

EPC & EPCM: The Misunderstood Construction Contracts

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Abstract—Equally the utilization of EPC contracts is becoming more predominant in the construction industry, it appears appropriate to spotlight some of the differences between Engineer, Procure, Construct contracts (EPC) and Engineer, Procure, Construction Management (EPCM) contracts. Both these types of contracts have been practiced to some extent in Indian market, nevertheless, mostly in the vitality and infrastructure sectors. The party's rights and obligations in EPC and EPCM contracts differ substantially and in that place is much confusion in the market between these two types of contracting methods. Thus, to clarify the difference between the two project delivery methods literature was reviewed & some material components were taken into account to illustrate the differences between EPC and EPCM agreement.

Keywords: Construction, Contract, Risk, EPC, EPCM

1. INTRODUCTION

An owner, developer, or even project manager (Owner, for simplicity's sake) with a billion-dollar budget should, from its vantage point, be able to get what it desires. Unfortunately, it is not invariably thus. The trio of choices between time, cost, and quality lead mega project Owners to attempt to balance the potential combinations of strict quality control, tight completion schedule, and lowest initial and long-term outlay for their desired facility. The well-advised Owner will consider what contractual arrangement best suits the mega project; two major choices are (1) between the EPC (engineering, procurement, and structure) and the EPCM (engineering, procurement, and construction management) contract models, and (2) Between the lump-sum, turnkey, and cost-reimbursable (with or without spending caps) approaches. Owners can and do mix and match these basic types of contracts, but generally they pair EPC with a lump sum, and EPCM with cost reimbursable [1]. Acknowledging that every generalization begets an exception and that agreements are negotiated with almost infinite number of variations, significant differences and similarities may still be drawn between EPC and EPCM agreements, particularly with the types of payment (lump sum or cost reimbursable) in mind [2].

Experienced or properly advised Owners know that contracts should clearly allocate the major risks anticipated in a

task. With enough experience or the right advice, such Owners will air the risks (of cost overrun, later completion, and performance shortfalls or sub-par operations, for instance) with rewards commensurate with the particular dangers and with the ability of the party in question to effectively manage the risk. No form of contract suits all contingencies, much less all projects [3]. However, understanding what an EPC or EPCM agreement can do for the Owner and the project will enable the Owner to best match its goals with the contract employed to reach them.

This paper examines contractual means to allocate risks, but Owners may always employ methods outside an EPC or EPCM agreement to cover the contingencies arising in a megaproject.

Before comparing and contrasting the EPC and EPCM forms, it is significant to observe that the risks typically allocated in a public works project (where lump-sum agreements often are involved) are spoken differently by many private (and some very deep-pocketed public) Owners. Megaprojects for industrial and even commercial Owners now are approached through cost-reimbursement contracts more often than not [4]. Public Owners still feel more at home with the certainty of a fixed-price agreement. Perhaps the entrepreneurial spirit of private Owners or the aversion of many large public Owners to public criticism for delays and cost overrun explain the polarization of using these two payment methodologies [5].

2. OVERVIEW OF EPC COMPARED TO EPCM

In many instances, the EPC agreement functions as a turnkey contract. Whatever the scope of the work, be it an entire refinery or a moderate addition to an existing plant, the Contractor will design the facility, build the structures from foundation to trim, buy and install the equipment, perform all remaining construction, test all major and minor equipment and operations, train the operators, and hand over the complete drawings and operations manuals [6]. Of course, the Owners may create many variations on this theme, such as ordering long-

leadtime equipment for the EPCC Contractor. However, the core of the EPC Agreement is that the same entity is responsible for all of the operations from creation to certification of completion. The entity can subcontract out vast amounts of the work, and it certainly does not manufacture the equipment or create the materials. It may hire almost all of the labor for the projects. Nonetheless, the EPCC Contractor performs all the work, directly or indirectly, and represents the Owner as a single point of responsibility.

The EPCM Agreement departs from the EPC contract by removing the concept of sole responsibility for the project and substituting a single contractor (the Engineer) to design the project and to endear to cause others (suppliers and contractors) to equip and construct it. Bearing in mind the many variations possible with such an agreement, the essence of an EPCM is a service (engineering the work and administering its construction by others) rather than providing, through direct efforts, a finished project [7]. Owners may contract directly with the EPCM suppliers and contractors, or they may have the Engineer do so on their behalf. Owners may proceed with a complete cost-reimbursable project, designed and administered by the EPCM Engineer, or they may transfer all of the contracts to the EPCM Engineers even obtain a maximum project cost, coupled with incentives and variable payments for services, at some point after the work has begun. However, the EPCM Agreement still is not an EPC contract, despite some similarities. The Engineer still curtails its project risk, in keeping with providing services and not a complete project.

