

THE FPSO DELIVERY HANDBOOK

Practical Lessons from Fifty Years Delivering Major Offshore Projects

Preview Edition



Chris Morton



Date	Revision	Name
9 th August 2026	Revision 1	C I Morton

Note

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About the Author

Chris Morton has over 50 years of marine, offshore and FPSO industry experience, including 20 years at sea culminating in command, followed by more than 30 years delivering complex FPSO and offshore developments worldwide.

His experience spans FPSO conversions, new-build projects, marine operations, construction management, commissioning, offshore installation, mooring systems, and project execution. He has worked across the full project lifecycle, from concept and FEED through engineering, procurement, construction, commissioning, operational handover and FPSO decommissioning.

Throughout his career, Chris has held senior leadership positions, including Project Manager, Construction Manager, Site Manager, Offshore Construction Manager, Consultant, working with operators, FPSO contractors, EPC contractors, shipyards, and specialist vendors.

Drawing on lessons learned from projects delivered across multiple international locations, Chris now provides independent advisory and consultancy support through Cemore Consultants, focusing on project delivery, execution excellence, risk management, governance, and FPSO lifecycle management.

After more than fifty years in marine and offshore construction, and over thirty years delivering complex FPSO projects around the world, I realised that the same problems keep recurring from project to project. This handbook is not an academic text. It is a collection of practical lessons learned—sometimes the hard way—on projects that succeeded, projects that struggled and projects that recovered.

About This Handbook

This handbook is not a textbook, nor is it about how projects are supposed to be delivered.

It is about how they are actually delivered.

The observations and lessons throughout this handbook are drawn from more than fifty years in the marine, offshore and FPSO industries, and over three decades delivering complex FPSO projects around the world.

Others will have different experiences, but these are the principles that consistently proved true on the projects I was privileged to be part of. Some lessons were learned through success. Many were learned the hard way.

My hope is that this handbook helps you avoid making some of those same mistakes.

Five Things I Hope You Remember

1. Projects are delivered by people.
2. Small problems become major failures.
3. Walk the yard before trusting the dashboard.
4. Make decisions and own them.
5. Build relationships before you need them.

Signed,

Chris Morton

How to use this Handbook

Why projects rarely go the way they are planned—and what that means for you.

This handbook can be read from beginning to end or used as a practical reference throughout the life of an FPSO project.

Each chapter focuses on a key aspect of project delivery and concludes with **Chris's Rule**—a practical lesson distilled from years of project experience.

At the back of the handbook, the **Project Leader's Field Guide** brings together these rules, along with additional practical reminders and one-line prompts that can be reviewed in just a few minutes before a meeting, project review, or interview.

Whether you are preparing for your first project, managing a live yard, or recovering a project that has started to drift, the aim is simple:

To help you make better decisions before problems become expensive.

The Reality of FPSO Project Delivery

Practical Lessons for Project Managers, Project Directors and Construction Leaders

If you've picked up this handbook, chances are you've just stepped into an FPSO project role—or you're about to.

Perhaps you're a Project Manager. Perhaps a Construction Manager. Perhaps you've just become a Project Director and are already feeling the weight of the responsibility. Or perhaps you're simply interested in understanding why these projects are so challenging.

Either way, welcome.

Over the years, I've spent countless hours walking shipyards, standing beneath modules, sitting in progress meetings and watching projects evolve day by day. One thing became obvious very early. Projects rarely fail because of one major event.

They fail because of hundreds of small decisions, assumptions, delays and missed opportunities that slowly gather momentum.

Good leadership doesn't eliminate problems. It creates an environment where problems are identified early, decisions are made quickly, and people work together to keep the project moving.

As you read this handbook, imagine that ***you and I are walking around a live construction yard together***. Sometimes we'll stop beside a piece of equipment. Sometimes we'll sit in a progress meeting. Sometimes we'll review a report.

I'll explain what I'm looking at. I'll explain what worries me. And I'll explain what experience has taught me to never ignore.

Some advice may seem obvious. Some will challenge conventional thinking. Some will only make complete sense after you've experienced it yourself. But every lesson comes from real projects, real people and real situations.

Welcome to the reality of FPSO project delivery.

Part 1 – The Project Leader

Standards are set by what leaders accept, not what they say.

Chapter 1 - The First 90 Days as a Project Leader

Where you really need to focus early on to understand control, risk and reality.

There are generally two ways a Project Leader arrives on a project. The first is to join at the very beginning, when the project is still taking shape, and the foundations are being laid.

The second is arriving six months, a year, or even several years into a project that is already underway, often because the project needs fresh energy, stronger leadership, or a change in direction.

While the circumstances may be different, the objective is exactly the same:

Understand the project's reality before you try to change it.

One of the biggest mistakes I see new Project Leaders make is trying to demonstrate value too quickly. They arrive, start making changes, challenge the organisation, redraw reporting lines, and issue new instructions before they have properly understood what is really happening.

You cannot lead effectively until you understand the project you have inherited.

Your first ninety days should be spent building that understanding.

Project Leader's Seven-Day Action Plan

Day 1 – Listen	Meet your leadership team. Listen more than you speak. Obtain the latest schedule and key reports. Resist the temptation to make immediate changes.
Day 2 – Observe	Walk the yard. Visit engineering. Visit procurement. Speak to supervisors and the workforce.
Day 3 – Verify	Compare reports with reality. Review the critical path. Identify major risks. Ask for evidence, not opinions.
Day 4 – Understand	Review engineering progress. Review procurement status. Understand interfaces. Identify the real constraints
Day 5 – Build Relationships	Meet the client. Meet contractors. Meet vendors. Build trust before you need it.

