



Book Selection

Edited by U Aickelin

T Curtin: *Managing Green Issues* (Hardcover)

KJ Hastings: *Introduction to the Mathematics of OR* (Hardcover)

J Fortune: *Information Systems: Achieving Success by Avoiding Failure*

S Reger: *Can Two Rights Make A Wrong?—Insights from IBM's Tangible Culture Approach*

Managing Green Issues

T Curtin

Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 224pp. £25.00
ISBN: 023050003X

If you or your organisation is planning to do or has done something with an environmental impact, and you want to manage your relationships with affected stakeholders, this book is a must. It starts by describing the world of environmental and green issues, before working through how you identify stakeholders and work with them to best effect. There is a whole section devoted to communications tools—although the author is clear that this is not a text on how to do corporate communications. Finally, there is a section on establishing green credentials and conclusions from the author on the difficulty of development in the future.

The style of the book is engaging, very well written and with frequent use of real or adapted case studies to illustrate in general how not to manage green issues. At times, the examples may seem a little dated, focusing on events such as the Shell Brent Spar fiasco or the Newbury Bypass; however, they do serve as object lessons in how projects can go wrong. As this is a second edition, with extra sections and additions, there are one or two places where sections are repeated word for word, or where the flow becomes slightly repetitive. This does not detract from the overall message of the book however.

One section looks at the World of Green Issues and has a helpful checklist to work through to identify whether your organisation has a current issue or to help identify whether some aspect of operation will become an issue. While the scoring is perhaps simplistic, the questions within the checklist are particularly thought provoking.

One of the key themes to the book is that green issues are not rational and that therefore issues are difficult to refute from a logical or scientific stand point. This aspect is a useful reminder for OR readers from the harder end of the spectrum, where models are described by lots of data and equations, but will be familiar to practitioners who use soft techniques rather more.

The section on communications is strong, with a lot of instructions on what not to do, although in some ways this aspect is also very daunting as it seems there are so many places a project can go wrong. Indeed the picture painted for an organisation trying to get approval for a project with any sort of environmental impact is rather bleak, as the author concedes. He sees a potential danger in beneficial development being stifled as people in the Western world move to a BANANA mentality (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone), but does offer crumbs of hope.

As a book with strong credentials on how to help organisations manage their green profile, it is good to note that it is 'printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources'. Although conversely this does illustrate another key concept from the book—'they would say that, wouldn't they?'

Organisations, individuals and consultants with an interest in managing green issues will all find this book of interest and highly accessible. Students of the Built Environment, Project Planning and some MBA programmes would also find this a useful text, giving a wider perspective to their studies. However, members of Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth might find aspects of the text difficult, as the author challenges the slightly artificial perceptions that have been created by these organisations.

Plantagenet Consulting Ltd

J Holland

Introduction to the Mathematics of OR

KJ Hastings

Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2006. 592pp. £44.99
ISBN: 1574446126

This is an eminently put-downable book and something of a disappointment. The only topics covered are: Graph Theory and Network Analysis, Linear Programming, Markov Chains, Continuous Time Processes (relating solely to the Poisson distribution) and Dynamic Programming. While these may well be regarded some of the mathematical topics associated with Operational Research, they are by no means the only

ones so I felt somewhat short changed. My 'Teach Yourself Operational Research' dating back to the early 1970s had more in it than this and was only seven shillings and sixpence ($37\frac{1}{2}$ pence or 75 cents) although I admit it did not come with a CD.

I had expected a book which described such topics as mathematical programming (eg linear, integer, stochastic and dynamic), optimisation techniques (eg hill-climbing), evolutionary methods (eg genetic algorithms), neural networks and maybe a little bit on Monte Carlo and discrete-event simulation. To be fair, the book does mention 'simulation' under 'Markov Chains' but this appears to be nothing more than using a pseudo-random number generator to produce samples from distributions. Apart from pointing out that each time you use the generator it will return a different value (unless it is reseeded), there is no explanation of how this is achieved or indeed how one might test it for randomness.

In the section on linear programming, it describes the dual simplex method but does not discuss problems in which one or more of the variables can only take integer values. The examples are all extremely trivial and boring and there was no mention of the limitations of this technique to solve real problems. There was also no mention of cost row ranging or right-hand side ranging or how to use the information to get an idea of sensitivity.

What the book lacked in diversity of topics was, alas not made up for in the presentation of the ones that were discussed. None of the large number of examples in the text or the questions at the end of each section appeared to relate to real-world problems.