The EPCM Agreement can do many things, but it is most readily adapted to a project in which the Owner wants a representative of its interests and an entity to take the lead in designing the project [8]. As may be apparent, an Owner wishing a greater role in procuring the equipment, in selecting contractors for distinct parts of the work, and in retaining more project control should consider the EPCM approach. Because the EPCM Engineer acts on behalf of the Owner and directly involves the Owner in making major decisions throughout the project, the service nature of EPCM comes through. Such service requires a equal measure of responsibility and responsiveness from the Owner, to provide the strategic decisions (on matters regarding major equipment, crucial contractors, and proactive interaction with governing authorities, for example).

By directly involving itself, the Owner in the EPCM Agreement tends to favor cost-reimbursable payments, perhaps with incentives and restrictions, to avoid paying the Engineer for risks that the Owner has retained.

Payment terms for an EPC contract typically are lump sum, although there are many variations on how components of the work are priced. The Owner and Contractor may agree to pay the stipulated price in regular, equal monthly payments over the life of the project, to provide a predictable cash flow. Alternatively, a percentage of completion for

mulamay be preferred. Pricing of major equipment may allow for payment at set stages (such as at placement of the order, completion at the factory, arrival at the site, and mechanical completion).

A comparison of some material components illustrates the differences between EPC and EPCM agreements.

• Cost and Schedule

An Owner primarily worried about staying within its initial capital expenditure budget and meeting its project schedule likely will prefer the EPC contract form [2]. A cardinal point of the EPC arrangement is that the Contractor promises a given result—the completed project—within a stipulated time and for an agreed-

upon price. Because of these central issues of cost and schedule, EPC contracts often have very completed definitions of mechanical and substantial completion, a heavily negotiated contracts schedule, and very explicit statements of what constitutes a force majeure event or basis for a change in price.

[9]. At least conceptually, the Owner should be prepared to give the Contractor considerable latitude on the methods and means of construction, numbers of craftsmen and amount/type of construction equipment, and wages and other incentives to assemble, retain, and motivate the workforce and the subcontractors.

An EPCM Agreement is not as well suited for demanding and obtaining a project on time and on budget [2]. The Engineer ordinarily commits to its best efforts to achieve those goals, but does not promise that either the cost or the schedule will be exactly what the Owner wishes. That said, some Owners and Engineers explore the outer boundaries of what is a goal and what is a guarantee by way of budget and schedule. Thus, an Owner may incentivize the Engineer to keep costs down so that the Owner's budget goal (and perhaps the Engineer's cost estimate) will be met.

[2]. Likewise, the EPCM Agreement may contain bonuses for meeting or exceeding completion date milestones. Also, the Owner and Engineer may agree in advance that at a designated point in the project, the Engineer will issue either a guarantee of the project price, the completion date, or both. It is uncommon in an EPCM contract for price or completion date to be guaranteed upfront by the Engineer. Again, the Owner is buying a service, not absolute promises of performance. In theory

at least, savings to the Owner resulting from keeping the project from running over budget or behind schedule should be carefully considered. The rational Owner very well may accept the risks, to avoid paying for the contingencies an EPC Contractor would include for them, and, perhaps, to exercise more control over the project's quality and standards (for example, by picking subcontractors, suppliers, materials, and equipment proactively, while leaving the design largely up to the Engineer).

Along with quality, the cost and timeliness of a project are the main components of risk that must be allocated clearly. When cost and schedule are paramount, the Owner should concentrate on an EPC Agreement.

[10]. When the Owner can absorb some flexibility in the price or timing, then an EPCM Agreement may better suit the project because it allows the Owner to carry more risk, on the "bet" that the overall price

will be lower, and the Owner will maintain more control over the details of the facility (through, for instance, active participation in selecting the subcontractors and suppliers).

• Defective Works. Defective Services

An Owner upset with the defects in its project would present the Contract or with a claim for defective work (EPC Agreement), while confronting the Engineer with a claim for defective services (EPCM Agreement). As further discussed in this paper, the Contractor warrants the adequacy of the completed work and the Engineer only warrants something to the effect that its services meet a carefully defined standard of good engineering practices [11].

The remedies for breach of warranty best illustrate the two contracts. Under an EPC Agreement, the Owner will receive a replacement for the defective work; under an EPCM contract, the Engineer most often will re-perform the services [12]. Negotiation of an EPCM Agreement requires careful consideration regarding what, if any, replacement of the work (as contrasted with a revised design, for example), will be required. Otherwise, the replacement design may be all that the disappointed Owner will have to show for a vital component that failed and that must be rebuilt and retested, at great expense and with serious loss of time. The comparison is central to the two types of agreements.

