



How efficient project management could have streamlined the lead-up to the 2016 Rio Olympics

Learn why complex projects need a combination of structure and analytical rigor, and industry and management expertise

Hosting one of the world's most prestigious sporting events is no mean feat and, all in all, Rio de Janeiro did a good job of organizing the 2016 Olympic Games. It did so in the face of multiple complications, over which the event's organizers had little control: fears about the Zika virus; the revelation of a state-funded doping program in Russia; the city's excessive water-pollution issues; and the threat of crime and terrorism (highlighted in a statement by the Rio Organizing Committee's CEO, Sidney Levy, as a main concern for the Games), for example. However, many issues throughout the Rio Olympics could have been avoided with effective project management, in order to streamline the lead-up to the Games.

While some 11,000 athletes from 206 national Olympic committees (NOCs) were rounding off their training programmes and preparing to compete, the Rio organizers were facing immense pressure to get the venue up to standard for the Games. The news was littered with details of organizational setbacks that raised concerns about the quality of the project – the collapse of a sailing ramp at the Marina da Gloria, for example. Sure enough, the problems did not cease with the arrival of the athletes in the Olympic village. A number of the rooms were incomplete, with plumbing and electrical problems rife. British diving champion Tom Daley even said that the bathroom sink fell off the wall while he was brushing his teeth! The Director of the Olympic Village, Mario Cilenti, was reportedly fired.

How on-demand talent could have helped the Rio organizers

Organizing a large-scale event like the Olympic Games is about more than just overseeing the construction of affordable, safe and purpose-built stadiums: it's about marketing, infrastructure, ticket sales, security, coordinating volunteers and ensuring the overall smooth-running of the event's entire duration. For events like these, where multiple projects are being conducted at once, a strategic approach to project management is vital, with the best skills being injected at exactly the right time. With so many intricate details to get right, it's essential that project managers and teams are highly experienced in the areas they're assigned to, and that they have industry-specific knowledge to keep the project running smoothly and ensure consistently high levels of quality throughout.

An example of where industry-specific knowledge was lacking at the Olympics is when the Maria Lenk Aquatics Centre diving pool turned green. The Director of Venue Management, Gustavo Nascimento, admitted that 80 litres of hydrogen peroxide had been put into the water on the day of the opening ceremony, causing it to react with the chlorine and prevent the chemical from killing the organic matter in the water. Organizers hadn't considered the effect that a large number of athletes using the pool in quick succession would have on

the chemicals. Had professionals with specific knowledge in this area of the project been employed, this slip-up would likely not have occurred.

Even with huge resources like the Rio Organizing Committee, tapping into the right skills at the right time can be a challenge. You may not have all the skills you need in-house, and hiring full-time workers is expensive and time-consuming. Also, the skills you need now may be different to the skills you need in the future. This is where on-demand talent can help, enabling you to access independent professionals on a flexible basis. As well as ensuring the work is managed to budget, deadline and standard, independent professionals bring a wealth of industry experience and foresight to the projects they work on – making sure potential problems are ironed out before they emerge, and that the entire team can respond quickly, efficiently and discreetly if issues do occur.

Holistic project management to help maximize on-demand talent

As highlighted by the Rio swimming pool mishap, large-scale sporting events like the Olympics cannot be managed to their full potential if the project structure is industry-agnostic. This is why it's important that project structuring, which is usually the administrative part of project management, incorporates a degree of strategy, so that the exact number and nature of resources can be implemented for the particular project at hand. Solutions such as PMO², which approaches project management with a combination of structure and analytical rigor, and industry and management expertise, are ideal, as administrative support, performance monitoring, project execution, strategic decision support, stakeholder management, governance, change management and communication are all dealt with through a single channel.

Bringing the right combination of skills together is one critical part of successful project management, but you also need to manage and integrate that talent properly for the project to go smoothly. You need to define a clear purpose for why you're hiring, and the exact skills you need, as well as communicating with Independent Professionals clearly in terms of project expectations, and investing in your relationship with them. Put simply: to maximise your return on your on-demand workforce, treat them as you would a regular, full-time team of staff.

For the organizers of the Rio Games, unresolved problems with logistics, security, costs, communication and workers meant that the majority of 2016's Olympians competed in front of scores of empty seats. Had a streamlined project management approach been taken, in which Independent Professionals were hired on demand for their industry-specific knowledge and skills, and coordinated within a framework that was relevant to the Games, the lead-up to the event may well have run more smoothly.

Just like the Olympics, complex business projects also require an expert, efficient and streamlined approach to project management, which taps into the exact skills you need, exactly when you need them. Here at a-connect, our pool of senior talent is made up of Independent Professionals across a wide range of industries, disciplines and global locations, so that we can curate the ideal team to meet the demands of your project.

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