

# THE POWER TO TRANSFORM

Project management is helping Bangladesh change its future.

BY S.K. KHOR, PMP

Though right next door to the emerging economic force of India, Bangladesh remains one of the poorest countries in the world. But some residents are looking to project management to help take the country to the next level. On a recent visit to Dhaka, the country's capital, I saw people aiming to improve the way projects are initiated, planned and managed—which can be quite a challenge.

Project management in Bangladesh is very unique, as most projects are largely dependent on the availability of financing. The completion date is secondary and is often deferred based on the availability of funds. The environment has indirectly affected the thinking of many managers handling projects and some of them believe it is all right to shift target dates and derail the entire schedule.

The perception of the project manager role in Bangladesh is also often different than what's found in more established markets.

"When I worked as a project manager outside of Bangladesh, I had to assume all responsibilities for project activities and was accountable on the success or failure of the project," says Razif Yahya, PMP, assistant general manager at mobile communications company AKTEL.

But in Bangladesh, "many of the critical decisions are left to higher management or, in some cases, the project sponsors," he explains. "It may be a few weeks, if not months, before they respond, but this duration is typically not factored in any project schedule or cannot be factored in due to political reasons. This, in a way, has created a 'flexible dateline' culture, which is against *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*."

Project managers also have to oversee operational matters, Mr. Yahya says, which leads to "confusion of roles and responsibilities" and adds to the schedule overruns.

## Force of Nature

Along with all the other scheduling risks, project managers in Bangladesh must contend with civil unrest, curfews and environmental disasters, Mr. Yahya adds.



"It will rain continuously for three months, usually in June to August," he says. "In planning long-duration projects, this has to be taken into account as risk. Following that, we have to prepare for the event of cyclone attacks or flood. This will definitely impact the project scope, cost and time."

It's not uncommon for these factors to delay a pilot project, which is then relaunched—stuck in "forever pilot" mode, he says.

Project management education at the university level and training will help build the necessary knowledge, but it's just beginning to establish itself. The Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification, for example, is still new in Bangladesh.

Mr. Yahya says it's important to have trained professionals whose judgments stakeholders or sponsors will trust. Once that faith is gained, project managers will be empowered—and help Bangladesh build its future. PM

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