

THE PROJECT MANAGER IS IN A DILEMMA

This page is devoted to discuss current "issues" concerning the membership. The members are invited to debate the issue and bring to bear their concern to have a broader appeal.

Project Management (PM) is a subject I enthusiastically studied under the late **Professor Gamunu Kanishka Fernando**, whose student I was at the University. The subject covered a vast area and brought to light numerous concepts and techniques, a novel outlook to the architectural profession as an indispensable tool in the present days context, which made me more and more interested and educated.

Perhaps Gamunu deliberately ignored to warn of possible impending dangers to my profession, and true to his fears I have now become an unfortunate victim of Project Management.

This is not to be a pathetic plea to my brethren, but intended more to be an eye-opener – a scenario to be aware of. What is PM? What does it entail? What specific area does PM cover? What qualification and knowledge does one require to be an efficient Project Manager?, are some queries, I am certain, that comes to our mind.

Gemunu's ideal Project Manager encompasses an all enveloping function, quite contrary to the PM we experience and confront today. His involvement begins well before even the project is conceived by clients and rests heavily on pre-feasibilities, preparation of terms of references, economies (of scale), viability, and operational methods.

Cost-benefit analysis, Force field analysis, the Programme Evaluation Review Technique (PERT), and Critical Path analysis (CPA), are only a few tools used for his expert advice on preliminary project planning.

As a new area that developed in response to all possible complexities in

the construction field, PM has attracted many a criticism as well as arguments in favour. The complexity of the present days building programme, requiring more and more specialized inputs, is in itself, has been the prime tool used to justify its existence. The more complex the working environment is, the more needed are will be Project Managers, is apparently a one school of thought. The array of resource personnel required for a large/moderate scale project brings an additional need for the co-ordinating and management services, for which architects have not received training, professionally.

This school of thought primarily, therefore, set aside the architect assuming the conventional **Team Leader** within complicated performance structures, that requires even negotiations with Banks and related financial institutions, and knowledge on taxation etc., in addition to all other co-ordination works. These, say, demands personnel with sound capabilities on negotiation skills, motivational abilities, time management, and on meeting procedures.

In many an instance we architects are required to cater clients who in the first place develop projects to cushion various financial commitments. **Taxation** is one such instance that allows amnesty or concessions for construction; and as such conforming to time schedules play a crucial role in determining the success or the failure of the total exercise. Delays in completion can cause heavy penalties to clients, who even can face legal action, to the much detriment of all concerned.

A delicate management and co-ordination is, therefore, indispensable and is also advantageous. It is advantageous, again, as the management is handled by an experienced consultant, as against by a hard-headed client, who in most instances seek third opinion, leaving additional delays and expenses.

Criticisms levelled by the other school of thought, quite justifiably, is due to the present trend and state of affairs, where PM dwells into other professions, even approaching sensitive areas that comes within the purview of architects. The confusion that prevails is partly due to the lack of definition not to mention a clear-cut terms of reference.

In a more serious note it must be mentioned that the scenario with regard to the **multinational PM companies**, who in effect are better placed than all professionals involved in construction. Their links with foreign investors and their access to global financial resources, give them authority to take decisions much to the detriment of local professionals and architects.

As we have witnessed in the recent past, these companies are powerful enough even to demand adherence to their own architectural working standards, methods of operation, and fees, and effectively to hold architects at ransom.

Should we take these for granted as a profession, or strive to develop a method by which all professions can co-exist?

Rukshan Widyalankara