

COLLABORATIVE THINKING

Taff Farrell the Lead on Operational Excellence and Continuous Improvement at VINCI explains why their new white paper on Collaboration in FM can help practitioners put the ideals into practice

Collaboration within FM has long been recognised as an important way to enhance service delivery and improve performance. However, recent research carried out by VINCI Facilities amongst senior practitioners and leaders associated with facilities management and the built environment found that only 15 per cent had actually implemented a comprehensive framework or strategy for collaboration. The data, which formed part of a wider look at four key issues: collaboration, wellbeing, climate change and asset management, concluded that despite incredibly positive ambitions to achieve improvements in all these areas, the FM sector has been slow in implementing clear-cut strategic actions.

To help address these shortfalls, VINCI has published the first of four White Papers, Collaboration in Facilities Management⁽ⁱ⁾, looking at how to achieve gold-standard collaboration in facilities management.

Explaining the thinking behind the White Paper, Taff Farrell the lead on Operational Excellence and Continuous Improvement for VINCI explains: "I'd done some work on collaboration, and what I thought was, 'we talk about collaboration, but do we really do it?' And I concluded that's probably a great question for the foundation of the white paper.

"We aim to reach the broadest church we can, with our greatest goal to influence how the built environment operates, its people, the supply chain and key policy makers, to create value. As an industry we want to help change the way we do things so that it works for everyone. We believe there's room for collaboration in everything we do, upwards, downwards and sideways."

Nearly 84 per cent of respondents who were asked whether their organisations were committed to collaboration said yes, but many were unable to demonstrate collaborative working in practice. One of the major sticking points it emerged was a lack of understanding of what collaboration actually means.

Says Farrell: "The loose sense of many respondents was that 'we collaborate because we work together'. We wanted to dig away at that and come up with not just a definition of what it is, but the practices that go along with collaboration. It's often seen as a soft skill, but actual real collaboration is hard, and it's got teeth.

"There are frameworks of course, most particularly the ISO





standard [ISO 44001]⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ around collaboration and the usual contractual measures such as KPIs and SLAs, but for me I think collaboration is probably somewhere in the middle. This reflects ways of working together when things are going well, and acknowledging that when there is issue what that will look like. Good collaboration requires open honest feedback, and something we refer to as 'a positive challenge'."

The survey also asked, 'when people say they work collaboratively, what partners did they have in mind?' According to the results, a huge majority (94 per cent) said they worked collaboratively with colleagues and stakeholders within their own organisation, with 74 per cent including customers and end users in this equation.

Advises Farrell: "Collaboration is a much wider piece and should concentrate on the multitude of supplier's organisations in a particular project or environment. Traditionally, if you think about partnering with customers, it's that dual party idea, but when organisations sublet so much work, into the supply chain or other delivery partners alongside them, collaboration is about looking at ways to get the best out of that."

MEASURING SUCCESS

There are a multitude of advantages to all

parties in working collaboratively, which the white paper lists as:

- ▶ Fewer mistakes
- ▶ Improved efficiency
- ▶ Improved morale
- ▶ Improved customer satisfaction
- ▶ Improved internal reputation
- ▶ Improved external reputation

The benefits are clear, but how do you go about measuring success? According to the report, achieving collaboration begins by defining key objectives - with every contributor to the supply chain sharing values and working towards a common goal, which helps create a benchmark.

Explains Farrell: "You can use indicators and check if you're meeting all those hard measures; including safety, compliance, equality, customer satisfaction etc. But unless we're all agreed on what we're trying to achieve and collaborating for and to what extent this could be done better or differently, how can collaboration move beyond just those hard measures?"



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"By way of example, I did a piece of work with one of our customers' as part of a team managing the design and construction of a blue light facility which was bringing three services together into one new site. We did a lesson learned session at the end determining, 'what was the objective, what were we trying to achieve?'"

"From the contractor's point of view, we were trying to create and maintain a multiuse service. When you asked the end user, 'what was the objective?' it was 'we want to deliver a better service to the public'. You could argue there was actually a misalignment of objectives as people didn't agree the overall objectives. "That blue light project was to simply enable three organisations to work from the same building, but what the end user wanted was to deliver a better public service and to integrate those services not just in a facility but in the way that they work. Good collaboration means getting under the skin of what the organisation is about, what's our part in it and how do we deliver that? That's hard to get to, but when you've got it, all your decisions flow towards that purpose rather than just contractual obligation.

