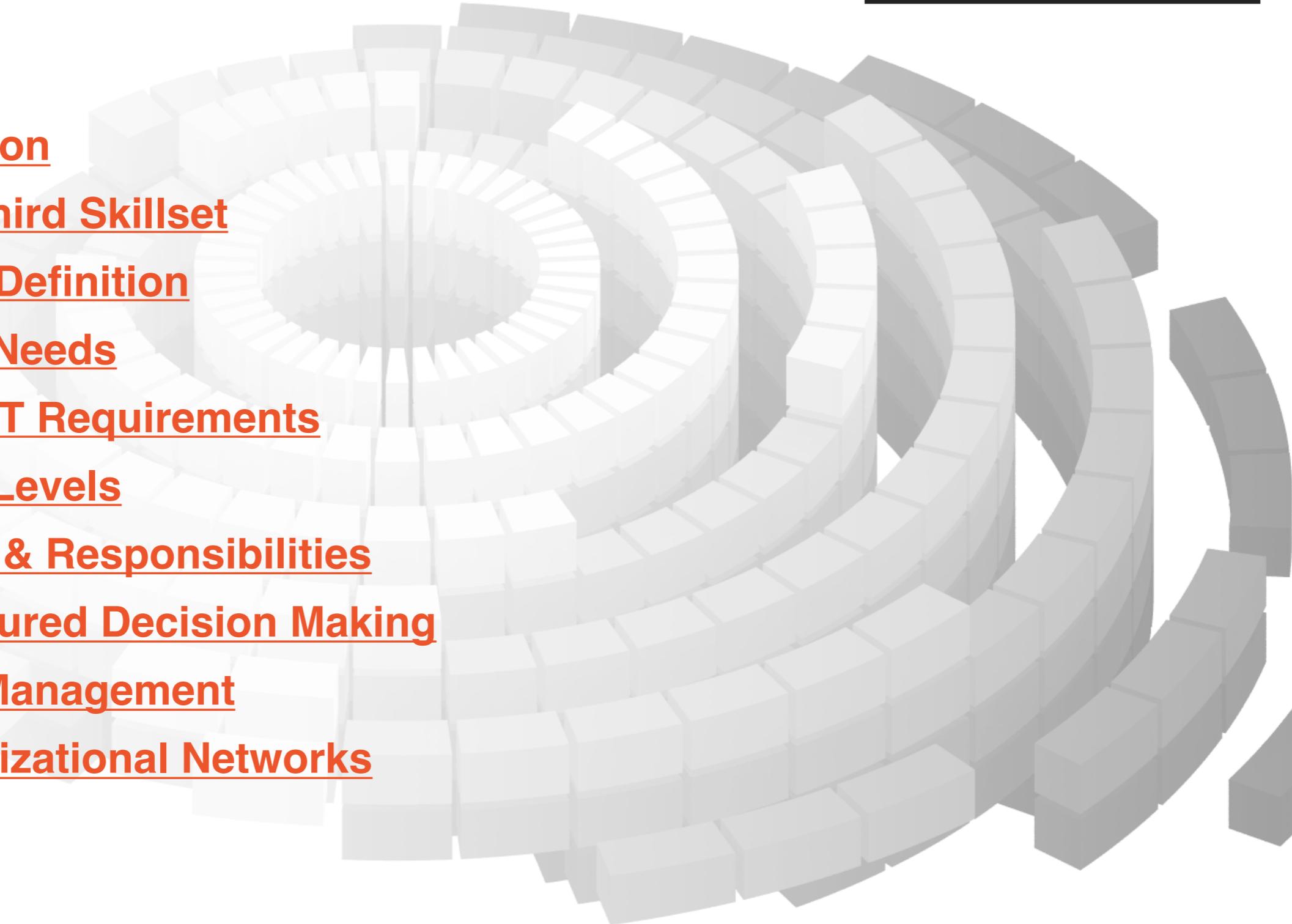
The Mechanics of Effective Teamwork



A How-to For High Performance Teamwork With Examples Using Altova [MetaTeam](#)

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Introduction

A brief introduction to this book explaining what it is, who it is for and why we wrote it.

