

Behaviours4Collaboration—Engaging with industry

Professor Juani Swart (School of Management); j.swart@bath.ac.uk

As part of a UK Government Construction Strategy, all centrally-funded construction projects will need to be delivered in collaboration by several stakeholders by 2016 through a process known as ‘Building Information Modelling’ (BIM). BIM is a collaborative way of working, underpinned by the digital technologies which unlock more efficient methods of designing, creating and maintaining assets.

BIM embeds key product and asset data and a 3 dimensional computer model that can be used for effective management of information throughout a project lifecycle – from earliest concept through to operation. It has been described as a game-changing ICT and cultural process for the construction sector. This project focused on a tool to support the cultural processes of collaboration—a Profession Map that helps industry to recognize, create and sustain positive collaborative behaviours.

PROJECT SUMMARY

As part of a wider project led by the Behaviours4Collaboration group to produce a Profession Map, we were keen to conduct a stakeholder engagement workshop as a means to test a draft Map.

We hosted a half-day interdisciplinary and interorganisational workshop in order to elicit people’s thoughts on our draft Map. Many of our industry stakeholders are based in London and, as we were inviting senior managers from these partners, we thought it unlikely that they would be able to commit to a whole day—we felt a half-day would generate higher attendance.

The World Café method—see: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html> - is a useful method for both getting collaborators to work together and to capture their thoughts and responses.

We chose to host the workshop on-campus in the Chancellors’ Building. This made sense as the building had been designed using the BIM process and so acted as a real-life example of what collaborative work in the construction sector could achieve.

The workshop itself started with an overview for stakeholders of the theoretical relevance of collaboration by Professor Stephen Emmitt from the Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering. We wanted attendees to be able to draw upon theory to enhance their collaborative practice, hence this presentation. Stephen was then followed by Dr Mark Shelbourn who gave a practical overview of how BIM was utilised in the design and build of the Chancellors’ Building.

Following these inputs, we moved into a workshop environment and used the World Café method to gain feedback from attendees on the Profession Map. People were divided into groups. Each group was given a draft Map before discussing their thoughts and capturing their feedback on a template provided. We then discussed in plenary. Notes from each group were recorded and circulated to all those who attended.

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Key external stakeholders from the Behaviours4Collaboration group attended, including:

- Stride Treglown
- Constructive Coaching
- Building SMART UK
- Constructing Excellence

If you would like to discuss how you might engage publics in or with your research, please contact the University’s Public Engagement Unit at: public-engagement@bath.ac.uk

WHAT DID YOU GET FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

We were able to engage key stakeholders in the shaping of the Profession Map. In particular we were able to glean feedback on how the Map could work across various contexts. It is critically important that this information was provided during a collaborative workshop. It meant that we could get real time feedback on the use of the Profession Map which would not have been possible in a linear or virtual space (e.g. through the exchange of emails).

Working in this way enabled us to have impact on practice via the early adoption of the Profession Map. In addition we were also able to apply for further research funding given that the Map has been adopted by University of Bath research faculty.

WHAT DID YOUR PARTNERS GAIN FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

Our stakeholders benefited from the practical opportunity to find out more about BIM and what it looks like in practice as well as to inform a tool that aims to help them to undertake collaborative work, ensuring it represents the reality on the ground. Stakeholders fed back key ideas and suggestions to enhance the Map, including:

- Keeping metrics simple and including 360 degree feedback when assessing collaborations;
- The need to differentiate between clients and end users when collaborating;
- The importance of trust and constant dialogue when collaborating;
- The need to think long term in collaborative relationships.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

We felt that the event gave stakeholders an opportunity to begin to use the Map and to familiarise themselves with how it might work in practice. The act of their shaping the Map's development should hopefully enhance the likelihood of them buying-in to it.

In retrospect, it would have been helpful if we had presented how the event was part of a range of other projects and activities undertaken by the South West Regional BIM Hub. This would have enabled us to 'join the dots' and to show that the Map is part of a wider process that aims to have impact over time.

I suspect this is often the case with engagement events but it would have been nice to have a longer lead time in order to involve even more stakeholders. It would also have been useful to have planned some follow-up events to keep the ball rolling.

TOP TIPS

1. Be clear on the intended outcomes for stakeholders involved. We wanted our stakeholders both to have had an opportunity to shape the Profession Map and also, to begin to familiarise themselves with the Map in the hope that they would adopt it in the future.
2. Think about where best engagement fits in your research journey. We think it best to involve stakeholders early in the process and in fact, could have sourced their opinions in designing the draft Map.