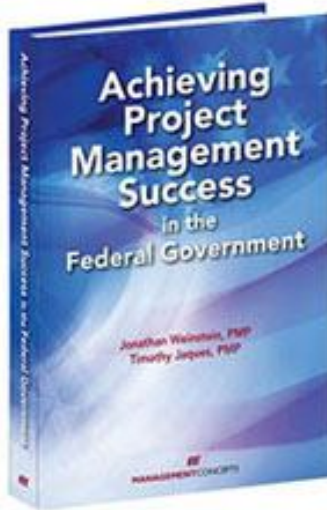


## PM World Today Book Review



Book Title: **Achieving Project Management Success in the Federal Government**

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Reviewer: **Kathryn Phillips, MBA, PMP®, SSGB**

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### Introduction to the Book

***Achieving Project Management Success in the Federal Government*** is a tightly woven library of explicit real world examples and conceptual practices in technology, organizational behavior, project management discipline, application and law. It reminds us in the same breath that the Federal Government, in a very heady way, was a predecessor and adopter of project management discipline and practice.

This book does offer a realistic cross section of the project management discipline in the U.S. federal government, a "state of the practice" in the largest single enterprise in the world. The authors point out exhaustive challenges to a number of federal agencies and their trials to deliver quality products and services according to scope, on time and within budget across a complex and highly diverse web of organizational cultures, locations, missions, regulatory and funding streams; thus, the use of the word heady.

Although the book's title - ***Achieving Project Management Success in the Federal Government*** - suggests its content might be a 'technical manual' or 'how to' guide on topics like earned value or risk analysis, it is not. Instead, this book focuses on any executive level stakeholder (government and/or civilian) who recognizes the value of project management and strives to apply the right mix of

skills, knowledge, experience, resources, and common sense to improve project successes in their organization. This book also strives to enlighten and improve the science of project management for federal leaders, project teams, and others who influence the direction of projects”.

The Honorable Thomas M. Davis III, Director, Deloitte Services LP and Former Chair, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, conveys a powerful foreword to this book acknowledging how dedicated public managers have used the discipline of project management to achieve results for many years. A stellar result of such dedication, discipline, and organizational leadership earned the Department of Energy’s Office of Environmental Management (OEM) the coveted Project Management Institute (PMI®) “Project of Year” award two years in a row for 2006 and 2007. The aforementioned is an exceptional accomplishment and sorely needed as a glaring spotlight on oversight has intensified as tax payers demand more accountability and performance on their government’s strategic use of funds.

### **Overview of Book’s Structure**

This book is organized into three parts that define project management from different vantage points. Together, the parts address the entire scope of project management, from organization to methodology, technology to leadership. The chapters in each part address project management topics are cross elastic and are interdependent. These topics grew out of the authors’ interviews with highly reliable government practitioners and ethical analysis of relevant research. The three Parts are outlined below:

In Part 1: **Organization and Structure** –addresses key elements and practices that contribute to framing or supporting project management in the federal sector.

In Part 2: **People** – describes project management practices that engage government personnel and stakeholders in projects and improve the quality of their participation. This part highlights practices and successes.

In Part 3: **Process** – addresses the processes that provide the operational context for project management practices. This part describes the emergence and application of project lifecycles, including governance.

The book concludes providing advice “from the field”. Case studies and examples are derived from civilian agencies and a special few from the Department of Defense.

### **Highlights: What I liked!**

This book gave me many “ah ha” moments like the recognition of “Opposition Stakeholders” among a dynasty of overseers and liable federal agencies as key

project stakeholders critical to successful project execution and delivery. And, while I really was seeking project management tools, techniques and practice unique to the Federal Government, I walked away with more information than expected.

For example, this book reminds us that the U.S. Federal Government is the largest single enterprise in the world influencing America and the world with an awesome responsibility to deliver an effective government. And, that while some standards and requirements exist, no unified field theory of project management within the federal government has yet to evolve. Nevertheless, for all the apparent randomness, the evolution of project management within the federal government remains a story of great project management achievement.

