



TRUST BASED LEADERSHIP

Samer Tamimi, Senior Vice President, UAE & Oman, Hill International shares his confidence about Oman's growth potential in the near future and its enablers in an interview with Mayank Singh

Can you give us an overview of Hill International?

Hill International is an American company based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We have been in the

business for almost 50 years with a presence in the Middle East region for about 38 years. We are a pure project Management Company which is focussed on supporting clients,

managing their project and defending their claims. In the region, we started our operations in Abu Dhabi and today we have offices in almost every GCC country and the larger MENA region.

Our regional office is in Dubai. We have 4,300 people strong team of Project Management Consultants (PMC). This might not sound too big, but for PMC it is one of the largest in the world.

You have done projects worth \$1 trillion worldwide, which are your biggest markets and what kind of iconic projects have you worked on?

We focus on mega projects across sectors - aviation, railways, real estate, mixed use development - to name a few. If you look at the aviation sector, we have managed almost all airport projects in the region including Muscat, Salalah, Bahrain, Dammam, Abu Dhabi and Qatar.

In the railway sector, we managed the Riyadh Metro, Lusail and Doha Metro. Currently we are working on the land bridge in Saudi Arabia. We dominate the entire PMC market across most sectors. If we speak about iconic buildings, in Abu Dhabi as an example we managed Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Shaikh Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi Corniche several landmarks such as Etihad Towers, Nation Towers and ADNOC HQ. I believe, we have helped shaped the city skyline of Abu Dhabi and most cities in the region.

How has Hill International contributed to the PMC market in Oman?

In Oman, our major projects have been the Muscat International Airport and the Salalah Airport. We also managed the Al Sharqiya Highway and Military Base. We are currently managing Theme Park and Water Park at A'Sharq Development. We see Oman as a promising market and expect to do more work here in future.

Hill International has recently merged with GISI (Global Infrastructure Solutions Inc.) What is the rationale behind the merger and how will it strengthen the company?

It was a tremendous move. Hill International's merger with GISI gives us tremendous power in terms of bonding capacity, depth and cash flow. The merger enabled us to grow quickly, and it has been very fruitful, especially in the GCC region. Since the merge, we have got humongous projects.

GISI is a US based company with global operations. While they do have a PMC practice, they do construction or contracting work on a limited basis. They are very selective in their work and take on only high-end and high calibre projects. In addition, they do advisory and claims. So, GISI does what Hill International does and a bit more.

Hill International has helped a range of businesses such as transportation, environmental, power and electrical. How does this kind of a differentiated product mix work and does such expertise enable you to do turnkey solutions?

Absolutely. We have a big pool of professionals across disciplines and sectors and this helps the business. Project management as a concept is fundamentally the same whether you are managing an airport project or a real estate project as finally it comes down to managing the complexity and technical aspects of the project. Over and above project management, we also need the requisite technical skills such as aviation experts, real experts etc. hence we built on the fundamentals through our technical expertise. This helps us to handle big and complex projects.

Hill International is ranked highly in the world across a number of metrics. What are the fundamental strengths as a company?

Firstly, clients are our foremost priority. We constantly strive to protect and satisfy a client's interest. I remember an instance when one of our client's was challenged by his Board of Directors saying, 'Why should we chose Hill International?' His answer was 'because whenever there is a problem, I see their top management on the project site, supporting the staff and solving problems.' This is something which we are proud of.

The fact that we care about clients by prioritising and satisfying their interests is our biggest strength. This is what differentiates us from our competitors. We care and go to the site – the proverbial trenches - to resolve problems, unlike others who just lead their people onsite and then leave them to struggle with

whatever comes their way.

How long have you had a presence in the Middle East region?

We have been in the region for about 38 years. Our basic concept here is repeated work. All we ask for is a chance to prove our abilities and to demonstrate as to what we can do, and the rest is easy. Most of our existing clients give us repeat business as they know that they can trust us. They have faith and trust in our PMC capabilities and that is what matters. Price is not everything. Clients look for a company which protects their interests and makes sure that their project objectives are met.

How has the Middle East market been over the couple of years and what are your thoughts on its future prospects?

The construction market is cyclical across the world and the Middle East is no exception. There is demand, you build and then there is a period of stagnation. The industry goes through these cycles everywhere. The rule of thumb is that there is a correction every eight years. We started in the UAE, and in 2008 we were impacted like everyone else, but we were sure that the market will revive and it has done so. Presently, the market is booming across region - in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman.

Can you share your thoughts on Oman's market, its potential and ways in which its growth can be accelerated?

Oman has a lot of potential. I mean, they have the fundamentals and pretty much everything needed for fast-paced growth. I think Oman is a bit more conservative than its regional peers such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which are aggressive, but the potential for growth is amazing.

The number of cities under design or under strategic development in Oman is unbelievable. I think in the near future, we are going to see a major growth in the construction industry in Oman. The international airports and the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre will be major factors for growth as they will attract tourism and people.