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What Lies Ahead For Project Managers

The art of project management like any other form of art is constantly evolving. Though it could be also be surmised as being a science that only requires a thorough understanding of it, project management must and invariably entails constant upgrading of expertise and know-how to keep itself abreast with the times and ever changing technology.

Looking ahead at the next 15 years, it is thus inevitable that the main focus of project management would be on continual skills improvement and knowledge enhancement.

It is well accepted that a true blue project manager must be conversant with development briefs, feasibility studies, investment portfolio, design development, construction management, contract administration and expeditious completion of a project. All these must be inherent capabilities of any project manager, albeit other considerations like human relationship management and even business acumen are equally important.

We are all too familiar with the primary objectives of project management - to deliver to the owner a building that is within budget, completed on time and with the desired quality and standard of finishes. However, the future and in consequence the success of project management and its image must rest on a new breed of project managers who not only fulfils the primary objectives of time, cost and quality, but possess the knowledge that spans the entire spectrum of activities from inception to completion, sustainable development and construction, operations, facilities management and asset enhancement.

The role of a project manager traditionally ends with the completion of a project. Functions related to facilities management and enhancements are next assumed by a different group of professionals namely the facilities and estate managers. While this delineation of duties would provide the distinction in name at least between a project manager and a facilities manager, it is nonetheless important that a project manager acquires specialist knowledge on facilities and asset management in order to be able to better discharge his duties by providing valuable input during the design and implementation stage of the project. Project managers must not stay within the traditional realms of project management but to extend his knowledge and expertise beyond their core capabilities.

Gone are the days when project values used to be about S\$30 million to S\$50 million and they were then considered to be substantial and complex projects. However, today such values are deemed miniscule and it is not uncommon now and even considered a norm to have projects valued at S\$1 billion to S\$2 billion. With such huge contracts, project managers assume an even greater significance and hence they must acquire a totally new and different skill set. It would be foolhardy for anyone to suggest that he would be able to manage such large projects with the same skill set as before. Do bear in mind that the success or otherwise of the project would hinge on the skill set that the project manager possesses. He holds the key to success. In this respect nothing short of the best and all round expertise would suffice.

The knowledge on facilities and asset enhancement would be acutely relevant when considered in the light of the huge existing stocks of building structures that we now have. This massive stock of buildings would impose a tremendous if not the greatest challenge to project managers in terms of their ability to apply their skills and expertise to such buildings. The challenge is in the utilisation of their project management know-how in running and maintaining existing structures, not only in facilities and asset management but also in achieving Green Mark recognition, retrofitting, additions and even redevelopment if planning guidelines permit. So the scope for project managers is immense and the potential limitless.

With the current emphasis on sustainability and green environment, project managers must without exception assume the additional role of understanding and fulfilling the requirements in respect of global warming. He must familiarise himself with the various pillars of sustainability ranging from economic, social and environmental to education, and to consciously and actively do his part in terms of social corporate responsibility.

Over the years, project management has become an integral and indispensable member of the development team and has now assumed a greater status that is reflected by its critical role that is sought by both the public and private sector. This will inevitably mean the constant upgrading of skills and knowledge which SPM has duly carried out through various forms like accreditation, regular trainings and active participation in both regional and worldwide events and membership.

In the years to come, there is no alternative but to have an entirely new breed of project managers who possess the requisite all round skill sets to manage projects and at the same time uphold the commitment to sustainability and the green environment. There has to be a paradigm shift of sort not only to change the mindset of project managers but more importantly to upgrade their skill set to meet the ever changing landscape of the profession of project management. Only then will project managers be able to stand tall and proclaim themselves as truly respected and honourable professionals.