

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Marriage counselling for the construction industry: what is subverting our aims to be more collaborative in the construction industry?

1994 was the year the UK construction industry took its first step towards major change. The Latham report (1994) and its proposals would be the touchstone for future industry reviews and reports. Despite this and recommendations from many more high profile industry reports, it still finds itself, nearly 25 years later, dogged with poor collaboration, disputes, low innovation, skills shortages, and poor outcomes. Collaboration is hailed as the panacea to heal the construction industry. Its benefits could deliver greater surety of project success, client satisfaction, innovation, improved end products and an industry fit for the modern world.

This research investigates factors that affect the construction industry and its players' ability to collaborate. Although lots of research had been conducted around collaboration, trust and contracts, little research had compared the differing views of industry players and whether this could be a reason for the lack of collaboration amongst its players. A survey was conducted to seek views on Attitudinal, Institutional and Industrial issues. In addition to this, participants were asked to play a 'Trust Game' which used the five personality types identified by Axelrod (1997) in his research on game theory (the prisoner's dilemma) to see how players under the client/contractor dyad believed they behaved towards one another. The results were grouped to see if there was consensus to form an opinion amongst the players.

The findings show that there is little trust placed towards contractors. Clients were likely to adopt cooperative behaviours with consultants and more defensive behaviours with contractors, as contractors were perceived as being more likely to behave unethically or 'cheat'. This was further supported by contractors, who, due to differing views on the drivers behind current tendering, contract and procurement practices, believe that they have to adopt unethical behaviours to be successful.

These findings have important implications for the future of the construction industry: they identify that in order to improve collaboration, trust needs to be established into player relationships, which can only happen if the rules of the game change. Clients need to play their part in setting the rules by adopting tendering procedures that do not encourage a focus on price: concurrently contractors need to lose their opportunistic nature to help build trust both with its client and supply chain. In other words, success needs to be defined for all players in the industry and not the few.

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January 2019