

FIG Changing the game

How to sustain a fast developing profession: Lessons from Kuala Lumpur

Chee Hai Teo PPISM FISM FRICS MAALS MIS (Aust),
Licensed/Chartered Surveyor, Association of Authorised Land Surveyors Malaysia

THE SURVEYING AND MAPPING PROFESSION in Malaysia has recently held a series of public private consultations. The move stems from a number of factors including:

- Surveying is facing multiple challenges, including an ever-accelerating rate of change.
- Surveying is focusing on crisis management instead of planning how to strategically respond to present and future challenges.
- The emphasis on rebranding and marketing is becoming a do-or-die necessity because of increasing complexity of the global marketplace.
- The critical need to create and maintain a viable and sustainable industry.

Public private consultation

As part of the government's commitment to 'Malaysia Inc', central government agencies were advised to establish consultative panels that brought together relevant stakeholders. The Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia established such a panel at the turn of the millennium, comprising representatives from the department, the Land Surveyors Board and the Association of Authorised Land Surveyors Malaysia.

During its early years, the panel established a select strategic planning committee to answer three questions:

- What does the surveying and mapping industry stand for?
- What kind of industry should the surveying and mapping profession seek to be over the longer term?
- What short-term, mid-term and long-term objectives will help the profession fulfil its role?

Core purposes

One outcome of the consultation was the realisation of the profession's core purposes:

- Ensuring surveying's relevance in national development.
- Maintaining an invaluable presence in the marketplace.
- Advancing its influence in policy decisions and advocacy on matters that impact the profession.

This led to a vision for the future of:

- A cohesive community of professionals with clarity of purpose, direction and accountability, unified in its agreement on strategic initiatives and priorities, armed with an unfailing discipline to follow through.
- Professionals who demonstrate increasing ability to anticipate and adapt effectively to the future.
- An innovation-driven infrastructure that enhances access to comprehensive information through a wide range of technology and facilities.

The mission

The underlying philosophy about surveying's existence is that it is 'mission-based'. To enhance the relevancy of surveying, it is necessary to meet buyer expectations. Surveying service providers can be categorised into four types; vendors, specialists, total solution providers and game changers. Surveyors need to identify which quadrant of service provider category they belong to; the following characteristics relate to buyer expectations:

Vendors

Because of their low potential value, customers buying offerings from vendors do not normally want to spend much time or energy in the purchasing process

— all they want is an offering of acceptable quality, one that is easy to buy and at a low price. All things being seen as equal, the lowest price always wins.

Specialists

Because the specialist has unique capabilities, the customer expects best-in-class services. Since there are very few providers of these services, the customer is always wary of being taken advantage of. Customers do not mind paying a premium for these services (they have to have them), but they are always concerned about not having the services available when they need them. Hence, the customer is always looking for other options to meet their specific needs.

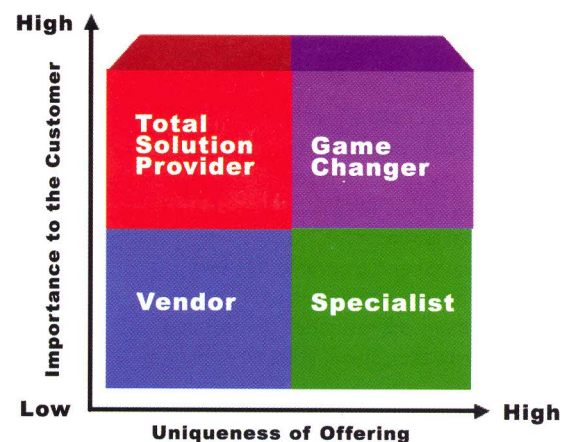
Total solution provider

When buying from a total solution provider, the purchase is high visibility (and high risk to the backers of the selected services provider). First on the list of expectations is reliability — the sign of assurance that the services will be provided, followed by the fact that the client would want the solution to work. However (and although they will seldom admit it) clients are not looking for the very best answers, otherwise they would have handpicked a team of diverse specialists required to do the job.

Game changers

Customers expect only one thing from game changers; innovative answers that positively impact business performance. These service providers can do what they say they will do.

A client's (be it the government, multinational corporation or individual) philosophy on their approach to purchasing, is also dependent on the service provider.



The four types of service providers.

