

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS

Alan Hurst¹, Myra Hodgkinson², Alistair Mutch²

¹ School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment, Dryden Centre, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 4BU, UK.

² Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU, UK.

E-mail: alan.hurst@ntu.ac.uk

ABSTRACT: Various studies and reports into the construction industry have highlighted the need for the industry to improve its performance and the levels of education, training and development of its managers. Continuing education, training and development of managers through the use of continuing professional development (CPD) is seen as one of the key routes to achieve this. Research was conducted through a survey of the top 150 UK construction companies to establish the nature and extent of CPD of their construction managers. The research also examined the CPD requirements of the principal professional institutions in the construction industry. Although many claim commitment to idea of CPD the research has revealed that formal CPD of managers is not widely undertaken, and the professional institutions, whilst having formal CPD policies do not widely enforce them. If construction performance is to improve then CPD for construction managers must be more widely implemented and encouraged.

Keywords - Continuing professional development, Construction management, Professional institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction industry's reputation for poor productivity and poor profitability is well known and widely documented (e.g. Lewis, 1965; Hillebrandt, 1984, 2000; Powell, 1980; Gruneberg & Ive, 2000). Egan (1998) identified one of the contributory factors to poor performance as low standards of management education, training and development, which must be raised considerably if the industry's performance is to be improved. Egan identified implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) for managers as one of the key drivers for raising standards; but to what extent have the major construction companies adopted CPD in an attempt to raise management standards?

This paper presents some of the initial findings of surveys of CPD embodiment in top UK construction companies and in the professional institutions that serve the UK construction industry. The study also forms part of an EU Minerva-funded project for Continuing Professional Development for Construction Management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

CPD has been given two interpretations, the most common and widespread in use is that of Continuous Professional Development, whilst a lesser used interpretation is that of Continuous Personal/Professional Development (Egan, 2002). CPD is embodied in the ethos of many professional bodies as a means of trying to ensure that

its members' knowledge and skills are up to date. A few professional bodies have recognised the value of CPD for many years, whilst many others are only now starting to recognise its value and slowly making it a widely incorporated requirement for continued membership. However in many instances its incorporation is rather in the word than the deed.

The engineering professions of the engineering industry, which in many ways are allied to and parallel to the construction industry with some segments being considered a part of the construction industry, underwent a two year Government Committee of Enquiry chaired by Sir Montague Finniston from late 1977 to late 1999. The Committee of Enquiry published its report in early 1980 entitling it 'Engineering our Future', a deliberate pun according to Finniston (1984), which was more commonly known as 'The Finniston Report' and made a staggering eighty recommendations for the future of the engineering industry.

Like the construction industry, the Committee recognised the importance and value of engineering to the UK economy and made many recommendations for an increase in provision and access to engineering education. It also recognised the importance of engineers maintaining their knowledge and skills. However, when the Finniston report was presented to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in 1982 the committee expressed considerable disappointment with the report for its lack of emphasis on continuing education:

The SRC welcomes the section in the report on "continuing formation" (4.103-4.117) but regrets that more attention was not given to this aspect in the Committee's work.

Kingman, Oakley and Eggington (1982: 103, para. 5.1)

They continued, recognising some of the problems involved:

We have found that the central difficulty in continuing education arises because there is little social pressure either from individuals or employers to seek systematic continuing education in technological subjects.

Kingman, Oakley and Eggington (1982: 103)

Four years after his original report was published Finniston commented:

Much of Britain's industrial and social progress, even its survival, depends upon the rapidity with professional men and women to seek new solutions to develop new skills and prepare groundwork for others. It is in this area of continuing education and training that professional institutions can, through their organization and membership (who are practicing practitioners), make their greatest contribution to engineering and engineers (whether members or not), and not just through the exercise of existing facilities but through their extension through newer communication devices...

Finniston (1984: 67)

Finniston also noted that in 1984 only three professions had any form of formal requirement for CPD; accountants, [town] planners and surveyors, additionally by this time the medical profession had dropped its formal requirement for CPD. Whilst

Finniston was concerned with the engineering industry a considerable segment of that industry might also be considered a constituent part of the construction industry.

