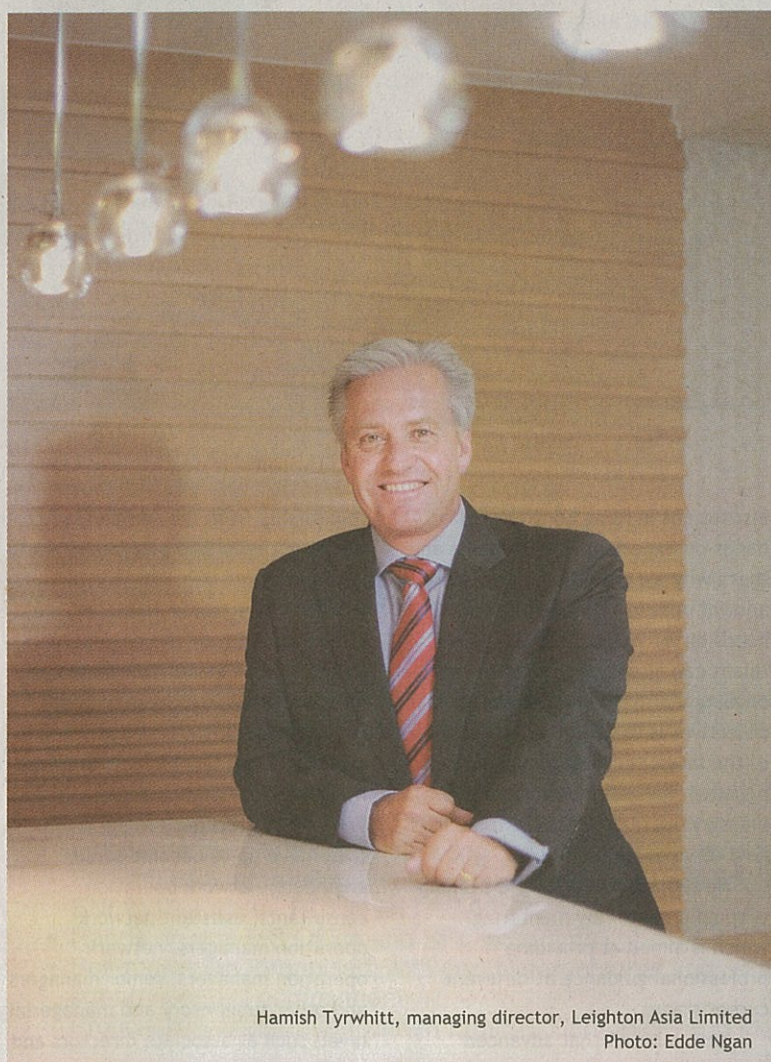


CONSTRUCTION & PROPERTY

CAREER PATH



Hamish Tyrwhitt, managing director, Leighton Asia Limited
Photo: Edde Ngan

by Nicolette Wong

A career in civil engineering has not only opened up a myriad of opportunities for Hamish Tyrwhitt, but has also seen him working on projects that have made a vast difference for communities in the region.

Mr Tyrwhitt, currently managing director of leading contractor and project developer Leighton Asia Limited, recalls developing a keen interest in construction as a "not-so-average" Australian teenager.

After graduating from high school, he took advantage of a scholarship to study civil engineering at the University of Western Australia in Perth. "I chose this particular discipline as it presented many different career possibilities and matched my interest in marine and building engineering," Mr Tyrwhitt explains.

Once he obtained his qualification in 1985, he signed on with one of the Leighton Group companies, John Holland, as a graduate engineer and worked in

various locations across Australia, before setting his foot in Asia in 1990 to work on a range of construction projects in countries such as Malaysia, Laos and Thailand.

Having developed his operational and management expertise, Mr Tyrwhitt proceeded to head Leighton Contractors' activities across Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand in 2004.

He took up his current role in 2007 and is responsible for the leadership, management and strategic direction of the company, overseeing more than 20 projects in Hong Kong, mainland China, Macau, Taiwan, Mongolia, Guam, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Cambodia and Kazakhstan, and managing a regional team of 8,000 staff.

Global choice

Civil engineering and construction management offer plenty of job scope for new graduates with aspirations to move globally, says Mr Tyrwhitt. "The ability to work as part of a team and a willingness to learn are crucial in this people-oriented industry," he adds.

An adventurous spirit is

beneficial to long-term career development, and people that are willing to travel to remote or "exotic" locations for on-site work will find themselves thriving.

With an ongoing shortage of civil engineers in Hong Kong, there are plenty of opportunities for graduates to join the field, Mr Tyrwhitt observes. "This trend will definitely continue in the next few years, since a good number of engineering graduates go on to work in consultancies, contractors, or move to other industries. At Leighton Asia, we're looking to recruit up to 25 newly graduated engineers this year."

His own diverse career has been greatly rewarding and Mr Tyrwhitt takes pride in the fact that he has helped build infrastructure that provides tangible benefits for communities in far-off locations such as Malaysia, Laos and remote parts of Australia.

"It gives me a real sense of achievement to see how my work helps change the living conditions of people, for example by constructing pipelines to provide drinking water," he says. "There have been many memorable moments during my work in Asia."

Moving forward

Leighton Asia's civil engineering and construction scope in the region is wide and its project portfolio includes mining work with large equipment in Mongolia, Indonesia and the Philippines. This means that the company is in a position to offer graduates diverse career development routes, not only across the industry but also in various geographical locations.

All the project developer's regional offices have dedicated human resources departments and training coordinators. Newly joined graduate engineers undergo a special programme that familiarises them with different projects and sites, helping them to apply their academic training in practical situations. "They also receive in-house training, regularly reporting on their progress to their mentors, and undergo six-monthly performance reviews to identify areas for improvement," Mr Tyrwhitt notes.

He expects a greater focus on environmental sustainability in the construction industry in the near future, mainly through improved construction methods and the recycling of waste and unused

materials. Another area under scrutiny is work safety on remote sites. "I anticipate the implementation of more standardisations and equalisations in work safety and welfare, along with the introduction of new technology and equipment," he says.

Young engineers should choose employers with visions that align with their own career interests and long-term objectives, Mr Tyrwhitt advises. Although several contractors may work on similar projects, their business focus and values may differ from location to location. This can have a definite impact on an engineer's future development.

"Formulate your own goals and take ownership of your careers," he emphasises. "A company provides the work, the platform, the training manual and the people they can learn from, but it's up to the individuals to grab their chances. The more aware and focused you are, the more successful you will be."

In his own experience, a commitment is key to job satisfaction. "You need to put everything into your job, but also be able to enjoy yourself along the way," Mr Tyrwhitt concludes. □

Down the surefire road to success