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New book focuses on construction project success

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When it comes to successfully constructing buildings, much depends on the processes used and how they are applied at the very beginnings of a construction project. In his comprehensive book, [Choosing Project Success: A Guide for Building Professionals](#) [1], J.F. McCarthy brings his more than 30 years of construction experience to bear on that topic.

Beyond careful examinations of building processes, this book provides the information that anybody can use to plan and successfully build construction projects with the added bonus that brevity reigns. Chapters are short and easy to read so you can come to an understanding of the topics very quickly. McCarthy sets the tone of the early chapters with astute sayings by philosophers from other times, and then reinforces each chapter's message with succinct summaries. (*Editor's note: You*

can learn a bit more about the book in a post called

[Choose _____](#)

[Project and Business](#)

[Success _____](#) [2] *on Craig's blog.*)

On managing people and the ways they work

At the very heart of the ideas in the book is the concept that there is always room for improvement in how construction is carried out and that the people involved need to start at the beginning of the process to really put together better buildings through better processes. Right off the bat, McCarthy emphasizes communication and how the various players have to create messages and communication systems that allow them to have a common core of experience. That common understanding then allows them to share information in meaningful and useful ways.

The author takes a careful look at the attitudes and points of view that are necessary to ensure construction project success. In a way this is also a good review of Construction Psychology 101, as McCarthy delves wholeheartedly into the things people bring to the process that are going to affect project success. While it might seem obvious, McCarthy does readers a great service by reminding them to not just imagine project success, but to assume it as well. He outlines how we observe things and how we get to the point where we are "thinking right," or gathering "right" facts and organizing them so that they can ultimately be communicated to others. Here too McCarthy's level of detail, delivered efficiently, deftly covers the process of discovering the facts that will be used to guide the construction project. The author examines the power of observation in detail, right down to the qualitative and quantitative processes that are needed to be successful at observing and picking out the facts that are really relevant.

There is much about people in this book -- which is fitting because of all the resources that anyone manages, people are the most difficult. McCarthy doesn't shrink from the task by glossing over the nuances of managing people. Instead he talks about the nature of people and about including the nature of people in the project planning stages. He covers the kinds of things that motivate people and how their views of themselves and their natural tendencies will challenge and reward a construction project. He writes about managing people with rules and incentives and about the ways people are affected by those different approaches. When he writes of productivity you learn, or are reminded, about the percentages of time that are lost to various non-productive activities and how to increase productivity. By focusing on people through a number of chapters, McCarthy continues to reinforce the importance of people in a construction project.

On construction project management processes

As you move past the more esoteric discussions about building that occupy the front of the book, you arrive at the explanations and processes portion, where you are treated to wonderfully succinct descriptions of how things are done. From defining the purpose of your project to deciding who will be involved to assessing the various tools that you will need to use for [construction project management](#) [3], estimating or scheduling, McCarthy provides the whys and wherefores, sprinkled generously with the what-ifs.

Through subsequent chapters covering processes such as [cost estimating](#) [4], McCarthy breaks things down while still keeping the reading manageable. Beyond covering the basics of estimating, the author tells how to approach the estimating task and then explains the variables that are going to affect the finished estimate.

From there the book covers [construction scheduling](#) [5], assigning resources and validating your approach. All these things are provided with enough depth to be effective and not so much depth that you have to spend hours and hours in the book instead of actually doing the estimate or schedule.

A treasure trove of technical knowledge

McCarthy emphasizes that the book is not designed as a reference for trade education with hands-on and how-to descriptions of building tasks. But it does share something with trade education in its focus on results and on coming to know what works, why those things work, and how to make them work better. Indeed, as I was going through the more than 340 pages of this book I was struck by the depth of information. Many builders probably don't give any thought to the age of the cement blocks they are building with, but McCarthy reveals the most desired situation for cement blocks old and new alike.

There is no shortage of depth and breadth here as McCarthy ties together the processes of getting a construction project started on the right foot. He accurately links the early observations and statements of facts to the organization process and reminds us to also evaluate the approach we choose. He goes on to reveal the kinds of things that will kill a project, including subtleties like taxes, fees, regulations and the nuances surrounding the job site.

Parts of this book could be likened to an encyclopedia for construction, while other parts start out stating the obvious on their quick journeys toward explaining the deeper meanings of things. One bright example is McCarthy's treatise on time. Beginning with a description of the typical ways we measure periods of time relative to employee pay, and then contrasting that with how we measure time for accounting purposes, he brings home the point that, if a common time denominator is not used when hourly employees are talking to accountants about job completion, then gross misunderstandings will result. In a way McCarthy takes apart common knowledge that we often apply in knee-jerk style, allowing us to observe and then reconstruct it so that if we never knew it we come to understand it -- and if we did know it, but had forgotten it, we are reminded.

There is a wealth of information here placed in a very easy-to-follow format. He astutely describes processes like that of drawing circles of machine operation so the proper numbers and sizes of equipment can be accurately predicted. He extends that to include the circle of worker operations; this way one can calculate the maximum number of workers that could be

accommodated in a particular work area.

The science details in this volume are pretty incredible. If you want to know the heat transmissivity of various materials and how they affect the total building the basics, that's in here. If you need to understand the ways materials react to water, that's here too. The ways that materials conduct electricity and factors of material performance based upon friction events are outlined, along with the different ways that materials interact with each other. This is clearly an amazing compendium of technical information put into understandable form so the reader can quickly understand the true nature of variables one may encounter in a construction project.

Conclusion

This is one construction book that offers an easily accessible compendium of valuable facts and knowledge about the process of constructing buildings. It covers timeless information in a compelling and timely manner. I suspect that, for any person who has the desire to deepen their understanding of construction, this book will be read and thought about a great deal -- and after the initial reading it will join the ranks of their most consulted references.

[Project Management Scheduling and Resourcing Microsoft Project for Construction Management and Scheduling](#)

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