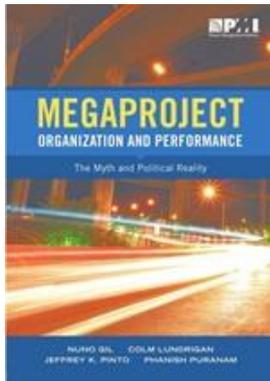


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Megaproject Organization and Performance: The Myth and Political Reality***

Authors: **N. Gil, C. Lundrigan, J. Pinto & P. Puranam**

Publisher: Project Management Institute

List Price: \$34.95 Format: Soft cover, 170 pages

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Reviewer: **Frank Murphy, PMP** Review Date: May 2018

Introduction

This book summarizes a three-year study of mega projects, which are defined as “project-based organizations purposely formed to develop capital-intensive, large-scale infrastructure systems”. Project managers are always managing stakeholders, and this book gives a different view of who those stakeholders might be, and why they may wait till later in the process to voice their views. Even though they wait, they impact the overall viability of the project and force radical design changes to satisfy them.

The fascinating part of the book is how assumptions can radically change and change background details for various projects. The authors tell a project story that is easy to follow and shows how the size of the stakeholder is not important, but rather how their influence is wielded can impact the final product. This is worth reading, and applicable whether you manage small or large projects.

Overview of Book’s Structure

The 170-pages are broken down into 5 chapters, with a natural progression in understanding the intricacies of megaprojects bringing them all together. Chapter Two describes the organizational design for these projects, and the challenges in bringing together the right resources to fund and manage them. Chapter Three discusses the performance of these organizations and the evolution of project goals. Chapter Four highlights the optimism bias of the project promoters, and the challenges the project will face due to this mindset. The final chapter switches gears and looks at megaprojects in developing economies to see if they face the same challenges. Spoiler alert: they do!

Each chapter gives a bountiful amount of references used for that chapter and is very helpful in looking for more information on particularly interesting topics. The overall tone of the book is scholarly, but it is easy to follow the conclusions and look for more material on the various subjects.

Highlights

Megaproject structural characteristics are described in a building block fashion and easy to understand. Case studies are used on different projects and easily understandable diagrams are throughout and illustrate the concepts and methodologies the authors used.

The highlighted projects include Crossrail and High Speed 2, the London Olympic Park, and Heathrow Airport Terminal 2, all in the United Kingdom. The variety of projects studied add to the findings. Chapter Five looks at infrastructure projects in India, Nigeria, and Uganda as a contrast and attempts to find similarities amongst megaprojects in different economies.

Each of the projects described outlines how decisions were made, and why the project evolved in its goals. The value is in the lessons that can be applied to projects of all sizes, and a reminder that political actors of all sizes can dramatically impact the final product.

Highlights: What I liked!

I liked the method where the authors built the megaproject story from an academic perspective, and then used real examples to test their theories. The amount of research is obvious and well done. The references included in each chapter add tremendous value in researching similar issues. The tables in each chapter convey the story in a manner that is easy to understand and replicate for other projects.

I also liked the description of megaprojects conceptualization with ambiguous targets and how they evolve into finished products. Although they may exceed the initial resource allocations, this book helps to explain how that process changes and stakeholder involvement shape the final goals. The political aspect cannot be understated and is described in terms of an optimum goal used to gain support, which adapts to future support needed to complete the project.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Anyone who is a Project Manager managing complex projects, and evolving goals would benefit from this text. The descriptions of how these megaprojects encountered difficulties as they had more stakeholders voice their opinions is a lesson to us all. Consensus can be hard to gain, and this book shows what the end results may look like if that agreement takes longer to form. If you manage a project where resources are committed, and the goals have changed, you need a way to mitigate running out of goodwill. This book provides another way to look at that difficult process.

Conclusion

I enjoyed reading this book. It is relatively short at 170 pages, but packed full of information to look at for future research. The book follows a natural progression and is useful for the information gleaned from various projects. The research is valuable for projects of all sizes, and will be a valued reference. The questions raised as you read thru the various case studies will make you a better questioner on critical projects where goals may be lofty, and the sources of resources aren't identified.

For more about this book, go to:

<http://marketplace.pmi.org/Pages/ProductDetail.aspx?GMProduct=00101602101>

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About the Reviewer



Frank Murphy

Texas, USA



Frank Murphy is a USAF veteran of 30 years, with multiple deployments and extensive travel on the 7 continents. He was a Loadmaster on both C-5 and C-17 aircraft, with his final USAF assignment as the senior enlisted leader for an Operations Group. Frank recently moved to the Texas Hill Country and is a member of the Project Management Institute (Alamo Chapter).

Frank has a BS in Industrial Technology, MBA in Strategic Leadership, and is completing a DBA at George Fox University. He has been a certified PMP since 2012 and has worked projects ranging from real estate to satellite transport.