Practical Training Report 2013

CON3023X

10/30/2013

Thato Seetelo
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Terms of reference
The Department of Construction Economics and Management has instructed all Construction Studies students at the University of Cape Town to undertake in practical training. These instructions are given in the year of registration. Students are to partake in practical training during their vacation time. They are then required to document and present the practical training in a report. We are required to complete 12 weeks, over the 3 year undergraduate program, and the report is to be finished and handed in by 31st October, in the year of graduation.

Summary
This report entails my practical training experience (CON3023X). It is a description of the construction activities I got exposed to and the skills acquired. The main purpose is to highlight the lessons learnt with specific reference to course outcomes. Having worked on other projects, this experience has added value and further more broadened my scope with regards to the Quantity Surveying profession and construction as a whole. I now understand the importance of practical training and why experience in field is of great value.
Introduction

Subject of and Motivation for report
This report entails the 5 weeks spent on site, in the construction of Craddlestone Mall in Krugersdorp. This is project undertaken by Aveng Grinaker-Lta, to the value of R850,000,000 (Eight hundred and fifty million rands). I was on this site exactly a year ago, therefore this opportunity allowed for more exposure as more trades are being handled.

Background to Investigation
The site is located in Roodepoort (Johannesburg) and undertaken by Aveng Grinaker-Lta. The company is constructing a shopping mall worth R890 million and the duration is 18 months. The Architects working on this building are Bentel Associates and the Structural Engineers, Sutherland. This site is divided into 5 different zones, and the team consists of 9 (nine) Quantity Surveyors, 4 (four) Site engineers and 2 (two) Site Managers. Zone 1-4 are the shops and 5 the parking lot. The project has been divided into the different zones, and therefore, all five zones are at different stages of construction.

The construction started in March 2012 and is due to be completed in October 2013. At this stage of the project, the contractor (Aveng) is running behind schedule and this is as result of the Subcontractors and the contractor’s labour force.

Objectives of report
The objectives of the report are therefore to:

- Produce detailed, descriptive diary of the work experience during the practical training.
- Evaluate lessons/or skills learnt during practical training, with specific reference to course outcomes.

Plan of development
This report begins with weekly diary inputs, detailing activities I partook in throughout the weeks, as well as the highlights in this learning experience. This is followed by an evaluation of issues dealt with in the classroom, and the relevance to the industry.
Week 1: (10 June – 14 June 2013)

In the previous year (2012), I worked on the same site. It was 3 months into the project, and so very little work had been done. Although the site is split into five different zones, and they were all on different phases of construction, the only work done was foundations and. In Zone 5 (five), which is the parking lot, construction of superstructure columns had begun, and that’s the furthest the project was. Because of this, I was only exposed to foundation work and in essence, structural framework. There was very little work to be done, and as result, the team of Quantity Surveyors consisted of only 3 (three). Being back now on the same site, 15 (fifteen) months into the project, a lot of progress has been made and the site is a lot busier.

The construction team has expanded, with the site occupying 9 (nine) Quantity Surveyors; 4 (four) Site Engineers and 2 (two) Site Managers. The Project Managers were still on site, and I also found that, the weekly meetings with the Client and the Architects still took place.

Adjusting wasn’t hard, as there were familiar faces. In this first week, I got given tasks such as counting the breakings for wiring in the different shops. This helped me get acquainted with the site, as well as orientation. I also got to meet the Foremen and Site Engineers responsible for the respective zones.

I had dealt with Contra charges previously, and knew how to about them. I was then as result tasked to update the records of Contra’s, so that the necessary claims can be made to the relevant Subcontractors. On this site, we have Domestic, Selected and Labour only Subcontractors. Material is therefore provided for the Labour only Subcontractors. In the case where the Domestic Subcontractors use the Contractor’s material or tools, it is recorded, as a Contra Charge. The Subcontractors are then required to pay this amount back, the Contractor therefore deducts this from they’re payment certificate.

It has been about 6 (six) weeks since the Contra’s have been updated. How it works is that, the material and tools store keeps requisition, and at the beginning of each week, this gets sent to the Quantity Surveyor’s office. It then gets input on an excel spreadsheet and processed accordingly. This kept me busy for the rest of the week.
Week 2 (17 – 21 June 2013)

I learnt that the Labour-Only Subcontractors get paid every fortnight. In this week, I was asked to help with these payments, for the Masonry work. As mentioned, the site is divided into 5 (five) zones, with the Quantity Surveyors split between the Zones. For the Masonry, a number of Subcontractors had undertaken the job; it then made it tricky when making payments. How it works is that, the Quantity Surveyor walks on site with a representative of the Subcontractor and the contracts foreman, identifying the work that has been done in the past two weeks, which they then get paid for. The conflict came when the Subcontractor’s representative wasn’t present on these walks, and as result would over claim. It works a lot better when they are present, and all three parties agree on the work that has been done, and therefore no expectation of being paid more than what has been agreed on.