Some twenty years after Finniston's Committee of Enquiry sat Sir John Egan (1998) was finding similar problems within the construction industry that had been found in the engineering industry of the 1970s, noting the improvements made in engineering over the last decade or so with regard to performance, competitiveness and profitability. Egan puts forward a number of drivers for change for the construction industry, the fifth of which is

'a commitment to people: this means not only decent site conditions, fair wages and care for health and safety of the workforce. It means a commitment to training and development of committed and highly capable managers and supervisors...'

(Egan, 1998: 14, para. 17).

Expanding upon these drivers for change Egan explains:

- at the **top management** level, there is a shortage of people with the commitment to being best in class and with the right balance of technical and leadership skills to manage their businesses accordingly. The Industry needs to create the necessary career structure to develop more leaders of excellence;
- the key grade on site is the **supervisor**. The UK has one of the highest levels of supervision on site internationally but one of the poorest records of training for supervisors...;
- upgrading, retraining and **continuous learning** are not part of construction's current vocabulary....

Egan (1998: 26, para. 55) [original emphasis]

In the follow-up study 'Accelerating Change' by the Strategic Forum for Construction in 2002, again chaired by Sir John Egan, the Forum made twenty-one recommendations to the construction industry, amongst which are:

- All industry sectors identify how to demonstrate that they have a qualified workforce;
- The professional bodies jointly with the CITB and other training bodies conclude as a matter of urgency issues of professional development for graduates into managerial roles.

(Egan, 2002: 9)

In the Forum's vision statement for the future of the UK construction industry it foresees an industry in which, amongst many things, the industry has a respect for people including 'an emphasis on education training and development' (Egan, 2002: 10). The forum notes that 'getting the right people with the right skills is a priority for the industry, but so too is the updating and enhancing the skills, and where applicable, management abilities of its existing staff (Egan, 2002: 31, para 6.17).

Although not explicitly stated the Forum clearly has a vision of 'an all qualified workforce' (Egan, 2002: 32), i.e. a construction industry in which everyone is qualified, but it is very keen to stress that 'all qualified', goes far beyond simple

health and safety knowledge’, stressing that ‘continuing personal and professional development is also relevant to all workers in the industry including designers and managers’ if they were all to keep up with the Forum’s proposals.

Following the Egan report the Movement for Innovation (M⁴I) was established to tackle some of the issues raised by Egan. Within M⁴I a working group, Respect for People, was created to tackle concerns about the way people in the construction industry were treated. The Respect for People Working Group published its report ‘A Commitment to People “Our Biggest Asset” ’ in November 2000 (Rethinking Construction, 2000). The Working Group identified six themes or ‘action areas’, each of which needed ‘prompt attention’, one of these action areas being that of ‘Career Development and Lifelong Learning’ (Rethinking Construction, 2000: 15). The importance of this is clearly recognised by the Working Group who emphasise that the importance of lifelong learning is not only for the employee being better able to contribute to the competitiveness of the firm they are working for, but also to enhance their own employability (Rethinking Construction, 2000: 32).

The Working Group also recognised that an important factor in the decline of applicants to the construction industry degree programmes is that young people perceive a lack of career prospects in the industry, brought about by a lack of training and development opportunities.

They further identify three conditions that have to be met for lifelong learning:

- Employers and individuals need to see the value of engaging in the process: there must be a perceived gain in making the investment in learning.
- Both parties need information in order to make choices about learning and careers even if, as a result, they choose to reject it as a result.
- Learning must be more accessible in terms of time, cost and place. The easier and less disruptive the learning, the more likely it is to be taken up. This includes both formal and informal learning.

(Rethinking Construction, 2000: 32)

In terms of the statutory requirements, the Working Group acknowledge that there is little scope here for legislating for lifelong learning, beyond that of health and safety issues. The most important issue raised here (in terms of this study) is that of the ‘work-based learning’ pull factor. Here Rethinking Construction (2000: 33) recognises that:

- The proximity of learning and work is very important since it not only demonstrates business relevance, but it requires the active involvement of employees;
- It should be recognised that there is a shared commitment from both employer and the workforce to promote continuous learning;
- Employers need to make time available for learning and training;
- Individuals should actively seek to update their skills.

The Working Group note that for any organisation seeking to commit themselves to a programme of lifelong learning and career development then a key component to this provision is that of CPD.