"For us we like to think the work we do

is more than just keep things working, so for instance at Whiston Hospital⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾, their approach to everything is ‘one team for the patient’, and tapping into that common purpose and common goal is absolutely essential.”

KEEP TALKING

One of the key threads that flows through the white paper is on the importance of maintaining good communications. The survey revealed however, that regular meetings and interactions were carried out by only half of the respondents. While the results suggested collaboration was strong at the outset of a project (including supplier selection, jointly agreeing a common purpose or goal, agreeing targets and KPIs) it was less frequent throughout the lifecycle of a project.

Farrell suggests a rethink on how communications are organised:

“Instead of holding meetings with copious actions etc we should aim to change this to make meetings action focused. This means you don’t have to sit down for an hour, but hold short action orientated briefings where everyone has the same understanding of what the meeting is about.

“For example, at VINCI Building Solutions^(iv)



communications can only have got more difficult since going back into lockdown, so how can contractors, customers and partners ensure ongoing communication in such difficult circumstances?

Says Farrell: “If we can get people communicating in the same way in shorter more focused ways via [Microsoft]

Teams calls we can apply the same principle but it is a damn sight harder. I believe a key part of emotional intelligence is understanding the pressures people are under. This means if someone can’t be there, we’ll recommend you record calls and make use of messaging

to keep people updated. It’s a bit trial and error as none of us have been through a pandemic before but together we can find the right answer.”

SHARED GOALS

While the pandemic has undoubtedly led to the acceleration of technology designed to support and enable communication and collaboration, the survey found that digital data-sharing between suppliers only took

effectiveness of technology, so if you’ve got a whole load of information and share that with someone else, they might share their insights too and help you both come up with a better answer.”

Sharing data for the common good with partners, subcontractors and clients is something that VINCI is absolutely committed to, and in terms of internal relationships with key stakeholders, digital collaboration is vital.

Says Farrell: “There are so many contractors in the supply chain and the way they capture data can often be very different, so one of things we’re looking at now is how to get the supply chain to supply us with information in the same way and in a standard format that we can use and our customer can access.”

Collaboration by its very nature means bringing everyone on board and that means getting buy in from key stakeholders. According to the survey, respondents who had successfully established formalised collaborative working recommend the following steps had begun by building the business case to get senior management on board which spells out the benefits and how risks will be managed and mitigated.

Explains Farrell: “The business case comes down to demonstrating what you’ve achieved and using examples of where collaboration has succeeded. This is why we’ve included a couple of case studies^(v) in the white paper.

“But my advice is that one of the ways to get buy in is to get the Board to look at that ultimate vision and say what’s the cost of not doing it? What’s the risk? It does come down to understanding what you’re trying to achieve and looking to excite people around that purpose. If you can excite a board of directors around a purpose you’re on the way.”

He concludes: “We’ve got to ask, in normal times what is our purpose? It’s not just to engage with a piece of work, it’s about making a difference, something which has only been highlighted during the pandemic. If we take that lesson and continue to collaborate for a higher purpose that would be a wonderful thing.”

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we were looking at how the project team interacted on a daily basis, as the site manager would hold a progress meeting during the day but people would also go in and out of his office throughout the day asking questions.

“We tilted this and asked, ‘how much time are you spending in those little interactions – what if we got all of the supervisors together for 20 minutes in the morning to deal with all of that in one fell swoop?’ When they switched to daily stand up meetings, it was very focused about what they were trying to achieve, who was meant to do what, and which individuals were responsible for which action. This meant all parties were given an update at once.”

Unfortunately, maintaining good

place around 42 per cent of the time, with the reason being a reluctance to share data with potential competitors.

Farrell admits that entrenched attitudes are impeding the take-up of secure data-sharing technology, which is something of a barrier to promoting collaboration.

“When we think of entrenched attitudes it’s the ‘this is mine,’ mindset, because as corporate organisations we’ve all got to make our margins. When we set out just to achieve our singular objectives it can damage those around us, so the way we can help advance the industry is ideally to allow information to flow more openly.

“The rate of change is demonstrating the

REFERENCE NOTES

(i) www.vincifacilities.com/media-centre/white-paper/

(ii) www.bsigroup.com/LocalFiles/en-GB/iso-44001/Resources/ISO-44001-Implementation-Guide.pdf

(iii) www.vincifacilities.com/downloads/case-studies/st-helens-and-whiston-hospitals.pdf

(iv) www.vincifacilities.com/services/building-solutions/

(v) www.vincifacilities.com/downloads/case-studies/rainbow-hospital-deeside.pdf