

## **5<sup>th</sup> CU Construction Conference**

# **Continuous Professional Development Changes for Construction Professionals Post Covid-19**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a requirement of all Chartered construction professionals. The benefits of CPD are also espoused by many construction companies so arguably CPD should also be undertaken by all professionals regardless of Professional Body Chartered status. However, construction reports such as ‘Modernise or Die’ (Farmer, 2016) and ‘Building a Safer Future’ (Hackitt, 2018) have highlighted the construction industries lack of focus on skills and training development. This is argued to undermine the competence of construction professionals. The aim of this paper is to therefore understand if construction professionals undertake CPD, and if they believe their current CPD is effective in terms of type and quantity. The paper seeks to understand how CPD needs are identified, why CPD practices are undertaken, and if CPD is reflected upon. A total of thirty-six completed questionnaires were collected from UK construction professionals. Analysis of the responses revealed that Chartered professionals were more likely to take responsibility for their own CPD than non Chartered professionals. Interestingly the impact of Covid19 on CPD practices was also identified. The results revealed that prior to the national lockdown CPD was largely a company-initiated process, as for the most part companies were the ones who often identified training needs. However, since the start of the first national lockdown construction professionals revealed they have an increased focus on the need for CPD and are now less reliant on their company initiated CPD processes and more likely to take responsibility for their own development. Nevertheless, company expectations and requirements were also some of the reasons revealed for CPD participation. Although, belief that the CPD topics covered would be of use in professional requirements, followed by increased employment opportunities and that the CPD topic sounded interesting were the most common reasons for professionals undertaking CPD.

**Key Words:** Continuous Professional Development. Construction Industry. Covid-19.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) can be described as the ongoing process by which professionals assess their skills, knowledge, and experience to highlight any deficiencies against current and future role requirements, and then take appropriate actions to ensure these deficiencies are addressed. It has been argued that whilst some professionals voluntarily undertake CPD activities, other professionals do so through encouragement by professional body requirements (Kwofie et al., 2018). Professional bodies do place obligations upon their members to engage with and record their CPD undertaken. This includes 20 hours of CPD per year if you are a chartered member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS, 2021) and 35 hours of CPD per year for members of the Association for Project Management (APM, 2021). Some professional bodies do place obligations upon chartered members to undertake CPD, but do not place any minimum requirements on the annual amount they have to undertake, instead leaving it to the volition of the individual member (e.g. CIOB, 2021).

As the requirement for undertaking CPD requirements spans professional bodies, undertaking CPD activity can be viewed as a competent and beneficial experience for the development of professional skillsets. However, a review of construction industry reports reveals that CPD is often not widely undertaken by many professionals, and where it is, the activities undertaken are not of sufficient quality. Hurst (2009) links the poor productivity of the construction industry described in ten different major government reports from 1944 to 2002 to the lack of education, training, and development of the construction industry workforce. The lack of CPD take up, and the links this has to low levels of construction industry productivity has also continued in the last decade. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) confirm that the average productivity of the construction industry (expressed as pounds per hour of output) has marginally risen from £24.00 in Q1 2007 to £27.00 in Q4 2017. However, this is still well short of the average productivity of the UK economy as whole which in Q4 2017 was £33.70. This productivity problem, and its links to the CPD behaviors of construction professionals was highlighted in the Government commissioned construction industry report 'Modernise or Die' which described how the construction industry symptom of low productivity requires the treatment of strong construction industry leadership, training, and investment in the development of skills (Farmer, 2016). The report 'Building a Safer Future' that was published in the wake of the Grenfell Tower Disaster, whilst focusing on Building Regulations, also commented on construction professional's skill development practices. The report argued that lessons are not learnt or shared and that the industry workforce often lacks the relevant knowledge, skills, and experience (Hackitt, 2018).

There therefore appears a gap in knowledge, between the benefits and requirements of CPD espoused by professional bodies, and the lack of attainment of relevant skills and knowledge highlighted by numerous industry leading reports. The aim of this research is to address this gap by understanding if current construction professionals undertake CPD, and if they believe their own current CPD practices are effective in terms of quality and quantity. This research also seeks to understand how CPD needs are identified, why CPD practices are undertaken, and if CPD is reflected upon.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

As this research serves to position itself within a gap in current literature, contributing to a broad area of understanding yet generating and developing a theory to explain the phenomena witnessed, an inductive approach has been adopted. In this instance this is concerned with capturing and utilising quantitative data to develop an understanding that can then be tested for its wider application (Bryman, 2016). To capture such quantitative data in a time and resource efficient manner questionnaires were utilized as the most appropriate research instrument as these allowed for numerous potential participants to be reached relatively easily, with each having the anonymity to complete the questionnaires truthfully and confidentially (Bryman, 2016).

