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**The Importance of Collaboration in Construction
Industry from Contractors' Perspectives**

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Abstract

Collaboration is essential to the success of construction projects; the project participants are realizing that sharing of knowledge and information is one of the key elements of a successful contractual relationship. There appears to be no clear guide on the process of collaboration between main contractor and subcontractor; therefore making it difficult to effectively interact and achieve a common project goals within the bounds of cost, quality and time. The purpose of the paper is to identify the views of contractors on the importance of collaboration in construction supply chain. The results of a survey on the importance of collaboration in the construction industry will be supported by the results of semi-structured interviews. The structured questionnaire surveys was participated by 160 delegates at a National Forum of Malaysian Malay Contractors 2011. Next, the semi-structured interview on the challenges on collaboration in the construction industry was conducted. The units of analysis was a contractor and subcontractor organization. Six important factors were found that lead to willingness to collaborate among contractors are; (i) collaboration encourages teamwork; (ii) similar racial collaboration develops cooperation between team members; (iii) stimulate information sharing; (iv) improves quality and timely project completion; (v) enhance service quality; and (vi) better communication among project members. These findings should not be considered as universal, as the geographical or cultural differences can affect their application is a different set up.

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1. Introduction

Lately, the landscape of the construction development delivery has been changing rapidly with an emphasis on partnering, joint venture, public/private partnership, and strategic alliances (Akintoye & Main, 2007). It has also been reported that in the early 1990s, the demand for collaboration between companies in the manufacturing industry was quite high. Based on the report by Leverick & Littler (1993), the demand for collaboration has moved from commercial pressures to an increase in competition, higher research and development (R&D) costs, higher demand of innovation projects and technological development, and the higher demand in internationalization of the industries (Akintoye & Main, 2007).

Stiles (1995) identified that the factors influencing collaboration around the world include: globalization demand, competition, risk and uncertainty within the business environment; while businesses as diverse as insurance, airlines and computers are recognizing the need to collaborate in order to survive. Stiles (1995), also concluded that many companies are considering new market ventures and looking for long-run research plans and development programs that offer opportunities to spread the risks of this to investors. The use of collaborative relationships to deliver goods and services has been a subject of much research in the manufacturing and service industries (Akintoye & Main, 2007).

Many researchers have investigated collaboration by the construction industry players. Douma, Bilderbeek, Idenburg and Looise (2000), discussed collaborative relations from the angle of strategic alliances and noted that due to the ever-increasing pace of technological developments and access to new technologies, alliances have become a key success factor in many industries. In addition, they (Douma et al., 2000) also found that there was a shift from “traditional” cost driven alliances to knowledge-intensive alliances, where inter-partner learning was a major objective.

Stiles (1985) indicated that successful collaborative partnerships and strategic alliances needed to be developed as part of the overall strategy of the construction organization such as identification of clear goals and objectives, and significant attention to the choice and type of partner. Crouse (1991) concluded that the power of partnerships had important roles which were enumerated by the clear advantages of a balanced partnership relationship: partnering provided the ability to leverage internal investments; focus on core competencies; leverage core competencies of other organizations; reduce capital needs; broaden product offerings; gain access or faster entry into new markets; share scarce resources; spread risk and opportunity; improve quality and productivity; have access to alternative technologies; provide competition to in-house developers; use a larger talent pool; and satisfy the customer.

Partnering involves a commitment by the organization to cooperate and achieve common business objectives (Bresnen and Marshall, 2000). One of the few studies was by Ardit and Chotibhongs (2005) who investigated the issues in subcontracting practice. They also investigated individual issues rather than subcontracting practice in its totality. The objective of this paper is to identify the views of contractors on the importance of collaboration in construction supply chain. There is no clear picture shown in the process of collaboration within main contractor and subcontractor and therefore the importance of collaboration in contractor’s relationship needed to address and supported by mixed method approach..

2. Research methodology

2.1 Mixed method approach

Mixed methods research offers great promise for practicing researchers who would like to see methodologists describe and develop techniques that are closer to what researchers actually use in practice. Mixed methods research as the third research paradigm can also help bridge the schism between quantitative and qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). Methodological work on the mixed

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