

How to qualify and evaluate the emerging sustainability management and consulting profession

Initial Indicators

If you have already arrived at that point where you are beginning to question effectiveness, chances are it's a sign something might be wrong. The challenge is that the risk indicators that caught your attention may not necessarily be the direct fault of your sustainability manager. There are many potential sources from which issues can appear in the development process, and all need to be understood and evaluated.

From our personal experience, we would have to say the single most problematic issue is the requirements being clearly understood and communicated. It is all too familiar for a proposal request to say one thing or be entirely vague with regards to a scope of work outline, the Client later explain it another way, and the architect and design team understand it differently yet. It is also not uncommon to confuse roles of commissioning agent, sustainability manager, engineer, etc. The growing demand for the introduction of sustainability into projects has left many confused about who should be doing what, when and how; hence a review of apples to oranges proposals and qualifications.

Sustainability Manager Qualifications

In a nutshell, effectiveness is a function of the sustainability manager's technical knowledge, practical experience, management skills, and communication abilities. A process that enables you to evaluate all of these factors is a critical part of the experience you will have on your project. It is also important to fully research precedents for scopes of services that are unfamiliar to you so that you can conduct a search of candidates capable of meeting or exceeding your needs. You can't fully assess how to meet your needs if the services of your consultants are complete mysteries to you.

Performance Evaluation

The evaluation of a sustainability process can also be tricky because so much is based on the knowledge of the individual developing the methods. For example, a LEED compliance review is a critical component of determining if a project is documented and designed as required. However, as obvious as this might sound, this evaluation method cannot be used by someone who isn't experienced with LEED (which is different from being familiar).

Some Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that you may want to consider:

- Is the overall attitude of the sustainability manager positive? Does it seem like he/she enjoys the job? *FYI- 99 % of us really love what we do. This is a profession driven by passion before profit for most.*
- How quickly does he (she) grasp the requirements of a project and to communicate it to others? Has he/she clearly outlined their understanding of the scope of services to be performed with associated deliverables?
- During the requirements gathering phase does the sustainability manager ask probing questions to help identify true needs? If not the scope of the project may change as design evolves.
- Has the sustainability manager demonstrated the capacity and resources to fulfill the project requirements?
- Are the requirements thoroughly documented before design begins?
- Does the sustainability manager present a clear plan of how the process will proceed? Does this include an understandable estimate of the number of hours and/or weeks the scope of services will take by phase of project and when it should be complete?
- Is progress being demonstrated throughout every phase of the project?
- Are the estimates for hours and delivery dates you were given being met by the team and the sustainability manager? If not, then why not?
- How are shortcomings being evaluated? Why did they occur? Are they being communicated?
- Do you review the progress at each phase of the project to determine if something could have been improved?
- Does the process work the way you intended it? Do you understand enough about the process at this point to suggest improvements? Would recommendations be minor or major?