Book review

NEC4: the Role of the Project Manager

Bronwyn Mitchell and Barry Trebes. ICE Publishing, London, UK, 2017.
ISBN 978-0-7277-6353-2, £45.00 (paperback), 192 pp.

To quote the overview of this book, its aim is 'to provide guidelines to those who have been allocated the role of the *Project Manager* on an Engineering and Construction Contract (ECC), describing the obligations, activities and culture necessary to fulfil the role effectively' and, as such, be a companion to the Institution of Civil Engineers NEC4 accreditation course for the project manager. Does it fulfil its aims?

The core text of the book provides a very thorough, dare the reviewer say complete, checklist of obligations under the ECC with the accompanying activities which the project manager should do to manage and administrate an ECC contract correctly. Each section references at least one appendix, which is often titled 'Checklist for ...'. Indeed, when one takes out the blank or near-blank pages from the main text, one ends up with 65 pages of text compared with 50 pages of appendices! The time-based way in which it is arranged – starting at section 3 with 'Prior to contract award' and finishing with section 11 on 'Post-project evaluation and learning experience' – allows any project manager to check what they should be doing at any point in time throughout the contract duration. This is very valuable to a new or even experienced NEC project manager and, as NEC4 is new, all project managers will be new to NEC4!

However, the breadth of coverage comes at a cost. By this, the reviewer means there is a lot more to being a good NEC project manager than operating the contract as written by doing the activities identified, although that is a very good start! Take the following, for instance.

- While the book has a subsection 2.3 on '*Project Manager* behaviours' and it consistently emphasises the need to discuss and collaborate, it is short on specifics of how one collaborates when doing a particular obligation or activity.
- The knowledge and skills of a project manager need to be broader and deeper than just operating the contract – see, for instance, the

Association for Project Management's body of knowledge and its competency framework. While it would be unreasonable to expect the book to regurgitate the relevant parts of these texts, do not think that just following this book makes one a good project manager in the broader sense.

- It almost completely ignores the project manager's legal obligations and interpretation of clauses. While other books, the reviewer is sure, will appear on this, it does not, for instance, cover when the project manager has to act 'impartially' and when to act in the client's best interests, which is pretty fundamental to the project manager's role.
- It almost completely ignores the consequences of key clauses. For instance, ECC clause 63.5 gives the criteria by which delays to the contractual completion date – or 'extensions of time' in non-NEC speak – are calculated, but the book gives no guidance on this in practice or on what 'tricks' the contractor might be using to maximise time entitlement. The reviewer could give numerous other examples.

In this sense, for the reviewer, the book lacks depth – which it could be argued it never set out to achieve – and is too 'on-message' as opposed to real-world for the reviewer.

So does the book achieve its aim 'to provide guidelines to those who have been allocated the role of the *Project Manager* on an Engineering and Construction Contract (ECC), describing the obligations, activities and culture necessary to fulfil the role effectively'? It does with respect to the obligations and activities but, for the reviewer, not in terms of culture. The reviewer would replace the 'effectively' with 'completely'.

So would the reviewer buy this book if he was appointed an NEC4 engineering and construction contract project manager? The reviewer would say 'absolutely yes' because it thoroughly covers 'what' the reviewer has to do and 'when' as the contract progresses. But there is a lot more to being a good NEC project manager than mechanistically doing this.

Jon Broome