

Collaboration in the Built and Natural Environment: where are we now?

The first of the Futurebuild NOW webinars in association with ACO, the Edge and Colab CPD on 21st April attracted such a huge number of attendees from all parts of the industry and globally one has to ask whether there is a growing interest in the importance of transforming our industry into a collaborative one if we are to have a hope of achieving 100% Net Zero Carbon; or is that wishful thinking?

We have been trying, for as long as I can remember, to bring about change most noticeably through Latham ('Constructing Excellence' 1994) under a Conservative Government and Egan ('Rethinking Construction' 1998) under the new New Labour Government. Others followed and now Government talks to the industry through the Construction Leadership Council. The CLC has produced 'Procuring for value' (2018 Ann Bentley) and New Build Mission 2030 (2019 Green Construction Board Report, led by Lynne Sullivan).

Procurement is key and there have been significant innovations such as the PPC2000 contract and some partnering contracts as well as the fledgling Integrated project Insurance process. Yet despite Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance to the contrary, lowest first cost dominates industry procurement with lawyers and project managers advising clients of the consequences of straying from a lowest risk strategy; this can lead to expensive risk transfer and design fragmentation through the multiple tendering inherent in Design and Build contracting.

Under conventional contracting, the Performance Gap between design intent and as built performance has become endemic, with little incentive to change, despite the research such as the revealing 23 publicly funded 1995-2002 PROBE Studies (<https://www.usablebuildings.co.uk/UsableBuildings/Unprotected/BUSOccupantSurveyQ&A.pdf>). Although change is difficult, it is not only the drive of Net Zero but MHCLG's quite slow response to the Hackitt Report on the lessons from the Grenfell tragedy that will bring change; Hackitt's proposed 'golden thread' of responsibility running from inception through into occupation is just what is needed to build both for fire safety and Net Zero Carbon. Will collaborative contracts and procurement routes such as IPI become more mainstream in the future?

The Climate Emergency requires a retraining and recalibration of the whole industry within 60 months. The enormity of the task must not be underestimated, but it has sparked unprecedented collective action within the industry. Groups like LETI and ACAN were born out of a shared passion for transforming the status quo, and they demonstrate the possibility of cross-industry collaboration. There are undoubtedly still gaps in current collaboration - how clients, designers, contractors and builders all work towards a common vision will be crucial in delivering climate resilient buildings. The sharing of success and failure should form a key part of the retraining for the industry to support continuity and replication of success, and avoid baseless experimentation.

In 2015 the Edge published 'Collaboration for Change' by Paul Morrell who chaired the Edge Commission on the Future of Professionalism. This March at Futurebuild, ACO hosted the launch of a second edition that they had sponsored. Now this team is holding two webinars on Collaboration, one at a project level and the other as a whole industry.

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Footnote

The Edge is a multi-disciplinary voluntary think tank for the built and natural environment that encourages greater collaboration across our industry especially between our professional institutions. The membership and workings of the Edge are at www.edgedebate.com