

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
.....  
MEGAPROJECT  
MANAGEMENT  
.....

*Edited by*  
BENT FLYVBJERG

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*The Iron Law of Megaproject Management*

BENT FLYVBJERG

1.1 CLASSICS IN MEGAPROJECT  
MANAGEMENT

THE ambition for this inaugural edition of *The Oxford Handbook of Megaproject Management* is to become the ultimate source for state-of-the-art scholarship in the emerging field of megaproject management. The book offers a rigorous, research-oriented, up-to-date academic view of the discipline based on high-quality data and strong theory. Until lately, the literature in this new field was scattered over a large number of publications and disciplines, making it difficult to obtain an overview of the history, key issues, and core readings. *Megaproject Planning and Management: Essential Readings* (Flyvbjerg 2014a) assembled the central historical texts in the field. *The Oxford Handbook of Megaproject Management* has been designed to provide the most important contemporary readings. Taken together, the two books are intended to map out the best of what is worth reading in the megaproject management literature, past and present.

In a recent survey, the author asked 114 experts to identify the classics in megaproject management (Flyvbjerg 2014b: xxx–xxxi). The results show that if one defines a “classic” in the conventional sense—as a written work that is generally recognized as definitive in its field by a majority of experts in that field—then there are no classics in megaproject management. Remarkably, the publication proposed by the most respondents as a classic was proposed by only five respondents—several times less the required majority for a classic. In no less than 79% of cases, a publication put forward as a classic was proposed by one and only one respondent, indicating a huge spread in views regarding what the classics might be in this field.

Several explanations exist for this lack of consensus regarding classics in megaproject management. The field is young and unconsolidated as an academic discipline; therefore, perhaps more time is needed to develop and agree upon possible classics. Moreover, the field is multidisciplinary and fragmented, which makes consensus harder to come by. Whatever the explanation, Kuhn (2012) and other philosophers of science hold that classics are necessary to develop and strengthen an academic field, because classics serve as exemplars and reference points around which paradigmatic research may evolve and against which revolutionary research can pit itself. Following Kuhn and others, it is argued here that megaproject management, if it is to make progress as an academic field of inquiry and a professional field of practice, is very much in need of classics. *The Oxford Handbook of Megaproject Management* together with the previous book of historical texts have therefore been developed with the explicit purpose of contributing to the growth of such classics, and hopefully one or more papers in these books may one day become classics.

In addition to the print version of *The Oxford Handbook of Megaproject Management*, an electronic version is planned to ensure the widest possible dissemination and to allow updates as new research appears.<sup>1</sup> The primary audience for the book is the research academic community, professionals, doctoral students, master's programs, and executive education programs in management, strategy, planning, megaproject management, and project and program management. It is hoped that by providing the present set of cutting-edge contemporary readings in megaproject management the book will help progress the discipline, academically and professionally. It is also hoped that citizens and communities interested in and affected by megaprojects may find useful insights in this book.

## 1.2 WHAT ARE MEGAPROJECTS?

Megaprojects are large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost \$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people.<sup>2</sup> Hirschman (1995: vii, xi) calls such projects "privileged particles of the development process" and points out that often they are "trait making;" that is, they are designed to ambitiously change the structure of society, as opposed to smaller and more conventional projects that are "trait taking"—they fit into and follow pre-existing structures and do not attempt to modify them. Megaprojects, therefore, are not just magnified versions of smaller projects. Megaprojects are a completely different breed of project in terms of their level of aspiration, stakeholder involvement, lead times, complexity, and impact. Consequently, they are also a very different type of project to lead. Conventional project managers should not lead megaprojects. Megaprojects require reflective practitioners (Schön 1983) as leaders who have developed deep domain experience in this specific field.

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