

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

EFFECTIVELY MANAGING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Your construction project was running smoothly and according to plan, within budget and on schedule. Your Client was happy with progress on site and your team's momentum had reached the project targets – and then the COVID-19 global pandemic broke out and all non-essential construction work was halted internationally. Now that most countries are slowly finding their feet again and allowing limited construction projects to continue, **how does one effectively manage and lead their construction team to successful project completion in a fast-changing, volatile global situation with high levels of uncertainty, insecurity, and stress?**

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

When recommencing a construction project which had been ongoing prior to COVID-19, it is likely that smaller teams will be mobilised now due to stringent safety and social distancing requirements, as well as potential employer financial constraints. Detailed and clear communication regarding the execution plan, deadlines, targets, and expectations are more important now than ever before.

Communicating with your team whilst wearing a face mask and other forms of protective gear may not be easy. To avoid misunderstandings, **visual management** should be implemented wherever possible.

Visually displaying daily and weekly targets and goals can assist in ensuring total alignment of the team whilst also motivating them.

Ensuring that your team is reassured and supported during this time is critical. Many team members may have close friends or family members that are affected by COVID-19 either financially or health-wise. Some may be caring directly for someone with COVID-19. **Acknowledge that times are difficult** and provide support systems for these resources. Also ensure that personnel feel safe and comfortable to approach you should they display any symptoms or have been in contact with

someone that does. Always make sure that all personnel are up to date with the company's latest COVID-19 procedures and plans of action.

INNOVATIVE PROGRESS MONITORING

With regular site and Client face-to-face meetings being discouraged to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, it may be challenging to report on construction progress accurately and transparently. Making use of virtual walk-through inspections, photos and videos of site progress shared with the team and the Client is a solution to this.

Where third party or engineer inspections

are required, investigate using available technologies and apps which can make this possible remotely. There are many apps available whereby the site personnel or inspector can complete checklists by looking at the photos. Inspections can also be done real-time by using live video interfaces.

ANTICIPATE & PLAN FOR CHANGES

With frequently changing regulations detailing what is and is not permitted at each stage of the spread of the virus and each nation's independent recovery plan, changes are inevitable but unpredictable.



As the severity of the pandemic is changing, so are construction schedules, material costs and lead times, safety and induction protocols, labour quantity limitations, legal and contractual terms and conditions, etc.

As the project or construction manager, it is necessary to review all of these changes and assess how they affect the project before implementing response measures. It is also useful to think ahead and attempt to **predict or forecast potential changes** and note down the measures that should be implemented in these instances. Holding frequent risk reviews with the relevant stakeholders may assist to identify required changes and help generate protocols.

Preparing demobilisation and re-mobilisation plans in the event of project suspension, site closure or government ordered shutdowns and training the team on these plans in advance will assist in ensuring that you can act swiftly in changing times, saving time and money, and protecting the health and safety of your team members.

SHORTENING PLANNING HORIZONS

Setting realistic and achievable **short-term deadlines and schedules** during the current changing and uncertain climate is challenging and can only be done by having a week-by-week approach.

Committing to 3- or 6-month schedules will only lead to a disappointed Client and a frustrated team.

A project manager that breaks down the outstanding activities by scheduling weekly targets and goals can adapt to global, national, and site-specific changes with agility and ensure that stakeholder expectations are managed effectively.

MAINTAIN “BIG PICTURE” PERSPECTIVE

While the duration of this global crisis and the steps we need to take to fully recover are unclear, we do know that this will be temporary. Remember this when handling all team, third party and Client interactions – do not act short-sighted due to short-term frustrations, profit opportunities or limitations.

Public discourse is so completely saturated with COVID-19 related content at the moment that personnel and Clients may feel overwhelmed. Whilst engaging with team members, remember to touch base on other non-COVID topics which we all have in common – a short break from reality may prove to be motivational and uplifting.