

Editorial



*Professor Craig Langston
Chair in Construction Management
School of Architecture and Building
Deakin University
Geelong, Australia*

Welcome to the first edition of The Australian Journal of Construction Economics and Building for 2005. Deakin University, and in particular the School of Architecture and Building, are delighted to be the hosts of this journal for 2005. This edition consists of eight papers covering a range of areas as detailed below.

Sawalhi and Enshassi present their research findings concerning the use of project time management tools by contractors and owners in the Gaza Strip. They conclude, like similar studies, that the benefits of recognised tools are not being capitalised upon to the extent expected or appropriate. The authors suggest that intervention may be necessary by authorities or professional bodies, perhaps through education and training programs, to increase the awareness of time management tools in this war-torn country.

Blismas, Gibb and Pasquire describe the outcomes of a major research project called IMPREST, and in particular an implementation assessment instrument developed from an industry survey and workshops. The purpose of this project and the resultant tools is to enable improved assessment of off-site production. Previous techniques took a rather simplistic view and this research has now made it both practical and accessible to perform such investigations. Off-site production is obviously an important issue for the construction industry in terms of cost, time and quality, as well as wider sustainability considerations.

Shash provides the results of a survey of construction contractors in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia concerning the procedures and techniques of managing the replacement of their equipment. Contractors in Saudi Arabia own most of the equipment they deploy on projects, and so the methods used to make appropriate financial decisions is obviously of concern. This paper identifies the top qualitative and quantitative factors affecting decisions, and also lists the financial techniques that are normally applied.

Motawa proposes a new change process model that better enables project teams to manage change effectively, and describes cause-and-effect relationships and how these can also be modelled. The two models are complimentary. In particular, at the early stages of project development, effective management of change can lead to significant benefits. The generic change process model, illustrated in the paper, forms a valuable weapon in the project manager's armoury. The appendices to this paper also provide a useful classification of change management considerations.

Ng, Luu and Skitmore describe developments for construction procurement selection, including a prototype tool using a case-based reasoning approach. This tool enables selection of historic cases that are similar to the project at hand, and ways in which key characteristics can be modified and assessed. A substantial literature review is presented as a foundation to an outline of the proposed model. Five Australian experts with experience in this domain were interviewed and their knowledge used to guide the model's development. With the diversity of procurement options being applied to modern construction projects, this research has clear practical application.

Lingard's paper on balancing study and paid work is both topical and significant. Using a case study of courses offered in the built environment discipline at the University of Melbourne, the extent to which students combine academic and industrial experiences is explored. There is consensus in the literature that some component of practical experience is highly valuable, but if this becomes excessive then a deterioration in academic outcomes will follow. Lingard's research highlights this challenge for the University, and indeed others, and reports on further research that needs to be undertaken. It is likely that professional bodies that accredit building/property courses may need to consider these issues more formally and assist students in arriving at an effective work-study balance.

Jawahar Nesan's paper is a major review of the literature on factors influencing tacit knowledge in construction. The author identifies promoters and inhibitors for construction organisational and cultural characteristics, and construction project-specific characteristics, and the ways in which these affect employee behaviour. The linkage between practices, characteristics and behaviour is the contribution that this paper makes to new knowledge, and the basis for this outcome is derived from a comprehensive review of previous research. Valuable lessons are discussed that can benefit the performance of construction organisations that must operate in an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based context.

Finally, Khalfan and Raja describe recent developments in the United Kingdom to integrate construction processes and stakeholders via technological developments and information sharing. Several examples are presented as case studies, including a discussion of PracticeNet, which is now one of the top suppliers of building surveying services in the UK. While the concept of a shared central database for project information is not new, this paper succinctly explores the underpinning logic and design of a low-cost system to improve communication efficiency.

I hope you enjoy this selection of papers, which clearly underlines the quality of this journal and its increasingly international readership. My sincere gratitude is extended to all the Editorial Board who provided their assistance, expertise and time reviewing the submissions. In particular I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my assistant, Debbie Paxton, for her most valued contribution in bringing this volume to fruition.

Kind regards,

Professor Craig Langston, Editor

July 2005