

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Do partnering contracts deliver on their promises? A review of partnering versus traditional project outcomes in the UK construction industry

Industry reports dating back to Simon (1944) highlight concerns with UK construction industry quality, performance and productivity. With UK industry key performance indicators scoring 66% for delivery to budget and 59% for delivery to programme in 2018, significant improvement is required if the UK construction industry is to survive and thrive. Numerous research studies within and beyond the UK construction sector have described partnering as one of the most significant means of improving project performance. Indeed, the assumption that forms of collaborative working (for example, partnering) can have a substantial beneficial impact on project performance underlies many of the proposed reform agendas in the UK construction sector. However, some authors have questioned whether the reported benefits are realistic and achievable, and the UK construction industry continues to use traditional procurement where design is separated from production, often leading to underperformance and adversarial behaviours. A review of partnering literature revealed a lack of quantifiable performance data to demonstrate whether the perceived benefits of partnering are experienced by both clients and contractors on construction projects. Such data could help determine whether the investment in partnering is worthwhile for clients and contractors alike.

To address this, the research quantitatively compares performance data from 200 partnering and traditional (non-partnering) UK building projects, using key performance indicators including client satisfaction, delivery to programme and budget, product quality, teamwork and profitability as measures of delivery effectiveness. The results indicate that partnering delivers on its promises of improved performance outcomes for both clients and contractors. Based on the project sample, the results indicate that, on average, partnering projects outperform traditional projects in all key areas of performance, including contractor profitability. Analysis of the results provides insights into partnering success factors, including Early Contractor Involvement, the adoption of partnering forms of contract, minimising tendering and using quality measures as the basis for contractor selection. Additional value is found to be derived from long-term partnering relationships that enable investment in research and development to drive continuous performance improvement. The results are significant in terms of increasing industry knowledge and understanding of partnering, providing the basis for a clearer definition of construction partnering, evidencing the benefits and describing the conditions for success. Wider communication of this research has the potential to encourage uptake of partnering by clients and contractors, leading to the possibility of delivering improvements in construction industry profitability and performance.

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