The Problem of Teamwork

In This Section

1. The Problem of Teamwork
2. Teamwork Is Not a Science
3. Why Are Teams Important?
4. What Is Team Structure?
5. What Is a Self-organizing Team?
6. Is Self-organization Sufficient?

The Problem of Teamwork

Teams are complicated by their nature. Most of us have participated in some kind of team, formal or informal. In doing that you very likely noticed that people have to work hard to work together effectively. This is because there are natural differences between team members. These differences include:

- Levels of motivation, energy and ability
- Expectations about how activities will be done
- Ways of thinking about work
- Understandings of goals and roles
- Aspirations and interests

Teamwork Is Not a Science

Teamwork is fuzzy, not black and white like mathematics. In some ways organizing a team is like building a machine without instructions or navigating a maze.

You can read books like this one to get started, but fundamentally you learn teamwork by trial and error. Moreover, there will always be new ideas about teams, competing approaches and situations that refuse to fit with best practices.

This book does not attempt to cover every aspect of teams. No book about teamwork can realistically do that.

Why Are Teams Important?

In many situations, teams of people have more potential for problem solving and doing work than individuals. When a person or group of people want to do something that requires combining their efforts they need to work at a larger scale. Working at a larger scale requires organization. Organization allows multiple people to achieve more than a single person, without the group becoming an ineffective mob.

For organizations, using teams is one solution to scaling collective efforts. There are other approaches with similar goals. Some of these are:

- Hierarchical organization
- Group processes, like formal project management
- Affinity networks
- Franchising, subsidiaries and affiliates

This book only addresses teamwork. More specifically it addresses the structures and self-organization of teams.

What Is Team Structure?

Teams are organized by information and processes. The structure of a team is the way it is defined for its management and members in terms of:

- Membership
- Goals
- Roles
- Responsibilities
- Processes, starting with decision-making, communications and information management

What Is a Self-organizing Team?

A self-organizing team is simply a team that organizes its members' efforts. All teams do this.

Examples of self-organization include:

- Delegating roles and tasks

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- Having expected ways to do common activities
 - Using the same words for the same things
 - Coordinating working hours.

Self-organization is a practical requirement for every team to some degree. Without self-organization a team would be little different than a group of industrial robots. It would require all the painstaking and expensive programming of robots. But it would have none of benefits of tireless work and super-human strength and precision.

Self-organizing teams are found in every type of organization. This includes even the most hierarchical or command and control organizations. Self-organization is as much a part of human nature as it is a part of how groups reach the scale required to meet complex goals. There is nothing revolutionary, subversive or even adventurous about self-organization.

Is Self-organization Sufficient?

In most cases multiple approaches to group organization need to be mixed together to create an effective approach for a specific situation.

For example, it would be very uncommon for a team within a business to not have a well defined position within the overall hierarchical structure of the company.

Likewise, a less formal team might exist outside a hierarchical organization, but it would typically still have a context. Such a team might form within a wider affinity network of some kind, such as a common interest, activity or communications platform.

About This Book

In This Section

1. **What This Book Is About**
2. **What This Book Is**
3. **What This Book Is Not**
4. **Who This Book Is For**
5. **What To Expect**
6. **An Overview Of the Contents**

What This Book Is About

This book is about the organizational structures that define and enable productive teams. For more context-setting read the brief first chapter titled *The Third Skill Set*.

What This Book Is

This book is a simple summary of some of the ideas and suggestions we have communicated in blog posts, presentations and in other ways over the past year or so.

What this Book Is Not

This book is not a textbook. It does not cover the topic of teamwork exhaustively. Rather, it is a high-level combination of some core concepts in an easy format.

This book is also not a manual for project management, department management or running a committee. There are standards and methodologies for those activities that will combine well with this book's suggestions.

Who This Book Is For

Our goal in collecting these ideas in one place is to help teams think through ways of self-organizing.

