

Key Take-Aways
Panel Discussion on MGI Study of Construction
Mar. 3, 2020

As the construction industry in the Metro Washington market searches to become more productive, our panel of young leaders, as well as a well-educated and experienced audience of construction professionals, shared their views on what progress looks like to them. Much was discussed, but a few themes arose:

Design/Build

First, the contracting and delivery method recommended for productivity is Design/Build. The environment that this method creates is one of collaboration, transparency, and an opportunity for all project stakeholders to participate in the success of the project. Design/Build contracts properly reward trade contractors for their expertise in design and eliminate much of the confusion created by incomplete or uncoordinated drawings, rather than placing the burden of bringing the design to construction on the trades after engineering has taken place. In addition, Design/Build projects seem to have the best potential for creating shared project incentive structures that create alignment across entire project teams. In this way, we can create efficiency by eliminating competing interests from the equation.

Workforce

The second theme that emerged was the importance of training and developing the workforce as a means of ensuring tradespeople are prepared to perform in their roles at the levels demanded on their projects. This issue should be confronted on two fronts:

1. First, in our communities, as we engage young people and the unemployed to consider a career in the trades. Within our communities, a special note was made that we must recognize the challenges facing the people within each unique environment, rural, suburban, and urban settings, and develop a model of engagement designed to meet each demographic where they are and help them to see the industry as a viable option for them. Steering these people into the industry also requires a keen awareness of the training programs available to them. Significant efforts have been made by industry associations to develop these resources, and they are available to those who seek them.
2. Second, within our own companies, we must embrace our own responsibility to develop our employees with well-built training programs. Special emphasis here should be placed on onboarding programs that prevent new hires from being put into the field before receiving training that is crucial to preventing mistakes that damage productivity, and safety risks that jeopardize the health of everyone on the project. Resources here are also available through industry associations.

Technology

The third theme from our panel is the implementation of technologies to enhance productivity. Lessening the reliance on paper and embracing good document management

software will increase productivity by making information more accessible and updated in real-time. Identifying the aspects of your work that can be fabricated in a controlled manufacturing environment rather than all done in the field can drive down reliance on labor, as well as propel the speed of construction, which both can have incredible impacts on productivity. Eliminating unnecessary email communication will reduce clutter and improve overall communication by making it easier for people to respond to those things that require their attention. There are many other process improvement items we can mention here, but these were some of the best-presented concepts.

One key takeaway that all attendees should have is the recognition of the imperative to embrace change. In some cases, that change may be going toward new technologies and processes as we've outlined above, and in other cases, it may be back toward old technologies like the telephone as a preferred method of communication to increase productivity. What's not in question, however, is that there are major opportunities for improving productivity, and the people who embrace the challenge will outperform those who hold on to the status quo.

Additional Take-aways:

1. A strong team with collaboration among all stakeholders – GC, Subs and Owner – is what we need to seek on every job.
2. Managing risks is taking valuable resources away from building a building more efficiently.
3. Owners will have to be convinced of benefits of building a strong team and what that involves from a cost standpoint.
4. Other countries have models we can study on both faster construction and training available labor.
5. On-site labor training needs to be more efficient and productive.
6. Pre-fab and modular construction will address labor shortage.
7. Owners would have to accept similar buildings to get economies of scale, however owners want each of their buildings to be unique.
8. Returning citizens are a viable option for workers.
9. Using the IKEA concept of easy to install assemblies that require less skill would address shortage of technicians.
10. BIM is worthwhile but all trades need to be involved in the design process up front.
11. Coordination meetings can provide value if the right people are there.
12. There are technologies that subs need to get more comfortable with. ASA will provide additional information on this at it's 3/19 program.
13. Design build is a reasonable alternative. Again, subs need to be partners in the process.