

Back to school

3 June 2019

In the second article in our client views series, we speak to a client at the University of Glasgow about her experience of working with project managers and quantity surveyors

Q: What do you understand to be the role of a project manager?

AA: A project manager on a construction project can have many roles depending on who they are representing. On any large scheme at the [University of Glasgow](#) we have 2 senior estates colleagues who work together: the development manager and the project manager.

The development manager works with the internal client: our academic. The development manager's role is to shape and develop the brief, clearly articulating the benefits and then compiling the business case for the project. Up until the point of business case approval, the development manager is the key university lead collaborating with the design team.

The project manager works with the contractor or delivery partner to manage the construction and delivery of the project. At the early stages of design the project manager will support the development manager on buildability and cost, and will be responsible for the procurement process. Once the project has approval, the project manager will take over from the development manager and focus on delivery of the project. As a long-term occupier of our building and the projects we develop, a focus on time, quality and cost is important.

Q: Which qualities and skills do you look for when appointing or working with a project manager?

AA: The hard skills are obvious: a detailed knowledge of the construction industry, the complexities of construction and a good understanding of the building contract and contract law. However, it is the soft skills that make an excellent project manager.

A project manager must be able to find simple, clear solutions to what are often complex problems with multiple potential responses. They need to be able to facilitate discussions between relevant parties with diverse views and to manage the expectations of all parties. Sometimes this can mean defusing difficult situations or relaying bad news to the client or design team. They must be a good leader: authentic, trusted and a great communicator. Communication is pivotal: the university is a heavily governed organisation and therefore clear, accurate reporting is essential. A project manager who can communicate issues and opportunities to both the expert and the uninformed client will create an environment that allows for timely decision-making and good progress.

Q: Can you give any examples of good or bad practice?

AA: I can think of several occasions where experienced project managers lost the confidence of the client due to poor-quality reporting, or project reports being issued behind schedule. Simple things like this are important to the success of the project.

Q: How do you see the role developing in the future?

AA: There are many ways in which the construction industry is changing. Building information modelling, off-site construction and soft landings will mean that the construction process becomes more complex but also more collaborative and, in some ways, more cohesive. If a project manager is the person who glues all this together, their role can only become more significant. With the increased emphasis on quality and partnership, the project manager will be essential to the successful delivery of a project. The soft skills will become as important as the hard skills.

Q: What do you understand to be the role of a quantity surveyor?

AA: It is interesting that you use the term quantity surveyor and not cost manager. In simple terms, as a client, the quantity surveyor is the person who I expect to be watching and managing any costs associated with the project, while safeguarding the position of the client in any cost-related discussions. The quantity surveyor should be responsible for keeping the design team informed regarding budget, being able to identify any future risks, and challenging on buildability and value engineering issues when necessary.

At the University of Glasgow, we always appoint the quantity surveyor directly, not through an external design team. Although I want the quantity surveyor to be at the centre of the design process, I also want independent thinking and a direct reporting line from them to the project manager. When we appoint external project managers and quantity surveyors, we usually do this under separate appointments.

Q: Which qualities and skills do you look for when appointing or working with a quantity surveyor?

AA: I expect the quantity surveyor to have all the necessary technical skills and knowledge to allow them to support the client. A good level of solid benchmarking evidence and detailed knowledge of the contract and contract law is also essential.

However, I expect more than technical skills: I want the quantity surveyor to understand the client ? for example, their appetite for risk. An understanding of the internal environment the client works in is important. For instance, I work in a heavily regulated and governed environment, so my mantra is ?No surprises?.

An understanding of the internal environment the client works in is important. I work in a heavily regulated and governed environment, so my mantra is ?No surprises?.

Although I recognise that unexpected things can happen on any construction project, I expect the quantity surveyor to be thinking ahead and anticipating any potential problems. I also need them to understand that from a client perspective, cost management is not one-dimensional: cost versus budget is important, but so is cash flow and risk management.

Soft skills are vital ? the best quantity surveyors are not just technically competent but they are good leaders who are able to challenge the design teams constructively. They must also be able to communicate, and report clearly and accurately, with both informed and less-informed clients.

Q: Can you give any examples of good or bad practice?

AA: The best quantity surveyors I have worked with have been trusted partners of the client. They have advised on specific issues, and challenged the design team and contractor ? but without overspecifying or delaying the project. Finally, they are always looking forward and anticipating issues for the client so that they can be managed effectively, from the start of the project right through to the final account.

Q: How do you see the role developing in the future?

AA: I see a huge potential change in the role of the quantity surveyor. Much of the traditional work of the quantity surveyor will be automated: the computer will be able to manage benchmarking, complete cost plans, scenario testing and risk analysis. In many ways, some may question if and why we will need quantity surveyors.

Having said that, I believe the role of the quantity surveyor will actually become even more important. While data and cost plans can be computer-generated, it will still take a cost consultant to understand how to interpret the figures by providing an experienced oversight of the data. They will need to have the skill to take the data and apply it to each situation, using their experience and current knowledge of the construction industry.

Quantity surveyors will still need to be able to interpret contracts and ensure the client chooses the right contract for them and then secures the best outcome from that contract. They will still need to sit in the middle of the design team to ensure the client receives value for money and then be able to report back to their client in an effective manner.

Soft skills will therefore become increasingly important, as it is through these that quantity surveyors will be able to show how they add value to any project.

Ann Allen MBE FRICS is executive director of estates and commercial services at the [University of Glasgow](#)

Further information

- Related competencies include: [Leading projects, people and teams](#)
- To provide feedback on these questions or take part in a future interview, please email the editor at sfairbairn@rics.org
- This feature is taken from the [RICS Construction Journal](#) (June/July 2019)
- Related categories: [Project management](#)