

# Top 10 Tips for Collaborative Working



As the sector climbs out of recession, the Collaborative Working Champions of Constructing Excellence wish to remind people of the most important issues that define collaborative working and make it work, in terms of delivering superior outcomes for clients, suppliers and stakeholders....

- 1. Encourage the culture, and reward the behaviours, that support a collaborative approach.**
- 2. Focus on outturn value not just cost.**
- 3. Select on merit: do not procure on lowest cost especially when you can't be sure what you need.**
- 4. Involve the supply chain, they are the experts in their field.**
- 5. Make decisions that benefit the whole project.**
- 6. Involve others as early as you can and not just earlier than usual; involve key partners right from the start.**
- 7. Ensure that all team members know what to do and have the appropriate collaborative competencies to do it.**
- 8. Make sure everyone can access and use all the information.**
- 9. Use collaborative contracts that encourage trust, provide transparency and produce more trouble-free projects.**
- 10. Expect promptly paid for involvement - not free consultation.**



---

## **Encourage the culture, and reward the behaviours, that support a collaborative approach**

To establish a new culture it must be led from the top, with the client and their primary partners demonstrating collaborative behaviours themselves and recognising and rewarding it in others – starting with the procurement process and reinforced through the use of KPIs and transparent communication tools. In order for a team to gel it must be given the opportunity (and be encouraged) to interact regularly both in a work context and more informally in order to allow productive relationships to develop. The individual team members should also be given an opportunity to contribute collaboratively to their shared objectives. This will ensure buy in so that their behaviour supports the delivery of the project outcomes. Finding methods of openly rewarding appropriate behaviours will help the culture to become embedded at every level.

### **Focus on outturn value not just cost.**

The value of any built asset is not ascertained by the cost in providing it but in the outcomes it delivers for its owners, occupiers and society. Even when purely considering financial cost, the delivery of an asset is hugely outweighed by the cost of operation, maintenance and use. In 1998 the Royal Academy of Engineering were first to raise the 1:5:200 model which suggested that for every £1 spent delivering an asset, £5 would be spent operating and maintaining it and £200 on the business costs in using it (over a 25 year period). Furthermore, Constructing Excellence has suggested that the value of the purpose that the asset serves could be as much 1000 times greater than the cost of its delivery. As such, in undertaking a project to deliver a built asset, clients should not focus on minimising the capital cost of design and construction but rather on understanding how decisions made at an early stage can both minimise the cost of using the asset and improve the value it unlocks.

### **Select on merit: do not procure on lowest cost especially when you can't be sure what you need.**

Procuring on lowest cost can lead to an adversarial relationship resulting in disputes, lower quality work, rework, arguments, and claims. The cost of dealing with these is bound to add up to more than the savings made in the first place. More tenders these days are based on a combination of cost and quality – which may include references from previous clients, case studies, and performance statistics. Whilst these aspects help to give a better picture of the organisation, it's still difficult to get an idea of the culture of the company and their employees, and thus the fit with the customer organisation. The use of collaborative behaviour assessments should be considered as part of the selection process, or at least question(s) seeking evidence of collaborative working, ideally with references from a number of previous clients and supply partners.

For longer term relationships there is a range of procurement routes available including partnering, frameworks, and alliancing. For maximum benefit early involvement of the delivery side is essential to ensure the most appropriate systems and components are incorporated in the design of the project. More information can be found in the Constructing Excellence Collaborative Procurement Guide: <http://constructingexcellence.org.uk/resources/collaborative-procurement/>

### **Involve the supply chain, they are the experts in their field.**

Like manufacturing, modern construction relies on the supply chain to deliver its customers' needs. As most buildings have functional needs specific to the users' business, it benefits the customer to directly consult with the specialist suppliers who develop and deliver key elements. This means starting the dialogue in the earliest phases of design development; when the principles are being agreed and can be influenced by insight on the characteristics of specialist components or products and how they will contribute to and enhance the functional value and performance of the new building. Failure to consult the supply chain at the inception or design stage leads to inefficiency and loss of optimum usage through incorrect selection, positioning or inadequate spatial allowance.

