

Talk on 'The Role of Project Management in Promoting Transparency'



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THE Project Management Technical Division (PMTD) of the Institution of Engineers, Malaysia, organised the above talk on 29 October 2011 at Wisma IEM. The talk, attended by 80 participants, was delivered by Ir. Ali Askar bin Sher Mohamad, a former Senior Lecturer at the College of Engineering, UNITEN, who is now attached to the Sustainable Energy Development Authority of Malaysia (SEDA).

According to Ir. Ali Askar, cases of collapsing stadiums and cracked highways have called into question the role of project managers in executing projects. At the same time, Variation Orders have become a constant issue in many government-related projects, and this has contributed to budgets being exceeded and delays in the schedule. Instead of incurring a penalty, the late delivery of a project often benefits the contractor.

Project management provides an effective monitoring-evaluation – a control function throughout the project lifecycle to prevent the abuse of power by the project manager and his team. Project documentation beginning from the Project Plan to Project Audit and Termination, is critical to prevent false claims and justify penalties for non-performance by the contractor.

There are five main processes in a project's phases. Ir. Ali Askar explained the meaning of each process, namely, 'Defining' (the defining phase sets the scope of the project), 'Planning' (determining resources, developing a schedule and budget for the project), 'Executing' (coordinating and guiding project team members to get the work done), 'Controlling' (monitoring project progress) and 'Closing' (acceptance of the deliverables and concluding the operation).

In addition, the speaker also posed questions to the audience on the transparency in project management under the topic of Frequent Variation Orders and Delays. Some of the pertinent questions were:

- Was the scope properly defined in the plan?
- Did the client frequently change his mind?
- Was there proper authorisation and documentation for the change?
- Was the schedule underestimated?
- Were the delays properly documented?
- Was there any determination of responsibility for the delay?
- Was the party responsible given a warning, etc.?
- Was LAD charged due to project delay?

Subsequently, through the control of change and scope creep, the scope change process, monitoring and controlling the project, and tracking its progress can be measured. The speaker advised to go back to basics, as monitoring of projects is essential for the evaluation and control of the project. Evaluation and control are the opposites of project selection and planning:

- The logic of project selection determines the components to be evaluated.
- Details of planning determine the elements to be controlled.

Project information systems are used to monitor project progress, costs, performance and other related parameters. The use of well-designed graphical representations is a valuable aid to understand the concept of monitoring by setting up a monitoring system.

The planning-monitoring-controlling cycle explains that a project can be controlled using four key items:

1. Cost or budget variances
2. Time or schedule variances
3. Performance or specifications
4. Risk

Lastly, the speaker deliberated on the data collection, information needs and the reporting process, report types and Traffic Signal or Stoplight Reports.

The talk concluded with guidelines on how project managers can promote transparency simply by applying the well-known principles of project management.

To ensure transparency, it is essential to have a proper and accurate Project Plan, execute the project as planned, monitor the project progress, document all scope changes, and determine and document responsibility for cost and schedule overruns as the project progresses.



Participants listening to the talk



Ir. Ali Askar receiving an IEM memento from Ir. Noor Iziddin at the end of the talk

During the Q&A session, Ir. Ali Askar responded to questions raised by the participants related to promoting transparency. The talk ended within the allotted time, in accordance with the principle of timely delivery. At the end of the talk, Ir. Ali Askar received a certificate of appreciation and a memento from the Session Chairman Ir. Noor Iziddin. ■