

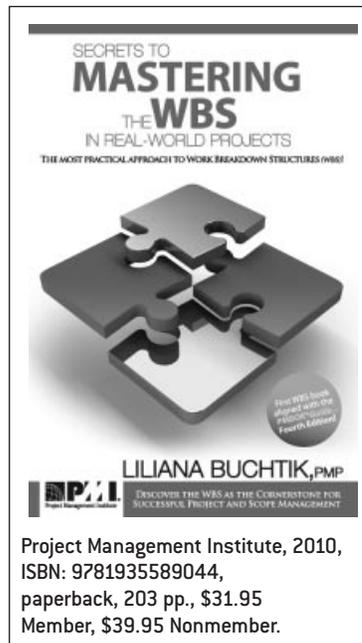
# Secrets to Mastering the WBS in Real-World Projects

by Liliana Buchtik

**W**ith project managers facing shorter delivery cycles and limited resources, it is crucial that we plan and execute our projects with a very high degree of precision. To accomplish this objective, one of the keys to success is to understand and use the work breakdown structure (WBS) appropriately. One of the most fundamental tools in a project manager's arsenal, the WBS exactly defines the *what* that we are to deliver versus the *how to* or *when* aspects. It is interesting that it is common practice, albeit not best practice, to develop a schedule (the *when* aspect) prior to defining the project deliverables (the *what* aspect). This practice tends to foster a more activity-based schedule focused on process tasks (the *how to* aspect) and process artifacts (the documents that move information through the process) over the deliverables-based focus. This approach may result in missed requirements (needs) and, ultimately, project deliverables (value for the customer).

In *Secrets to Mastering the WBS in Real-World Projects*, author Liliana Buchtik discusses four typical confusions about the WBS, each of which is taken from real-life examples. An interesting observation that she brings to light is that although the Project Management Institute has moved away from the activity-driven model for WBS development, 20-plus years later we are still training project managers to develop their WBS in this manner. In contrast to the misunderstanding around the WBS, Chapter 2 focuses on the top 20 benefits of using a WBS. Regardless of your experience level, the list serves as a great checklist, or at least a good reminder of what value you can get from your WBS.

After this background overview, the remainder of the book focuses on the application of the WBS. From a more basic point of view, in Chapter 4 the author answers several typical questions surrounding the “Who, What, When, How, and Why” of the WBS in order to lay the groundwork for the rest of the book. The following chapter transitions the reader from the basic understanding of the WBS to a more advanced level of understanding.



The introduction of the “100% rule” solidifies one of the most significant benefits for using a WBS: accounting for *all* the work (deliverables) that composes the total project. This is of great interest to the project manager because one of the top reasons for project failure is poor project scope control. By using the WBS, the scope of the project in terms of the deliverables is clear and well documented, hence facilitating the change control process.

In Chapter 6, the author provides several tips on how to develop a valuable WBS. For the typical project manager in the workplace, the 20-step guide to developing a WBS is at the novice level, but it does provide value in that it may serve as a quick refresher. Other tips include different approaches to develop the WBS, different options to represent the WBS, and also various techniques used to create a WBS. The chapter ends with

a quick discussion of various template formats and guidelines. This brings us to the author's discussion of various software tools to create and maintain the WBS. There is a handy summary chart that does a side-by-side comparison of some of the most common WBS tools.

The next three chapters are focused on the alignment of the WBS with the various Knowledge Areas of *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide—Fourth Edition)*.

To close out the book, the author has included a chapter on how and when to use the WBS in global, multicultural, and virtual projects, and also one on the WBS in the agile environment. Both of these areas are becoming, if not already, very dominant in the IT world. It is worth the effort to get the author's perspective on these subjects.

*Secrets to Mastering the WBS in Real-World Projects* is a relatively short, very-easy-to-read book, packed with immediately useable concepts, practices, and tips. It is a terrific book for both novices working on their first WBS and seasoned project managers looking to refresh their skills and ensure alignment to industry best practices.

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