

Opinion piece - More agile, flexible work environments and teams reflect the shift in business dynamics - project management is the ultimate enabler

Opinion piece - More agile, flexible work environments and teams reflect the shift in business dynamics - project management is the ultimate enabler

By Yasas Jayakody, Project Operations Manager, Projects - Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Solutions

15 April 2014

Without project management, innovation, vision and strategy remain little more than an intellectual exercise. To drive organisations forward, it's necessary to build the frameworks and environments within which teams and individuals can function optimally, meeting time and cost constraints while achieving scope and performance requirements in the delivery of projects. Johnson Controls' Global WorkPlace Solutions team has first-hand knowledge of creating optimised business environments.

When mergers and acquisitions occur, when companies downscale, realise the need for transformation, or when globalisation impacts an organisation, the Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Solutions team gets called in. They go about their business—the internal restructure and optimisation of a facility—in a very precise way. They take into account the people, processes and technology requirements in order to design an effective solution, applying best practice and field tested methodologies and also making use of technology to drive the delivery and performance of that solution. It's an approach that mirrors the way people function in business today.

Top-down hierarchical management structures are disappearing. So is the use of paper. The Information Age has brought greater access to information which, along with closer collaboration and knowledge sharing which drives creativity and speeds up innovation within business environments. The tools of business, work patterns, and even the defining characteristics of the workforce have evolved. Business is leaner. It is staffed by smaller, specialised, often cross-functional teams that come together strategically, collaborate closely, then quickly move on to new projects. The workplace needs to facilitate that kind of interaction.

The discipline of self-management by individuals and teams is now essential, but to deliver the entire solution, each needs to understand their role in the larger project. The complex or multiple variables that impact the success of the solution need to be integrated, measured, monitored and closely managed. This is the secret sauce that leads to successful achievement of targeted outcomes.

When it comes to the physical business environment, the shift is to open plan offices with common areas and meeting rooms, along with breakaway areas or 'phone booths' for private calls. The focus is on providing flexibility through creation of areas in which people can work together in different ways, communicating effectively and efficiently. Access to technology and information, including the capability to share or presenting information easily and access both internal and external data, is paramount. Along with that comes the need to adapt heating and cooling depending on the volumes of people, and to introduce

smart building management, which in turn makes energy usage more efficient and reduces cost. Maximising the value that the facility can deliver to business in terms of driving productivity and optimising outputs is analogous to putting in place the tools and methodologies that will assist people, teams and project managers to deliver.

Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Solutions, which manages 1.8 billion square feet of corporate real estate space globally, strongly advocates use of technology. Globally, the Global Workplace Solutions teams make use of a Web-based reporting tool that links real estate information into projects and into facility management. It has global project management best practices embedded into it. It provides a snapshot of the project and the risks, and allows for remote project management. It is an open tool that acts as a project interface, and keeps the team and all project stakeholders fully aware of deliverables, performance against targets and within cost and time constraints.

Knowledge and experience within specific industries and vertical markets is very important for delivery of projects. A typical example is the R14 million pharmaceutical client's project that Johnson Controls Global WorkPlace Solutions' South African Project Management team is undertaking locally for a multi-national. The project involves the construction of a new facility as well as the refurbishment of office space in another building owned by the client. Key factors that have contributed to successful outcomes include: knowledge of the principles that need to be applied in pharmaceutical environments (e.g., health and safety), gaining a full understanding of client needs at each site, and knowing who the users are, and being able to engage with the client and users at all levels as well as utilising the robust cost management tools to ensure the project was within budget.

In project management of any size project in any industry sector, a project manager must have hard and soft skills. Both are essential. Formal training can provide the project management methodologies and processes to drive execution within cost and time constraints, as well as ensure quality and performance requirements are met, and soft skills, some of which can only be acquired through experience, can make the difference between merely satisfactory and excellent delivery.

The Global WorkPlace Solutions team has identified a number of factors that contribute largely to its success in delivery of projects. These include:

- fully understanding the client requirements, the scope of the project, the risks and the variables, and the constraints;
- the ability to communicate, of which listening is a possibly the most important component;
- the ability to engage at all levels, from the C-level to the back office;
- attention to detail in project planning, budgeting, design, execution and refinement;
- introduction and leveraging of project management technology and tools – for the delivery team as well as for project stakeholders within the organisation;
- deep understanding of Facilities Management, therefore ensuring involvement at appropriate stages of the project, as well as understanding their end requirements;

- embedding best practices; flexibility and adaptability within the agreed constraints.

Project management is discipline that increasingly needs to be driven through all levels of the organisation to enable increased productivity and quality outputs. The methodologies being applied – namely within restructuring of the physical business environment and use of new technology and staffing models -- are a reflection of the changing patterns in work, workforces and workplaces. With each turn of the kaleidoscope, a new pattern is formed, but each uses the same components. Project management provides the tools to empower each participant in a project to find their place in that pattern.