Granted, the site is quite big, although I wondered why there was a large number of Subcontractors. I soon learnt that, in having the Subcontractors, there’s less responsibility on the main contractor in terms of deadlines and ensuring that the work force is efficient at all times. In this way, the contractor’s responsibility is to remunerate the Subcontractors, and in turn, the work is completed on time at no extra cost to the main contractor.

The Site Manager has meetings with the team every morning, usually very brief. It’s in these that it is brought to our attention that at this stage, the project is running behind schedule, and one of the reasons has been our labour force. Although more labor is employed, we find that the workers are not efficient. We’ve had to be more vigilant when doing our walks on site, of the laborers that spend most of their time on site not actually working, with the occasional broom in their hands when they see us.

This raised another problem; that the project was making a loss, and not breaking even as anticipated. We then had to look at areas where we could cut down, or were over spending. This brought up the issue of cleaning. It seemed there were too many Subcontractors, cleaning on site, although the timing was off, as there was still construction work.

The tasks for this week allowed me to learn about more than the paperwork, but also dealing with unhappy Subcontractors. I learnt how to deal with conflict, in a way that still maintained a good work relationship.
Week 3 (25 – 29 June 2013)

I noticed a pattern in the office. Some weeks are busier than others, and this week is the busy. In this week, the team is compiling their claim from the client. How this is done, is that the progressive work is measured, and the previous month’s work is deducted from his, giving us the grand total to date.

The team is required to measure all the work done to date. This means that a lot of time is spent on site, assessing work completed. It also involves the Quantity Surveyor applying themselves and gauging where the work would be by the date of payment (30 June). I learnt that, it is at this stage that the Quantity Surveyors and the Site Engineers work quite closely, it is therefore important to maintain a good relationship.

One of the challenges is the Site Instructions. This is when the specification has changed, and drawings are amended. This often leads to more money being spent, in both breaking and making good or additional work. It is the responsibility of the Site Engineers and the Foreman to make notes of these, which are then passed on to the Quantity Surveyors, and the company can claim accordingly. Sometimes, this claim is not in monetary terms, but time wise as well.

I have been tasked with the Site Instructions on zone 3 (three). The process involves checking the Site Instruction book, the new drawings referred to and whether or not the work has been completed accordingly on site. In this month, Site Instructions are given on the steel. Having done structural steel in the first semester in Con3031W, this exercise proved to be exciting. I encountered a few problems being on site; firstly being female and secondly a student. It boiled down to making the decision to keep going anyway and eventually obtain the respect.

Long hours are spent in the office this week, which is something I wasn’t aware of. In the interim, I’m working on the Contra charges, ensuring that they’re up to date.
Week 4 (1 – 5 July 2013)

Payments have been made to the Subcontractors, and the claims have been made to the client. In this week, the report to head office is compiled. This comprises of costs in the previous month, and forecasts in the next month. This time of the month is quite stressful, as this is when we find out how the project is doing financially- loss or gain. The junior Quantity Surveyors are required to report on their respective zones, and give forecasts for the next month. Once this is done, it is handed over to the senior Quantity Surveyor, who then compiles it all in one document and presents the report to head office.

Although the work may seem tedious, I can appreciate the tools available. Measuring in office is not done manually; electronic tools such as OST are used, as well as Quick Scale. This makes it a lot easier to measure. Coffers can be counted in number, and the volume of one multiplied by the total number, depending on the section of work getting done.

Each week I help out where I can, and in this week, I had to measure the brick work done to date. Using Quick Scale, I upload the soft copy of the drawing and set it to scale. The work is initially measured in linear lengths, and then gets exported to an excel document, where I then input the lengths to get the total area. The work gets saved; I therefore need not worry about measuring complete at the time. Before I can actually start measuring, I need to know where the work has actually been done. So each morning, I take the drawings and walk on site, and mark of the work that is complete.

