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Jim has 40 years experience in the construction and civil engineering industries. Having held senior positions with major international construction companies, his experience spans the whole spectrum of Building and Civil Engineering contracts. He has held senior commercial roles with three major international contractors, having controlled contracts circa £360 million, and has specialised in associated engineering installations. With his knowledge and experience in the industry Jim is able to offer his expertise and advice in all areas of commercial management.

As well as undertaking general commercial management duties Jim has been involved in numerous commercial disputes and their settlement. In this respect he has been responsible for the preparation and submission of numerous claims for various time and financial entitlements and represented his claimant's entitlement on a variety of Contracts, including his participation in the formal procedures of adjudication, arbitration, mediation and litigation as Claimant and Respondent.

Back to Basics Again !!!

How many times in recent years have there been incentives introduced by individuals, departments, companies and even Governments imploring us to get back to the basics? While their intent is always good these requests seem to me to not only lack the substance to inspire but also fail to address how the desired goal is achieved, and so the problem remains unresolved.

Whilst the majority of our disputes in recent years has been the usual problems of time and loss and expense, this year we are encountering more and more disputes arising from the very basics of quantity surveying. If this is becoming a regular and major issue then clearly it is an area which we all need to address.

Bearing in mind my earlier comments I will therefore endeavour to not only illustrate those problems we have come across but also show, how by renewing basic quantity surveying skills, some of those disputes could have been avoided.

My apologies to those many surveyors who are already performing these skills, but as you will see there are some who for one reason or another are getting it wrong.

Measurement

Many years ago the industry employed professionals called "taker offers" who were the key to producing the bills of quantities. With the arrival of computer billing programmes these positions are no longer advertised but the skill of "taker offer" is still required. As quantity surveyors we need to be able to take off quantities. The skill lies in being able to understand the drawings and the full scope of works shown on the drawings. Being able to relate that information to other drawings/specifications and then measure those works in accordance with appropriate methods of measurement, describing the works within the bills of quantity.

While methods of measurement have changed to suit modern working practices the measurement skill has all but disappeared and with it unfortunately also at times an understanding of how something is constructed. It was impressed upon me very early in my training "that if you can measure it then you know how it is constructed and where the money is being spent."

As the contractor's surveyor the fun was to try to find the errors and omissions in the descriptions or the quantities so the works needed to be remeasured and/or re-rated. Do this right and some of the disputes over loss and expense would never arise.

How many reading this paper have heard or actually said "I don't like taking off, its boring" and I agree, if you have not been taught properly how to bring together all the information to produce and use a detailed bills of quantity, it can seem tedious. But work at it and measurement can be both interesting and rewarding not only to you but your company and your clients.

I am aware of one major arbitration currently pending based on the principles of measurement and I am sure that money is being lost by both clients and contractors because of the lack of skill to measure the Works properly.

Basic Information

This is another area which seems straight forward but again this year it is a major area of dispute especially when there are Schedules of Works and Prices. The works generally progress without a problem until there is an instruction, or many instructions and the arguments begin to flow. Is the instruction part of the original scope, and if not how do we value it.

To find no defined scope of the Works, no agreed Contract drawings, the scope for dispute is wide open.

Whether acting for a client or a contractor always maintain and record what you believe is the scope of the Works, how the price has been built up and the drawings which identify the scope of the Works. Keep the information safe, do not use it other than to show changes etc.

Evaluation of variations and Final Accounts

I have already touched upon the skills of measurement but another basic skill is that of preparing and agreeing a final account. You might say nothing difficult in that, well no, if you follow yet again the simple rules. Take for example a recent case where the PQS omitted both in quantity and value more than he had measured in his bills of quantities, whereas a simple running total of adds and omits against the items in the bills would not have put him in this embarrassing position.

Or take the final account where the PQS, when measuring and valuing new additional works, frequently included a minus quantity and thus a minus monetary value in his bill of additions.

In another instance recently the Works were subject to remeasure, but there were no supporting documents, no one had been out on site and the Works were all revalued using daywork sheets recording time, material and plant. What a surprise when the other side produced a measured account with supporting measures priced at bill rates which varied from the costs calculated using the daywork records, you can guess who won the action.

Or the areas of work which were covered up before records could be taken. As a Contractor how could you argue it was 10m² when the PQS says there was none and the Subcontractor is claiming 100m²? The winner will be the one who can prove his point.

And then there are the build up of the rates and prices in the Bills of Quantity or in the schedule of prices which are ignored by several surveyors. To price a variation in a lot of instances we find a new rate has been calculated using the subcontractor's rate plus the margin. Where is the skill in such exercises, this is not quantity surveying. When faced with such a scenario a director of a major contractor (and also a quantity surveyor) asked what has happened to the skill and flair he used to apply.



I am not advocating we return to people sitting in offices taking off quantities long hand, measuring every item but by more use of the tools we have in order to properly value the works correctly before there is a dispute which then can only be settled by others applying these skills.