



## Lean Culture for the Construction Industry: Building Responsible and Committed Project Teams

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To cite this article: Janet Druker (2012) Lean Culture for the Construction Industry: Building Responsible and Committed Project Teams, Construction Management and Economics, 30:8, 710-711, DOI: [10.1080/01446193.2012.679947](https://doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2012.679947)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2012.679947>



Published online: 23 May 2012.



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2012.674210>

### **Lean Culture for the Construction Industry: Building Responsible and Committed Project Teams**

Gary Santorella, CRC Press, New York, 2011  
267 pp, ISBN 978 1 4398 3508 1, £38.99 (hb)

This is a book written by a consultant for construction managers and professionals. It is in the genre of 'how to do it' books about management. Its central aim is to encourage recognition and planning for the construction process on the premise that it is a people business. While technical or professional expertise is highly regarded within the industry, the author argues, leadership, clarity of organizational structures, effective communication and team building should be given much greater weight. The book sets out to explore these issues, engaging with both strategic and operational perspectives and encompassing the human and non-technical aspects of work management and organization. Chapters on purpose, philosophies, standards, motivation, and conflict management in construction (among other examples) set out to explore the less discussed and sometimes intractable aspects of human interaction, with examples of the ways in which they can impede or contribute to success.

The author is a consultant with a background in behavioural psychology and his academic interests might seem to be far removed from the construction industry. Yet he has engaged in problem-solving with

construction teams in the US and in Europe, working both on site and with organizations. It is this experience that gives him a claim to understanding the construction process and the pressures to deliver. He uses the first person in his narrative and many of the examples are based on his own, American experience.

The UK is not hugely different from the US in that the philosophical underpinning for management in the construction sector rests on a positivist philosophy in which technocratic expertise is paramount. Santorella's perspective will be familiar to those who remember debates about lean construction and human resource management following publication of the Egan report (Egan, 1998). For a British readership familiar with the legacy of that Report, Santorella's lean construction message might not seem surprising. That report reached very similar conclusions some 14 years ago, emphasizing the importance of partnering, relational contracting and effective supply chain management. It also argued (section 52, p. 25) for the importance of people—of all of the workforce—to the success of the construction process.

The Task Force believes that, to deliver the cultural changes necessary to improve the project process, we must start by valuing our people. Not only is the quality of the workforce fundamental to the process of change in construction, but also the way workers are treated. In our view, the workforce is undervalued, under-resourced and frequently treated as a commodity rather than the industry's single most important asset.

The importance of a people focused perspective—and the tensions inherent in reconciling it with lean culture—have been suggested by a number of writers over the last two decades (e.g. Green, 2002; Green and May, 2005). The advent of a literature concerned with human resource management raised questions about corporate and human resource strategy (Langford and Male, 2001; Loosemore *et al.*, 2003), organizational culture (Dainty *et al.*, 2007) and informality at work (Chan and Räisänen, 2009).

Santorella's writing is less grounded in the theories debated in this area of literature and his advocacy glosses over some fundamental questions. His message seems to operate at two levels—on the one hand it deploys a rationalistic rhetoric that fits readily with a traditional technocratic perspective. On the other it embraces the idea of change, and particularly seems to suggest that more might be achieved by loosening management decision-taking and having more trust and confidence in the workforce. More discussion about the tensions and challenges involved in reconciling these perspectives would have been interesting.

Some of the messages may be helpful—for example a chapter entitled the ‘Conflict paradox’ touches on routes to handling mediation and conflict resolution on site or in the workplace—difficult areas for new managers. The emphasis throughout is on teamwork. Yet the book has little to say about the dilemmas of inter-organizational relations, for example in terms of the difficulties encountered in working through an extended contractual chain with individuals or teams who may be on site for a very short time. A redeeming feature is the section on anxiety, stress and anger management. These topics are less frequently covered in the construction literature and here the author (a specialist in cognitive behavioural therapy) has something new to contribute. Unfortunately, this section, while interesting, is relatively brief.

This book is clearly written and will find an interest and an audience among construction managers. It may be useful to newer or less experienced managers or to those who are seeking to reflect on their approach to management and work organization. Yet ultimately it lacks the depth of analysis and discussion that could have given real meaning to its message.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01446193.2012.679947>

## Risk Management for Design and Construction

Ovidiu Cretu, Robert B. Stewart and Terry Berends, Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, NJ, 2011

288 pp, ISBN 978 0 470 63538 4, £85.00 (hb)

Risk management is an important factor in every system’s success. Through the risk management process, uncertain and surprise events can be anticipated, and appropriate activities can be developed to reduce exposure to such events. It also allows for an organization to effectively manage contingency and allocate risks among parties. The importance of risk management in the construction industry is increased because of the dynamic and complex nature of construction projects.

This book claims to tackle the risk management of construction projects from the initial phases of design through construction. Risk management of construction projects is an important topic which has been widely addressed (Edwards and Bowen, 1998; Chapman *et al.*, 2011). However, because of the complexity of these projects, lack of knowledge at various project phases (especially the initial phases of design), several unknown variables, and difficulty in data acquisition, risk management is always a time- and cost-consuming activity in construction management. In this book, it is stated that a practical and simplistic framework is proposed for managing risks on construction projects. In addition, risk modelling software is introduced which allows users to quantify project risks in terms of their impact on cost and time.

In the first two chapters, the book provides a brief introduction to risk management, why it is needed and its principles, as well as cost and schedule estimation in different phases of the project. Given the book’s focus and its use of different risk distributions and methodologies, the risk management chapter could be more detailed and comprehensive (for more detailed and comprehensive information on risk management, different methodologies and applications, refer to Haimes (2009)). One wonders too, if safety and quality-related risks can be ‘rolled up’ into cost and schedule impacts, or if perhaps management of these risks is best addressed separately.

Chapter 3 is concerned with deterministic and probabilistic project estimates, and introduces the risk-based estimate (RBE) in construction, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. In supporting RBE, risk events are introduced with two characteristics: (1) probability of occurrence; and (2) the impact of occurrence. To measure the probability, various scales can be used according to the project specification and complexity. For the impact analysis, a couple of discrete and continuous probability distributions are