A Book Review by Ian Jay

There are many books on the market that cover a general project management course. However not all of them provide good coverage where the course is aligned to the PMBoK or the South African NQF Unit Standards. The two texts reviewed here aim to address that need.

These two books are suitable as supporting texts for anyone wishing to deliver a basic or introductory course in Project Management. The writing style is accessible and straightforward. Concepts are clearly explained and well illustrated with useful forms and tables where appropriate.

The first of the two books provides a practical but general introduction to project management and covers the full project life cycle. Feasibility studies and project selection methods are also dealt with. This book starts with a brief history of project management techniques and then describes the fit between the project and product life cycle. The main body of the text then addresses the different methods and tools employed by the project manager to plan and control the work.

The second book, Project Management Techniques, builds on the material contained in the Introduction text. Much of what is in the Introduction is repeated in the Techniques text, so it is not necessary to use both on the same course. The techniques book follows the same general outline as the Introduction but provides a little more depth in the topics it covers. In addition there is a chapter on leadership. The Introductory book has some material not covered in the Techniques text these include organising meetings, managing small teams and event management.

A striking feature of both texts is the section on control. For each area of the project management body of knowledge there is a short list of the planning and the control documents or artefacts. The focus on control is carried through in the rest of both texts; this is done by inserting illustrative sections of tables taken from spreadsheets. For the student, adoption of these items will result in a useful and practical toolset to apply to live projects.

The chapter on procurement is a good example of the integrative and control oriented nature of the books. The main thrust of this chapter relates to the construction of a procurement schedule. The chapter begins with the procurement cycle shown as a flow diagram; each activity is then described on the following pages. An example of a procurement schedule is then presented in a variety of different formats. Finally expediting and control methods are discussed.

Both texts contain numerous tables, flow diagrams, graphs and examples to illustrate the concept, or tool set, being described. This feature makes it easy to grasp the message in the text itself. From a teaching viewpoint these diagrams are easy to reproduce as classroom aids for discussion and elaboration. Most commonly known techniques used in the project arena are described including earned value methods and line of balance.

The text sections within the chapters are usually no more than a few paragraphs, which makes it easy reading. This plus the extensive use of easy to understand diagrams and charts makes the comprehensive content easily digestible to entry level project management students.
Project Management Techniques by Rory Burke. Published by Burke Publishing / Blue Weaver Marketing. 2007. ISBN 0-9582 733-4-0

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