It may also be a useful read for people who have an oversight role by virtue of being a part of a PMO (Project Management Office), acting as a functional manager or in another way influencing multiple teams.

This book is written to help all teams, from agile to formal. However, larger teams and teams in larger companies have greater need for the structural support that is the subject of this book due to their more complex environment.

What To Expect

Each chapter of this book is broken into brief sections. The sections address one set of related thoughts. Sections are intentionally short. Each chapter should take just a few minutes.

We offer suggestions or questions for you to think about. In each case we explain the reasoning. We do not attempt to pin down the details because there are many differences between organizations. Instead we provide you with a jumping off point that will help you consider new approaches or confirm your own thinking.

This book does not provide many citations or suggestions for future reading. But to be sure, the vast majority of the content is derived from well-regarded sources in the literature on teamwork — we can't claim to have invented most of this material.

Instead of a blizzard of citations, we keep it simple. We do provide a few links to articles on the [MetaTeam blog](#). Many of these posts contain links to more background information.

Teamwork is a subject that has been well covered by a great number of fine writers and textbooks. If what we offer here interests you, you will easily find much more information on the topic starting from a simple web search.

An Overview Of the Contents

We will look at how teams operate in a progression that basically tracks the stages of setting up a team. The order we chose is:

- Membership
- Goal setting
- Roles, responsibilities and tasks
- Decision-making

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- Communications and cooperation

This ordering roughly follows the concept of the hierarchy of team needs, often referred to as GRPI, that we will look at in chapter three.

Introducing MetaTeam

In This Section

1. **About Altova**
2. **Why We Offer This Book**
3. **What Is MetaTeam?**
4. **Is MetaTeam Required?**
5. **Where Can I Learn More?**

About Altova

[Altova GmbH](#) is a software products company based in Vienna Austria and Beverly Massachusetts, in the United States.

The company was founded in the early 1990s and is best known for its market leading XMLSpy development environment. More recently Altova has become well-known for data management and business intelligence. Altova entered the project and team management area with the release of its MetaTeam online service.

Why We Offer This Book

Altova is a software products company. We created this book to compliment one of our products, MetaTeam.

Altova is not in the business of consulting to companies on teamwork. But we do have a strong interest in helping companies organize teams well and run successful projects.

This book highlights the structural foundations of good teamwork. MetaTeam implements these concepts in an accessible, consistent and practical way. We want to encourage you to take a look.

What Is MetaTeam?

MetaTeam is an online service offered by Altova. It is a tool for self-organizing teams that want to be more effective.

MetaTeam integrates elements of

- Collaborative Decision-making
- Team Performance Management
- Project Management

These structural elements of teamwork are well-known and include practices that are widely advocated. However, they have not been integrated in a single software product before now.

Part of our job here is to help teams understand how MetaTeam implements some of the best ideas from these three areas, and how MetaTeam can help them be more successful.

Is MetaTeam Required?

In short, no.

This book is not a guide to using MetaTeam. Every idea and suggestion in this book may be easily applied with MetaTeam. But you can also implement these ideas in other ways.

In a very few places we mention MetaTeam by way of illustration. In these cases we endeavor to make the illustration clear to people who have not used MetaTeam.

