

Book review

Managing Construction Projects, 2nd edn

Graham M. Winch, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK, 2010,
ISBN 978-1-4051-8457-1, **£39.99, 344 pp.**

In *Managing Construction Projects*, Graham Winch asserts in his preface that this second edition contains a stronger focus on the 'business of managing construction projects'. The result is very much a management book rather than a technical text, and will be of immense value to a range of construction professionals in project management roles leading all construction project types. Indeed it is no coincidence that this text is authored with Manchester Business School's course 'MBA for Construction Executives' in mind, since it provides the strategic, value-based and systems-thinking approach to construction project management, so often lacking in general project management and construction management texts.

At first, the book's division into five distinct sections may seem a little counter-intuitive, but the author's logic is nonetheless effective. He begins by neatly setting out his stall, discussing some of the first edition's criticisms, and offering general project management contextual characteristics of construction projects for the reader to keep to hand for the journey ahead. Not least of these is the recurring theme of the management of project uncertainty; a crucial, yet often over-looked component of successful project management. Part II takes a strategic overview of one of the trickiest areas of project management: capturing what exactly it is the client wants at the briefing stage, while simultaneously managing the myriad of disparate stakeholders. It proceeds to do a rather nice job of highlighting the benefits of alignment of construction parties' goals for their and the project's mutual gain. Sound advice is offered in this regard, for example on the non-value-adding effect of the traditional adversarial arrangement where no party is incentivised to reduce costs or increase project utility or benefit. Good sections on cost, schedule and specification management follow, however, for such a holistic project

management text, it seems somewhat light on the potential for value management in this regard.

At this stage in the book, it amounts to a solid, comprehensive, yet not ground-breaking treatise on the matter at hand. However, where it excels is the excellent section on the management of uncertainty and risk. A mature and insightful offering here examines in substantial detail the relationship between uncertainty and risk, and uses traditional and contemporary schools of thought on the subject as its basis for concluding that a cognitive approach often best applies to construction projects. A thought-provoking discussion on subjective biases of expert opinion in risk assessment ensues.

Other useful sections of note delve into the management of project information, and in particular on the role and characteristics of project extranets. The final section, entitled 'Conclusions: Managing Construction Projects Consummately', is an interesting reflection piece on the value-creation nature of construction projects, and discusses how the industry's nature has shifted to the creation of assets which clients can exploit for long-term benefit, rather than the creation of one-off 'artefacts' with little consideration of their residual value, multiplicity of uses, or life-cycle costs.

The more I read this book, the more I learn from it. It speaks the language rarely uttered by technical engineers; but that which is *de rigueur* among the industry's more commercially-oriented and results-focused clients and sponsoring bodies. Apart from being a timely espousal of systems-thinking and value-based approaches to project management, its secondary merit therefore lies in its potential to assist in the conversion process of a technical engineer into a more business-fluent, commercially-savvy manager, who should as a consequence find it easier to win the confidence of the most demanding project clients.

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