

SBE16 Tallinn and Helsinki Conference; Build Green and Renovate Deep, 5-7 October 2016,
Tallinn and Helsinki

Partnering elements' importance for success in the Norwegian Construction Industry

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Abstract

As construction projects are becoming more complex and uncertain, and there is an increased focus on sustainability and green building, partnering is a way of enabling a non-adversarial environment. This creates a flexible process that helps e.g. retrofit projects achieving their goals. The purpose of this paper is to identify key elements that ensure the success of partnering projects for the different stakeholders. This paper will seek to answer the following questions: What elements are used in partnering projects? Is there a link between the use of the different partnering elements and the project's success seen from the client, contractor and user perspective? The research is carried out as a review of partnering literature, as well as an investigation of 10 partnering projects within the Norwegian context, using a case study approach. The investigated projects were both new buildings and retrofittings. A preliminary survey with additional in-depth, semi-structured interviews of clients and contractors was conducted. A document study was also carried out as a supplement to the survey and interviews. Key partnering elements such as early involvement, value-based procurement and start-up workshop were identified through this study. Further analysis revealed that these partnering elements, in combination with soft elements such as trust, commitment and competence, help facilitate success for stakeholders. The identified key partnering elements gives practitioners an implication of which partnering elements should be implemented to achieve project success and more sustainable buildings.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of the SBE16 Tallinn and Helsinki Conference.

Keywords: Partnering; Hard partnering elements; Soft partnering elements; Success for stakeholders

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1. Introduction

The use of partnering as a project delivery model emerge as an important trend in the Norwegian construction industry. Public clients such as the Norwegian Directorate of Public Construction and Property (*Statsbygg*) have developed their own models for executing partnering projects, but also municipalities are implementing partnering at an increasing scale. The popularity appears to be due to the traditionally adversarial culture and the high level of conflicts typically associated with the construction industry [1]. A driving force for partnering being more in demand seems, partly, to be that projects are getting more uncertain and complex than before [2], and partly due to the increased focus on sustainability. As stated in the report State of the Nation 2015 [3], municipal buildings are in particular characterized by a lag in maintenance and are in need of retrofitting and refurbishment in order to be as effective as possible. As these types of projects often experience scope creep, partnering is found to be a well suited project delivery model.

Construction projects are often associated with low efficiency, mainly due to the large focus on transactions [4]. The aim of introducing measures such as partnering is to increase productivity, avoid conflicts and shorten execution time by focusing on relations rather than transactions. The use of such measures may also lead to an increase in innovation and thus better products [5].

Different partnering models are in use within the Norwegian context. Haugseth et.al [6] investigated how partnering projects are executed in Norway, and examined elements that are used in partnering projects. However, the list of elements identified by Haugseth et al. [6] is not complete, and needs to be supplemented. At the same time, since implementation of partnering elements demands resources and dedication, it will be useful to establish a link between what partnering elements that are used and the projects' success. In order to do so, the paper addresses the following two questions:

1. What elements are used in partnering projects?
2. Is there a link between the use of the different partnering elements and the projects' success seen from the client, contractor and user perspective?

When assessing project success, the focus is on the client, contractor and user perspective. The perspectives of the consultants and architect are thus not evaluated. The practitioners from the clients and contractors were asked about the users' satisfaction with the end product. Based on the limited number of cases in this study, the conclusions are narrowed to address management and collaboration aspects of partnering projects in Norway, but they should partly be applicable in an international setting.

The following theory part presents the definitions of partnering and success. In part three, the research method is elaborated upon. The results from the case studies will be presented in part 4, and further discussed in part 5. The paper will conclude with a set of recommended partnering elements that are important for a successful outcome for both clients and contractors.

2. Theory

2.1. Background

Relational contracting has been a growing trend in the construction industry since its humble beginning in the late 1980s and early 90s. Largely based on insights from the Latham [7] and Egan [8] reports, public clients have started the shift from a practice based on transactions towards establishing relations.

One main ambition of relational contracting is to avoid adverse objectives and conflicts, which have characterized the industry for too long [9]. In order to achieve this, a relationship based on trust between the actors should be established. The literature argues that this can be achieved through relational contracting concepts such as alliancing, joint venture, public private partnership, partnering and integrated project delivery (IPD) [10]. Partnering, focusing essentially on improving cooperation within existing frameworks, separates itself from alliancing and IPD by being a more conservative approach than the latter [11, 12]. Alliancing and IPD are typically more explicitly incorporated in the contractual structure, and can thus be seen as independent project delivery models.

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