

ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN AZERBAIJAN: ADDRESSING THE LACK OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

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Azerbaijan's construction sector confronts a significant challenge: a shortage of skilled project managers. This paper examines the root causes, explores the consequences, and suggests solutions to foster a capable group of project managers aligned with the nation's growing construction needs.

Introduction: A 2022 study by the Project Management Institute revealed that projects led by skilled project managers achieve their timelines and budgets 43% more consistently. Yet, Azerbaijan's expanding construction sector faces a significant deficit in these crucial professionals. This shortfall hampers the nation's infrastructure goals and has broader economic implications. This study seeks to address this issue, emphasizing the importance of enhanced training and setting higher industry standards.

A 2021 study revealed that less than 10% of Azerbaijan's project managers have received formal training, indicating a significant educational deficit. **Unclear Career Paths:** The undefined progression routes in Azerbaijan's project management sector discourage aspiring professionals.

Pay Disparities: When compared to regional counterparts, Azerbaijani project managers face considerable wage differences, driving many to explore opportunities overseas.

Budgetary Exceedances: A 2022 insight showed that about 40% of projects exceed their initial budgets due to management shortcomings. Quality lapses can occur, as projects often fail to meet expected standards, leading to additional costs and tarnishing the image of the industry. **Safety Risks-** inadequate oversight increases the potential for on-site incidents.

Constructive Recommendations to Redress the Issue:

a. **Upgrade Educational Platforms:**

Initiate collaborations with esteemed global institutions, such as the International Project Management Association, to inculcate a world-class project management curriculum in Azerbaijan. Diversify educational

avenues to encompass diplomas, graduate, and postgraduate courses, with a pivotal focus on internships that serve as crucibles for marrying academic knowledge with field realities.

b. Clarify Career Paths:

Develop a national framework outlining career progression in project management.

Introduce annual awards to recognize and incentivize excellence in the field.

c. Revise Salary Structures:

Conduct regular wage surveys comparing with neighboring countries. Introduce performance-linked bonuses to encourage excellence. Case Studies Highlighting the Need for Expertise: Baku Olympic Stadium (2015): Demonstrates the impact of seasoned management on timely and budgeted project delivery. Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center (2013): Affirms the importance of global expertise in managing complex projects.

Borrowing from Global Best Practices:

Insights from Singapore: Singapore's Public Service Project Management Office (PMO), established in 2009, serves as an exemplar for nations grappling with project management challenges. Their strategic approach has led to: Reduced Delays: The PMO's rigorous methodology curtails project postponements, ensuring timely delivery.

A systematic process using Optimized Budgets reduced cost overruns and ensured projects stayed within budget. With a focus on Excellence through Quality Enhancement, Singapore's public infrastructure projects have witnessed a rise in quality standards.

Lessons from the United Arab Emirates (UAE):

The UAE's centralized project management office (PMO) has been instrumental in its development successes. Key initiatives of the UAE PMO include:

- Establishing a national project management framework.
- Offering training and certifications for project managers.
- Creating a knowledge base for best practices.

A 2022 study revealed that 80% of UAE projects met their targets, outpacing the global average of 69%. Azerbaijan might benefit from a similar centralized PMO structure to enhance its project outcomes.

Key Takeaways for Azerbaijan:

Centralized Oversight: A national project management office could coordinate and set standards for all major construction projects, thereby streamlining operations.

Regular Skill Upgradation: Periodic training sessions can be organized to keep project managers abreast of the latest global trends and methodologies.

Using of technological solutions during project management is one of the important factors. While Artificial Intelligence garners global limelight, other technology-driven solutions can offer significant enhancements in project management.

Building Information Modelling (BIM): BIM offers a digital representation of a project's physical and functional characteristics. Its application can:

- **Enhance Visualization:** BIM allows stakeholders to envision the final output, enabling better decision-making throughout the construction lifecycle.

- **Streamlining Collaboration** Real-time access to project information facilitates better coordination between teams and ensures smoother execution.

Project Management Software: Cloud-based solutions, such as Asana or Trello, can:

- **Centralize Information:** These tools serve as a repository of all project-related data, ensuring teams have up-to-date information.

- **Optimize Task Management:** Managers can allocate tasks, set deadlines, and monitor progress in real-time.

Feedback Mechanism - A Crucial Tool:

- **Regular Stakeholder Surveys:** Periodic surveys can capture stakeholder sentiments, offering insights into areas of improvement and aspects that are performing well.

- **Post-Project Reviews:** Once a project concludes, a comprehensive review can shed light on successes and areas that fell short. This iterative learning can significantly refine future project executions.

- **Digital Feedback Tools:** Online platforms can provide real-time feedback during project phases. Such immediacy can allow project managers to address concerns without waiting for the project's conclusion.

While the roadmap is optimistic, it's crucial to understand the hurdles in implementing these solutions.

Government-Industry Misalignment: A cohesive strategy between the state and private stakeholders is paramount. Any discord can stymie the proposed solutions' success.

Resource Allocation: Investments in training, technology, and feedback mechanisms require substantial financial backing. Prioritizing

these in the face of competing demands will be a challenge.

To overcome the gap, it would be good to consider a number of recommendations:

a. **Government & Industry Collaboration:** Unified strategies can enhance project management. Emphasize the role of public-private partnerships in fostering quality project management.

b. **Competitive Compensation:** Ensure competitive pay packages to attract and retain the best talent in project management.

c. **Boost Training Programs:** Increase training centers and international partnerships to equip project managers with world-class practices.

d. **Public Awareness:** Educate the public about the significance of quality project management, promoting better standards and accountability.

Azerbaijan's construction landscape is poised for remarkable growth. To harness this potential and ensure projects are completed efficiently, addressing the lacuna in skilled project management is paramount. By incorporating global best practices, leveraging advanced technological tools, and instilling robust feedback mechanisms, the nation can elevate its project management capabilities to global standards.

Empirical data and case studies underscore the urgent need for intervention. The future beckons with promise, and with concerted efforts, Azerbaijan can transform its project management narrative, ensuring infrastructure projects are synonymous with excellence and efficiency.

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