

Greater need for quantity surveying than ever

By  Larry Feinberg

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The construction industry has always been cyclic, enjoying a boom for several consecutive years only to face a slump afterwards. Eventually, things pick up again. South Africa's last upward cycle ended around 2010 in step with the global economic crisis. Since then, quantity surveyors have been feeling the pinch. Unfortunately, this trend looks set to continue into 2017.



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Value enablers

However, quantity surveyors have always been value enablers in the construction industry. In 2017 they should strive to promote the results they produce, not just their technical capabilities. In a down economy, investors hope to do more with less and the quantity surveyors are in a prime position to help them reach that goal. The price of their services are easily offset by the cost savings achieved from their advice on sensible construction choices, such as cost-effective substitutes or avenues for realising lower building life cycle costs. So quantity surveyors can thrive, but they will need to work harder to build awareness of the value they add.

Another notable trend for 2017 is the Construction Sector Charter Council's revised construction sector codes. The new codes are designed to bring the industry in line with the black economic empowerment and transformation targets set by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). While the codes are still open for comment, quantity surveying firms should familiarise themselves to ensure they are prepared in the coming year.

Technology is only a tool

Technologies available to the quantity surveyor appear set to continue developing in line with other industries. Various software packages exist for quantity surveying and they should make the most of suitable technologies. Automation of repetitive tasks brings greater efficiency, resulting in faster service and higher profits. However, technology is only a tool and cannot replace sound business advice, solve problems or suggest alternatives.

The #FeesMustFall movement has called into question whether or not 2017 will suffer a skills gap due to a lack of graduates. We've yet to see how this will affect quantity surveying. However, the construction industry is a cornerstone of the South African economy. The government is well aware of the talent required to keep it strong and there's a huge drive to develop

skills in all fields. So the expectation is that there will be sufficient expertise next year.

Protecting our future

In the past, green buildings were assumed to cost nearly 60% more than traditional ones. But a recent study by ASAQS, the Green Building Council of South Africa and the University of Pretoria, using data from 54 green star-certified office buildings around the country, shows that costs actually average around 5% and may drop as low as 1.1%. That's a small price to pay for protecting our future. In 2017, quantity surveyors should take the initiative and recommend sustainable building practices and materials.

While the forecast for 2017 isn't ideal, there is a greater need for quantity surveying than ever. By leveraging every opportunity and promoting their cost-cutting guile, quantity surveyors will thrive.

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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