

Building and construction trends from a quantity surveyor perspective

 By [Larry Feinberg](#)

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The built environment is often thought of in terms of only its visible results: buildings, roads, bridges, dams, and so on. A group of lesser-known construction professionals, however, work together for quite some time even before the first brick is laid.



Image source: www.pexels.com

One of these professions is the quantity surveyor – experts trained specifically in the complexities of built environment finance. The quantity surveyor is responsible for ensuring that a client receives value for their money during both the construction phase and the entire lifecycle of the building, road, bridge, dam, etc.

The profession has over the past two years been challenged by a number of changes in the macro environment. 2018 will be the year that quantity surveyors – and other professions in the built environment – create and adopt solutions that secure their relevance and is to the long term benefit of the entire country.

New accepted model for calculating professional fees

Economic and political turmoil affect those involved in the less visible work just as much as those responsible for doing the on-site building, as they traditionally derive their fees from a percentage of the total project budget.

In 2015 the Competition Commission, however, ruled against this practice, and the fee calculation model has been in a state of flux since then. With economic pressure that is not forecasted to lift anytime soon, built environment professionals will have to settle on a method that embraces the calculation of fees based on time spent and value offered, rather than offering ever-increasing discounts from a scale of fees that has become irrelevant.

Regulated appointment of quantity surveyors to infrastructure projects

The Association for South African Quantity Surveyors (ASAQS) has been advocating the appointment of a professional team – regulated by relevant professional bodies – to all public infrastructure projects that are awarded through tender.

This will contribute to the reduction of irregular and wasteful expenditure, as these professionals will be regulated by the codes of conduct they signed with their respective professional bodies.

The codes of conduct provide recourse to private citizens that become aware of professionals that are involved in suspicious practices. Claims of misconduct can be investigated by the relevant professional body and disciplinary measures can be implemented. This will help a great deal in ensuring that public infrastructure spend is applied to the benefit of the greater South African public.

Wider adoption of technologies in line with digital innovation

With the first 3D printed building a reality in Dubai already more than a year old, traditional ways of designing, planning, costing, managing and constructing projects are officially obsolete. These traditional practices however still form the basis of the majority of professional service offerings in the built environment.

Building information modelling (BIM) is still considered the new kid on the block and is already revolutionising the manner in which a professional team now collaborates and completes build projects.

The basket of services that a registered professional quantity surveyor should be offering clients must change. As important as bills of quantities are, it should not be viewed as the be all and end all of services offered by a quantity surveyor. Life cycle costing, value management towards savings and operational efficiency, and advice on sustainable building practices, methodologies, and materials are just some of the many additional valuable services that should be available to clients.

When the personal computer was first being absorbed into the built environment, critics were quick to point out that it would be the end of the professional team that work behind the scenes. All of those professions are however alive and well and will remain so, as long as they accept that the responsibility to chase relevance and adapt to environmental and technological changes is theirs alone.

ABOUT LARRY FEINBERG

Larry Feinberg is currently the executive director of the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors (ASAQs), a voluntary association for the membership of quantity surveyors.

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