



PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: **MEGA PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

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Reviewer: Lakshmi Subramanian

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Introduction to the Book

“Mega Project Management – *Lessons on Risk and Project Management from the Big Dig*” is a good read and extremely informative. It is designed to be used primarily as a textbook. The Central Artery/Tunnel Project (C/A/T) a.k.a the *Big Dig*, was a Mega Project (i.e. project cost exceeds \$1 billion) in Boston, spanning 23 years, costing \$14.8 billion, employing 5000 workers and 130 major contractors.

The *Big Dig* was the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in the United States and the largest inner-city construction project in the world. It was built to address many urgent issues including inner-city congestion, deterioration of the 1952-vintage elevated highway system (Highway in the Sky) and need for green space. The solution was to replace the elevated Artery with a depressed Artery (Ted Williams Tunnel), the Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Memorial Bridge, over the Charles River, and the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

The author focuses primarily on what went right with the *Big Dig* and how it came to be. The author documents the *Big Dig* in depth while creating an elaborate guide for any mega project. The amount of research and diligence that went into creating this book is truly commendable.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is structured for teaching, where each chapter starts with the background of that Chapter's title/topic and is related to the Project Management Standards. It is then followed by references to the *Big Dig* and in some cases, other Mega Projects around the world as well. Chapters always close with the following sections – “Lessons

Learned”, “Best Practices”, “Summary”, “Ethical Considerations”, “Discussion Questions” and “References”

The book is divided into 12 Chapters beginning with the definition and need to study Mega Projects, their characteristics and framework, the History of the Big Dig and its financing, the Stakeholders, Governance, Megaproject Scope Management, Schedule, the Big Dig Cost History, Cost Management, Risk, Quality Management, Project Integration and Leadership.

Highlights: What's New in this Book?

This is one of a handful of books on the *Big Dig*. The book lends high credibility to the topic since the author was a central member of the team and the book is a result of her personal experience and interviews with several others, who served on the project in different areas and played different roles.

The book is a guide to the theory and practice of Mega Project Management and specifically discusses the challenges and risks faced in the *Big Dig* and the processes and procedures used to overcome them. It also draws references from other Mega Projects around the world and references several other publications.

Highlights: What I liked!

The content is well organized including pedagogical tools. The chapters begin with the basics and gradually steer to an intermediate/ expert level. The cases in *Ethical Considerations* and *Discussion Questions* help pique one's interest and aspire to get into a classroom, brainstorm and arrive at an answer. The context specific quotes were quite enjoyable.

The *Lessons Learned*, *Best Practices* and *Summary* sections at the end of every chapter capture the essence of that chapter in a nutshell. The Tables and Figures were just right and appropriate for the discussion and enhanced the reading experience. The References at the end of each chapter provide avenues to the reader to go beyond this book. The Glossary and Appendix are exhaustive.

The information presented may be overwhelming for a casual reader, however when used as a textbook, as it is intended to be, one can absorb a lot more value that this book has to offer.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Students would benefit the most since it is extremely detailed and covers the basics to expert level gradually.

Project Management Professionals who work on regular projects would be able to see the contrasts and similarities between a regular Project and a Mega Project. And those that do work on Mega Projects will find this to be a useful handbook.

Researchers on Mega Projects will find this book an extremely useful resource in itself and as a pointer to find further resources.

Conclusion

The detailed efforts to document a historic Mega Project is truly commendable. One cannot but help appreciate the work done on the *Big Dig*, with the several engineering and technological marvels to its credit such as the deepest underwater connection and the largest slurry wall application in North America, unprecedented ground freezing and tunnel wall jacking, extensive deep-soil mixing programs to stabilize Boston soils, the widest cable-stayed bridge, and the largest tunnel ventilation system in the world. Apart from that, the high standards of safety for the workers, the strategy that resulted in zero litigation and the several instances of risk avoidances for a Project as big and complex as the *Big Dig* are valuable lessons.

This is a must read for every Project Management Professional! Very Inspiring!

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<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118115473.html>

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About the Reviewer



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Lakshmi Subramanian, PMP, has over 10 years of varied and valuable experience serving the IT and IT Enabled Services industry. She has a Bachelors in Commerce, Masters in Computer Applications and Diploma in Business Management and is a proud member of the Dallas PMI Chapter. Lakshmi is currently working for a Telecom Major in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas, USA. Lakshmi can be contacted at slakshmi1505@gmail.com.

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