

Green gets the go-ahead

Environmental awareness is the way to go in commercial buildings, writes **Cameron Cooper**

GREEN-COLLAR jobs are shaping as one bright spot in an industry coping with issues including climate change, emissions trading and the international financial crisis. The spotlight is switching to a new breed of specialist who understands and embraces sustainable design and development.

Green buildings, once seen as marginal and expensive to construct, are in. Energy-sapping skyscrapers are out.

Australia appears to be following the lead of the US, where sustainable buildings such as the Bank of America Tower in New York and the MGM Mirage city centre project in Las Vegas have won acclaim.

In Sydney, Lend Lease headquarters at 30 The Bond in Millers Point boasts 30 per cent lower carbon dioxide emissions than a typical office building. These are among a new batch of commercial developments gaining accreditation under ratings systems such as LEED (leadership in energy and environmental design) in the US and Green Star in Australia. They set benchmarks for sustainable site development relating to water savings, energy efficiency and materials selection.

Romilly Madew, chief executive of the Green Building Council of Australia, reports a rapid increase in applications for green accreditation of construction projects over the past 18 months. This year alone such applications have equalled the total number for the past four years. Many are seeking five- and six-star green ratings.

"So it's jumping," says Madew, who attributes the growth to greater government focus at federal, state and local level on sustainable policies, regulations and incentives. Major developers are also anxious to "green their portfolios".

Such acceptance of green buildings is fostering employment opportunities for engineers, architects and development planners with sustainability credentials. "They were a rarity in the market before," Madew says. "Now there are whole consultancies being established purely around ecologically sustainable development. Whereas before you'd have one person in a group, now you are getting whole teams."

According to a joint report from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Australian Conservation Foundation, more than 251,500 green-collar jobs will be created in the property and construction industry alone by 2025, representing 45 per cent of the total number of jobs to emerge overall in the same period.



Well-received: Lend Lease's office 30 The Bond at Millers Point, rates five stars

The built infrastructure sector is dirty, with OECD figures painting a damning picture of its impact on the environment: it uses 32 per cent of the world's resources in construction; consumes 40 per cent of global energy; generates 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and sucks up 12 per cent of water. Such figures are prompting more businesses to opt for environmentally friendly buildings.

Janet Lewell, a partner and climate-change leader in risk services at consulting firm Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, is seeing evidence

of this among the firm's client base, with companies opting to occupy green buildings.

Fuelling the green movement, too, is Australia's looming emissions trading scheme, set for a possible launch in 2010. It is likely to have a significant impact on big business sectors such as mining, construction and infrastructure.

Lewell says many businesses are starting to get their heads around the implications of a carbon economy. "They are at varying degrees along the continuum," she says.



Romilly Madew

On the employment front, Lewell argues that a lot of new work will emerge around compliance, finance and auditing issues. She expects a redeployment of skills as more specialists are required to handle emissions trading and sustainability issues.

She says such demand will inevitably translate to new employment opportunities in construction-related areas such as architecture, while work prospects will also extend down the supply chain.

"As you work backwards through the whole supply chain of a green building, think about how many people are potentially touched."

A concern in some quarters is that there simply may not be enough trained personnel to design, develop and construct green buildings. The Green Building Council has entered a submission to a Senate inquiry into the effects of climate change on training and employment needs. It is urging greater capacity within universities and other traditional education and training institutions to meet the need for more climate change professionals.

Local government also shapes an important piece in the green building jigsaw. At a recent Australian Council of Local Government meeting in Canberra, Madew urged councils to fast-track applications for environmentally friendly buildings and take a slower approach to the rest.

She is also calling for more training programs to re-skill local government staff to ensure they are up to speed with sustainable construction trends, particularly in booming coastal areas with sensitive ecological systems. Elsewhere, education will be crucial to ensure enough tradespeople are available to respond to the rising demand for sustainable buildings.

While there are fears the global financial crisis may stall momentum for green buildings, which typically cost more to construct, some analysts believe sustainable initiatives will be part of the solution. Nicholas Stern, author of a seminal 2006 review on climate change, has raised the prospect of a "green bail-out" and says governments must ensure the economy of the future is a green one.

Madew agrees that demand for green buildings will continue, despite financial ructions around the world. "It is not abating and the reason is because government policy is not abating."

DEVELOPMENT

Complex crises expose ill-prepared executives

TODAY, more than ever before, organisations are faced with an ambiguous and uncertain future. Even before the current crises of confidence enveloped the world, there was a crisis of choice — globalised competition, market pressure for short-term performance, rising costs, disintermediation of many markets and the ageing demographic to name just a few.

Now we are in an environment where complexity has been compounded. Executives are required to reconcile competing interests, make trade-offs, take on acceptable risks and make choices that are sensible in the long run.

Herein is the challenge: executives are unfamiliar with complexity and without the attributes especially needed in confronting and mastering complexity.

A recent study of executive derailment by TalentInvest showed that complexity and unpreparedness most likely to derail previously successful executives.

Their stumbling points are:

- Complexity associated with organisational relationships and politics, such as an inability to take a "whole of company" view in working with peers, an inability to adjust to a change in sponsor/ownership, an inability to win over a resistant team.
- Complexity associated with increased scope and scale of role, such as an inability to deal with ambiguity in the role (eg, clarity of mandate or change in direction), an inability to balance competing priorities/reconcile paradoxes and an inability to manage the risks decisively.

The research showed three "sense making" attributes are required in executives in order for them to understand the complexity they face and take sensible action — learning agility, wisdom and resilience.

Yet few organisations underpinned their talent identification processes or leadership development processes with these.

Organisations participating in the TalentInvest survey said that with 20-20 hindsight, taking a planned, more strategic approach to appointments would have avoided a painful derailment.

Furthermore, even a well-designed succession planning process is likely to deliver a generation of under-developed successors if it is not backed by systematic assessment of potential derailers in order to address the identified gaps early.

So what should organisations do to better equip their executives to deal with the increasing levels of complexity today? TalentInvest concluded there are some

MEENA THURAISSINGHAM



medium-term and longer-term actions:

- Rethinking organisational design. Are aspiring executives exposed to complexity early enough to develop natural strengths in the "sense making" attributes described above? An organisation that does not devolve decision-making to the lowest appropriate level is missing an opportunity to develop ability and confidence.

- Robust talent identification. Are the right things measured? Past performance is not a reliable predictor of future performance, especially as the pace of complexity accelerates. Underpinning assessment with very generalised definitions of potential (typically IQ-EQ) will not deliver the leadership talent required in an increasingly challenging future. Any definition of potential used to underpin talent identification processes will need to pass the "fit for future" test and assess executives on the three "sense making" attributes.

- Better integration of succession and development efforts. Often the development effort required to ready those identified as having succession potential is not targeted. This is likely to deliver a generation of under-developed successors.
- On-boarding support to deal with transition risk. The best on-boarding programs understand deeply the nature of transition risk and ensure that it is systematically managed.

- An early warning system. Organisations need to build a system that triggers the required development action for executives who have potentially derailing attributes, or who find themselves in organisational situations that can potentially derail.

- A strong culture of feedback — upward and sideways feedback is as important as the more traditional one-way downward feedback.

- Valuable organisational learning. When a project goes belly up or when a strategic initiative stalls, how often do its owners and sponsors get around a table and ask what are the things we did not pay attention to, what wrong turns did we take and why, what should we have better anticipated and what voices were we not listening to?

Meena Thuraisingham is director and principal of TalentInvest, and author of *Careers Unplugged*

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