



Happy Birthday, Mom! Had to get that out of the way. My mother is 84 years young today. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. You would think she would have witnessed many revolutions in the building industry since she was young. She did witness the construction of the Wizard of Oz sets in her neighborhood in California when she lived there while my Grandfather served the Bureau of Reclamation on a dam assignment. That was a revolution in film, introducing Technicolor to our theatres and our lexicon. Funny how technology insinuates itself into real innovation. And funny that, after 84 years, we haven't had a process called techniconstruction.¹ Maybe not that funny.

We know that in 40 or more years, construction productivity has not improved with or without technology. And we've added lots of innovation and inventions. But we still haven't conceived, designed, built and commissioned anything as impressive as the Empire State Building in close to the time it took to add that edifice to Fifth Avenue in New York on May 1, 1931 (total construction time: 1 year, 45 days).

Technology, like the kind that allows me to write this update at 29,000 feet on a Sony VAIO and send it to Donna for publication via the internet, has left our industry without substantial improvements in productivity. It reminds me of how one friend of mine describes his engineering alma mater: "150 years of history unimpeded by progress." We have Primavera 6, and CAD and Revit and other BIM tools. We have laser leveling devices and hardness meters we implant in concrete. We have all our plans downloaded to I-Pads and updated through Evernote. But it still takes us as long as it ever has (if not longer) to build buildings. And we're still putting float, buffer and contingency in our schedules, saving three weeks at the end of the job for a quaint tradition called the "punch list."

The lessons (I've shared with Mom and others) from Glen Ballard's and Greg Howell's forays into production have been used across many construction projects. The Last Planner® System continues to drive production efficiencies into projects. But what else can we do? Where else can we start?

I was lucky enough last week to begin exploring what else we can do with the DFW Community of Practice. We did a community workshop concerning metrics. It was almost a power pointless presentation—I reduced it two slides. It could have been one if I'd skipped our animated logo as the first slide. The simple second slide asked three questions:

- What do you measure?
- Why do you think it matters?
- What would you like to measure that you're not?

We broke into ten tables of 6 or more and each table scribed their own answers to those questions. I'll have a full report up on the DFW site (access it through the LCI site) but I thought

¹ There is a construction firm specializing in the installation of solar photovoltaic systems located at Clos du Champ d'Abeiche 11, 1420 Braine-L'Alleud in Belgium



it was interesting that at every table, at least one participant routinely tracks Percent Plan Complete (PPC). Most track some form of productivity if not using PPC directly. The budget and the schedule are tracked. RFIs and Change Orders are tracked. Float in schedule is tracked. The most important metrics, according to the democratic vote of those assembled (at least those with the most powerful voices) were PPC, Customer Satisfaction and Budget. That was very heartening to me. Since we preach both customer engagement and reliability of the planning system as measured by PPC, we seem to be engaging our base. At the very least, we're on to something.

I remember that among the three least important items to track as "float in the schedule." I thought that was interesting as well. While I continue to search high and low for float inside a building, it never ends up there. If it was in the schedule as an activity, shouldn't we see it there? "We use it all up," was one response. "We'd use it all up, even if we didn't have it," was my response.

When asked what you would like to track that you're not, one suggestion was innovation. Wouldn't that be cool if we had a consistent way of measuring innovation? Another suggestion was that we dashboard aging of changes and RFIs. The owner who made that suggestion says that he can tell a good, collaborative project by the ability of the team to not carry any RFIs or Changes beyond thirty days.

I've encouraged all communities of practice to have a similar kind of workshop. If metrics are so important to our community (especially, the story goes, to convince owners of the efficacy and efficiency of our processes), then we should be responsible for defining what metrics matter.² I hope to have the results of the DFW workshop up on the site by next week. Let me know if your COP is interested in pursuing a similar dialogue. I'm happy to help.

Speaking of helping, I had a wonderful day in barn-boarded, law book filled, empty wine bottle decorated dark bar in Birmingham, Alabama last week delivering an Introduction to Lean Design and Construction to the Birmingham Community of Practice. Dressed in my day old pink golf shirt and jeans, John Gill of SSOE was kind enough to pick me up in front of my hotel. We enjoyed breakfast at the Café hooked up with the Birmingham Center for Innovation. John has worked with Toyota, Honda and Mercedes and it was a great opportunity for me to get a download on his insights. We then joined co-Core Group member Richard Drennen of Superior Mechanical, at the B&A Warehouse. Richard and John were as hospitable as you would expect of Southern charm and courtesy, so thanks to them and their Core Group



² We maintain all kinds of metrics that might be misleading. For instance, unemployment figures don't tell us a clear picture if those released from jobs have no job to return to even if the economy picks up. We need a better metric than unemployment—like number of employable people seeking retraining or the number of jobs created that can be filled by those whose jobs have disappeared.



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(including Ashley Colburn of Brasfield and Gorrie who dropped by in the afternoon) for making this a very successful event. It is wonderful to have a community of practice that is *actually located in a real community*—where everyone knows and cares about each other. We were a stone's throw from the construction of the new home of the Birmingham Barons who have played baseball in that town since 1885 (Michael Jordan played there briefly in 1994). Thanks for the warm welcome and wonderful support. See you soon!