

Consulting Services

By

KHWAJA AZEEMUDDIN

Consulting Services have a very short history which dates back no further than World War II. Before this, the bulk of engineering projects were being taken care of by Government Organisations. Two factors are in my opinion largely responsible for the rapid growth of this profession since the war, one, the recent advancement in design and construction techniques and, two, the provision of large scale aid to developing countries.

2. Specialisation in techniques advanced at a fast pace, whilst the number of specialists at any one time, was small, the demand for their services grew day-by-day. Governments could not attract such specialists to their service at the normal scales of salary. Nor did Governments find it economical to recruit a band of high salaried specialists and keep them fully occupied. They felt that it was best to draw upon private consulting houses for specific assignments as and when the situation so required.

3. The second factor which is responsible for the growth of this profession stems from the conditions which countries who are better off attach to the aid which they offer to us, of the developing countries. The technical assistance such countries provide normally takes the character of offer of services of consulting houses both for design and supervision of projects sponsored under aid programmes.

4. The history of this profession in Pakistan is still shorter. A few Architects and Engineers did ply this profession in their individual capacity but there was no consulting house as such till as late as 1958, when I established the Associated Consulting Engineers (ACE) Ltd.

5. As is well known, I am an old Government servant who passed many years of life in the service of the community, making my modest contribution in the field of engineering. I had the honour to serve under and to be associated with some of the great names in this subcontinent in the field of engineering. I naturally learned to hold my head high as an engineer. But soon things were to change and a decline to set in the status and the prestige of Pakistani Engineers, not because they were not conversant with their profession but because Authority had ceased to have confidence in their professional ability and had begun to look to foreign engineers for help and guidance. It was also forgotten that foreigners could not possibly acquire that intimate

knowledge of local conditions which enables engineers to judge what is best suited to the capabilities of local labour, local material, local talent, factors which are of considerable importance in the organization and implementation of engineering projects.

6. Foreign consultants tend to introduce practices prevalent in their own countries under completely different economic conditions. As a result an impression has been created that works, carried out by manual labour, not only takes time to complete but are costly. Indeed, this impression has gained such strength that soon Pakistan almost forgot how to utilise its biggest asset, its manpower resources, for its developmental projects. Within an amazingly short period of time, even Pakistani engineers began to believe that without heavy mechanical equipment nothing worthwhile could be achieved.

7. China has exploded this theory. Many gigantic projects have been completed in China without the use of any heavy mechanical equipment and that in less than a quarter of the time taken for similar projects in other countries with the help of the maximum use of mechanical equipment. As regards economics, I have no desire to enter into any controversy and to try to prove that one method is cheaper than the other. But I do wish to point out that in one case almost 75% of the money spent goes out of the country, in the shape of purchase price of equipment, spares, and fuel oil etc. etc., and in the other case more than 75% of the money goes back to the people in the country, providing them with employment and improving their economic conditions. And I must add, this system of using our indigenous resources reduces appreciably the dependence of Pakistan on foreign countries.

8. The second aspect of this practice is that it has turned Pakistan engineers into mere onlookers. No country in the world can develop a sound economy unless it possesses competent engineering talent in which it places its full confidence. I can say from my personal experience that not long ago at World Congresses of Engineers eminent foreigners have spoken highly of Pakistan as being "the cradle of barrages and canal irrigation". Even after the creation of Pakistan, our engineers have built barrages and canals. Yet today no Pakistani engineer is considered qualified either to design or construct a barrage or a large canal.

9. In 1958 I decided to step down from the security of Government service and start a consulting house in order primarily to prove that Pakistani talent is in no way inferior to the very best anywhere. ACE began its career in February 1958 devoting its initial energies to the public sector. In course of time, ACE extended its activities to the private sector, the industrial field,

feasibility studies, economic appraisals etc. etc., and also to inspections, analysis and testing. Today nearly seven years have passed since the fateful February. I can only claim modest success within Pakistan. A prophet, they say, is not honoured in his own country. So it appears to be the case with engineers in Pakistan.

10. In foreign countries like Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Ghana and Somalia where ACE had opportunities to show its worth, it definitely earned greater appreciation. Indeed it made a name for Pakistan. The day is not far off, I fervently hope, when full recognition will be given here to the work of Pakistani consulting houses and Pakistani engineers. A big awakening is underway in the country and the wisdom of employing foreign consultants on this vast scale and is widely questioned.

11. It is most appropriate, in the circumstances, that the Seminar should be taking place now. You will forgive me if I take advantage of the occasion to share my experience with you and tell you a few home truths.

12. I would like my professional friends to avoid some of the pitfalls we face in ACE. First and foremost I would ask you, in the initial stages to touch and tackle no project which you do not feel yourself competent to defend before the severest critic local or foreign. You should direct your pioneering efforts to build up a reputation for soundness in a particular branch of activity and only later, when you have consolidated your position, extend the scope of your activities.

13. There is another difficulty which consulting houses have to face. We in Pakistan are not as happily placed as our colleagues in USA or in Europe. In these regions consulting houses normally draw upon the large reservoirs of experienced engineers available, after works have been secured by them. Not so in Pakistan where our resources in trained, young engineers are limited and availabilities in the open market sharply restricted. We have to recruit such talent as is available and to train it to shoulder new responsibilities of consultants. Having trained such personnel we have to, whether work is offering or no, to retain it not only out of necessity and business prudence but also on account of a sense of fellowship. Pakistani consulting houses should therefore be prepared to shoulder additional financial burdens out of their meagre income.

14. There is one more thought I like to share with you. It is time that we of the Consulting Services get together and learn to live with one another. This means two things, one to refrain running down sister organisations just to secure work or for the pleasure of it and two, organize ourselves into an Association,

15. You will agree with me that the public image of the profession has suffered in Pakistan by self annihilating attacks on one another today in Pakistan and outside Pakistan. Let us pledge ourselves today neither to utter evil against one another nor to listen to it.

16. On the positive side it is time that an Association of Consulting Engineers was formed as in Europe or USA. This Association should draw rules and regulations and act as the watch dog of the interest of its members. Unless we get together the tendency both in Government and Private Sector to pitch one consultant against the other in respect of their fees will continue to grow and result in serious and permanent damage to the ethics of the profession. In order to ensure that new comers are not barred it is incumbent on the older organisations to see that there is reasonable sharing of business. "Live, let live and live together" should be our motto.