I am sorry to say that even with the accompanying CD, I would be reluctant to recommend this text to anyone thinking of taking up OR as a career as I feel it would do more to put them off than to encourage anyone to delve deeper.

Data Systems & Solutions

J Crocker

Information Systems: Achieving Success by Avoiding Failure

J Fortune

John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2006. 234pp. £25.64
ISBN: 0470862556

The reliance of modern society on information systems (IS) is increasing, yet these systems seem to be particularly prone to failure. This book is a laudable attempt to impose rigorous structure on the study of IS failures, to enable lessons to be identified—and hopefully learnt. It mixes case study descriptions with a review of systems methods to provide a vivid sense of how a structured approach can provide valuable insights into system failures.

The book starts with a roll-call of failure—a litany of information system projects that have all 'failed' in some way. Much of the following chapter is taken up with definitions of

the terms 'success' and 'failure' in the context of systems in general and IS in particular. Chapter 3, graphically entitled 'Chalk and Cheese', presents two case studies—one project where things went well, and one where everything that could go wrong, did so. Because the details of the project have been anonymised, much of the contextual detail is missing and this chapter is strangely dry and un-engaging, when it could have really captured the reader's imagination and enthusiasm.

The next chapter discusses a range of system concepts, which are taken from a wide range of sources, starting with Young's work from 1964. The point is clearly made that 'systems' are really constructs, not necessarily physical entities with well-defined boundaries and interfaces, and that people—with their different stakeholder viewpoints—are key parts of the system. Projects that ignore this do so at their peril.

Chapter 5 is a description of an accounting systems developed for the University of Cambridge in the late 1990s. Although an interesting read in its own right, it would have been beneficial to have reminded the reader at its start that this chapter is a means to an end—as it stands, the impression is left that there is too much descriptive detail and not enough analysis. This scene-setting leads into the real meat of the text, where a range of system failure approaches, including the authors' Formal System Model, are applied to draw out the reasons why this accounting system did not meet its objectives. The two projects described in Chapter 3 are also used as vehicles to demonstrate the use of these techniques.

The final part of the book begins by returning to two of the projects mentioned in the opening chapter. Chapter 8 describes a system for providing payment of social security benefits via an electronic card, and a project to provide IS support to magistrates' courts in England and Wales. The descriptions draw heavily from previously published National Audit Office reviews—although interesting, this material could perhaps have benefited from more analysis by the authors. More engaging is a description and demonstration of how the approaches proposed by the authors can be used to look forward, in order to identify potential risks to an IS project (in this case from the healthcare domain, concerning electronic patient records), so that timely risk mitigation and management activities can be put in place. This is again proof that providing richer contextual information and rigorous analysis leads to a more satisfying read. Finally, the book concludes with a summary of other techniques that can be used to examine and analyse IS failures.

This book has a strong streak of practicality, with the ample case studies being used to illustrate how different analytical approaches can help provide insights into why things did not work as well as they might. For those involved in the review of major projects, it would be an interesting and worthwhile read. For those involved in the design and delivery of such projects, who would not wish for their projects to be cited as case studies in failure, it is essential.

QinetiQ

B Spedding

Can Two Rights Make A Wrong?—Insights from IBM's Tangible Culture Approach

S Reger

Prentice Hall, 2006. 320pp. £17.09
ISBN: 0131732943

This book covers IBM's learning on how to merge two organisations effectively. I read it with great interest having been part of a merger process in the last two companies I have worked for and seen how difficult creating a combined culture can be.

The book is very easy to read. It is written to enable the reader to use the book as a handbook rather than reading cover to cover and seemed to meet this criterion well. There is an extended contents section at the front that highlights the various sections of the book and enables a topic-based reading approach.

I particularly liked how the soft aspects of culture modelling were discussed. Time was spent in providing supporting evidence and multiple tables showed each stage of the process. There were a number of soft OR techniques that could be identified from the text. Discussion of what worked well or what did not work was clear. I liked how the areas that did not work were analysed and used to support changes to the process. It is refreshing to read a book that is so open about what did not work as these areas can often be the most useful source of learning.

For those with an interest in soft OR, mergers and acquisitions or for a student learning how to apply soft OR skills, this text provides a step by step guide to application and supporting discussion of what worked and what did not.

I loved this book. It seems good value for money and would be well placed in either a student library or a practitioner's bookshelf.

xoserve

S Blackett