

12 Construction Partners in the Trenches

PartnerLink Services were invited to generate a shared appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of a joint enterprise so that the staff could focus unemotionally on practical improvement measures. The two partners had worked closely together over the last 7 years on some prestigious infrastructure projects so this meeting, to make the arrangements to appraise their collaborative capability, ought to be 'easy-peasy'.

It was bright and early in the HQ conference room of multi-national construction company BuilderCo. The coffee was hot and the biscuits were chocolate hob-nobs. Various people from the organisation were sauntering in. The head of the home delegation appeared to be the chief project engineer, Bob. Staff from the partner company, DrawitCo, designers with a global reputation, also started to filter in. Their leader was someone senior from the Key Account Management department.

We went round the table making introductions and to our surprise it emerged that very few of the partners knew the people on the other side of the table. BuilderCo had almost held a raffle to choose their Relationship Manager, Bob, hence the crusty engineer was not in the best of moods. DrawitCo had decided their KAMs (salesmen) were not really up to talking about the 'nuts and bolts' of a complex, construction relationship and introduced Dwain, a recent young arrival with a project management degree, as the newly appointed Relationship Manager. He seemed distinctly nervous.

At this point Bob awoke from his biscuit-induced reverie and realised that for the first time in 5 years he actually had people in front of him that purported to represent DrawitCo, his old *bet noir*. Summoning to mind all his frustrations and concerns he 'let rip'.....*"concrete wouldn't set"....."drawings were wrong"....."costings were late"....."design changes got lost"....."and another thing"* (jabbing his finger menacingly at the quivering Dwain).....*"where were you when it all got sticky?"* He eventually ground to a halt and looked around the room, a bit sheepishly.

We swiftly moved on with the briefing on the results of the short, on-line surveys completed by the knowledgeable people at all levels and the four follow-up telephone interviews. Both firms were pleased. The main lesson was 'don't throw out the baby with the bath water'; governance is still needed even when the site is knee deep in mud. Too much control limits flexibility and innovation. Too little is likely to result in cost overruns. The appointment of responsible, professional relationship managers on each side at the outset would have nipped all these issues in the bud. Incidentally, the Highways Agency was very impressed by the objective review of the relationship and noted the enhanced credibility of BuilderCo and DrawitCo as collaborative partners.



For Further information contact:

Telephone: +44 1 908 561892

Email: sales@sccindex.com

Website: <https://sccindex.com>