Project Management A Multi-Disciplinary Approach, by Herman Steyn

A book review by Ian Jay

A perennial problem is the need for a book suited to the needs of the African project environment. This is a book that provides a comprehensive coverage of project management for the local education and training community.

One difficulty in providing education and training in South Africa is the need for local cases and context to bring the topic to life for the local audience. Herman Steyn has moved to address this problem with this text book. Another problem is the lack of coverage of areas specific to local conditions such as labour law and contract law, this book addresses both these issues.

The bulk of the text provides coverage of all the areas indicated in the Project Management Institutes body of knowledge. This makes the book a good foundation text for anyone interested in doing the professional exam set by PMI. In addition to this there are separate chapters dealing with local knowledge areas, these are Labour law, and Contract Law. The labour law chapter provides insight into issues such as the employment contract, basic conditions of employment, empowerment and employment termination or dismissal legislation. The chapter on Contract Law begins by providing a background to the need for properly formulated contracts. It then moves on to discuss what a contract should contain and finishes with contract termination and breach of contract matters.

There are also two special chapters on areas relevant to projects; these are ISO 90001 and Work Authorisation. These chapters with the two relating to law mentioned earlier give the text a distinctive construction industry focus. Notwithstanding this, it is also a good foundation text for anyone who wants to pick up the basics of project management; these remain unchanged across industry groups. The chapter on time management is followed by one devoted to scheduling; this includes a sound introduction to the concept of Critical Chain scheduling.

The project control chapter takes up the subject with the control process. This is followed by a good description of the Earned Value approach to project monitoring and control. There is a section on controls used in conjunction with critical chain schedules. At the end of the chapter is a short discussion on explaining to team members the need for and use of control information.

Each chapter has a set of learning outcomes described at the start. These are worded in such a way as to make them tempting material for inclusion in exam questions. At the end of each chapter is a set of relevant references and further readings as well as study assignments for student follow up. A number of local case studies are also presented to illustrate points made in the main text; these include the Mozal smelter in Maputo, the Gautrain railway project and the Injaka Bridge tragedy in KZN.

The need for a comprehensive single text giving good coverage to all aspects of project management is addressed by this text. Prof Herman Steyn has assembled a team of eight local experts to co-author a book that addresses the needs of local training and education providers. This is the second edition of the book and it has been substantially updated and revised from the earlier edition. The style of writing is accessible to the lay reader and though it has a construction focus it covers all aspects of generic project management and is an excellent introduction to the subject.

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