

QUALITY - IT'S ESSENTIAL FOR PROGRAMME & BUDGET

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TIME TO BRING BACK THE CLERK OF WORKS ?

Back in the 'good old days' of ICE contracts and traditional build, there was a role for the 'Clerk of Works'.

As an Engineer, I spent the early part of my career trying to appease the all powerful 'Clerk of Works' if they did not agree your quality was good enough, then the work did not proceed, it was that simple.

Quality on site is something we hear a lot about, sometimes in terms of how quality will be achieved and sometimes in the context of the challenges that are being faced, but are we doing enough ? Getting quality right is paramount to achieving project programme and bringing the project in on budget.

EVERY PROJECT IS UNIQUE

A couple of years ago, I went to visit the Triumph Motorcycles Factory. I was immediately struck by one thing, the attention to quality. This attention is obvious everywhere, the carpark was immaculate, the trees were all clipped to the same shape and you could sense all the staff had a real pride in producing a quality product. Do you know they don't even need head gaskets, the tolerance are that fine ! Who knew !!?

The procedures they had in place effectively reduced the risk of quality defects to an absolute minimum.

I left the factory really motivated by what I had seen. I immediately started thinking about how we, as an industry, can bring that sort of process and culture into our projects.



There are obvious challenges, construction projects are not generally built in a factory environment, our teams constantly change, each project is bespoke and the specifications and standards are not universal.

A project was not self certified like a Design & Build of today.

The Clerk of Works could not ask for something that was additional to the specification or works information. Their role was to rigorously enforce the required quality standard and they would sign off your 'approval of works' form when they were satisfied that you had met the contract quality.

Critically, the Clerk of Works had no responsibility for cost or programme. They were single minded in their role and that was to construct it correctly.

Today you could employ a Quality Inspector for your site but the major difference is they are employed by you, the contractor.

If you are serious about quality and decide to employ your own Quality Inspector or Clerk of Works then you have to EMPOWER them to a point which makes you feel uncomfortable. You need to expect them to challenge you, stop the works if they feel it's necessary and make sure that the Inspector is backed up so that Quality Culture takes over. Get yourself out of your comfort zone and into the QUALITY ZONE.

QUALITY CULTURE

However, how would you feel if the new car you purchased came to you with a snag list ? Are we setting ourselves up to fail from the start ?

In my own experiences, all the quality systems and specifications under the sun make zero difference unless quality CULTURE is bred throughout your team. It is simply not enough to give the specification and quality assurance documentation to your engineer and foreman and expect it to be built correctly, as leaders we have to DRIVE it and drive it hard.

Quality is bred from the top down and therefore leaders have to set an expectation and a culture that becomes absolute and that is difficult!! Culture does not change overnight and the construction industry with it's constantly changing teams, has a particularly difficult task.

Before you start a project, a leader must give serious consideration to what they want to achieve. This needs to be done in collaboration with the client and designers and then make sure this message is delivered along with an expectation to your team and supply chain



Then WRITE YOUR QUALITY EXPECTATION DOWN !! Write it down and display it so your expectations can be seen every day and at every single team meeting you must have quality on your agenda.

QUALITY CULTURE

A LACK OF QUALITY EXPERIENCE

I was once asked to go and look into a project which had lots of quality issues on it .

On the face of it, there should have been no issues, it had an experienced team, a full time quality inspector and a specialist subcontractor carrying out the bulk of the work.

It did not take me long to unravel what was causing the issues though. The team were under massive pressures to complete the project in a timescale which was probably unrealistic from the outset and coupled with pressure from the Client to get them out of their premises and the inevitable monetary loss the contract was experiencing, the team had started focusing on programme and only the programme.

The Quality Inspector had zero empowerment and the team had no culture to ensure quality was more important than programme.

Being a leader means having hard conversations and driving QUALITY, QUALITY, QUALITY.

Bringing your commercial team on board is also essential on the journey to quality culture. Cheapest is rarely the best !! Start thinking in terms of value not cost.

Rarely would I choose the cheapest contractor. Even at home when I was having my driveway paved, one of the contractors started talking about moisture content to make sure the type 1 was compacted properly, they were the one for me (but not the cheapest) !!



In so many ways choosing the cheapest is the wrong decision for long term quality and financial reasons. Have a review of the project you are currently undertaking and evaluate what is costing you money / time and then review how you could have avoided that from the outset. Let me give you some examples:-

- Constructing a pump station in several parts by different contractors - rarely successful in my experienced, let it as one package to a specialist, you'll pay more upfront but less long term.
- Drainage pipework - Plastic used to cost more than clay but plastic had 71% less joints and where do your quality issues normally arise in pipework ? On the joints ! So lessen your risk by 71% for the sake of a few quid!
- Wide wall manhole rings - may well save you having to shutter and surround but they are way more likely to displace under construction loads. I went away from them back to single wall and had no issues.

Quality culture is a journey that we, as an industry, need to embrace. It's a difficult road, but ultimately one which is handsomely rewarded. Getting quality right will help you achieve your goal of meeting programme and delivering on budget.

If you need help with your quality culture, I can help.

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