

THE ROLE OF PROJECT MANAGERS IN PARTNERING ARRANGEMENTS

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The paper briefly identifies specific roles associated with the advocated duties of construction project managers in the UK construction industry highlighting relevant issues pertaining to their potential role within partnering arrangements. This paper uses the results of a pilot study undertaken to provide a link between project managers and partnering arrangements and also contributes to the development of an empirical questionnaire, which will form part of broader research case study. The work reveals a number of preliminary key findings and makes a useful contribution to ongoing research in the field of project management within construction. First, in understanding the relationship between construction project management processes and the construction project manager. Secondly, in extending the role of the project manager as a possible facilitator of the partnering process on construction projects.

Keywords: facilitator, partnering, project manager.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the role of project managers in the context of partnering arrangements. It makes a useful contribution to an ongoing 3 year research project which has its roots in issues pertaining to organisational relationships in achieving project success within project management systems. It builds upon a number of previous published material by the same author (Watts *et al*, 1999a; Watson and Watts, 199b; Watts *et al*, 2000)

There are highlighted in previous construction related publications and journals many successful case studies of partnered projects (CIB,1997; Bennett and Jayes, 1998;). Research into partnering process models has also continued to grow and develop (CIB, 1997; Bennett and Jayes, 1998; Crane *et al*, 1997). Project management within construction environments has also been the subject of many publications (Walker, 1996; Morris, 1997; CIOB, 1996) to such an extent that it is generally recognised as, a key modern management method and, in having a crucial role in the management of projects.

Information collected from a pilot study conducted as part of an on-going research project suggests a possible link between construction project management systems and partnering processes. In addition, preliminary findings suggest that problematic issues exist between contextual definitions of project managers and partnering. The results also provide validation for the development of a larger empirical questionnaire in which this contextual mismatch can be analysed further.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGERS

A reoccurring theme associated with literature appertaining to the role of a project manager is that any person utilising tools and techniques that are common to project management systems and process to directing or controlling projects must be a project manager. No where is this more so than within the UK construction industry.

Project managers; a problematic definition

Walker (1996) notes that in the construction industry the title has deflected attention away from considerations of the process of project management, the APM's Body of knowledge (1996) goes further by suggesting that the title is to be so common and covering such a spectrum of activities that in many cases it is practically meaningless. The role is further complicated when firms within the supply chain have their own project manager thus at any one time there could be countless numbers of project managers associated with one specific construction project.

In particular, the role of a project manager is that of an overall planner, controller and co-ordinator of a construction project (Rwelamila: 1994), one who must ensure that the client's defined success factors including the traditional time, cost and quality criteria are met. One could postulate that in order for a project manager to act '*on behalf of and represent the client*' s/he must be directly employed by that client in either an in-house or a consultancy basis. Moreover, Walker (1996) argues that within a construction environment the title 'project manager' should have a reserved meaning i.e. that of managing the whole project in the sole interest of the client. In furthering the discussion of the role of the project manager this paper takes as its starting point the description provided by CIOB (1996: 3):

The project manager, both acting on behalf of, and representing the client has the duty of 'providing a cost-effective and independent service, selecting, correlating, integrating and managing different disciplines and expertise, to satisfy the objectives and provisions of the project brief from inception to completion.

Both, experience and evidence identified within the authors pilot study results (see figure 1) corroborates this problematic issue, when questioned "did the respondents consider that project managers directly employed by the client i.e. in-house or on a consultancy basis, are in reality less likely to have any conflicts of interest than project managers employed directly by the designers or constructors" 93% of the project managers responded positively.

Project managers; their role in project success.

The precise definition of project success has been the subject of much debate, commonly cited factors include time, cost and technical/quality specifications (Morris, 1997; Handa and Adas, 1996; Williams, 1993; Munns and Bjeirmi, 1996) other definitions include: a satisfied client (Lock, 1996) as well as environmental sustainability issues. Whichever criteria are selected, in which the outcomes of the project are judged against the key role of a project manger as advocated by CIOB (1996: 4), is one of motivation management and co-ordination of the whole project team. Moreover, Gabriel (1997) notes that the project manager becomes an individual client-based leader of the project team, the source of decision making and the conduit for communication. Within complex construction environments the project manager, as the task leader, will also assign tasks to specialists (the project team) as in all likelihood these task leaders will not have the expertise in all facets of a project. As

Rwelamila (1994) points out, the role is also concerned with resolving conflicts and avoiding project team disintegration.

PARTNERING PROCESSES

Within most partnering arrangements commentators acknowledge that a partnering champion is normally a precondition to a successful partnered project (McGeorge and Palmer, 1997; CIB, 1997). Crane *et al* (1997) Identifies the existence of a champion within the owners organisation as a valuable asset.

