

TOWARDS BETTER TRAINED AND MOTIVATED CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS

by

E.J. Sunil Perera

ARTICLE NO. 5

Abstract

The need for training construction managers in various branches of project management has been gradually felt in Sri Lanka with the acceleration of construction programmes in Housing, Road Rehabilitation, Irrigation Works etc. Gone are the days when technical knowledge alone was considered adequate to manage construction projects. The modern construction manager needs to be well conversant in other functional areas such as financial, legal, personnel and even marketing.

Construction Manager needs to be self-motivated and depicting plenty of initiative, dynamism and leadership qualities if they are to build team spirit among the workforce which is a crucial factor for the success of any construction project.

1. Importance of Training

Managing construction projects in a developing country like Sri Lanka under a climate of scarce financial resources, unpredictable weather conditions, regular breakdowns of plants and equipment, recurrent material shortages and a volatile labour force is often an exercise of considerable ingenuity.

The need for well trained and highly motivated Construction

Managers has never been felt more than today in Sri Lanka, with the accelerated construction programmes of Housing, Road Rehabilitation, Reconstruction in the North and East, Mahaweli and other Irrigation Works being presently carried out in full swing. The need of the times is for Construction Managers well conversant in all aspects of project formulation, evaluation and implementation, contract systems, financial control, quality control, inventory control, plant maintenance and human resource development.

Notwithstanding the fact that some

Mr. E.J. Sunil Perera graduated from University of Sri Lanka Katubedda Campus in 1976 obtaining B.Sc. Engineering degree in Civil Engineering.

He obtained the Postgraduate diploma in Industrial Engineering in 1979 and the Master of Engineering degree in Environmental Engineering in 1985 from University of Moratuwa.

He joined the institution in 1979 and was elected a Corporate Member in 1980 and a Fellow in 1988.

He is also the Honorary Secretary and Course Director of Management Courses of the Institution.

Presently, he is attached to ICTAD as Deputy Director (Training).

of these topics are taught in a very general sense in engineering and architecture degree courses in universities a true appreciation of their significance would only be made when applying such techniques in the field as practising professionals.

It would be desirable for such personnel to refresh, update and upgrade their knowledge by attending refresher courses from time to time. In Sri Lanka the Centre for Housing, Planning and Building (CHPB) in association with the Institute for Construction Training and Development (ICTAD) - both Organisations functioning under the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction - have designed and developed a host of training programmes in Construction Management for Engineers, Architects, Town and Country Planners, Quantity Surveyors, Middle Level Technical Officers etc., whose joint contribution is vital for the development of our Construction Industry.

It is never too late to acquire new knowledge, whichever age group a person belongs to. The only requisites are an open mind receptive to new ideas, an urge to keep abreast with modern techniques and willingness to accept that there is no "One best way" of doing things for posterity.

It is common to find professionals in charge of construction projects, especially in the Public Sector, being preoccupied with routine administrative and clerical matters, acting as paying officers, attending an endless chain of meetings and tamashas, being called upon to submit an unrealistically high number of reports and data related to the project to higher authorities before specified deadlines etc. When they are compelled to work under such relentless pressure

the last thing in their minds would be applying their technological knowledge still left after years of diverting their efforts to other activities.

Not surprising therefore that they may forget most of the subject matter studied at undergraduate level, in the process, and being found wanting when questions related to such subjects are fired at them by subordinate technical staff. Senior engineers and architects have an obligation to ensure that their juniors are afforded sufficient opportunities of applying the knowledge gathered in the universities, while they work in industry, as there is hardly any difference between a person who studied something and forgot all and a person who did not study at all !.

Being engrossed in routine matters should best be left to those mortals with far lesser education than engineers, architects and other professionals in the construction

industry. The latter categories deserve working conditions which do not subject them to undue pressure, but which are conducive for planning, innovation, creativity, research and development. Releasing them periodically to update their knowledge by attending well organised construction management courses, granting scholarships to obtain postgraduate degrees and diplomas related to their work, recognising such higher qualifications thus obtained for granting promotions, additional salary increments and specialisation allowances - these are just a few ways of fostering a healthy work environment which breeds effective construction managers.

The training process should pervade to all levels in the construction organisation to include construction

superintendents, construction supervisors, store keepers, draughtsmen and secretarial/clerical staff. Otherwise a highly trained construction manager may find it difficult to obtain positive results from subordinates who do not have any appreciation of the techniques used.

A commendable recent development in Sri Lanka is that more and more organisations have realised the importance of the training function and have appointed training specialists to organise and co-ordinate their training activities. Such training should not be confined to orientation of new recruits to the procedures of the particular organisation, but also to systematic on the job training geared to their future promotional prospects.

Often engineering and architecture graduates just out of the universities have been prematurely assigned to take charge of Construction projects without any training. This is a gross injustice done to young technologists who may end up making a mess of things despite possessing the potential to be effective construction managers if properly trained under experienced professionals at the launching of their careers.