The EPC Agreement with a lump-sum price lends itself to enforcement of warranties that pertain to replacement of defective work. To be specific, regardless of why the work is improper (e.g., design, wrong equipment provided, improper installation, mistaken placement of the work, damage to the controls), the Contractor with a turnkey responsibility normally will be required to redo the defective work, retest it to turnover status, and absorb all the costs of such repair, but usually not the indirect costs of interruption or delay [13]. Such full responsibility matches with the lump-sum approach that Owners often equate with EPC contracts.

The EPCM contract often contemplates a cost-reimbursement model of payment, usually with incentives for saving money, finishing on time, and providing demonstrable quality. When a defective service is identified by the Owner, causing portions of the project to be repaired, the Owner must pay for the rebuilt work. At first, it may seem like a poor bargain for the Owner to have proceeded with an EPCM agreement when significant defects are discovered [14]. After all, the Engineer often is only responsible for producing a better design, not necessarily fixing the damage to the project caused by a contractor following the defectives set of plans. For truly large problems, the Owner probably wishes for the comfort of a single point of responsibility provided by an EPC Agreement. Nevertheless, for many facilities, the inevitable defects coming to light may not spell catastrophe. The Owner with the EPC Agreement can expect to pay a significant, and largely invisible, premium to the Contractor for warranty work and replacement design, procurement, and construction [9]. Either the Contractor or its subcontractors will protect themselves to some extent against future warranty claims. Thus, the Owner has paid for the cost of at least some work, whether it is needed or not. A

project with comparatively few defects may represent a hidden cost versus run for the Owner using an EPC Agreement because of the anticipated warranty costs built into the lump-sum price [13]. The EPCM Owner, correspondingly, "pays as it goes" for replacements and rework. The EPCM Owner may pay less, overall, for actual repairs to actual defects. The Owner also may decide to live with the problem when confronted with "optional" rework for defects not central to the project's operations.

• Change Orders and Changes to the Contract

Muchas Owners wish that there would be no change orders sineither a n EPC or an EPCM Agreement, change is inevitable. In EPC contracts, Owners are often reluctant to recognize that there are exceptions to the EPC scope of work, there are reasonable assumptions as to conditions, and, notwithstanding everything else, and there can be changes in contract provisions. Hence, change clauses, force-

majeure provisions, and schedule updates and monitoring are standard in the EPC contract for any megaproject. The EPCC Contractor often has a difficult task convincing the Owner that something new is a change of law, an exception to the scope of the work, or an unforeseen and unusual condition [15]. The concept of a lump-sum price for a turnkey project, which often accompanies the EPC Agreement, makes for Owners' skepticism. Owners can conclude that the cause changes that make the conditions of the work more favorable to the Contractor are never shared, why should all the news regarding variations in the

circumstances be bad news for the Owner's budget? From the Owner's vantage point, perhaps nowhere is the underlying difference between EPC and EPCM clearer than in the propensity for changes. Within EPCM, the Owner should expect change orders, especially if the scope of the work. No one has accepted the risk of delivering an entire plant for one sum of money. More than likely, the Owner will have agreed to pay carefully defined costs plus a fee, with certain incentives, precisely to take on the risk of unknown conditions, rather than pay an EPC Contractor to fold them into its all-encompassing budget. Indeed, the EPCM Agreement often contains mechanisms for cost variables [16]. The design may be pitted against later estimates of cost, for evaluation of design adequacy, before major equipment is ordered or significant work proceeds. Contracts for construction may be let in phases, as the work progresses and costs are better understood. Forward-looking pricing mechanisms may be included in the EPCM Agreement, such as increasing or decreasing the project's scope, depending on progress against the Owner's project budget. Variations are almost presumed within an EPCM Agreement, especially one based on reimbursement of costs. The flexibility of buying design services and then letting the rest of the project in waves or pieces carries a high level of change-order risk. Likewise, not placing one party at risk for the whole project means that price variations within the component parts are expected, and the sensible Owner creates reserves to meet the contingencies that otherwise might be the problem of the EPCC Contractor.

