

Coaching PFI towards open goals – Construction News 14/08/03

Getting PFI teams to agree clear aims and responsibilities is a job in itself, writes Myles Downey

With the London Underground finally in the hands of Ken Livingstone and his team, the test begins in earnest to find out if this PFI really will benefit the network. Londoners will now have to sit tight and wait.

What is clear is that Mr Livingstone's team will have their hands full. Getting the leaders in a PFI contract to work together to set clear goals, responsibilities and agreements to which all parties are committed can be a job in itself.

With divided loyalties across the supply chain and the potential conflict for competing aims, getting the leadership team right and working together to set goals for which all parties agree can take its toll.

This is where Performance Coaching can help. The business world has already used external coaching as an effective means of developing leadership. But the construction world has not used coaching extensively despite the potential impact, particularly in completing projects on time and to budget.

The integration of the supply chain is critical. As Dermot Gleeson, Executive Chairman of MJ Gleeson, acknowledged in early June at the Public Private Finance Congress, "PFI has in many respects transformed the way in which larger contractors conduct their business. The single most important reason for this is that as an equity investor in a PFI project, a contractor has a much greater interest than under the terms of a traditional construction contract in that project's 'whole life' cost and in the effective integration of the supply chain."

But within the supply chain are multiple stakeholders and there is huge potential for divided loyalties, lack of trust and complex chains of command getting in the way of performance. Matrix organisational structures can include the main contractor, sub contractors, architects, engineers as well as public and private sector stakeholders who have made a large investment. They can find themselves at loggerheads when it comes to managing the project with the potential for competing goals resulting in projects becoming unmanageable and deadlines being moved.

Coaching brings these issues into the open and works to find creative solutions. It builds a sense of teamwork in which relationships are strengthened and co-dependencies worked through. Goals are agreed to give a sense of there being a single team. The coach works with the project team, keeping it focussed on its aims, removing obstacles and holding people to account for the commitments made to each other.

Having recently worked with the leadership team from a large-scale PFI capital project worth £300million, I have experienced first hand how divided loyalties can lead to a project becoming almost unmanageable. Performance Coaching introduced a framework of clear goals and responsibilities were agreed to which all parties in the supply chain were committed. By removing all obstacles and working through issues, all

parties had clear objectives and the result was the completion of the project on time and within budget.

This is the perfect example of the enormous impact Performance Coaching can have for the construction industry in the new era of PFI.