



Book Review

Managing Construction Logistics

Gary Sullivan; Stephen Barthorpe and Stephen Robbins Publishers : Wiley-Blackwell 2010, 304 pages, ISBN 978-1-4051-5124-5 (paperback), GBP 49.99, EUR 60.00, AUD 99.95, NZD 115.00.

I suspect that I am not alone when first picking up a new book in starting at the last page and quickly flicking to the front cover in the hope of somehow obtaining a subliminal impression of the contents. I must say that my first impression of this publication, subliminal or otherwise, was not particularly encouraging. This was mainly due to the photographs which appear towards the end of the book which, in several instances, are unlikely to be of interest to a general reader, in particular group photographs of award winners. However my concerns as to whether the intellectual content of the book would be up to the mark were immediately assuaged on the reading the introduction by Gary Sullivan which strikes a nice balance between humour and insightfulness. Readers can look forward to being entertained as well as being informed. In fact, I read some parts of this publication with almost a guilty pleasure worrying as to whether the serious and worthy topic of managing construction logistics should be so enjoyable.

The foreword to the book makes a very strong case as to why the management of construction logistics is important and laments the fact that to-date this topic has been largely neglected by the construction industry. Most authors of management texts make the case that they are filling a gap in current knowledge. The proof is, as they say, in the pudding. In this instance the case is well made that there are compelling reasons as to why the construction industry should recognise the benefits which accrue in adopting a professional approach to logistics. Much as I enjoyed the opening chapter which gives a historical perspective it may perhaps have been advisable for the authors to present the case for the adoption of logistics as a discipline more forcibly in the opening chapter although the case is made, to some extent by Stephen Barthorpe in the Preface. However this is a minor quibble on my part and the line of argument for the adoption of construction logistics permeates the text.

The text is essentially practical in nature containing a good deal of sensible advice which will be of interest to construction industry professionals. The conceptual models in Chapter 2 provide a useful framework for the following chapters. Each chapter is extensively referenced, a feature which will no doubt appeal to an academic readership. Section 2, which is essentially the backbone of the book, contains 9 chapters as follows:

- An introduction to practical logistics
- Mobilisation and resourcing the team
- Materials delivery and handling
- Transport and communications
- Managing critical risks
- Security
- Coordinating infrastructure and services
- Waste management and good house

Each of these topics is dealt with in a very readable even-handed manner. Although the text tends to rely on the use of aphorisms to make a point, I never found this style to be wearing or irritating. Indeed, the advice given always appears to be sensible and based on personal

experience. Although each of the chapters can be read on a stand-alone basis, it is clearly a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

Section 3 contains a chapter on the future of construction logistics followed by a chapter containing a number of case studies. I found the concept of Consolidated Centres (CC) as described in Chapter 11 to be of particular interest and despite the fact the example cited is 'Anglo centric' (as indeed are all the case studies) I believe that CC will be of interest to an international readership.

The conclusion to the book, 'The argument for change' is rather tucked away after the case studies and because of its brevity may be missed by the less diligent reader. This would be regrettable as it is an elegant counterpoint to the introduction and ends on a suitably ringing call to arms to the construction professional.

My one criticism and this may very well be a symptomatic of my personal bias, is that there is no mention, as far as I can determine, of the role of design in construction logistics. Just as it is now advocated that facilities managers should have early involvement in the design process. One would have thought that early consideration of construction logistics in the design process was also essential. Perhaps this point is so self-evident that it somehow passed under the authors' radar or perhaps this aspect may be taken on board in the next edition?

I can commend this book to both industry professionals, to academics and to students in the field of construction management. I would recommend that potential readers not follow my example but rather follow the advice of the King in Alice in Wonderland and begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop.

Denny McGeorge
Sydney
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