Consultation means appointment and collaborative engagement including inviting supply chain partners to attend collaborative planning sessions and progress meetings. Ideally the full team should work in an open book environment perhaps using interim arrangements such as professional service contracts, until the work is fully scoped.

### **Make decisions that benefit the whole project.**

In traditional non collaborative projects it is normal for parties to make and consent to decisions that deliver the maximum perceived benefit, or protection, to their organisation. This leads to confrontation as what suits one may not necessarily suit another, so when things change the focus is on protection of the company position rather than the impact on the outcomes, resulting in sub optimal performance, delays and claims.

Collaborative working environments encourage the team to put the need to deliver the right project outcome ahead of individual agendas or concerns. When all parties are focused on best for project outcomes, the waste and inefficiency of fighting positions and backing into corners is cut out in favour of greater certainty of time, cost and functional outcomes. This behaviour can be reinforced by the adoption of 'whole project' risk registers as used on NHS Procure21+ projects and the adoption of initiatives such as Integrated Project Insurance to remove the need to protect individual positions.

---

**Involve others as early as you can and not just earlier than usual; involve key partners right from the start.**

Collaboration is more effective when each team member clearly understands their role, responsibilities and contribution to the project outcomes. To achieve this, they should be involved in the project at the earliest stage appropriate. Key specialist supply chain partners in particular should be engaged in the early design stages to ensure they can contribute their invaluable expertise to the ultimate solution. Without early involvement there is often a lack of clarity and time can be wasted as team members struggle to get up to speed or negotiate their position rather than focusing on the task.

People generally prefer to be consulted rather than instructed and ideas are normally improved when more perspectives are available. Involving others has the double benefit of teasing out ideas, innovation, problems and potential solutions whilst leading to greater ownership and commitment to agreed outcomes.

**Ensure that all team members know what to do and have the appropriate collaborative competencies to do it.**

Within the models for successful collaborative working promoted by Constructing Excellence, it is clear that adopting appropriate behaviour is crucial to ensuring that any team functions effectively. As such, any organisation participating in a collaborative project should understand the extent to which their people are prepared to work in a collaborative manner. Appropriate behaviours such as integrity, openness, honesty and trust are essential and these can, and should, be measured for participating organisations as well as individuals. In the early days of a collaborative project the team can be undermined if collaborative behaviours are not demonstrated by all, especially if it is a senior member/partner in the collaboration. Once the culture is fully established a collaborative team can be very robust in dealing with unwanted attempts to return to traditional ways of working.

**Make sure everyone can access and use all the information.**

The first area to agree is the platform to be used to share information ensuring that everyone can access it. Communications can be difficult when information stored on a secure server within an organisation needs to be shared, so it may be preferable to use an external shared information platform. A key decision is whether the platform is to simply be a repository, the active collaboration area or something in between. Once in place, protocols need to be agreed to cover which information will (and will not) be shared and who will take responsibility for keeping it up to date.

Document management processes are crucial and should include naming conventions, version control and electronic approval of documents and drawings. Agile project management tools can be used for recording and assigning actions so people can access and update shared and live information in a collaborative way wherever their geographical location. Once information can be accessed by the team in this way, virtual meetings and videoconferencing can be used such that people can meet 'face to face' irrespective of where they are located whilst reducing travel (time, cost and carbon) and e-mail traffic, and increasing productivity.

---

## **Use collaborative contracts that encourage trust, provide transparency and produce more trouble-free projects.**

If you cannot trust your business partner, should you do business together? An absence of trusting behaviour when conducting business saps energy, undermines morale and is a direct waste of effort, time and money. Procuring building projects under traditional contracts which reinforce fragmentation and rely on embedded adversarial practices and procedures to resolve problems and issues, does little to foster a collaborative culture. Such contracts inevitably increase cost and prolong the construction duration, creating unnecessary waste in processes in an attempt to manage the isolationist business behaviours of self-interest and disconnection from the project purpose.

Adopting a collaborative contract which helps parties to understand each other's aims and to align them to focus on common objectives enables the delivery of benefit for all. Collaborative contracts encourage positive attributes of openness and honesty, leading to shared problem solving and supporting the desire to remove wasteful processes and procedures. These contracts reward participants through more efficient use of resources, greater predictability and certainty of activity and cash flow. They lead to earlier, more profitable and more appropriate functional and quality completion, resulting in fewer issues post-handover and more delighted customers to sing their praise.

