Managing product innovation is a significant challenge for many firms across a broad spectrum of industries and technologies. Innovation management poses a dilemma – the trade-off between tightly defined systems that ensure the efficient delivery of new products and the freedom within such systems to encourage creativity and innovation and respond quickly to changing user needs. Webb’s text has a definite systems focus; it provides a solid description of many of the tools and techniques of project management. However, it is much more about project management than product innovation.

The text takes a practical approach, Chapter 2 which addresses innovation and the creation of new products says more about where to find sources of funds for developing new products and bidding for development projects than is does about innovation management. In fact, throughout the text there is very little reference to the main body of literature about innovation and new product development.

Chapter 3 looks at how projects should be organised and provides interesting data about the effectiveness of different project structures and their relevance to different type of projects. Surprisingly, team building and motivation are dismissed as being simply an issue of pay and conditions. Chapter 4 introduces project planning and describes the use of network analysis. A useful feature of this chapter, and indeed the text in general, is the
review and evaluation of the software products available for managing projects – this reinforces the practical nature of the book. The importance of design in product development is discussed in Chapter 5. Engineering design methods such as concurrent engineering, Taguchi’s robust design, configuration management and change control are described in detail. In Chapter 6, Webb moves on to the topic of value and cost, value engineering is introduced using an example of a washing machine – practical information, well illustrated.

Materials management is an important part of developing any new products, in particular the selection of components and suppliers that are new to the firm and the involvement of suppliers at an early stage in the product development process. Chapter 7 examines the management of materials but at times the distinction between materials management in development and manufacturing is blurred. Earned value management is introduced in Chapter 8 which deals with controlling project progress and performance. A work breakdown structure, normally considered a planning tool, is also described in this chapter. For many new products particularly those using rapidly developing technologies or targeting changing markets the most significant control problem is that of scope control. Webb addresses configuration control in the chapter on design rather than while dealing with project control.

New product introduction (NPI) deals with the handing over of a new product from the design department to those responsible for manufacturing/production. Webb deals with this in Chapter 9 where he provides an overview of types of production systems, before a detailed review of the impact of learning on production performance. The economics of the project is the subject of Chapter 10 which covers the different methods of estimating
project costs and looks at how project investment decisions are made. Chapters 11 and 12 address the analysis and management of risk and include a section on decision analysis. The discussion of commercially available risk analysis software packages is useful. Finally, Chapter 13 deals with two commercial aspects of managing projects - contracts and intellectual property rights (IPR). In a text dealing with product innovation a more detailed discussion of IPR would not be out of place.

The text is well presented, the illustrations are clear, the book handles well. The style is at times heavy but the extensive use of examples makes it easier to work through. Webb provides many tools, techniques and formulae that are useful in managing projects as long as firms have the metrics in place to provide the data necessary to carry out the calculations. In this respect the text, or at least that second half of it, is rather academic. Formulae are presented which would be rather difficult to apply in practice. On the other hand the review of software products that are available to assist the project manager is very practical.

At times the order in which information is presented is confusing. For example some project planning tools are not mentioned until the second half of the text. Also, the content of some of the chapters is surprising, implementing production is more about learning curves than new product introduction. A stronger link between product innovation and product strategy would be useful at an early stage. The examples used throughout the text relate to very large engineering projects many within the defence industry. Given the price of the text it is unlikely to be a casual purchase and the reader would need to be involved in managing large scale engineering projects in relatively mature organisations in order to get value for money. Overall the book is probably most
useful as a reference for project management practitioners rather than as an academic text.

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