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CONSTRUCTION ACCOUNTING:
Financial, Managerial, Auditing, and Tax

Fourth Edition

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KT CÔNG NGHIỆP
THƯ VIỆN
PHÒNG ĐỌC

to Robert and Helen

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PREFACE

After years of observing and working with numerous construction firms, we have concluded that the use of sound accounting practices is the single most important characteristic of the profitable firm. Successful construction contracting is, in great part, the ability to forecast correctly and control costs efficiently. Fundamental to both tasks is the regular use of good accounting methods.

This book assumes no prior knowledge of accounting, so we have attempted to present accounting and its related practices in an easily understood manner.

For those readers with prior accounting training, the unique characteristics of construction accounting should be of interest. Understandably, the unique characteristics of both the construction process and the businesses themselves result in accounting practices and procedures that differ from those used in other industries. Included in these characteristics are long-term contracts, decentralized accounting, significant dependence of the construction firm on external parties, and poor internal controls. In fact, no business needs accounting more, but practices it less, than the typical construction firm.

This book is meant to interest any construction firm intent on structuring its accounting practices. The objectives are to assist in increasing a firm's profitability while decreasing its risk. Both objectives take into account the relatively low profit margin and high risk typical in construction.

Lending institutions, surety companies, accountants, and other external parties dealing with the construction firm also need a thorough grasp of construction accounting. This understanding is necessary if they are to assist the construction contractor and if they are to evaluate the construction contractor properly. The book attempts to help external parties with both tasks.

An important part of a construction student's training in a college program should include business topics with an emphasis on accounting. Too often, however, such training addresses either the design or the construction supervision phases of the whole process. Design and supervision mainly affect quality-one of construction's three important variables. Accounting in great part addresses the other two variables-time and cost.

Construction accounting is not static. The introduction of automated data processing equipment that utilizes the computer is having a significant impact on construction accounting practices. Management auditing that aims at improving the overall efficiency and profitability of the construction firm is another example of recent change in accounting practice.

Construction Accounting covers the four most widely recognized divisions of accounting: financial, managerial, auditing, and tax. An introductory chapter precedes these four divisions. This introductory chapter cites some of the special difficulties of construction accounting and identifies accounting areas applicable to construction.

Financial accounting and related material are presented in chapters 2 through 8. Of these, 2 through 5 can be considered as a package of basic accounting principles. Some would maintain that chapter 4, on bookkeeping, should come first. I believe, however, that bookkeeping and all its related forms and procedures are better understood if one first has an understanding of the basic accounting relationship and typical accounting transactions. The accounting relationship and accounting transactions are examined in chapters 2 and 3.

Chapters 6 through 8 address the financial statements of the construction firm. These should be of special interest to any external party who has to interpret these financial statements. Chapter 8 illustrates how the use of alternative accounting methods and principles can result in widely varying financial statement results.

Managerial accounting is discussed in chapters 9 through 13. Here the emphasis is on using accounting for future decision making. This contrasts with the widely held view that accounting is merely a means of reporting on past events.

Management information systems and computers are discussed in chapters 9 through 11. The treatment of these topics reflects their increasing impact on the construction firm, project management, and construction accounting. Chapter 11 has been updated from Edition II to reflect the new computer technology and computer software currently available to the construction firm and industry. The chapter should enable the reader to appraise computer software applications relevant to the construction firm and construction project.

The construction firm's dependence on external parties often results in the need for a financial audit. Chapter 14 discusses the unique difficulties of performing a financial audit of the construction firm. In addition to helping external parties perform an audit, chapter 14 assists the construction firm prepare for an audit.

The concept and procedures of management auditing, to include operational auditing, are presented in chapter 15. Unlike the financial audit that focuses only on financial data, the emphasis of management auditing is on improving the efficiency of the operations that in turn dictate financial results. More and more construction firms are recognizing the value of management auditing.

Chapters 16 through 18 address that far reaching aspect of accounting referred to as tax planning. The emphasis of these three chapters is on ways to lessen the negative impact of tax by tax avoidance and deferral. Discussion is limited to the tax areas commonly confronted by the construction firm.

Part 6, Value Added Services, includes three new chapters. These three new chapters recognize the new and changing services provided by accountants to the construction clients. One of the best ways to increase construction firm profitability and reduce risk is to increase job site productivity. Many of the procedures to increase job site productivity are accounting oriented. Chapter 19 provides accounting related topics relevant to increasing job site productivity.

Given the difficult and uncertain nature of the construction process, many construction firms encounter the need to prepare a construction claim to the project owner or designer. A key component of these claims is the quantification of financial damages. In chapter 20, accounting related topics are presented to enable the construction firm to prevent, prepare, and present construction changes and claims.

Finally, given the need to sell the construction firm or to restructure the firm, an valuation of the firm has to quantified. In chapter 21, alternative methods of valuing the construction firm are presented.

The addition of chapters 19–22 recognize the changing business environment of the construction firm and the services provided by the accounting profession. These chapters provide the reader with the tools and procedures to aid the construction firm in a competitive environment.

We would like to thank the staff of Stipes Publishing for their preparation of typesetting and their review of the material. We would also like to thank Sandy, Jim's wife, and Doug's mother for her review of the material and her assistance in typing. Finally we would like to thank the many construction firms that we have serviced. These firms indirectly inspired us to write this textbook.

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CONSTRUCTION ACCOUNTING

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER