

Top 10 Ways to kill off Collaborative Working



The Collaborative Working Champions of Constructing Excellence have been looking at the things people do that either act as a break on Collaborative Working or stop Collaborative Working dead in its tracks before it has a chance to get established. In their simplest form these are;

- 1. Obsess about price not cost and value.**
- 2. Ignore everyone else.**
- 3. Don't pay for anything.**
- 4. Rush.**
- 5. Don't be accountable.**
- 6. Keep everyone apart.**
- 7. Bully everyone.**
- 8. Only do what you are told.**
- 9. Pick the wrong people.**
- 10. Walk away and don't look back.**

Not your organisation? Read on.....



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Having read the list you probably think that it doesn't apply to you or your organisation. But could it be that you are inadvertently exhibiting some of these traits through the application of established outdated processes and procedures? The following might help you to see if there is anything you might need to change.

Obsess about price

Do you realise how a price is built up? For most suppliers price is made up of the costs they pay for the project (labour, equipment, subcontracts), risk allowances, the overheads that are charged to the project, and then hopefully profit! A company that has not planned to make a fair profit is likely to be more focused on finding opportunities for claims than simply delivering a good job. So don't focus on price but look to understand the breakdown – what are the overhead levels, what costs are actually waste which can be reduced by working together, and which risks can be better managed by another party more able to control them.

You probably apply a quality/price selection process with most emphasis on the quality (80/20 or 70/30 for example) to make sure you pick the best partners/suppliers. But have you looked at the way it is applied? If you tend to score all the quality elements similarly i.e. with close matched scores, but have large differentials on the price elements, you may well have turned this back into a price lead section. What happens if you have a much cheaper offer on the table, how hard is it to put it aside, even though you really know it is too cheap?

What are the objectives of your buying department – do people have performance targets based on minimising spend that drives them to secure the lowest price even though it isn't what you were looking for and can work directly against the above advice?

Once you get going what is your first thought if something changes? Is your initial reaction “how much is this going to cost?” Do you focus on how to negotiate the lowest price increase or do you look for alternative solutions which might add value even if they cost a bit more?

Finally, how well are you supported in getting something that isn't the lowest price through your hierarchy - is it difficult or easy?

Ignore Everyone Else

Do you see others as a source of expertise, ideas and innovation or do you take their suggestions as a challenge to your experience and knowhow? Do you believe you are the experts because you have done it before? Is it really necessary to ask everyone's opinion all the time?

Maybe you feel that since you are the ones that are responsible you just need others to do what is instructed and not debate it. You may feel under pressure; there isn't enough time to talk about everything and meet the programme. Perhaps you feel you are being reasonable to your suppliers; they surely won't have allowed for all this discussion in their bids so why expect it from them.

Remember that Newton's 3rd law applies to construction too - if you ignore everyone don't be surprised if they ignore you and don't bother to raise issues and problems with what they have been asked to do. Look at your communication routes, modern IT can make it easy to share problems, ideas and solution and whilst collaborative methods appear to take a lot of time and effort, people who feel ownership will make sure problems are fixed when they arise.

Don't Pay for Anything

A bit extreme perhaps, but do you know how long it takes for money to pass all the way down your supply chain? If you have a 90 day payment policy and so does your immediate supplier, just how long will the lowest tiers have to wait for money to arrive? Don't be surprised if it feels to them that people at the top of the chain are not interested in paying.

Take a look at your system; does it only work if people fill in the right forms in the right way; even if they only work for you occasionally? How long does it actually take to get a new suppliers 'on the system'? Surely more evidence of your unwillingness to pay? What is your process for making a deduction? Do you discuss the reasons in advance to avoid them being invoiced, or when invoiced will your organisation simply send the whole submission back - even if the deduction was minor?

Do you realise that at any given time there is some £40bn due for payment in the UK – no wonder its cash-flow rather than lack of work that pushes most companies into liquidation?

Rush

Time is always of the essence so you really don't have the luxury of naval gazing when things need to get done. Have you seen the 3 Hour house video? (Check out YouTube) – Planned for months but executed in under 3 hours – this shows that sometimes you have to stop, think and plan properly in order to move forward quickly. "Plan plan plan do - right first time", or Front End Loading as they call it in petrochem.

In our haste to 'get on with it' it's all too easy to forget that there are other skills and perspectives available that can help us to make a leap forward. Sometimes it is just about the sequence or making sure that you don't rush through a key step which will need to be revisited at a later date. How often do you find other actions have now complicated the issue meaning you can't fully redress it, the solution or product becomes compromised and you end up disappointing your customer when you thought you were going to please them by getting it done as fast as possible? Remember also on the list of customer abhorrence, poor quality, defects and abortive work are often the consequence of rushing.

Don't be Accountable

Blame is endemic and incredibly divisive. But it is so much easier to think of it as someone else's fault rather than to admit it might be something you or your organisation did. Once you blame someone else don't be surprised if they react – especially if they feel wrongly treated. Once the blame game starts it can easily escalate, bouncing back and forth and wasting everyone's time. And whilst everyone is investing time making sure everyone else knows it wasn't them, the things they should be getting on with also suffer. All because someone is not big enough to say "sorry I made a mistake".

Of course there are other problems. It is often another sign of price obsession (see earlier) or a symptom of the litigious landscape which means your insurers insist you do not admit liability - even when you know you are wrong – leading to a legal solution to the problem (i.e. apportionment of blame and liability), instead of the technical solution required.

In reality no one can fix a problem until it's known about and unresolved problems tend to fester and grow. In construction the skills and capabilities are readily available so that most issues can be relatively simple to solve when they occur, but a nightmare to unpick later on, adding waste and inefficiency into the process. Ultimately leading to the inevitable compromise on what can be provided, undermining the final product, its long term use and everyone's credibility.

