



Developing project management competency: perspectives from the construction industry

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Abstract

Project managers in today's construction industry are faced with a situation whereby the fundamental roles and functions they perform are witnessing a gradual shift in focus. To maintain their professional competency, practising project managers in construction adapt to this changing industry environment by relying on knowledge and skills acquired through training and experience. The extent to which such training enables project managers to effectively adapt to changing demands have considerable relevance not only for the training of future project managers, but more importantly, the kind of management and general manpower development policies that construction organisations can adopt. The paper presents a study that focuses on the development of construction project managers and how they maintain their professional skills in a changing construction business environment. The paper first sets out the areas of knowledge and skill required for project management certification, and argues that the traditional engineering orientation of these requirements are insufficient for today's construction project manager. It identifies the general knowledge and skill elements that are perceived as essential for developing project management competency through a survey of project managers in the construction industry. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd and IPMA. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Project managers in construction are responsible for the overall success of delivering the owner's physical development within the constraints of cost, schedule, quality and safety requirements. As such they play a crucial role not only in the operational activities of architectural and engineering construction companies but also the development of infrastructure in every country. From the beginning of the 1990s the business climate in the construction industry has witnessed unprecedented dynamics as organisations respond to increasing competition within a stagnant or declining market [1]. The industry's procurement methods are changing with clients allocating greater risks to

contractors [2]. The emergence of design-and-construct contracts as an alternative to the more traditional options of open competitive tendering for procuring public projects, and their widespread adoption is impacting on the role of project managers. Equally, the renewed demand for quality, productivity and performance is leading many organisations, and particularly construction companies, to question traditional philosophies and principles associated with their management processes and business practices [3].

Within such a changing industry climate, project managers increasingly find themselves accountable not just for the technical content of the project as expressed by the engineering and construction accuracy, reliability of the facility, and within-cost performance. Project managers find themselves confronted by issues, and undertaking additional roles, that have traditionally not been part of their responsibility [4, 5]. Both Celan and Dorman [6] and Russell and

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