Core Concepts of Project Management, by Mantel, Meredith, Shafer and Sutton

A Book Review by Ian Jay

This book is for anyone who wishes to gain a basic grounding in the use of computer models for managing projects. The focus is on tools such as Excel and MS Project; these are used to illustrate a large number of modelling problems faced by project managers.

Many projects would benefit from greater use of a structured approach to problem solving. To handle these situations greater understanding of the problems and the tools to solve them would be useful. This book discusses some examples of these problems such as fast tracking and crashing calculation.

The standard Microsoft Office suite supported by MS Project can be used to address most of these situations. The book contains several worked examples with supporting text to illustrate how to build the models and use the results. A good example is the use of the Excel Solver function to optimise the selection of a crashing schedule.

The main benefit of using the approaches and tools set out in the book is that the user will develop a sophisticated modelling capability. With experience, this starting point will evolve to a set of best practices. These in turn will support sound decision-making. By using the techniques in the book, a library of templates to support a project methodology will emerge.

In the broader scheme, a section deals with methods of selecting projects. This sets out a framework for a portfolio management approach to project selection using various scoring models.

For the teacher or training provider, the text represents a progressive curriculum. It combines desktop tools with basic project management techniques. For those who are interested in the PMI exam, this is a good foundation text. It covers most aspects of the material in the PMBoK.

A thorough workout based on the content of the book will yield a sound understanding of the mechanics of project management. It will provide a good understanding of the use of statistics to model uncertainty. Moreover, the exercises will give greater insight into the ways to unlock the power contained in modern computer desktop office suites.

This is a very simple book to dip into and read up on a specific aspect of project tools. It gives quite thorough and in-depth treatment to the areas that it covers. Apart from a core of modelling literature, there is sound coverage of the basics. Examples include the Work Breakdown Structure, linear responsibility charts, budgeting and earned value. The softer side of project management is not neglected and includes conflict management and the role of the project manager.

The book comes in soft back cover with a pair of trial software CD’s enclosed. One CD is a 120-day trial version of MS Project 2002 and the other is a 140-day trial version of Crystal Ball Pro 2000. This makes it an excellent teaching aid for students with access to the Office Suite of products.

The book is a re-packaged copy of a publication that came out in hardback with the title; Project Management in Practice.


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