

# Earlier the Better for Contractors



Conventional procurement is not always cost-efficient and clients and consultants are ready to look for alternatives like Early Contractor Involvement (ECI). For many attendees at the ECI Forum in London, UK, the exact definition of "Early Contractor Involvement" was not clear and for some, who had their own preconceptions, it was not a positive possibility. The Forum on ECI held at Hilton London Docklands on 23rd and 24th June 2011, exposed many areas of conflict and, yet, at the end, this two-day interactive marathon revealed the potential for the ECI process for the 75 plus participants.

The focused presentations of the keynoters and other speakers, participants: consultants, contractors and clients, gradually changed their attitudes about ECI, about how to work together in the future and enthusiasm for the ECI method grew.

Starting with Professor of Project and Construction Management in the Del E Webb School of Construction at Arizona State University, USA, Dean Kashiwagi's assertive and optimistic approach to making construction projects more profitable and less antagonistic, and moving on to Peter Lundhus' description of the stumbling blocks and need for cooperation and transparency when working on multi-national projects such as the Fehmarnbelt link between Germany and Denmark, receptiveness to the ECI concept gained momentum.

An overflow of sharp questions from the audience and even sharper answers from the speakers followed the keynote addresses. Then the sparks really began to fly in the three break-out workshop groups where Marc Gramberger and his cohorts facilitated exchanges about the "Benefits, Challenges, and Needs of Clients, Contractors and Consultants" of understanding and implementing ECI.

Concluding day 1 was Daphne Broerse, partner at the law firm Norton Rose, who drove home the message that although reluctance may be present from participants, "the EU regulations are certainly not the obstacle. Legally ECI is possible".

On day 2 four clients: Stephen Bradford, CEO Port of Melbourne, Australia, Cees Brandsen of the Netherlands Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, Richard Nunn, from the UK Environmental Agency and Menno Steenman from the Port of Rotterdam, the Netherlands, described their successes with ECI as well as the demands that ECI puts on all parties. After their presentation, the audience returned to the three workshop groups and the highly charged discussions raised on day 1 gave way to concrete solutions as the overload of information clearly began to take positive form.

Gramberger and company then guided the plenary group through the rough waters of pragmatically establishing real communication, based on teamwork, on transparency - and not just trust. As Dean Kashiwagi said, more than once, "Trust and transparency are not the same thing. Trust is risky.

Transparency brings clarity and certainty". Mutual respect for partners and the ability to really listen to the technical experts - the Contractors and Consultants - and to listen to them early on which needs to be clearly embedded in contracts that take advantage of each party's expertise.

In between sessions, the noise level of voices in the foyers and reception areas testified to the networking that started at the meet-and-greet the evening before the Forum and continued intensively during the lunch and coffee pauses, followed often by informal dinner arrangements.

The gathering agreed that the role for branch organisations such as IADC and CEDA to spread the word and explain the real significance of Early Contractor Involvement for future large infrastructure projects is just beginning. As Peter Lundhus expressed in his closing remarks, "This conference was visionary, a first step... Too little use is made of the knowledge of contractors... Clients must provide leadership to implement ECI and IADC and CEDA must speak up to spread the word". By discussing difficulties early on and seeing the total picture of a project, ECI can help lower costs and increase value.