The questionnaires were distributed via an online link aimed at Construction and Project Management (CPM) and Quantity Surveying (QS) professionals. In total thirty-four completed questionnaires were received, 16 from CPM and 18 from QS professionals. The results were then plotted on Microsoft Excel whereby patterns and trends could be interrogated and identified.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In total 53% (n=18) of respondents currently belonged to a professional body and 47% (n=16) did not. Out of those who did not currently belong to professional body 62.5% (n=10) were either working towards chartership or planning on doing it in the future, and 37.5% (n=6) had no current intention of joining a professional body. We can therefore see that the majority of respondents were either a current chartered professional, were training to be one, or had plans to commence training in the future. When these figures were further broken down by profession, it was revealed that of the CPM's 31% (n=5) were currently chartered compared to 61% (n=11) for QS's. However, 70% (n=7) of CPM professionals were either currently working towards becoming chartered or planning on doing so in the future compared to only 30% (n=3) of QS professionals. When asked regarding motivations for CPD engagement, promotion opportunities, enhancing current skillsets, employer/professional body requirements and personal interest were ranked as the most common.

The questions asked around personal responsibility for planning and achieving CPD objectives revealed a stark contrast between those professionals who were chartered and those who were not, regardless of role. Of all current chartered professionals, 83% (n=15) believed they should take responsibility for their own CPD compared to only 31% (n=5) of none chartered professionals. Of those none chartered who were working towards or planning on working towards achieving chartership, 60% (n=6) believed they should take responsibility for their own CPD compared to 40% (n=4) who believed it should be the employers responsibility to develop their employees. Of those professionals not currently chartered nor planning on undertaking chartership, only 16% (n=1) believed CPD should be the responsibility of the professional themselves with 83% (n=5) believing it should be responsibility of the employer. These results reveal that chartered professionals, or those working toward achieving chartership, are more likely to take responsibility

for their own CPD than none chartered professionals, and those with no intention of working towards chartership. There is a clear trend between a professional's personal responsibility over their own CPD and their chartered status.

Of all respondents (n=34) the result reveal that 85% (n=29) undertake some form of formal CPD recording compared to 15% (n=5) who do not. Of those who record their CPD, 90% (n=26) believe the CPD they undertook (prior to the first UK national lockdown) was sufficient for their development requirements compared to 10% (n=3) who did not. Post lockdown, perceptions of organisational CPD had changed as the results revealed that of those who recorded their CPD (n=29), those who believed the CPD offered solely by their companies was now sufficient for their development needs had reduced from 90% (n=26) to 54% (n=14). Analysis of the results revealed also that prior to the national lockdown CPD was largely a company-initiated process, as for the most part companies were the ones who often identified training needs. Analysis of the results revealed 88% (n=30) of all respondents had been on a company organised training event in the previous twelve months. Out of the 21 respondents who stated they took responsibility for their own development, 67% (n=14) felt that prior to the pandemic induced lockdown, company organised training events alone were enough to address all their personally identified development needs. However, when asked if the current organisational practices were able to meet their development needs, the positive response reduced to 38% (n=8). The results revealed a drop of 29% (n=6) who now felt the company CPD practices alone were not enough to meet their own identified training needs since the pandemic induced lockdown, and so they planned to take more control over the CPD activities they undertake in future.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The importance of CPD is emphasized by both professional bodies and leading government backed industry reports. It is argued it has a wealth of benefits including improving the productivity of the construction industry. However, there appears a gap in understanding between the quality and practice of CPD undertaken and the quality and practices the industry requires. This inductive research sought to inform this research gap through distributing a questionnaire to construction professionals to better understand their CPD practices. The results revealed chartered professionals (and those working towards chartership) are more likely to place an increased focus and emphasis on CPD than those professionals not chartered or working towards achieving chartership. The research also found that since the start of the first national lockdown construction professionals have an increased focus on the need for CPD and are less reliant on company initiated CPD activities. It appears construction professionals believe their CPD practices are sufficient to meet their needs but are now more likely to take responsibility for their own development as they believe their organisations no longer provide sufficient training opportunities in a post pandemic industry.

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