Keep Everyone Apart

The contracts and insurances normally used in construction provide specific definition of who is responsible for what, so you probably feel there is nothing wrong in just telling people to do what their contract or instructions say. Maybe you believe construction has functioned perfectly happily with documents and drawings for 100s of years? If it was good enough for Christopher Wren or Isambard Kingdom Brunel, it must be good enough for today's participants. But 2D drawings and the written word are incredibly poor at communicating the whole picture.

We have made strides, replacing snailmail with email - but have you found ways to make communication more joined up? Have you looked at using information technology to create a single shared repository of information, or do you and your suppliers still maintain your own "islands" of information? If something goes wrong, can you quickly review an audit trail of who did what and when so you can simply resolve it - or is this what you would happily pay a lawyer for?

You may feel that bringing parties together only adds to confusion and ultimately makes it harder to apportion blame when things go wrong; and if you are part of the session you are complicit in any problems that arise. But experience shows that only by engaging with others can the interfaces, overlaps and gaps be identified and resolved, problems be foreseen and solutions developed. Furthermore, the best ideas often come 'left field' that is from people you least expected them to come from and these ideas are often sparked off by other thoughts which just doesn't happen if only a few different perspectives are available. Even if you consider collaboration as a risk, remember that people are much more committed to things they have been consulted about. Surely it so much better to end up with a workable outcome than to have to argue about whose fault the failure was?

Bully Everyone

Again this sounds a bit extreme – you know the industry used to be like that but those days are long gone... or are they? Do you ever use your buying power to achieve a better commercial outcome or deduct payment with little notice? Have you ever used your client's authority by proxy e.g. "if you don't do such and such, the client is not going to be very happy (with you)"? Whilst not all commercial dealings or 'incentives' are bullying tactics, there is a fine line between negotiation and coercion and it's all too easy to become aggressive when things are late or overspent and your credibility is on the line.

What about incentives – are they used to encourage or as a stick to enforce? And are they used with balance? A pain/gainshare incentive is fine when both sides are equitable, but if a customer takes most of the gain and expects their suppliers to take most (or all) of the pain just because they have lots of work to give out, is that really balanced?

Then there is bullying by jest. Saying unpleasant things and then excusing yourself from the remarks as humor displays an underlying lack of respect to those being addressed. Furthermore if that comes with 'positional power' too i.e. they are a long way up the supply chain or much higher up in a larger organisation, then the humor is often missed altogether and only the threat is heard.

Only do what you are told

Actually this is another technique for not being accountable. By doing only what you are told you can't be blamed for doing it. And if your customer really needs something else then they will have to instruct you as well, so it's also another price (profit) focused trait. Of course there are times when others do know better than you, so listening to them and doing what they suggest is the right action. But if you are just reacting without consideration that's not engagement is abdication.

Working together effectively required dialogue and interaction. Sharing thoughts and ideas is the only way to develop and deliver better outcomes, stripping out waste and improving the industry for all. If you look like you are not interested in anything different or anyone else's ideas, don't be surprised if you consign yourself to the tasks nobody else wants to do irrespective of your capabilities.

Pick the Wrong People

This is not so much an intention as a consequence of actions. If you select the cheapest offer do you really think you will get the best team? Instead it is more likely to bring in a team focused on increasing the contract value to recover the element that were sacrificed in order to win the work, or recover the mistakes/misunderstandings that lead to the award.

Collaboration is all about teamwork. Picking people who want to keep everything to themselves and not offer ideas and solutions will mean your outcomes are poorly considered and likely to become compromised as the inevitable clashes go unresolved or unilateral decisions made in isolation later prove unworkable.

Collaborative Working is also about behaviours so resourcing your project with people who favour coercion and bullying tactics as the norm is not going to produce the working environment where engagement, innovation and commitment thrive. Nobody specifically sets out to pick the wrong people, but if your behaviours are mostly those in this top 10 then don't be surprised if that is the kind of people and organisations you attract. "You get back what you give out" says the old adage.

Walk Away and Don't Look Back

How often do you stop to ask "how well did we do?" The industry is full of people repeating the same mistakes as organisations are poor at identifying lessons, sharing them (internally and externally) and crucially learning from them; meaning doing something different next time. Take a good look at yourselves and see how many implemented changes can be traced from documented feedback. What and where are your systems and processes for capturing lessons learned – and actually learning them?

Ask yourself how often you seek contact with funders, specifiers and end users to ask them how the products work for them? Do you challenge yourself to hear what they say and not dismiss concerns since "they weren't there when it was being built and don't understand the difficulties". At the end of the day they are the reason we build and if it doesn't work for those who pay for and use the products we shouldn't be surprised if they deliver a negative impression to others who ask them about it. A delighted customer may only tell a handful of people about their delight, but a disgruntled one tells everybody!



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)

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

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.

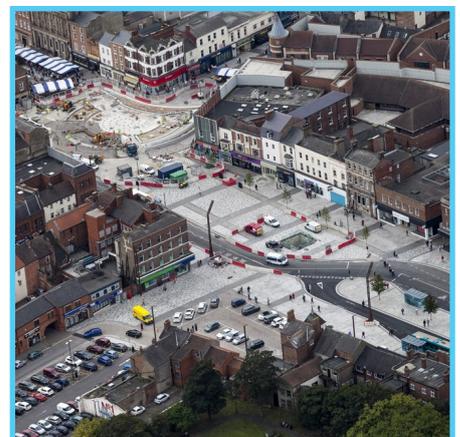
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P21 + Repeatable Rooms – National Winner of the Integration & Collaborative Working Award 2015



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