

Book review

Code of Estimating Practice, 7th edn and CESSM3 Price Database 2009

Chartered Institute of Building, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, UK, 2009, ISBN 978-1-4051-2971-8, **£47-50, 152 pp.**
Franklin + Andrews, Thomas Telford, London, UK, 2009, ISBN 978-0-7277-3595-9, **£130-00, 602 pp.**

It is not often that a reviewer can productively and rationally review two books at the same time. However, in the case of *CESSM3 Price Database 2009* and *Code of Estimating Practice* a joint review makes perfect sense. Both books are aimed at professionals involved in estimating costs and prices; both have a fundamental role when it comes to the assessment of variations; both seek to establish principles of best practice; and, perhaps most importantly, both books seek to provide detailed information on how the rates have been derived so as to enable a more objective analysis in circumstances of changes or variations. Ultimately, both books are commonly used beyond the tender, estimating and valuation stages in the dispute resolution stages by experts, adjudicators and in some cases by the legal advisors.

Readers will, of course, be aware that *CESSM3 Price Database 2009* is inextricably linked to the CESSM3 standard method of measurement commonly used on civil engineering works. However, the *CESSM3 Price Database 2009*, as the name suggests, goes further and provides an assessment of prices for labour and plant as well indicating productivity to be expected. Productivity is often at the heart of valuation disputes and the levels cited in this book are a very useful 'benchmark'. Further, while the actual labour and plant costs fluctuate commensurate with the contractor's commercial terms and methods of contracting with its supply chain, the efficiency/productivity levels remain an objective benchmark. Readers need to be mindful that, as one would expect from the underlying method of measurement, the focus remains in the database on unit rate estimating and price build-up is based upon a price for an activity on a weekly gang cost of labour and plant, with the weekly cost of the gang being divided by 39 to arrive at an hourly cost. This book is ordered, logical and rational. There is little to criticise in

the book and while practitioners may not universally use the same prices it is clear that the resource assumptions and productivity levels feature when devising target cost arrangements and/or when procuring sub-contractors/suppliers. In the reviewer's experience, this book tends to be a well-used reference manual with a number of manuscript notes and, as such, is often part of a practitioner's 'personal' library. Indeed, it is difficult to see how estimators could thrive without the *CESSM3 Price Database 2009*.

The Chartered Institute of Building *Code of Estimating Practice* covers, deliberately, much more than estimating and measurement. This book looks at the whole range of activities that ordinarily involve a building quantity surveyor or estimator, from receipt of tender documents to devising a tendering strategy to supply chain procurement to actually pricing the works as well as a number of post-tender activities. The book seeks to cover a lot of practical issues and in large part succeeds in doing so. However, the more senior or experienced practitioner may find the book less useful despite the fact that it seeks to adapt and keep up with recent trends and practices, such as computerisation and e-commerce. The book is written in a reader-friendly and pragmatic fashion offering sensible thoughts and guidance wherever possible. Naturally, readers and practitioners requiring or wanting more detailed advice, commentary or guidance may feel that reference to another textbook is required. For example, the section dealing with private finance initiative (PFI) contracts is perfectly correct and sensible, yet some readers may feel that that section could easily have been four or five times as long. It is easy to understand this anxiety but one needs to remain mindful that the *Code of Estimating Practice* is, deliberately, a book designed to be used by people learning new skills and not a detailed reference manual applicable to most areas of work carried out by the members of the Chartered Institute of Building. The book is a refreshing read, easy to understand, easy to digest and contains a number of 'specimen projects' that help readers to understand the written text better. It will be an invaluable book to students, members and those seeking a 'refresher course' in the latest best practice in building estimating.

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