

**Effective Work Breakdown Structures**  
**by Gregory T. Haugan**  
**Published by Management Concepts, Vienna, Virginia – 2002**

---

***Book Review by Robert Youker***

This is an excellent short book that should be in every project manager's library. Mr. Haugan, now retired, has a long history in Project Management starting with DOD projects in 1960. His book reflects the original DOD approach to WBS. WBS is an output-oriented breakdown of the products or end items of the project expressed as NOUNS.

There are no activities or time dimensions to the WBS. Activities are part of the schedule, which is developed after the WBS, as Work Packages are broken down into the activities necessary to complete the Work Packages. This distinction has been a matter of great controversy recently in the PM world.

The book is 100 pages composed of 6 chapters with many examples and rules for construction of WBSs. The various chapters relate the WBS to other aspects of Project Management including the life cycle, and nine project management knowledge areas. This book is much more useful than the institute's recently published practice standard for WBS because it provides specific rules and examples.

I wish the author had included the original DOD Mil Spec 881 definition of the WBS, which follows; WBS is defined as:

"A product-oriented family tree composed of hardware, software, services, data, and facilities. The family tree results from systems engineering efforts during the acquisition of a defense material item. A WBS displays and defines the product, or products, to be developed and/or produced. It relates the elements of work to be accomplished to each other and to the end product."

I liked the way he dealt with the issue of WBS and life cycle phases. Since each phase of a project will have specific outputs or products, by definition each phase requires a different WBS. The DOD procedures are different and recommend only one WBS.

One of the key elements of conflict on WBS is the use of the term "Work" which entails activity. Russell Archibald and I have argued unsuccessfully for years that the correct term should be Project Breakdown Structure, not Work Breakdown Structure. Unfortunately we are stuck with a term some DOD employee used in about 1960.

Some people argue that Haugan's DOD oriented approach is not useful for projects that are done under conditions of great uncertainty. To my mind this is a misunderstanding of the relation between a WBS and the project life cycle. In uncertain situations you would have a WBS for an investigation phase where your products or outputs of the phase were trying to define more certainty.

This book is highly recommended for all. — *Bob Youker*

***Comments to Bob and an anecdote from the book's author:***

You and I agree totally. Incidentally in 1956, I worked on the DynaSoar Project at Martin Company and had a Product Breakdown Structure. The AF later on in the project changed the name to WBS. 881b is still much better than the practice standard book, which is simply wrong.

— Greg