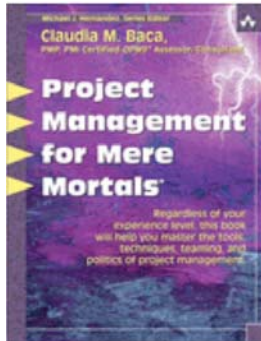


## PM World Today Book Review



**Book Title:** *Project Management for Mere Mortals*

**Authors:** Claudia M. Baca

**Publisher:** Addison/Wesley

**List Price:** US\$44.99

**Publication Date:** 2007

**ISBN:** 0-321-42345-3

**Reviewer:** Boley T. Thomas, MBA, PMP

**Review Date:** March 2008

---

### Introduction to the Book

*Project Management for Mere Mortals* is a meat and potatoes digest of tried and true project management principles and techniques that will greatly aid the new or developing project manager—especially if project management is not the main focus of the reader's job.

Claudia M. Baca is a recognized authority on project management and the Organizational Project Management Maturity Model (*OPM3*). Calling on twenty-four years of experience in the project management industry, Baca has presented and written extensively within the PMI culture on such topics as *OPM3*, PMP exam preparation, change management, and other general project management topics. Ms. Baca earned a Master's Certificate in Project Management from Denver University and obtained the PMP certification in 1995. She currently lectures for the Denver Chapter of PMI and teaches at Colorado State University and Denver's Front Range Community College.

### Overview of Book's Structure

*Project Management for Mere Mortals* is organized into fourteen chapters each containing discussion, case study, and review questions. The first ten chapters focus on project planning while the last four deal with the execution, controlling, and closing of a project. The weight given to planning in this book underscores its importance to the success of a project.

The first two chapters discuss the topic of project management by defining it, discussing the role of a project manager, and how the project manager fits into the larger leadership structure of an organization. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the importance of understanding the size and scope of a project including requirements gathering; creating a work breakdown structure (WBS); and organizing the tasks of

a project. Chapters 5 through 7 delve into estimating, quality, and establishing a communication network. Chapters 8, 9, and 10 address risk analysis, scheduling, and budgeting—three subjects that are rightly discussed close together. And finally, chapters 11-14 guide the reader through the elements of sound project execution, controlling, and closing including discussions about risk management; change control; and the importance of capturing lessons learned.

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

The best feature of *Project Management for Mere Mortals* is its dedication to preparing and planning for a project. The importance of preparation before work begins cannot be over emphasized. There is so much pressure on a project manager to get a project started and to show early results that often this is the only successful part of the project. The latter phases become mired in problems that could have been avoided with adequate planning. I also appreciate the author's generous use of simple and easy to read tables and graphs illustrating key project concepts such as mind mapping; work break down structure (WBS); and critical path.

Another great feature of the book is the review questions at the end of each chapter. Project management techniques and methodologies can be difficult to grasp the first time one is exposed to them. The quick review at the end of chapter 9 for instance, which deals with critical path calculating, helps readers boil down a complicated topic into its main ideas and key concepts before going on to the next chapter.

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

The author diminishes the quality of her book by using the topic of project management as a vehicle to deliver a career-building philosophy embedded in the examples, anecdotes, and case studies. The language of the content seems to speak to and benefit mainly project managers with a keen interest in office politics. Readers who do not see themselves as part of this target audience may find this aspect of the book distracting from its otherwise excellent content. I think there is a bit too much emphasis in the book on politics and being offensive and strategic.

The following quote from the 'Politics' section in chapter 12 illustrates how overtly offensive and strategic the author thinks a project manager needs to be. It reads,

*"Nothing can hurt a project manager's reputation more than unfounded rumors that get out of hand...Ask your trusted friends and core team members to keep their ears open to what people are saying about your project. Have informal meetings with them on a regular basis to find out what the rumor mill is saying. I've actually seen project managers put activities on their calendar to prowl for rumors." (pp. 413-414)*

Gossip is never the conversation of an educated mind and no person of integrity would ever engage in it. As a project manager I can't imagine ever being so

preoccupied with my own political standing or what others may be saying about me that I would go "prowling for rumors!" This just doesn't strike me as useful content for a book about project management. Leave intrigue to the sales staff.

### **Who might benefit from the Book**

*Project Management for Mere Mortals* could serve as an excellent text for an introductory project management course or as a reference guide for managers that manage projects only part of the time. Other readers who might benefit are:

- College students who want to add project management knowledge to their education.
- Volunteer organizations taking on a large project.
- Continuing education students.

### **Conclusion**

Claudia Baca has done a superb job of covering the vital components of project management. With insightful commentary and illustrative examples, Ms. Baca weaves a seamless tapestry of the total project life cycle. She gives significant emphasis to the essential work of preparation that is so often breezed over in the rush to show progress. Readers will appreciate how Ms. Baca first explains a concept and then illustrates it in the context of teaming, the work place, and through case study. *Project Management for Mere Mortals* follows the Project Management Institute's project management model, so it is a helpful study aid for those seeking to better understand the concepts found in the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK).

**About the Reviewer:**



***Boley T. Thomas***



Boley Thomas is a PMP certified project manager with twelve years experience managing technology projects for major telecom and semiconductor technology companies in North Texas. Boley majored in English and minored in philosophy at Brigham Young University where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1993; he earned his PMP certification in 2000; and earned a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Texas at Dallas in 2005. Boley's most successful and rewarding project to date has been his 24-year marriage to his wife Louise and the rearing of five fabulous children.