Day 6 – Challenge	Review systems and procedures. Identify bottlenecks. Question assumptions. Confirm ownership of key activities.
Day 7 – Decide	Bring everything together. Prioritise the issues. Develop your action plan. Lead by Example

So, in your first 90 days, do the above in your first week, then capitalise on it and gradually transition to your management style, which requires significant visibility, effort and commitment.

Start With the People

Before schedules, reports, risk registers, or dashboards, take time to understand your team. Never assume that because a project appears to be functioning, everyone is comfortable with how things are going. The people around you may have concerns they have been unable to raise, frustrations that have not been addressed, or risks they can already see developing.

Listen carefully. These people will ultimately determine your success or failure as a Project Leader.

Your reputation will not be built by what you know. It will be built by what your team achieves. Without their support, commitment, and trust, you are finished before you have started.

- Take time to meet people individually.
- Understand their responsibilities.
- Understand their pressures.
- Understand where they believe the project's strengths and weaknesses lie.

Most importantly, never assume they know all the answers. If the project were already under perfect control, you probably would not have been needed.

Respect has to be earned.

Look at the Schedule. Early within your first week, you should have a copy of the project's schedule sitting in front of you. If not the first day, take it home and study it quietly and carefully. Not because schedules are always right, but because they very quickly reveal how the project sees itself.

Ask yourself some simple questions:

- Is the schedule realistic?
- Does it reflect how work is actually being executed?
- Is there sufficient detail?
- Are major interfaces visible?
- Does everybody understand their part of it?
- Are parallel activities logically sequenced and physically achievable?

On large projects, one of the biggest leadership mistakes is trying to manage a Level 3 schedule as a single document. It is simply too large. Nobody can effectively manage thousands of activities across multiple locations and contractors as a single integrated schedule. Break it down. Ownership is critical.

For example:

- Turret
- Hull and Offtake Systems
- Topsides Modules
- Accommodation and Helideck
- E-House
- Power Generation
- Marine Systems
- Alternate yards if being used

Each major area should have a responsible owner. Someone who understands their scope, knows their milestones, and can explain progress without opening the planning software. The planner manages the schedule. The Project Leader manages delivery. They are not the same thing.

The Project Leader's role is to ensure every part of the project has clear ownership and accountability.

Understand the Risks

Every project has risks. The question is whether they are known and being managed or whether they are waiting to become problems. Spend time understanding both the major strategic risks and the smaller operational risks. Some risks will appear on registers, while others will not.

Often, the most dangerous risks are the ones people have become accustomed to living with. Challenge assumptions.

- Ask for evidence.
- Ask for recovery plans.
- Ask what happens if key milestones slip.
- Ask what happens if procurement is late.
- Ask what happens if engineering misses deliverables.

Never accept "we should be okay" as a risk mitigation strategy. Hope is not a control measure. And never make important decisions on incomplete information.

Good leadership requires facts.

Go and Walk the Job

As early as possible, get yourself into the yard, fabrication shop, module yard, engineering office, or wherever the work is taking place. Walk the project. Look at what people are doing. Observe the pace of activity.

- Talk to supervisors.
- Talk to engineers.
- Talk to planners.
- Talk to welders and inspectors.

You will often learn more during one hour on site than an entire day sitting in meetings. Being visible matters. Your own team should see you. The workforce should see you. Contractors should see you.

People take confidence from visible leadership.

Equally important, visible leadership allows you to identify issues that never appear in reports.

Projects rarely fail because of what the reports tell you.

They fail because of what nobody tells you.

Build Relationships Before You Need Them

Not every important conversation happens inside a meeting room. Make time to meet people informally. Introduce yourself. Have a coffee. Ask about their challenges. Listen more than you speak.

This applies to:

- Contractors
- Shipyards
- Fabrication Yards
- Engineering Teams
- Classification Societies
- Flag State Representatives
- Vendors
- Client Representatives

Projects are delivered by people.

When issues arise—and they always will—the quality of your relationships often determines how quickly those issues get resolved.

It is much easier to solve problems with people who know and trust you than with people you have only met across a conference table.

Examine the Systems That Run the Project

Projects are not only delivered by people. They are delivered through systems and processes. During your first ninety days, take time to understand which systems are in place and whether they are actually working.

Look closely at areas such as:

- Document Control
- Procurement
- Engineering Management
- Change Control
- Risk Management
- Vendor Management
- Classification and Flag State Interfaces
- Quality Assurance
- Safety Management
- Reporting Systems

Do not assume that because a procedure exists, it is being followed. Look for bottlenecks.

Look for duplication. Look for processes that create work rather than control it. Good systems support delivery. Poor systems create bureaucracy. There is a big difference.

Set the Foundations Early

The first ninety days are not about proving how clever you are. They are about establishing how you intend to lead. People watch closely during this period. They are deciding whether they trust you, whether you are consistent, and whether your words match your actions.

Set clear expectations. Be honest. Ask difficult questions politely. Listen carefully. Make decisions based on facts. Be visible and be accountable.

If you establish these foundations early, the project will have a far greater chance of succeeding.

If you don't, you may spend the remainder of the project trying to recover control that was never properly established in the first place.

Chris's Rule

Never try to fix a project you don't yet understand. Listen, Observe, Verify. Then lead.

Continue with the Full Handbook

The full FPSO Delivery Handbook is available separately for individual and corporate use. Contact Cemore Consultants for access and pricing.

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