

Projects At the Heart of Power: A Conversation with Algy Ayson

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In a world where the pace of change is relentless, few professions have the capacity to shape society as profoundly as project management. As we sit down with Algy Ayson for a Teams call, his warm smile and approachable demeanour immediately set the tone for our conversation. Algy, originally from the Philippines, now serves as the Head of Project Delivery Centre of Excellence and Profession at the Enterprise Portfolio Management Office for the UK Parliament. His journey to this pivotal role has been anything but conventional.

It is just over 4 months since I first heard Algy speak at an industry association event in London. His passion for project management shone through. And as he spoke to the room of senior project leaders his advocacy and vision for the industry struck a chord.

A Chance Start in the Profession

Algy's path into project management was unexpected. He began his career in customer service, with no initial intention of entering into project delivery. Reflecting on his early days working in local government during the leadup to the 2012 London Olympic Games, Algy explains, "It was a key tenet of the London Games that it would deliver a legacy beyond the month-long sporting festivities. My role was to ensure core services run smoothly and to provide extended hours of operation during the Games period". This experience ignited his passion for the field and set the stage for his future career.

Following his work on the Olympics, Algy transitioned to civil service and social housing roles working on digital transformation and customer service programs and then eventually landing his current role, with the UK Parliament PMO two years ago, with the task of creating a Project Delivery Centre of Excellence.

Having succeeded in developing an organisation overseeing nearly four hundred project professionals, he can look back at his meteoric journey with a certain level of pride. “I just fell into it, there was no real strategic career planning involved,” he admits with a smile. “The project profession just seemed to align with my style of working and being part of a collective.”

A position at the Centre of the British Establishment

UK Parliament, composed of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, operates at the core of the British government. It is responsible for debating and enacting laws that shape the lives of UK citizens. Algy’s role within this historic institution is both challenging and exhilarating. “No two days are ever the same,” he says, describing a diverse array of projects all aimed at supporting parliamentary members, staff, and the public. “Our projects ensure that Parliament succeeds in delivering its obligations to support a thriving Parliamentary democracy.”

When asked about the impact of recent political changes on his workload, Algy responds with a reassuring smile. “It is business as usual for us. Our delivery projects, programs, and services carry on throughout changes in the government.”

Public vs. Private Sector Project Management

Drawing from his experience in the public sector, Algy highlights the unique challenges of public sector project delivery. “It is a very different world in the public sector,” he confirms. “There is strict oversight, funding constraints, and rigid levels of governance, to ensure that everything we do demonstrates value for money.”

He further explains that public sector activities adhere to the Green Book 5-Case business model, which evaluates projects based on strategic, economic, commercial, financial, and management dimensions. Transparency and accountability are paramount, as all activities are open to public scrutiny. The necessity for wide consultation with diverse stakeholders, however can often lead to slower decision-making processes.

Nonetheless, Algy relishes the environment. “It brings people together for a common goal: to turn a vision into a reality,” he says. “Of course, at times it can be frustrating and unpredictable, but the project approach opens up the possibility of unlocking opportunities and developing new concepts and delivery models that you wouldn’t identify through other more rigid approaches.” He cites examples from his past work, such as optimizing digital solutions and leveraging new technologies to enhance project delivery.

Embracing Emerging Technologies

In an era where technology is reshaping every industry, Algy is at the forefront of integrating technological advancements into project management. His team is focused on harnessing the power of these technologies to optimize project outcomes. “We are ensuring that our team can develop the capability to use modern innovations efficiently and effectively manage the wealth of data and rapid learning models now available,” he asserts.

He emphasizes that long-term sustainability is fast becoming a major consideration within project and program delivery. “We are at the beginning of a new era where sustainability is a major pillar for project and program delivery. It goes far beyond the existing concepts of time, cost, and quality. It is imperative that we measure the success of projects based on the value they bring to our communities and society as a whole.”

Leading with Vision and Collaboration

Leading a community of over 400 professionals is no small feat, but Algy’s approach is rooted in collaboration and community-building. “Connection, collaboration, and camaraderie are at the heart of my leadership and the secret sauces to our success,” he explains. By fostering trust and engagement within the community, Algy ensures that everyone is aligned and committed to a set of common goals.

He reflects on the importance of keeping the community up to date with the rapidly changing project industry through the centre of excellence and capability-building initiatives. “It is essential that our community stays on top of industry standards and trends,” he states. “It really does take a village to build a community and we need to be willing to engage with each other and build lasting trust and partnership within and across our teams.”

The Future of Project Management

Looking ahead, Algy sees vast opportunities for the project management profession to make a significant impact. He urges the industry to tackle global challenges with courage and conviction. Strengthening partnerships, enhancing knowledge sharing, and future-proofing against technological disruptions are paramount. He also emphasizes the importance of inclusion and diversity of thoughts in improving decision-making and optimizing successful project outcomes.

“The problems we are facing as a global collective are immense. It is important that we challenge ourselves as project leaders to tackle and solve the big issues. We must be brave in putting forward new ideas, harnessing creativity, and seeding innovations that will address these critical questions. Projects need to be expansive in delivery, looking beyond simply commercial returns and adding value on a societal level.”

Advice for Aspiring Project Managers

Algy’s advice for those looking to enter the profession is clear: “Be prepared to get involved in projects, regardless of size or complexity.” Practical experience, combined with both professional certifications and academic achievement, is essential. He also highlights the importance of developing people skills such as engagement, communication and stakeholder management, in driving project success.

“Developing as a project manager is a lifelong learning journey,” he emphasizes. “Career development is important in such a wide-ranging sector. It is helpful to be clear on the goals you want to achieve and to have a vision of where you want to get to. Be open to a range of opportunities and possibilities for your career development, even if the outcomes are not clear at the beginning.” The path as a project manager is rarely a straight line.

Keeping informed of industry changes and updating one's skills is essential. Algy highlights the importance of balancing technical skills with soft skills, noting that much of the work done as a project manager involves working through others. "People skills are essential. Being able to communicate well, articulate your project's vision, and bring people along with you on the journey. Be willing to embrace change and stay open to new challenges and opportunities, as well as being resilient when things don't go to plan."

Project management remains a competitive profession, and staying sharp and continuously developing one's skillset is needed to stand out. "But the opportunities are incredible if you are willing to get out and embrace them," Algy concludes.

Supporting the next generation of project practitioners

Algy states that there are improvements that he would like to see in the profession. 'Project management needs to be more inclusive'. He qualifies by saying. 'As an industry, it needs to broaden its pipeline for those accessing the profession'. He points to the growing reach of apprenticeship programs and paid work experience in providing opportunities to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Algy, states that he has been fortunate to work for an organization which has been supportive of his development and career growth. 'I have in the past undertaken an employer-sponsored degree apprenticeship and MBA and their encouragement has ensured diverse 'voices' and reinforced the value and importance of bringing different perspectives and ideas to the table.

The Path Forward

As we wrap up our conversation, it is clear that Algy Ayson is not only a leader in his field but also a passionate advocate for the transformative power of project management. His journey, punctuated by both dedication and a steadfast commitment to excellence, offers invaluable insights for anyone looking to make their mark as a project leader. The future of project management is bright, and with leaders like Algy Ayson at the helm, it promises to be a journey of impactful and meaningful change.

For more on Algy's work and opportunities in public sector project and programme management, follow him on [LinkedIn](#) or visit www.parliament.uk.