

How much are Lessons Learned used on Megaprojects?

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Question – are Lessons Learned actually useful?

- Personal experience
- I've never used them
- Seen dozens of management systems
- What does 'useful' mean?
- Start with findings in the literature
- Finish with findings and recommendations



What's a megaproject?

Megaprojects are “large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost US\$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational and impact millions of people”

Bent Flyvbjerg, 2014



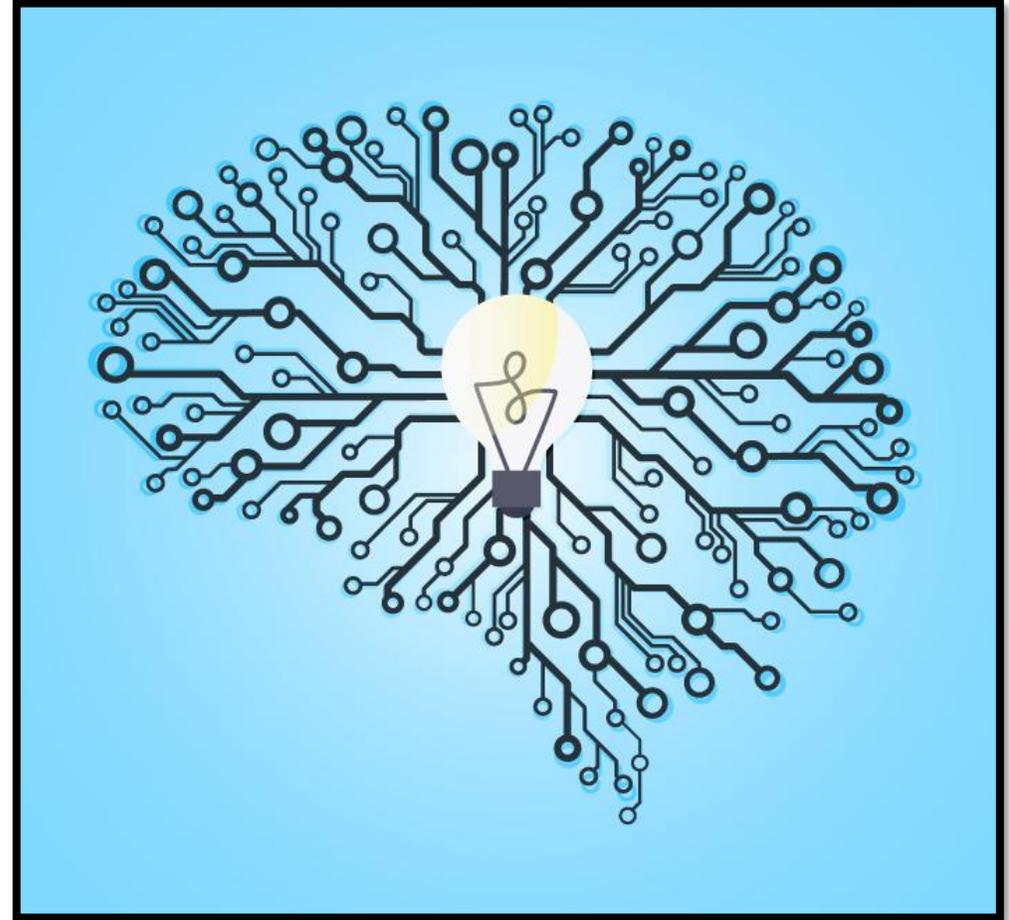
Lessons learned

- Single definition is hard to come by!
- OGC - the process which is undertaken by members of project teams of logging lessons through the life of their projects and culminating with the production of a report which is included in project closure documentation (OGC, 2009)
- Heavy focus on the logging, but not the learning



Knowledge management

- Notes from post-project reviews are classified as knowledge for the purposes of my study
- Two types of knowledge (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009) :
 - Explicit - communicated clearly in words and sentences
 - Tacit - sensory and unarticulated
- Lessons Learned knowledge is largely tacit - need to be converted to explicit to be stored. What is lost in translation?
- Storytelling - means of transferring tacit knowledge - needs a skilled storyteller (Dalkir, 2013)



Availability of knowledge

- Where would you go as a leader for some lessons?
 - Academia
 - Association Project Management - UK Body of Knowledge
 - Project Management Institute - Body of Knowledge
 - Office of Government Commerce - PRINCE2, MSP, etc.
 - NISTA - Routemap, Project 13
- How does a leader penetrate this for pertinent lessons during the early days?