Following the M⁴Is Working Group's report the Working Group published, in October 2002 its follow-up report 'Respect for People: A Framework for Action' (Rethinking Construction, 2002).

The European project for the Use of Standards of Competence in CPD for Construction Industry Practitioners (EUSCCCIP) has adopted a definition (1998, 5) of CPD in the UK construction industry as:

The systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skill, and the development of qualities necessary for the execution of professional and technical duties throughout the practitioners working life.

This definition has been adopted by the Construction Industry Council (CIC: 2006a), one of EUSCCCIP project partners. Within the UK the professional bodies have a powerful influence in the construction industry (Whitely, 1999) which is recognised by EUSCCCIP in its acknowledgement of the contribution the institutions' CPD policies make to the industry through their influence over their members' activities. EUSCCCIP observe that this is achieved through the use of either the 'carrot' or the 'stick', i.e. through the use of incentives or penalties (1998, 9) with some institutions making CPD a voluntary undertaking whilst other institutions make CPD an obligation, prescribing minimum time allocations and standards of acceptability.

The CIC (2006a, 9) recommend that institutions move away from minimum time standards towards a competency based model through the use of EUSCCCIP's 'Framework for CPD Systems' which they have adopted. Thus the CIC report, would help harmonise CPD standards through the industry's professional institutions and might be more motivational for members to undertake and record CPD as currently practitioners who are frequently members of more than one institution are faced with conflicting requirements and competency standards.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In order to assess the level of CPD implementation among construction managers in the construction industry research was conducted in two distinct areas:

- A survey of staff development for construction managers in the top 150 construction companies in the UK.
- A survey of the CPD requirements of the principal professional institutions in the UK construction industry to which construction managers might belong as members.

3.1 The Construction Companies

A list of the 150 largest construction companies in the UK was compiled from 'league-tables' published by Building (2006), Construction News (2006) and Top Companies (2006). In order to get compatibility between the tables companies were selected on the basis of turnover, in preference to profit, as this gave a better indication of construction activity. It was found that some of these tables had been prepared from the companies' annual reports that were two or three years old and some league tables had been prepared using accounts from different years, creating problems of compatibility and consistency. During these periods a number of companies were also known to have either ceased trading, merged, been taken over by other companies or were now trading under a new name. Each company was systematically subjected to a web-search to determine its current existence and to obtain contact details in order for a postal questionnaire survey to be conducted.

From the 'league-tables' the names of 187 companies were extracted, details of 156 of which were obtained, but it was noted that out of these, seven were part of conglomerates, but still traded as divisions using their original names, thus a final list of 149 companies was derived.

The questionnaire sought to ascertain the degree of development and implementation of staff development and appraisal policies in construction companies for construction managers. It also sought to ascertain the approaches to and levels of support and opportunities for staff development.

3.2 The Professional Institutions

The boundaries of the construction industry can be difficult to determine as some segments of the construction industry overlap other industries such as engineering. In order to determine the principal professional institutions serving the construction industry the list of the thirty Full Members of the Construction Industry Council (CIC) was obtained from their website (CIC, 2006b). From this list seventeen professional institutions were identified for the survey of their CPD requirements for their members. A further list was obtained for the CIC (2006a) which listed eighteen professional institutions having websites that contained information about their CPD requirements. From this list sixteen were professional institutes which were also listed in the CIC Full Members list.

A survey of these websites, including any downloadable documentation, was conducted to ascertain the policies and practices for members' CPD within each institution. Where information was not available or required further clarification then this was obtained by a follow-up telephone call to the respective institution.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 The Construction Companies

Of the 149 construction companies that were surveyed 35 positive responses were received. Four were returned by the Post office as the company had 'gone away' leaving a response rate of 24.14%. Although a greater response rate would have been

desirable it is close to the lower levels of responses typical of industry which is stated as being 25-30% (Easterby-Smith, 1991) and 25-35% (Fellows & Liu, 1997). The first three questions were concerned with staff development policy, and sought to establish how many companies had staff development policies, the requirement to undertake formal staff development activities, and the extent of the implementation of the staff development policy if they had one. Table 1 shows the response to each question (A) as a percentage of respondents and the mean R for the Likert scale.

$$\text{Mean R} = \frac{1(A_1) + 2(A_2) + 3(A_3) + 4(A_4)}{r_n}$$

Where A_n = number of respondents to Likert scale point n
 r_n = total number of respondents