I have enjoyed this exercise; purely because it forced me to work with the rest of the team. I’ve never deemed the interaction between the Quantity Surveyors, Site Engineers and the Foremen to be of utmost importance. I have managed to keep it polite and professional, although now I do see how the roles serve the progression of the project.
Week 5 (8 – 12 July 2013)

This is my final week on site. The financial report has been handed in and it seems the project is not doing well. We’re making a loss and also running behind schedule. The Contracts Manager has now decided and sent out a memo, extending the work hours till completion of the project- 31ST October. Work hours are no longer 7am – 5pm; they are now 7am – 6pm. Other measures have been put in place, like the Foremen ensuring that their workers are on site till the set time. Another area of concern is the lunch breaks. We’ve found that the workers stop working and go on lunch at 11:30am, when lunch only starts at 12:00pm. Foremen have thus been called to be more vigilant.

The work set out for next semester for CON3031W, includes plumbing. I therefore took the opportunity to walk on site with the Quantity Surveyor and the representative for the Subcontractor; Kebble Plumbing. In the beginning, not much of it was making sense, but I soon caught on. I appreciated the exposure and later got tasked to measure the plumbing for the next payment. The description are set out, an so all that I had to was to take down lengths and count the number of fittings – also ensuring that the fittings in the respective shops have been fitted. The Quantity Surveyor did this as well, so we could check against each other. I learnt that plumbing is quite difficult measure, and so most Quantity Surveyors opt to set a provisional amount to it. I do agree that it can be very tedious and does require a lot of time, but this is the most accurate way of doing it.

I also completed the Contra Charges, and ensured that as of 12 July, it is up to date. I hadn’t had queries from the Subcontractors, with regards to the costs. Should there be any queries, there’s good record of the tools and materials that have been used. This exercise has also helped me get acquainted with the material. A lot of I knew in theory, but I for to see them and also got familiar with their prices.
Conclusion

This work experience has again, opened my eyes to far more than I could have imagine. While I can appreciate the class material/content, there are some things so valuable to the profession, which cannot be taught in class. I’ve learnt that experience is the best teacher in our field. What has stood out the most is more than the actual work, but the interaction with the people that we work with; the importance of the relationships and interpersonal skills.

This experience has forced me to assess my skills to this regard, and grow accordingly. It has taught me the importance of professionalism, and that it is a universal language. I have gotten a better glimpse of what my future entails in this profession.

Because of the stage of this project, I got exposed to a lot of aspects of construction. Shops such as Edgars, Woolworths and Game, got beneficial occupation- what is referred to on site as a ‘B.O’. This means that the owners can move into shop before the rest of the mall is completely done. This then gives them the opportunity to bring in their own interior designers, to fit the franchise. Having to chase after these deadlines did put some what pressure on the team, but they managed to get it right.

Overall, the experience has been of tremendous help. I understand the urge from Lecturers to spend time on site and actually do the practical training. It is of great benefit for academic purposes.
Submission Declaration

ANNEXURE B

PRACTICAL TRAINING

SUBMISSION DECLARATION

Summary of Submission

I hereby declare that I have checked that I am correctly registered for the appropriate practical training courses for 2013, and hereewith summarise the duration of my 2013 practical training submission:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Hours/Days/Weeks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CON1007X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON2013X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON3023X</td>
<td>5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON4035X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

I further declare that I have read the 2013 course handout for the practical training requirements for the Department of Construction Economics and Management, understand the contents and acknowledge what my obligations for 2013 are. By ticking the checklist, I confirm that I have adhered to the minimum submission requirements applicable for 2013.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer letter(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>e-portfolio</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com Build questionnaire</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL submission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submission declaration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com Build Blog</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com Build Letter</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Plagiarism Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own.

2. I have used the Harvard convention for citation and referencing. Each contribution to, and quotation in, this report from the work(s) of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and reference.

3. This report is my own work.

4. I have not allowed, and will not allow, anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

5. I acknowledge that copying someone else's assignment or essay, or part of it is wrong, and declare that this is my own work.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: 30/1/2013

Full Name of Student: Thato Seetela

Student Number: STLTHA005
REFERENCE: 0038/RDK/1810(1)

Attention: To whom it may concern 18 October 2013

Dear Sir / Me

CRADLESTONE MALL: THATO SEELETO

I had the pleasant opportunity to work with Ms Thato Seetelo for the period between June to July 2013.

As Student QS, she was assigned to assist the team of Junior Quantity surveyors & Quantity Surveyors with numerous tasks. These involved helping with measures for Labour only & Domestic subcontractor payments & forecasts, and helping to manage store requisitions for Contra charges.

She has shown potential for the future, and I would not mind working with her in the future.

Aveng Grinaker-LTA – Building Inland

Rudi de Kock
Senior Quantity Surveyor