Table 1: Relationship table between project managers and partnering.

Advocated roles of a project manager	Stage	A generic partnering process
Selection of procurement system	1	Decision to partner
Selection of project team members	2 and 3	Selection of members of partnering team
Evaluation of tenders	2 and 3	Selection of second tier partnering team
Pre-construction team meeting	4	Facilitate partnering workshop. Team building
Development of control systems	5	Establishment of mutually beneficial working procedures
Monitor progress	6	Monitor process
Key stage meetings	7	Follow up workshops
Feedback	8	Feedback

It is somewhat difficult to pin down one ideal partnering process Glaxo Welcome for example initiated its own form of partnering known as FUSION on a recent project at its Beckenham Biotech site. Galliford advocates its own partnering methodology as do many other companies. CIB (1997) proposes a partnering process on which Bennett and Jayes (1998) builds upon identifying a case for second and third generation partnering. Crane *et al* (1997) focused on a partnering process model in terms of aligning objectives. Table 1. identifies and brings into line the likely the flow of the duties of a construction project manager against that of a generic partnering process. The table shows a close relationship between existing roles and processes.

CIOB (1996) notes that the leadership function for a project manager is essentially about managing people, in other words team building. Morris (1997) identifies the positive organisational environments created through team building. Within partnering this function is provided by the use of a facilitator (Barlow *et al*, 1997). This facilitation allows for people to become part of the team and successful case studies (CIB, 1997; Bennett and Jayes, 1998, Barlow *et al* 1997) have shown this to be a key to effective team building.

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

The pilot study undertaken forms part of a broader research framework and is a crucial stage in the development of the main survey phase of the project, the focus of which is the investigation of the inter-organisational and humanistic relationships found within construction project managed environments. The results are highlighted and discussed.

Contribution to the development of an empirical questionnaire is made and will form part of broader research case study. The sample consisted of a questionnaire sent to 20 randomly selected construction project managers identified from The Association for Project Management's database. The work reveals a number of interesting key preliminary findings.

Survey Method

SERC (1982) advocated the use of a construction management research process model and identified as one of its primary elements the establishment of a research method. Two critical factors associated with the success of a research method are to identify: the data to be collected; how to analyse the data.

The research method described follows a research design developed specifically to address a number of problematic issues associated with the role construction project managers. The aim was, in the first instance to design an appropriate method to gather the required data. In order to achieve this, a pilot study questionnaire was developed in order to:

- validate the practicality of the questions;
- identify the likely response rate;
- identify and resolving any other shortcomings as maybe come required.

Data Analysis

Response to the questionnaires have be analysed using computer spreadsheets, the authors felt this method to be the most appropriate for this small pilot study.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The survey results identify a number of observations. When asked the question "do you consider that project managers directly employed by the client (i.e. in-house or independent) are in reality less likely to have any conflicts of interest than project managers employed directly by the designers or constructors?". 93% of project managers responded positively. (Identified in figure 1 where 17% of the response rate selected never. As can be clearly seen in the response range on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 is 'always' and 4 is 'never').

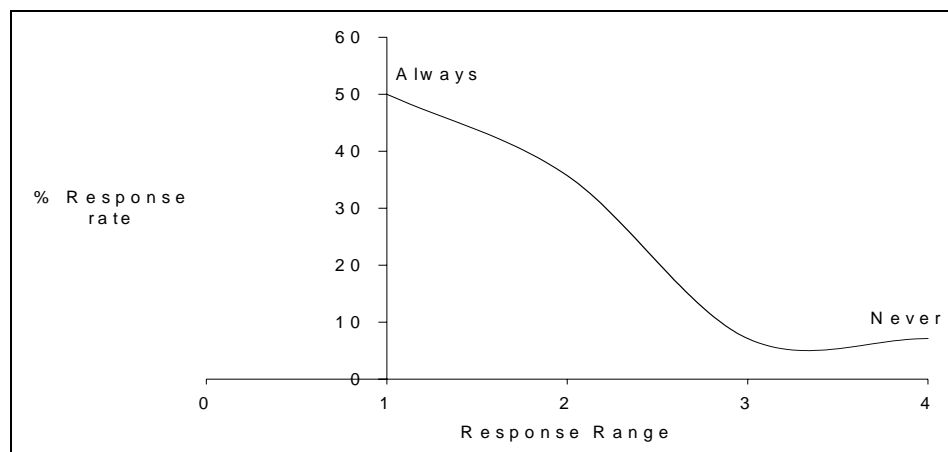


Figure 1: Employment and Conflict of Interest

When the questionnaire asked the respondents to consider the statement. *“The processes associated with managing the project team and ‘partnering’ are really variations of the same theme”*. Figure 2 indicates the resultant responses showing that 21% took a neutral stance with 35% agreeing and 35% disagreeing with the statement. It can be seen that 70% of the respondents held a definite view. The inference is that they may well be issues of contextual definitions associated with ‘project teams’ and

‘partnering’. However, a follow up survey is planned and may be the subject of a future paper.