Table 1. Staff Development Policy

To what extent does your organisation have a staff development policy?				
Not at all	Some staff only	For most staff	For all staff	R
5.71%	14.29%	25.71%	54.29%	3.29
To what extent is the staff development policy implemented				
Not at all	Partly	Mostly	Fully	R
5.71%	14.29%	42.86%	37.14%	3.11
Does the staff development policy formally require staff to undertake development activities?				
Not at all	Partly	Mostly	Fully	R
17.14%	28.57%	31.43%	22.86%	2.60

The responses to each of the above questions indicates the extent (or lack) of staff development within the UK's largest construction companies.

Whilst some 37% of companies have fully embraced and implemented CPD amongst their construction managers the majority do not have fully developed and implemented staff development plans, with 5.71% having no policies what-so-ever. The requirement for staff development activity is shown to be well embodied in staff development policies, although there is clearly room for considerable improvement, especially among the companies in the lower quadrant which accounts for 17.14% of companies. A similar pattern is evident amongst those with staff development policies including staff development activity requirements.

Of those who did not have fully developed staff development 55.88% cited that one of the major inhibitors was that staff were too busy to undertake any form of staff development, whilst others (52.90%) were concerned that staff development programmes would make their staff more attractive to other employers who would be prepared to employ them on higher salary levels than they were prepared to pay, thus they might leave.

The second three questions concerned staff appraisal, and sought to establish the existence of such a policy, the level of implementation of staff appraisal policy, and

the inclusion of staff development opportunities. Table 2 shows the response to each question as a percentage of respondents.

Table 2. Staff Appraisal Policy

To what extent does your organisation have a formal staff appraisal policy?				
Not at all	Some staff only	For most staff	For all staff	R
0.00%	5.71%	22.86%	57.14%	3.09
To what extent is the staff appraisal policy implemented?				
Not at all	Partly	Mostly	Fully	R
0.00%	22.86%	51.43%	25.71%	3.03
Does the appraisal policy include staff development opportunities?				
Not at all	Some staff only	For most staff	For all staff	R
0.00%	5.71%	22.86%	71.43%	3.66

If staff development is to be effectively implemented the key component is that of staff appraisal. Here a very different pattern emerges. Appraisal policies are far less developed and implemented than those of staff development policies with fewer companies providing opportunities for staff development opportunity. This in some instances is due to the lack of a training and development department within the organisation.

Even though most companies encouraged staff development activities amongst their construction managers (see figure 1) there was an expectation that their managers undertake much of the staff development activities outside of working hours, a reflection of the task-dominated culture inherent within many construction companies, with only 23.53% of employers reporting any form of requirement in their contracts of employment for the undertaking of staff development (see figure 2).

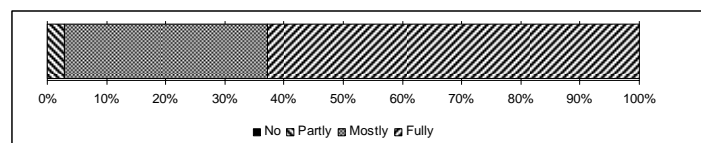


Fig. 1. Encouragement of Staff development Activities

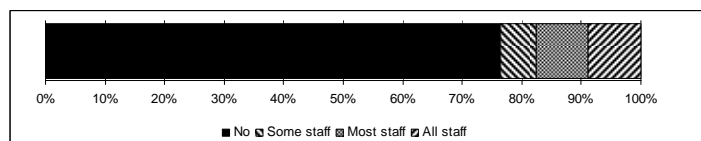


Fig. 2. CPD as a Formal Contract of Employment Requirement

4.2 The Professional Institutions

The seventeen professional institutions surveyed had a combined membership of 383,000. Every institution had formally adopted and implemented CPD policies, but it was found that these varied considerably in terms of CPD requirements, the degree of formality of the system, how members' CPD activities were monitored, and sanctions imposed for non-compliance.

Interpretation of the term 'CPD' varied amongst the institutions from a very strict interpretation of Continuing **Professional** Development to Continuing **Professional/Personal** Development. No institution adopted the interpretation of Continuing **Personal** Development although it was noted that even at the ends of the continuum the institutions recognised that professional development and personal development are not mutually exclusive, as shown in figure 3 below.