When buying from vendors, the strategy is always to shop around for the best deal. An important consideration here, though, is that not much time will be spent.

When purchasing from specialists, the buying strategy is to continually investigate other potential suppliers and substitute services.

When considering purchasing from total solution providers, there are always at least two or three businesses that clients feel can do the job adequately. Since there are only minor areas of uniqueness, once the shortlist is finalised, the buying strategy is to negotiate – offer better terms, toss in a few more services or lower the cost a bit.

When critical business issues are at stake, customers will aggressively try and partner with those they see as game changers, as they realise that organisations with these capabilities are few and far between. They will pay just about anything (within reason) to get a 'world class' job.

The surveying profession's mission then is to ensure that surveyors are endowed with the best chances of success to evolve from vendor-type service providers to those of game changers who provide the highest quality professional services, enjoy a high degree of confidence from the public, demonstrate continuing trust and collaboration, seek to continuously improve communication between and amongst industry players, and demonstrate unmatched knowledge, skills, and abilities in meeting the expectations of clients and consumers.

Present realities

A quick glance of the near and distant future landscape paints a picture of competitive pressures that demand both efficiency and effectiveness. Surveying will need to come to terms with the business imperative of adapting with increasing speed to market pressures and innovations. The traditional approach of maintaining individual enterprises that perform a limited array of capabilities, has paved the way for new initiatives involving the establishment of dynamic networks of multidisciplinary capabilities. In this arena, joint efforts are focused on collective branding, niche service offerings and pooling funds to finance rapid expansion and pursue business opportunities.

WHO'S INVOLVED?

The Association of Authorised Land Surveyors Malaysia was formed in 1979 and membership is restricted to surveyors registered by the Land Surveyors Board who possess an annual licence to practise.

The Land Surveyors Board, enacted by an Act of Parliament in 1958, is one of the oldest professional regulatory authorities in Malaysia, tasked with the control and regulation of licensed land surveyors and to provide leadership in the upholding and advancement of the survey and mapping profession.

The Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia, from its humble beginning as a survey department in the state of Johore in 1885, is now the national survey and mapping agency with a mission to enhance quality in surveying and mapping services. Its core function includes advising the government in the fields of cadastral surveying and mapping, state and international boundaries and publishing maps.

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Globalisation and technological change, coupled with deregulation and changing consumer demographics, have created another new competitive reality. Technological innovations are transferring from one industry to another and across international borders at increasing speed.

The global economy is witnessing the increasing trend of adaptive and agile enterprises placing high value on alternative strategies like outsourcing, partnering and communication with international network organisations.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is calling for the free flow of services within its member countries, and its impending framework arrangement for the mutual recognition of surveying qualifications is a current reality that the profession must not only recognise but embrace.

Game changers

There are a number of strategic thrusts for the way forward. The first will spearhead the attainment of the desired future by:

- Helping vendor professionals to change the way they do business and gear themselves towards the specialists market with enhanced business and management competencies.
- Helping specialist professionals to advance their core competencies and expand their capabilities in order to offer total solution provider-type services via synergistic networks.
- Helping both vendor and specialist professionals to aim for excellence in people development and involvement (relating to the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Business Excellence Model), while specialists should be helped in developing partnerships.

The second strategic thrust has a product development emphasis for total solution providers to enhance their marketplace acumen and expand their unique professional capabilities; especially in the area of utilising technology innovation. Total solution providers are encouraged to gear themselves towards continuous learning, innovation and improvement, customer focus and partnership development (again with emphasis on the EFQM model), thus moving towards achieving the long-term objectives of competitive positioning and technological leadership. Additionally, human capital development and impetus for innovation need to be addressed.

Strategic thrust-3 paves the way for game changer professionals to look forward to concentrated growth, where they can equip themselves with the knowledge, expertise and skills to compete nationally, regionally and internationally. Again, business excellence promotes capabilities and opportunities in partnership development and involvement, people development and involvement, continuous learning, innovation and improvement, management by processes and facts, leadership and consistency of purpose, customer focus and results orientation.

Facing reality

Despite the overall reputation of being one of the oldest professions, the surveying and mapping industry is in fact at a 'growth' stage; especially when considering the increasing number of professionals in the marketplace, as well as the increasing and extensive application of surveying and mapping technologies in