

## **CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

### **Distributed leadership as a model for high performance within the Construction Industry**

This study is motivated by the premise that the construction industry has traditionally implemented a top-down, hierarchical approach to leadership. This approach is now considered dated and limiting, as projects today are too large and complex for a single leader. Further, other industries and sectors are reporting the benefits of a flatter and more democratic leadership model. As such, this paper aims to investigate the impact of implementing a more distributed form of leadership within a professional construction team.

The research methodology commenced with an extensive literature review alongside a number of strategic interviews with high-performance team leaders. Subsequently, a web-based questionnaire was completed by 431 construction professionals in order to establish the current industry understanding and perception of leadership. The output from this survey then informed the development and implementation of a five-week site-based experiment. This experiment aimed to test the effect of operating a less hierarchical leadership structure in a live construction team.

The trial results suggest that a more distributed leadership structure does improve employee motivation and engagement as a result of increased individual accountability. However, the results did not demonstrate that the re-organisation significantly improved individual output. Interestingly, the researcher noted a more general increase in team cohesion, freethinking, urgency, and quality of work. On balance, these findings are significant and suggest that a re-organisation of the construction workplace would be of some benefit to the industry.

This new model represents a challenge to the traditional, purely engineering-based, approach to project management. Instead, it re-emphasises the need to develop a wider social science based explanation of the world, in order to enhance the knowledge around high-performance teams and project results.

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