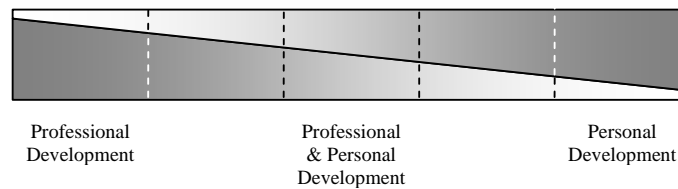


Fig. 3. *The Professional/Personal Development Continuum.*

Of the seventeen professional institutions surveyed, ten followed the strict interpretation of *professional development* and accepted only those activities directly related to their profession. These institutions accounted for 337,800 members (88.13%) of the total membership. Three institutions with a combined membership of 21,700 (5.66%) had a less strict interpretation of professional development and would accept a small amount of personal development, such as learning a foreign language, which might not be totally work related. The remaining four institutions with accounting for 23,800 members (6.21%) adopted the *professional & personal development* approach, accepting development activities that would enhance their members' professional abilities as well as activities that would enhance their members' personal development in recognition that improving one's self through personal development can also lead to increased professional performance. No institution adopted the *personal development* interpretation.

The professional institutions' policies for monitoring were found to be varied, ranging from monitoring a percentage of the membership each year to monitoring a fixed number of members each year, whilst some institutions had no monitoring policies or procedures place.

Ten institutions with a combined membership of 235,600 (61.47%) had a policy of sampling a percentage of their members. This percentage varied between 2% and 50% of the institution's membership sampled annually. Two institutions with 22,500 members (5.35%) had policies of sampling 200 members each annually, whilst the remaining five institutions totalling 127,200 members (33.19%) did not sample their members CPD activities for compliance. The reasons for not sampling members were given as having policies not to sample members, either because they lacked the

resources to do so or because they did not have mandatory CPD requirements, or because the institutions lacked the regulatory framework necessary to impose sanctions for non-compliance.

CPD requirements varied considerably between the institutions. It was found that only six Institutions (40.52% membership) followed the EUSCCCIP and/or CIC CPD Best Practice Guidelines in not specifying a minimum amount of members' time that should be allocated to CPD, but opted for a requirement that CPD should be appropriate to the member's needs and position. Of these, two had formerly had a time-based requirement, but had recently dropped their time requirements in favour of a more flexible approach. The other eleven institutions (59.48% of membership) retained a requirement for a minimum amount of their members' time to be allocated to CPD. This varied between 20 hours and 35 hours per year, but in many cases this could be aggregated over a two or three year period.

Where formal monitoring was operated generally the institutions' regulations allowed disciplinary proceedings to be instigated against members who failed or refused to comply. All most all the institutions reported that they were very reluctant to instigate any form of disciplinary proceedings, preferring instead to try and work with their members to resolve any issues and to understand the requirements and necessity of compliance. Only one institution reported actually having taking any formal disciplinary action against a member resulting in that individual leaving the institution.

Almost all institutions, including those without formal CPD monitoring procedures, reported that they would take into account a member's CPD record when they apply for corporate membership, or for upgrading of their membership status. Those who did meet the requirements would have their applications deferred until such time as their CPD undertakings were deemed compliant with institutional requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the derived major driving force for CPD implementation in the construction industry is coming from the professional institutions, rather than the construction companies. Thus, much of the CPD undertaken is undertaken at the behest of the institutions of which the managers may be members, rather than at the behest of their employers. There is, however, no requirement for construction managers to be members of any professional institution or to be registered, unlike chartered engineers and architects.

The research has shown that the principal professional institutions of the construction have, or are developing CPD policies in line with the EUSCCCIP framework, through their umbrella organisation, the CIC, of which they are, without exception, full members. There is no equivalent organisation for construction companies.

If productivity improvements are to be made in the construction industry as Egan (1998, 2000) suggests, this will only be achieved by increasing the standards of education, training and development amongst the construction managers. Currently the implementation of these recommendations amongst construction companies is not

widespread and patchy in implementation. A great deal remains to be done if CPD is to become embedded in the culture of the construction companies and construction managers, both of whom stand to achieve considerable benefits.

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