

What is the relevance of the Project Manager in the context of an employer's influence on the construct of the project delivery team?^{1, 2}

By Trevor Mpatsi

Where are the Construction Project managers?

Is the role of an independent Project Manager relevant anymore considering that there has been a visible increase in employers deploying their own internal Project Managers and assigning the Principal Agency to other professional team members? The role of the Principal Agent is now being spread across professional team members and it is no longer uncommon for the Principal Agent role to be removed from the Project Managers role.

What then is the relevance of an external Project Manager and/or Principal Agent if the employer further appoints an internal Project Manager? Who guards' the guards' the adage goes.

With the current set-up of construction projects whereby a client employs both internal and external Project Managers to execute their projects, yet project success is fraught with difficulty, the question posed herein is to where the interventions employed by clients to force the deliverables they seek speaks to a systemic failure by those employed to deliver on their mandate.

Furthermore, and more importantly, is this indicative of a dearth of trust on the Principal Agent and Project Manager and/or professional team to deliver accordingly thus forcing the employer to proactively impose a delivery structure they believe will mitigate the potential risk of failure?

Do our clients still trust us?

Within the built environment is an/are agent(s) broadly described as the Project Manager and a Principal Agents' whose "job is to get people to do certain things in accordance with their appointment. The nature of project teams as they are assembled is through some manner of procurement process, is that they are often thrust into a project (sometimes haphazardly) and are subject to the deliverables

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as required by the employer and enshrined in their appointment letter and contract. Within this newfound relationship, an advocate for the project is further elected and would carry the title of Principal Agent and/or Employers representative.

The relationship described above is consistent with the forms of contract typically applied within the South African context e.g. NEC, JBCC, GCC et.al. The relationship is managed by a Project Sponsor who is *an individual (often a manager or executive) with overall accountability for the project. He or she is primarily concerned with ensuring that the project delivers the agreed upon business benefits and acts as the representative of the organization, playing a vital leadership* (Schibi, n.d.)³. In addition, or as an alternative, it has now become common place for institutions to appoint an internal Project Manager as well to manage the project on the employer's behalf as discussed in the introduction.

The nature of the professional team assembly, is the contractual nexus that glues the professional team members and the introduction of an additional supervisory level (internal Project Manager) has seen a rise in the discourse relations and unmanaged scope creep in addition to project failure having no ownership as there are now "too many cooks" directing the activities of the project.

The decisions taken by the employer/client to provide "support" to the project is telling and thus begs the question on the role and independence of the professional team; if they are not to be trusted (as is evidenced) should then the relevant regulatory bodies not proactively design a workable briefing document to provide guidance and support to the employer. After all they (employers) face the most risk in a project failure and it is comprehensible that they would seek to employ a risk-mitigation measure to prevent what is perceived to be imminent failure. The decision to be made starts with whether the regulatory bodies (as governed by the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) who are delivering on their mandate? If they are indeed doing so, then where does the trust deficit come from and if they are not, what will see them embark on a concomitant course of action to mitigate the despair.

In a cursory review of South African recruiting websites and newspapers for both state entities and privately owned companies whom in recruiting for Project Managers, did not expose a fundamental difference in the criteria for Project Managers'. Undergraduate qualifications, a few years' experience in specific industries and some level of professional registration were consistent in the job applications.

What do we make of the situation and what do we do?

The complexity of project teams and their constitution, coupled with additional layers of oversight may inadvertently undo the performance being demanded by the employer.

The South African Council for Construction Project Managers (SACPCMP) defines a Construction Project Manager and principal Agent as follows:

“Construction Project Management” is the management of projects within the built environment from conception to completion, including management of related professional services. The Construction Project Manager is the one point of responsibility in this regard”.

„Principal Agent” means the person or entity appointed by the client and who has full authority and obligation to act in terms of the construction contracts”.

“Principal Consultant” means the person or entity appointed by the client to manage and administer the services of all other consultants”.
(SACPCMP, October)

The addition to the definition of the Principal Consultant is a requirement to demonstrate a further level of responsibility that exists within a project team. From the definitions is it abundantly evident that a congruent relationship exists with these three disciplines, whose roles are typically shared by the Project Manager (who would act as the Construction Project Manager and Principal Agent) and the Architect for example, who would be employed in addition to their primary architectural function as the Principal Consultant.

Historically however until the mid/late 2000's, the architect was appointed as the Principal Agent. *Throughout the years it has become the custom to appoint architects to act as principal agents on most of the construction projects. The rationale behind the assumption that architects will be the most suitable candidate for the job, is a historic custom that has never openly been proved or disproved (RENSBURG, 2009).* It must be noted however, that any of the other professional team consultants may act in any of the roles listed above and this the prerogative of the employer. *No specific training for a consultant is needed for that consultant to act as principal agent, thus allowing any consultant to fulfil this duty. It is possible to transfer general management skills but none of the curricula of the consultants' training is aimed to capacitate them with the skills that are needed to be principal agent. (RENSBURG, 2009)*

The addition of a client internal Project Manager can only add to the melee that exists within the professional team. All other members of the professional team would be appointed (again in a typical project) utilising the Professional services agreement (PROCSA) administered by the Principal Agent, yet the internal Project Manager would not.

We would aver that what is actually required is the insistence of performance by the professional team members as governed by their various regulatory governing bodies of each discipline. If indeed the performance of the professional team is the driver for the additional oversight, then performance management and the intervention of the likes of SACPCMP, ECSA, SACP etc. to name but a few must become the norm; independent audits (at no cost to the employer) and public peer reviews for example, may encourage the professionals that have been coasting unabated in construction projects to improving themselves to a must desired point of self-regulating heightened performance. The role of oversight is the clients' prerogative, however, it should and cannot be a contributing factor to poor performance of a project team and a project in full. The responsibility for performance must revert to the persons' employed as such and should they lack, they must be held to account without the employer suffering as a result of said lacklustre performance.

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