Within EPCM agreement, the Owner has no entity to which it can look for a broad project assumption of risk. For example, the EPCC Contractor might be willing to contract for subsurface conditions, for enough money and with enough time to study the site [17]. The EPCM Engineer would almost never warrant that its design thoroughly encompasses all unknown conditions or anticipates all subsurface factors. Consistent with divided responsibility and some measure of direct contracting with consultants and contractors, the EPCM agreement eases the Owner's assumption of risks for many ancillary, yet vital, to the core work [18]. Subsurface conditions are at least arguably within the EPCC Contractor's scope of risk. Not so for the service-oriented Engineer. Likewise, the usual letting of multiple agreements for pieces of the project lends itself to contracting out the investigation of the site or the subsurface work to distinct entities. Thus, an EPCM agreement logically fits with its investigation contract let to a separate entity, and with stand-alone agreements with contractors performing distinct aspects of the work. Such division of responsibility, with the service-oriented Engineer representing the Owner onsite, rarely results in any negotiation but the Owner accepting the risk of changed conditions. Nonetheless, the Owner also should keep its savings in mind based on various parties not pricing into their agreements the risk of subsurface conditions and other sources of change orders. In short, a cost-reimbursable contract is much more likely to be found in the EPCM, and will include provisions for change orders, or simply additional scope added to the project and paid for time and materials work.

• Liability Limits

Under current financial conditions, there may be EPCC Contractors willing to work with greater risk and higher limits of exposure for a project being late, not performing as designed, or costing too much. That said, the norm has been, and largely still is in the minds of most megaproject firms, that the EPCC Contractor expects a limitation on its liability for delays in delivery and for performance shortfalls. Most EPC agreements have capped the Contractor's total liability at a specific amount, regardless of cause, and often there have been separate caps of exposure for particular risks. For example, liquidated damages for delay might have a limit, measured in days or in total assessment of penalties, and the overall cap might be some higher number than that explicitly covers all risks. Performance guarantees almost always come with pricing mechanisms to measure the cost to the Contractor for failing to achieve the desired outputs, or failing to consume only the specified inputs.

Most Owners are more willing to cap the exposure of an EPCM Engineer, in light of the fact that the EPCM Engineer provides services rather than a completed project. Limiting liability to the amount of available insurance, for example, is common in EPCM agreements. In most situations, however, Owners should not be satisfied with limiting liability risk to the amount of the fee.

In both EPC and EPCM agreements, the parties generally have considered waivers of certain classes of damages, in addition to a cap on liability.

Thus, waivers of lost profits, of indirect costs of delay, or of opportunities forfeited by poor performance are common in both such contracts. Owners would be well advised to insist on the limitations of recoverable damages being mutual. Granted, the business of the Owner differs from that of the Contractor or the Engineer, but the Owners stand to lose much more. Thus, the lost profits on an oil platform delayed a year, a power plant pushed past the peak demands of a summer, or a smelter, not operating as designed to probably dwarf the consequences to the Contractor or to an Engineer of a project being shelved or cancelled due to radical changes in industry needs. In this author's experience, a cancelled facility reflects more loss (due to changed market conditions, for instance) to the Owner than to a disappointed Contractor or Engineer, and thus, liability limitations almost always impact the Owner disproportionately. That, arguably, is why reciprocity is only fair.

• Security for Performance

In a world of financial fragility, everyone is interested in project financial security. Owners of megaprojects long have exacted security for performance of contract obligations. Typically, the EPCC Contractor is expected to post some combination of a letter of credit, a parent company guarantee, a performance bond, a payment bond, and/or insurance for a variety of hazards. Retention on the amount of the contract performed, to ensure completion of work, also acts as a security device. How much do Owners post by way of security? Not much, and not nearly enough in the eyes of many project participants. At a minimum, greater disclosure of project finances can be expected both at the start and throughout the course of performance. Can letters of credit from the Owner be expected, for the current month's work, for instance? Not necessarily, but someone will ask and negotiate with that in mind. Likewise, guarantees beyond limited or non-recourse project financing remain a possible subject for negotiation.

The EPCM Engineer puts up far less security because its commitment to provide services rather than a finished project. In fact, even retention may seem unwarranted to many Engineers. Generally, Owners mostly rely upon the veritable carrot of bonuses and incentive payments, rather than the stick of instruments of security.

3. CONCLUSION

Mega projects vary by industry, by public-private ownership, by risk of technology and development, and by a host of other elements. No single contract form, even those as flexible and developed as the EPC or the EPCM models, will suffice for every demand. These points of comparison should help in sorting out the qualities that an Owner may want to include in its ultimate agreement. Parties working with that Owner, as well as their attorneys, need to keep these subjects of risk allocation in mind, if the project is to succeed and if they plan to move on to the next big undertaking in a highly competitive environment. The cancellation of mega projects and the postponement of many more make all parties more dependent on "getting it right" when they are able to work together.

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