

FEEDBACK: Why don't we learn?

Edge Debate No 18, 12 May 2003

BACKGROUND

In recent years, clients have expected the construction industry to deliver performance. Consequently, they have been moving from input to output specifications - as with the PFI - on the assumption that the industry knows best what happens to its products.

But how much does the industry really know? As a general rule, it leaves the site as soon as possible after practical completion, does not live with the consequences of its actions, and is not much involved in providing aftercare services. Sadly, many construction professionals on the client side also behave in much the same way. Consequently, old problems persist, innovations miss their targets, and simple effective solutions are not appreciated for the successes they are.

In the new industry regime, one might expect to find much more feedback activity; and indeed there is a growing level of interest. However, to date most of the effort has been put into the processes of procurement and construction, not into how the completed product actually performs. Why?

- Many clients assume that things should be right first time. However, as was debated at the Edge in October 2000, while there is much scope for improvement in performance and avoiding defects, the expectation of instant perfection is unreasonable in all but the most repetitive of projects. The customer needs the whole product, not just the physical bit.
- Many clients assume that if they get the right people together in an integrated team, the feedback will happen automatically. In fact, you need both the ingredients and the recipe.
- Nobody wants to bear the costs (although they are small, and almost certainly instantly repaid by the value added) and designers are fearful of the risks associated with discovering hidden problems (though these appear to be small too).

Effective feedback leads to benefits all round.

THE DEBATE

The debate will be in the sixth floor conference room at the RIBA, 66 Portland Place, London W1 from 6 PM to 8.30 PM on Monday 12 May 2003. It will be chaired by Edge Committee member Bill Bordass who also organised and spoke at the *Right First Time* debate which helped to catalyse a number of initiatives including *Soft Landings*.

The debate will take the normal format of three presentation slots of ten minutes each, followed by an hour or so of formal discussion with points recorded there and then, and ending with informal discussion over drinks for those who can stay on.

It will attract clients, designers, contractors, occupiers, managers, researchers, service providers and government to discuss how we can truly make follow-through and feedback a routine part of project delivery and how we can all learn from the experience.

- How can we secure commitment to feedback from the beginning of a project?
- How can we get as much as possible right first time?
- What aftercare services should we be providing?
- What should we be getting feedback on?
- How can feedback become a normal part of the procurement process?
- What are the implications for the appointments of all team members?
- How can we best manage the knowledge we create?
- What about the weak links in the chain?

SPEAKERS

- 1 Monitoring workplace performance and feedback into design
Barry Austin, Arup R&D
- 2 Alliances and knowledge management.
Ashraf Michail, BP/Bovis Alliance
- 3 Soft Landings update
David Adamson, Director of Estates, University of Cambridge.
Mark Way, RMJM.