## **Expect promptly paid for involvement - not free consultation.**

"You get what you pay for" goes the old adage. Simply put, if you try to get something for nothing then you shouldn't be surprised when it turns out to be a lot less value than you hoped for. In the early stages of a project the expectation that contractors, their supply chains, and often designers will provide their services for free is a direct application of this. Whilst some may be willing to offer assistance they are also aware that many of the schemes they do assist with will not proceed (undermining their commitment) and that if they give you their best ideas someone else may well end up installing them, especially when the tender process actively undermines those who have invested time and effort by pitting them directly against those who have not been involved and have nothing to recover (lose). Quite simply, they can't afford to give you their best people or ideas for free.

So if you want the best project team to ensure that the asset delivered meets your needs and performs to the required standard during the operational phase, you need to ensure that the project team identifies the right people from all team members and that they are available and committed when required. Organisations will understandably put their best people on the projects they are being paid for. Furthermore, if you do properly engage your partners early enough, changes can be made when they are just on paper and not once the time and cost critical installation has commenced. The comparatively low cost of using paid for advice set against the very high cost of a non performing or delayed asset will pay dividends over the lifetime of the project.

Finally, if you are being asked to perform for nothing what does that tell you about the commitment of your customer to your organisation?





### About the Collaborative Working Champions

This group of practitioners meets quarterly, coached by Kevin Thomas of Visionality to share experience and to influence and mentor those looking for support. There is a core group of

some 20 individuals but others are always welcome to join. Many of them have been implementing and promoting collaborative principles for well over ten years, and collectively they draw on some 500 years of construction industry experience.

In 2015 the group acted as a sounding board for IUK's Alliancing in Infrastructure, ICW's application of BS11000 and updating the Strategic Forum's Integration Toolkit. The Champions also undertook a survey of members collaborative relationships, produced the top 10 Benefits and Tips for Collaborative Working and commenced an evaluation of where the industry might be in 2025. In 2016 the group is looking to produce further Top 10's collaborating with other CE working groups starting with BIM; complete a maturity model linking collaborative working, BIM and lean; further promote member-to-member collaborative business; and continue to support the uptake of Integrated Project Insurance (IPI) procurement trials.

### Collaborative Working Champions Network

The Collaborative Working Champions have also created an online network for people interested in learning about and promoting integrated Collaborative Working in the built environment. It is an open group, welcoming industry participants from all backgrounds. More information can be found at <http://constructingexcellence.org.uk/collaborative-working-champions/>

### Constructing Excellence

The Constructing Excellence website is an excellent source of guidance and case studies from over ten years of practical application of Collaborative Working techniques. Members of Constructing Excellence have privileged access to a full set of how-to tools and training packages to support a change programme.

[www.constructingexcellence.org.uk](http://www.constructingexcellence.org.uk)

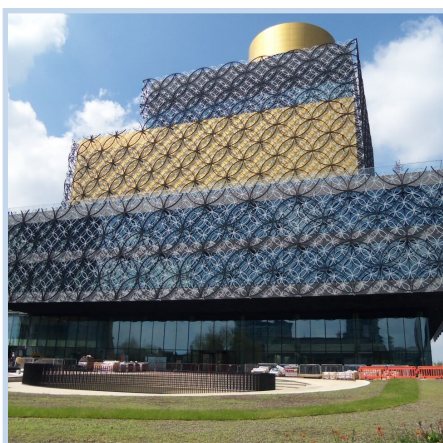
### Constructing Excellence Regional Network and local Best Practice Clubs

This network is a valuable source of regional information and knowledge as well as networking opportunities with like-minded people from the sector who wish to explore Collaborative Working opportunities.

Visit: [www.constructingexcellence.org.uk/regionsclubs.jsp](http://www.constructingexcellence.org.uk/regionsclubs.jsp)



Catalyst Research Laboratory and Office Facility, Billingham, Tees Valley – National Winner of the Integration & Collaborative Working Award 2014



Library of Birmingham – National Winner of the Project of the Year Award 2014



East Riding of Yorkshire Council – National Winner of the Client of the Year Award 2014