



Technical

5 Key Points of Consideration for an Employer when Appointing a Competent Project Manager

Date: 03 Oct 2018

Introduction

1. In this article I cover several key considerations for the Employer when looking to appoint a competent Project Manager. This article is intended to be the first in a series of articles in relation to professional services and their associated appointments and is not intended to be exhaustive.
2. Specific contract appointment forms and associated options will be dealt with in detail in a future article.
3. Throughout this article, for ease of reference, the term “*Employer*” is used to identify the person or organisation who has appointed and is in direct contract with the Project Manager.

Who is the Project Manager?

4. The Project Manager can take on several forms throughout the supply chain and their responsibilities may include a wide range of services. However, for the purposes of this article, the Project Manager is appointed by the Employer, acting as the Employer’s lead consultant.
5. The Project Manager is responsible for the management and successful completion of the project.
6. The appointment of the Project Manager, and the construction contract used, determine the individual’s role and involvement. This sounds like common sense and, you may say, “*pretty obvious*”. Unfortunately, this is not always how things work out.

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Setting the Brief / Scope of Services (1).

7. Item (1) on this list and often overlooked; accurately setting the brief for the Project Manager's role. This is most commonly referred to as "*The Scope of Services*". The Project Manager, as previously stated, is often the Employer's lead consultant and for this reason is usually the first person the Employer turns to when he needs advice or help.
8. It is imperative therefore that the Project Manager's brief is substantial and accurately drafted to reflect the key requirements of the role. Not only is this important for the Employer in ensuring he receives the service he expects, or requires, it will also provide him with a robust consultant fee forecast and ensure that he does not incur additional fees for services which were assumed to be, although were not, included for in the initial fee proposal.
9. A number of key points to consider when writing the brief:
 - Does the Employer have a standard scope of services and, if so, do these services need to be amended to align them with the specific project in question?
 - Does the Employer require the Project Manager to advise on the appointment of the consultant/design team?
 - Will the Project Manager be expected to draft and manage the Employer's Master programme?
 - What protocols does the Client/Employer wish to adhere to? Will a Project Execution Plan or other project protocols need to be drafted specifically for this project?
 - What level of reporting and meeting involvement is required outside of the immediate project? What level of Stakeholder interaction and involvement is required?
 - Will the Project Manager be required to administer the Contract?
10. Another key consideration when drafting the Project Manager's brief, is the programme and its potential impact on fees. The programme is discussed under item (3) of this article and the intention is to discuss it in further detail in a future article.

The Relevant Experience (2).

11. Having the relevant experience is imperative, this applies not only in the industry as a whole, rather to the specific sector in which the project has relevance. Construction projects are inherently diverse resulting in a wide level of experience and skillset. Taking the following Project

Manager assets into consideration prior to making an appointment is advised:

- Communication Skills/Rapport – Remaining calm under pressure, treating people with respect, possessing an ability to deal with complex and difficult situations at all levels.
- Knowledge – Construction methodology, design, programming, contractual and procurement skills in addition to the necessary skills of managing a project and the team. Applying the necessary project management processes to the project.
- Professionalism – How does the proposed Project Manager portray themselves. A Project Manager must be respectful, understand the terms of appointment and act on behalf of their Client and be impartial when required.
- Risk Awareness – Being able to understand and analyse the risks involved in the project.
- Attributes of a leader – Having presence and the ability to motivate and *‘get the best out of the team’* while having the confidence to take charge or diffuse a difficult or confrontational situation.

Sound Early Programming Advice (3).

12. If there is one contentious topic that arises time and time again on construction projects, it is the programme. How many times do we hear; *“the programme is too tight”, “you are behind programme”, “we need an Extension of Time”, “I didn’t realise how long the planning determination period would take”, “the tender period isn’t adequate”, “I need the building complete by”*....and so on and so on.
13. Sound early programming advice is key to the success of the project. The Project Manager should be capable of advising the Employer on the key elements of the project from inception through to completion.
14. All too often is *“lip service”* paid to the design stage elements of the programme. This is likely unintentional, however, without adequate management during these stages, the project may incur serious delays before works even begin on site.
15. Such early delays inevitably result in the tendering elements of the project being reduced in a bid to meet the Employer’s start on site date. This in turn affects the tender return quality and squeezes the construction period, impacting the Contractor who has to meet a tight Practical Completion date. This instantly compromises the project, increasing the risk to Time, Cost and Quality.

16. A competent Project Manager will manage the design stages of the project, ensuring adequate stakeholder involvement and liaison at the right time in the design stages to ensure the design team is able to carry out its tasks unhindered and within realistic, achievable timescales.

Procurement & Contractual Knowledge (4).

17. Depending on the appointment or the form of construction contract used, the Project Manager may or may not be required to administer the contract. Regardless of this, the Project Manager will most likely be involved in the procurement and tendering processes and therefore should be in a position to offer sound advice, enabling the Employer to make the appropriate decisions regarding the procurement route and contract for the project.
18. This topic, due to its complexity, will be covered in more detail in a future article.

Evaluation & Appointment (5).

19. A successful evaluation process is partially dependent on the above considerations, specifically item (1) on this list, setting the brief; or scope of services. Proposals should always be reviewed and evaluated on a like-for-like basis and setting an accurate brief or scope of services is key to this process.
20. Added Value – This is an important part of any evaluation process and should not be overlooked. In some circumstances the added value elements may increase the overall service proposal price. However, is this “*added value*” really added value or in fact a necessary service of which the Employer requires and has neglected to include or overlooked in his brief. In some cases, it is neither and can be discarded as an unnecessary inflated cost which will impact the Employer’s consultant appointment/professional fee budget. Nonetheless, in many cases added value elements are incorrectly labelled as such and careful consideration to the proposals is advised:
 - What is the impact of the added value elements? Will the Employer be able to reduce their risk elements? Could the Employer reduce project costs or improve overall quality. Can better programme certainty be achieved or maybe reduced altogether, thus resulting in an earlier completion date? These questions need to be asked and answered as part of the evaluation process to ensure the Employer is confident that he

has made the right appointment and has the best chance of achieving value for money.

21. Another key point to consider is; Will the Employer, upon accepting the cheaper service proposal, ultimately end up paying for an “*added value*” service as a variation after all? More importantly, will this service impact the project in any way, thus incurring the Employer costs or increasing their risk?
22. Remember, the lowest price is not always the best price!

“There is hardly anything in the world today that some man cannot make just a little worse and sell a little cheaper. The people who buy on price alone are this man’s lawful prey.”

John Ruskin (1819–1900)

Summary

23. There are many points for the Employer to consider when appointing a competent Project Manager. This article identifies 5 of those which I believe should be at the top of the priority list.
24. Setting the brief or the scope of services is the first step to ensure any submitted proposals for the role of Project Manager accurately reflect the Employers requirements and allows for an effective and un-biased evaluation process to be undertaken. Taking into consideration the proposed Project Manager’s knowledge level, especially their work experience, programming skills and contractual comprehension, is vital. As is the importance of the Project Manager’s ability to manage a team effectively while acting in a professional manner.
25. In addition, factor into the evaluation process, any added value items offered in the proposals and establish if they are a justifiable and value for money addition to the original brief for the appointment.

Note: This article is based on the author’s own experience.

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