I liked the way the authors used the three-legged stool approach to accommodate the different learning styles for the reading audience. First, the authors crystallized the intended message with weighty quotes from noted Americans Leaders (past and present) at the beginning of each chapter. Second, the project management concepts or theories were enhanced with graphic depictions which intended learning crystallized within a shaded box summarizing 'final thoughts' as the final leg.

I also liked the way the authors repositioned interpedently material throughout each chapter to heighten the transfer of knowledge and while keeping the learning experience "fresh". For example, certain project management concepts appeared throughout the book such as culture, people, and process; but, were reanalyzed to fit each chapter's topic which prevented the material from becoming excessive or dull.

### **Shortfalls: What was Missing!**

The beginning of the book initially did not appear to be robust for experienced or project manager professionals (PMP®). The book opened somewhat passively with prerequisite review of the basics and origins of project management. Most want to jump right into the material and quickly glean the desired "golden nuggets" of information.

As I mentioned earlier, I was looking to quickly discern the differences in federal government versus civilian project management practice and was disappointed to learn that such a comparison was not captured within the body of this book. The disclaimer of what this book "is not" was addressed in the book's Preface; but, was that visible and early enough? But, I did find that the authors provided enough federal project management detail that I could successfully take a stab at creating my own basic comparisons. Other than the aforementioned, the book held so many other positive jewels of information which easily offset the minor shortfall mentioned above.

## Who might benefit from the Book

Anyone with a key interest in project management, government or process improvement will benefit from this book. This book is entertaining as well as instructional. The most skilled professional project manager will see new business requirements for the federal project manager not envisioned within his own civilian sphere of business operations.

This book captures major events in the federal government that affected and still affects our lives. It recalls the history and origins of project management as well as the plans and promises for the use of project management discipline in the future. It provides an overview of critical federal agencies in their stakeholder roles in ensuring successful project delivery as well as shoring up tax payers' expectations for generational success. This book tightly weaves together organizational behavior, political impacts, legislative history, technology and ethics in project management to serve as a repository of information and becomes a valuable tool for any reader.

## Conclusion

It is very clear that the authors embarked upon a commendable goal which they achieved to make this book massively multifaceted through research, interviews, literature and surveys. My first pass through the book incorrectly suggested that this book was just a review of the *PMI's A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* coupled with history of the origins of project management and past use in the federal government.

It was with my second pass through that I realized the depth and volume of knowledge that existed within the 287 pages. The interviews were with high caliber and recognizable federal officers who revealed their thoughts about the use of project management or lack thereof within the federal government, a "Who's Who" in America. The examples of people and culture created another dimension of study and discipline found in master level organizational behavior courses. There didn't appear to be any soft shoeing or sugar coating of the federal government project management advancements or failures. Information appears to be forthright and firm.

I would have had to purchase several volumes of material to come within reach of the subject matter "***Achieving Project Management Success in the Federal Government***" provides. I highly recommend this book to all.

For more information about the book or to purchase, visit

[http://www.managementconcepts.com/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=275&PageID=643&mcTarget=publication&mcTargetID=project\\_management/AchievingPMSuccess.asp&cached=true&mode=2&userID=238](http://www.managementconcepts.com/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=275&PageID=643&mcTarget=publication&mcTargetID=project_management/AchievingPMSuccess.asp&cached=true&mode=2&userID=238).

**About the Reviewer:*****Kathy Phillips***

**Kathy Phillips** currently oversees the implementation data products for Fortune 500 Companies as Area Manager of Project Management for AT&T Business Solutions. Kathy is certified Project Manager Professional (PMP®) by the International Project Management Institute (PMI) and a Six Sigma Green Belt. She received the Bachelors of Science degree in Business Administration – Economics from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Illinois. She earned both the Graduate Certificate in Project Management in 2002 followed by the Masters in Business Administration in 2005 from the University of Texas at Dallas – Richardson Texas. Kathy's international travel has taken her to several German cities for academic study and business operations review at Siemens, Texas Instruments, BMW and the Solar Village Furth for renewable energies. She has developed and delivered training to technical professional groups. She has reviewed two additional books for PMForum and PM World Today, *The Zen of Project Management* and *Simple Solutions*. She can be reached at [kp0090@att.com](mailto:kp0090@att.com).