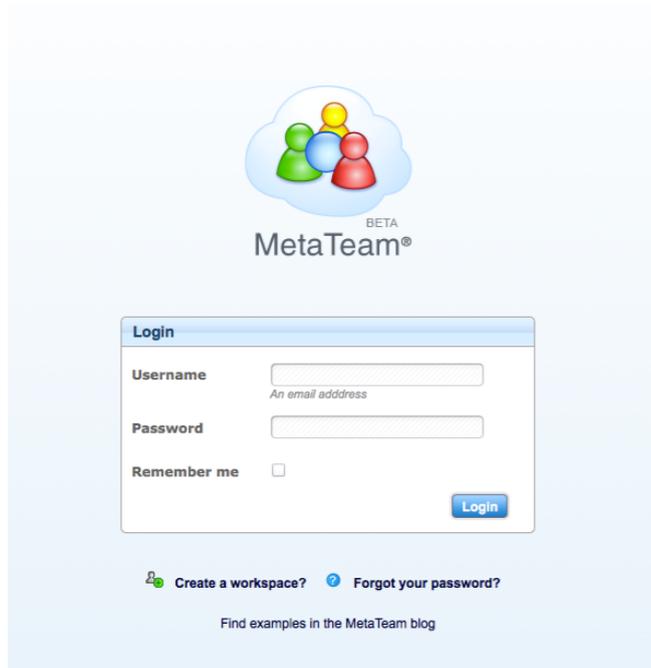
We believe MetaTeam is the best way for teams to organize themselves. However, we recognize that creative people may find their own approaches.

Where Can I Learn More?

You can [learn about MetaTeam on the Altova website](#). In addition, you can [find examples of using MetaTeam in the MetaTeam Blog](#).

To try out MetaTeam [sign up for a MetaTeam account here](#).

Then [login](#) to experiment, learn and apply MetaTeam at your own pace.



The MetaTeam login page at <http://metateam.net>.



The Third Skillset

Identifies a type of straightforward and well-known best practices which fill the space between soft skills and hard skills

The Third Skillset

In This Section

1. **Management Vs. Leadership**
2. **Soft Skills, Hard Skills**
3. **What Is The 3rd Skill Set?**

Management Vs. Leadership

In a now familiar quote, Peter Drucker said “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things”.

Before the right things can turn out right you have to know how to do things right. It is a natural learning progression.

Doing the right things wrong won't get you anywhere. Period.

Whereas, sometimes in doing the “wrong” things right you have at least the chance to compete effectively with your peers in other companies.

That may not sound inspiring. But consider, the vast majority of companies essentially compete on execution, not grand vision.

In this book we talk about doing the simplest team organization things right. We leave visionary leadership to specialists in that complex topic.

Soft Skills, Hard Skills

Project Managers and other team leaders often ask the question: what is more important soft skills or hard skills. In the usual case a lively discussion follows.

For the present purposes let's say that soft skills are interpersonal relationship oriented abilities. Examples may include:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Negotiation and persuasion
- Difficult conversations
- Empathy
- And similar "intangibles"

In contrast, let's stipulate that hard skills, in the context of team efforts, include the capabilities most often associated with project and department managers. These include:

- Estimation techniques such as PERT and function point analysis
- Work tracking techniques like Earned Value
- Scheduling methods including Critical Path and Critical Chain
- Risk management tools like Monte Carlo simulation
- And similar "algorithmic" approaches to quantifiable problems

What Is The Third Skillset?

What is often left out, marginalized or mixed in with dissimilar skills is what can be called the Third Skill Set.

These are the organizational skills that structure a team for success. They may be applied with the softest touch or in a mechanical way more in keeping with a hard skill. These skills include:

- Team definition and operations
- Organization of goals, roles and processes
- Management by responsibility
- Communications and information management
- And similar well-known best practices

These are practices that can be followed as you would follow a recipe. Like a recipe you can decide to follow them by the book or with some improvisation, knowing that if you stay close to the instructions you are likely to achieve a good outcome.

This book is about the third skillset that structures and improves team operations. In the context of teamwork, these are what we feel are the "right things" Drucker refers to.

A Map of the Road Ahead Toolkit

In This Section

1. How Does It All Fit Together?

How Does It All Fit Together?

The contents of this book are a toolkit for teamwork. You should be able to reach in and grab the tool you need when you need it.

There is also a pattern to the use of these tools. The chapter on GRPI is the best reference. (GRPI stands for Goals, Roles, Processes and Interpersonal).

But for the visual thinkers, here is a view of the toolkit to help you see how the sections of this book group together.

You may notice that there are not specific chapters for each box in the processes area. The contents of this book offers lots of guidance in these topics. However, it does not attempt to be comprehensive. There will always be much more to explore and learn.

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