2. Pre - Construction Stage

The following factors could be highlighted as crucial for the success of a construction project prior to commencement of construction itself and any good Construction Manager should pay due attention to them:

- a) Obtaining of all statutory approvals for the project.
- b) Selection of competent Consultants and Contractors, depending on whose side the Construction Manager is.

- c) Determination of a realistic Construction Programme.
- d) Determination of resource requirements (financial, plant & equipment, materials, manpower).
- e) Signing of Contract.
- f) Use of acceptable specifications (General and Technical).
- g) Selection of supervisory staff, craftsmen and operators in accordance with the needs of the project.
- h) Selection of good quality construction materials, spares etc. and their suppliers.
- i) Provision of satisfactory infrastructure for the project (access roads, water supply, electricity, semi-permanent/temporary dwellings for the workforce, site office, stores etc.).

3. Looking after the Staff

Construction Managers often find difficulty in getting their workforce to depict a high degree of commitment to work and perform their duties as a coherent team. By paying greater attention to their needs, minimising grievances and dissatisfaction, and striving to lead by example the enterprising, Construction Manager could raise their performance. Instead of money being regarded as the only incentive that would ensure consistently good performance from employees, steps could be taken to raise their morale, without necessarily having to spend additional money. Work itself may be considered as a rewarding experience when performed under a caring Construction Manager.

At the outset of the project the Construction Manager should ensure that his staff (of all grades) is provided with basic facilities to attend to their personal needs whilst at work. This includes satisfactory accommodation and toilet facilities, means of procuring

lunch, tea and other refreshments as well as hygienic places to have them, reasonable office/stores space to work in for office/stores staff, sufficiently sheltered security sheds for security staff, recreational facilities and the like. It is foolhardy to expect or ask for progress in the construction work without first taking measures to at least partly satisfy the physiological and safety/security needs of the employees. The Construction Manager should also be tactful enough to realise that provision of satisfactory (not luxurious) office/living accommodation for himself should be done only after his staff has been found such facilities.

4. Building Team Spirit

Having a contented workforce from the inception of the project is similar to already completing half the task at hand. From there onwards the leadership qualities, initiative and dynamism of the Construction Manager to develop an efficient and effective team of construction workers and officers would be the decisive factor towards successful project execution and completion to programme.

Whatever the magnitude of the construction project, each employee involved should be given a fair understanding of its purpose and the nature of the finished works. The best time to impart this appreciation is when the employee is transferred/recruited to work in the project. Even a clerk or typist working in the site office would feel a sense of belonging to and identify with the project if at the outset, the Construction Manager or other senior technical officer gives him/her a briefing of the various sections of the project and the type of work taking place there.

5. Worker participation in management

A vital tool of effectively managing construction projects is through worker councils comprising of a few representatives of workers and the management who meet regularly (say fortnightly) to review the progress and problems encountered in the previous two weeks and then plan out the activities to be implemented in the next fortnight. For a medium scale building project, for instance, the worker council may have the following composition :-

Construction Manager (as Chairman)

One representative from Technical Officers

One representative from Store Keepers

One representative from Administrative Staff

One representative from Carpenters

One representative from Masons

One representative from Operators

It is desirable that the worker council does not comprise of more than 7 to 10 persons if it is to be productive. Further, it would act as a channel of communication between the management and the staff in conveying decisions together with the reasons for taking them whilst obtaining feedback from the staff. The very act of sitting together and discussing the work regularly with the Construction Manager in attendance would serve as a catalyst to foster a family feeling among all segments of the staff which is vital for successful project execution.

6. Conclusion

It is earnestly hoped that those

holding key posts in the construction industry would address their minds to the importance of imparting proper training to their staff from Construction Managers downwards and respond accordingly.

When there are self-motivated and competent Construction Managers well versed in all aspects of the work our construction industry would profit immensely. It would then reap full dividends by way of projects finishing on schedule,

discovery of ingenious solutions to construction problems by versatile Construction Managers, consolidation of the various construction management techniques applied, less reliance on the so called "foreign experts" and the disbursement of some of the money thus saved to local staff in the form of far higher remuneration and better perks, resulting in more contented and motivated personnel - rather than the pittance offered to them as at present.

National Digitization Project

National Science Foundation

Institute : INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, SRI LANKA (IESL)

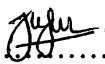
1. Place of Scanning : INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, SRI LANKA (IESL)

2. Date Scanned : ...29 / 08 / 2017.....

3. Name of Digitizing Company : Sanje (Private) Ltd, No 435/16, Kottawa Rd,
Hokandara North, Arangala, Hokandara

4. Scanning Officer

Name : ...R.M.S. MADHUSHANKA.....

Signature : ........

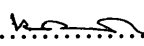
Certification of Scanning

I hereby certify that the scanning of this document was carried out under my supervision, according to the norms and standards of digital scanning accurately, also keeping with the originality of the original document to be accepted in a court of law.

Certifying Officer

Designation : LIBRARY STAFF

Name : MR. NISHANTHA HETTIARACHCHI

Signature : ........

Date : ...29 / 08 / 2017.....

“This document/publication was digitized under National Digitization Project of the National Science Foundation, Sri Lanka”