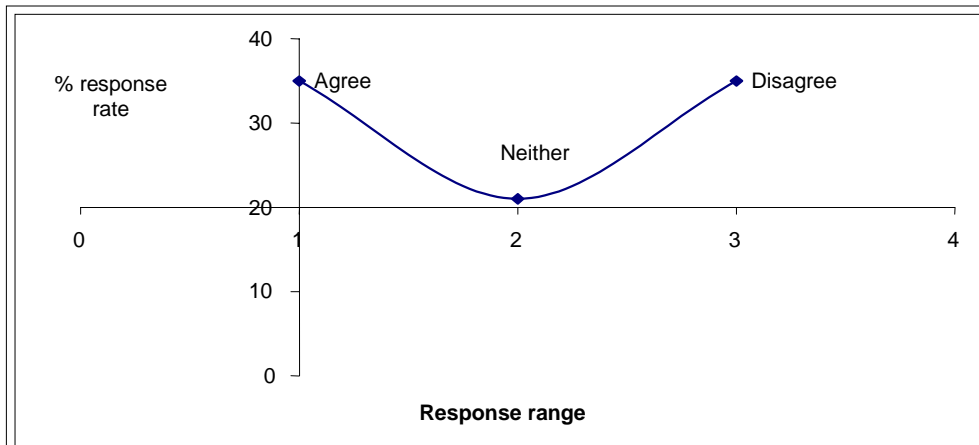


Figure 2: Are Project teams and Partnering variations of the same theme?

When questioned, all project managers agreed that being considered the interface between the client and the project, they are consequently ideally placed to promote the concepts of partnering. Moreover, the pilot study also concluded that, because they provide a pivotal role in project realisation, they should also be appointed to promote and assist in partnering arrangements.

Figure 3 compares the results of two issues. Issue 1, when questioned 43% of the project managers stated that they always promote the concepts of partnering, 29% always assisted in partnering arrangements.

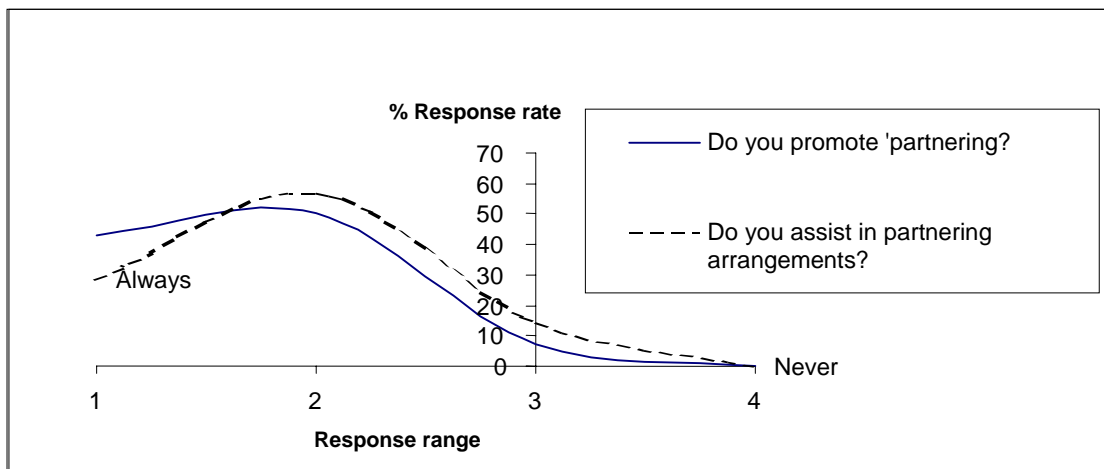


Figure 3: Project managers' role in partnering arrangements

However, 57% said they did promote the concepts sometimes, with 71% stating they had had some involvement with assisting in partnering arrangements. In other words, all had acknowledged having promoted and/or assisted in partnering and partnering arrangements at some time.

CONCLUSIONS

Case studies and other literature on partnering has identified that facilitating partnering arrangements enables teambuilding through workshops. The associated techniques used in project management in particular with reference to the identified role of construction project managers share a number of common themes (see table 1). Potentially, this overlap is useful on two counts, firstly it provides a simplistic process

model for project managers to assist them to play a key role in facilitating partnering arrangements. Secondly this relationship provides a useful starting point for further research in which the authors are exploring the development of an innovative project management process model that will encompass partnering and supply chain management.

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