Senior leaders and advice-taking

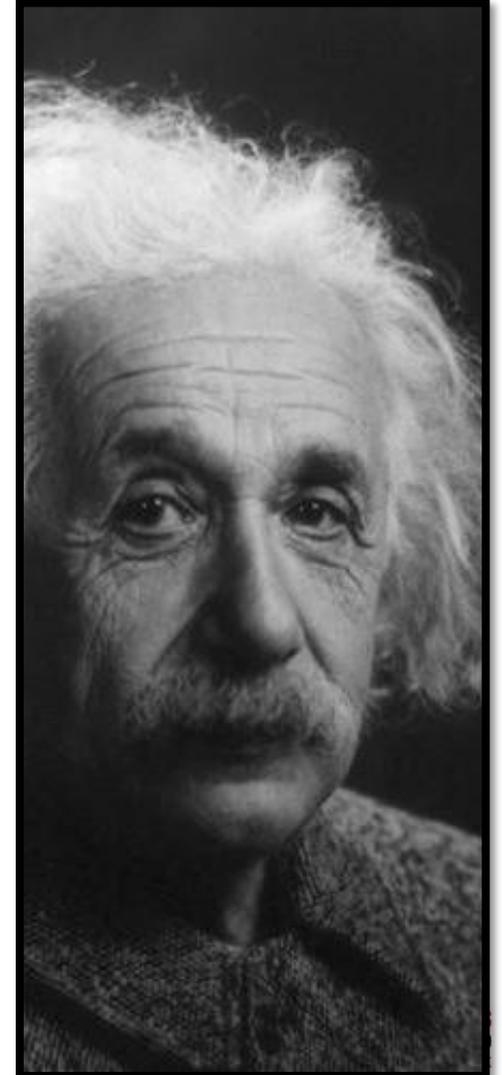
- Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006 - Judge and Advisor. Advisor advises and the judge decides whether that advice is worth taking
- **Arrogance**
- Power makes you feel more able to overcome issues (Galinsky, et al., 2008)
- Powerful judges feel there is increased weight to their own opinions (Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006)
- Judges with power see themselves as senior to the advisors (Krueger, 2003)
- Not only to senior leaders ignore lessons, they actively avoid it!



Heuristics

*The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, and the rational mind is a faithful servant.
We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift*

- What about instinct?
- What about hunches?
- Heuristics is a strategic approach to decision making which ignores elements of information with the aim of achieving a speedier or more frugal outcome (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011)
- Has been found to be successful where time is short (Czerlinski, et al. 1999 & Yan, et al. 2009)



Research



Objective - test my theory and see how it compared with the practice



Interviewed multiple senior leaders with experience of megaprojects

High Speed 1 & 2
Crossrail
London Olympics
Her Majesty's Treasury
Infrastructure Projects Authority
Institute of Civil Engineers

Findings

- Everyone believes Lessons Learned is useful, if not essential
 - Must be adopted effectively - stored but not always used
 - Post-project reviews can be a cathartic experience
- Most believe that lessons learned are not adopted on megaprojects
 - Arrogance of leaders
 - People think that all projects are different
 - People are rewarded for inventing new ways of doing things (consultants)

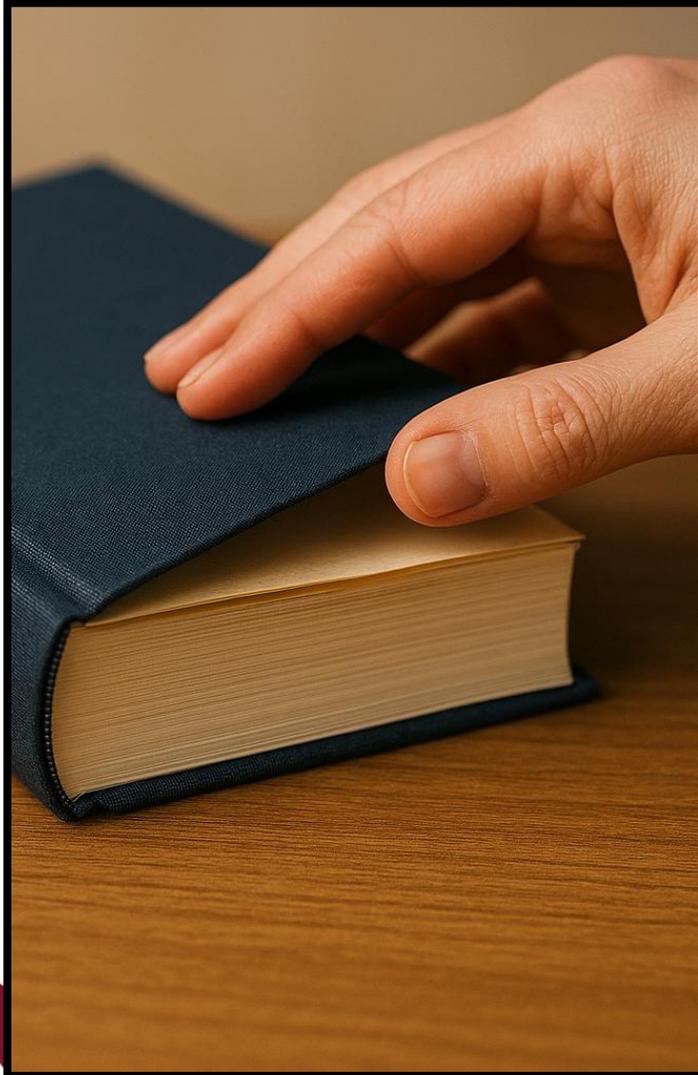


Findings, cont.

- If they want lessons, they will directly seek out individuals rather than use knowledge databases
 - Context is really important
 - Lessons are tacit
 - Databases are useless - data not stored well or searchable
- Most examples of lessons learned were from the individuals themselves
- Leaders are very confident of their own capability



Conclusion



- Theory and test subjects say it's useful
- However, hypothesis was right - lessons are very rarely passed on between megaprojects
 - Best knowledge is tacit and this is difficult to store and pass on
 - Too difficult to access what you need
 - Senior managers are arrogant
 - There are benefits to relying on instinct

Recommendations

- Create a single point of knowledge for successful delivery
- Store stories instead of information - use videos, provide access to experts
- Recognise similarity between projects rather than differences
- Keep things simple - store 6 'golden rules' rather than 600 'things to avoid'
- Take pride in the lessons stored - work as hard on dissemination as on storage



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Thank
You



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