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Removing Obstacles From Facilities Projects **Understanding where an organization is, and where it intends to go, is step one in providing the optimum results expected of any facility decision.**

By Paul Ziek

The goal of a successful facilities project is to enhance the mission of the organization it houses. Like all projects, the basic tenants of project management principles must be utilized and married with organizational insight and facilities experience. Just as any individual may require different housing throughout different periods of their life, so too, does any organization. Understanding where an organization is, and where it intends to go, is step one in providing the optimum results expected of any facility decision.

Realizing the most favorable location, image, flexibility, efficiency, and use of capital from a facility decision requires an army of experienced professionals working in concert with an organization. It is the role of the Chief Project Officer to facilitate the respective roles of professionals involved and assure that they have the tools they need to achieve success.

Since many facility projects can be significant in size and cost (involving hundreds of professionals and millions of dollars), the Chief Project Officer's importance in identifying and eliminating operational obstacles to success can be vital.

When approaching a facilities project, a myriad of factors must be considered beyond typical work plans and schedules. These could include such things as weather, local, state and federal government legislature,

labor conditions, and market fluctuations. Since many organizations maintain little or no in-house design, architectural, or construction expertise, they often find themselves facing complex project challenges that they are unable to efficiently address. Obviously this is a dangerous position that all of us recognize as a precursor to project failure.

Case Study: New York Post

For more than sixty years, the New York Post printed and distributed the eighth largest newspaper in the U.S. from the southern tip of NYC. By the late 1990s, the plant and obsolete equipment began to impair its ability to compete in the market; thus a plan to upgrade was initiated. The New York Post decided to bring on-line a new state-of-the-art one-half million square foot plant strategically located in the Bronx.

The parameters of the schedule demanded a 'swat team' approach while assembling the appropriate architects, engineers, equipment manufacturers, sub-contractors, vendors and New York Post staffers to be dedicated to the project. The massive amount of tasks to be coordinated in all areas of design, construction, and equipment commissioning and training demanded that any potential obstacles to progress be identified and resolved quickly.

This was accomplished through strategic and tactical lines of attack. As milestones were established, contingency plans were developed to address unexpected delays and alternatives were constantly being refined and updated. During this particular project, goals were achieved while encountering such obstacles as 9/11; a citywide crack down on the movement of tainted soil; custom built equipment having been destroyed in a fire; and building trade union slow-downs.

Furthermore, after benchmarking similar plants of the same size and technology, utilization was determined to be more than dozens of staff electricians, engineers and machinists, two to three times as many as the New York Post and thus a major obstacle. The company didn't want to increase the

staff dramatically but rather build the departments gradually. After all, there are many factors to consider during a move of this magnitude, the least of which being the year's worth of training that was required to operate the new equipment.

The New York Post didn't know what the optimum staff would be therefore temporary contractors were hired to do normal operating and preventative maintenance. The New York Post staff would work along side droves of trained experts to run the HVAC, electrical, press, inserting and mailroom equipment until such time the New York Post could evaluate the current staff and determine the proper needs that were required.

Case Study: Chicago Sun-Times

In 2001, Hollinger International, parent to the Chicago Sun-Times, sold their share of a real estate joint venture at North Wabash Avenue to Trump International. Following an exhaustive real estate search, the Chicago Sun-Times chose to move into the Apparel Center, a Merchandise Mart Property adjacent to the world famous trade show and office building.

Although the space required major renovation, its 82,000 square foot floor plate proved to be the most efficient layout available in the area. Making this particular project additionally unique (besides the 10 month schedule) was the fact that the Apparel Center was performing base building work at the same time the Chicago Sun-Times was building office space. The Apparel Center was transitioning from a windowless display space to a modern office facility.

As a result, there were several sets of vendors working in the same space. Separate sets of architects, general contractors, tradesmen and technicians for both the Apparel Center and the Chicago Sun-Times. Establishing a win-win situation in such a project is easy to say and difficult to do, particularly with so many different groups involved.

Consequently, the Sun-Times project team had to accomplish the project according to the spirit of the goals rather than the letter of each contract. Coordination was key; there couldn't be "too many cooks in the kitchen". Give and take between the droves of contractors was vital. The specs required for base building renovations were accommodated without hesitation. After all, it is mandatory for the foundation of any office space to be secure. Everything was done in concert with the ultimate goal of making the move deadline without sacrificing quality.

Conclusion

A successful facility project is never an accident. Rather it is the result of intelligent planning, innovation, flexibility and the implementation of expert skills. In this environment, talent and know-how is not the only important factor of a team, but also the temperament to work in a fast and frenzied atmosphere is also required. Obstacles can substantially set a project back, as they often deplete valuable time, energy and excitement from the team. Put simply, it is up to the project managers to make sure that there are no obstacles or impediments.

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