

# Deconstructing Errors

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**The UK's construction sector is coming together through the Get It Right Initiative (GIRI), to curb the cost of poor quality in the industry. According to the GIRI's recent research project, the construction industry recognises that 21% of its costs is due to error. In this article, The Chartered Quality Institute discusses how the sector can improve its productivity.**

As the sector realises the importance of quality management to reduce waste, a group of industry experts have come together to develop an initiative to improve the UK's construction industry. GIRI has the strategic aim of addressing the root causes of error in construction and significantly minimising their occurrences. The not-for-profit organisation has identified that the root cause of errors in the industry is related to attitude, culture, planning and communication.

## **Changing cultures**

Despite all of the checks and balances that have been put in place, it is evident that the level of error has not been reduced over time. Inadequate planning and late design changes are the main culprits for causing error, and concrete works and mechanical systems are the areas in which the cost of error is greatest. Over the last 15 years however, there has been a sea change in how health and safety has been managed, and a huge emphasis on culture, as opposed to rules and regulations.

This has gone some way in reducing on-site injuries, a similar cultural approach in terms of eliminating errors could have a large impact on both costs and reputation within the industry. The culture of an organisation can only be changed from the top. It is up to the CEO to take the lead.

At the macro level the role of the quality professional is to provide the data to their boards, to demonstrate the costs of errors, thereby incentivising them to take action. Over time, the quality professional will also provide data as to whether the cost of the error is diminishing as a result of their actions. At a micro level, quality professionals should be working to assist the supervisory teams and the operatives to make the quality management process as simple as possible, enabling these teams to buy into the process.

It is disappointing that the construction industry appears to accept this level of inefficiency. Alarming, clients seemingly do not pay attention to this and ask for better quality management and qualified quality professionals to reduce the bill and de-risk their projects. Changing this culture of inefficiency must stem from the top, in addition, you need a management system to set the standard, you need skilled people to deliver and a culture of learning to improve the standard.

### **Learning from your mistakes**

Quality professionals in any part of the system should encourage the construction organisations to look at how they can improve the processes that create errors. 'Poor workmanship' should never be accepted as the root cause of an error, rather what has caused the workmanship issue should be assessed. For instance, the recruitment process, job tools and decision-making are areas that quality professionals can try to correct and discuss.

However, there continues to be many challenges for the construction industry to face while trying to improve its quality culture – mainly changing the industry's perception that quality is just documentation, paperwork and bureaucracy. The industry needs to understand that quality management is about continuous improvement too, that learning from mistakes is key to improving, and that quality is in the centre of a project delivered safely, to budget and on time.

Quality professionals need to justify their involvement in the projects by showing the value they can add, by reducing errors and defects and preventing problems from happening, rather than allowing themselves to just "chase paperwork". They should be in all of the risk review meetings, they should be the first point of contact in case of a health and safety incident investigation, they should lead root cause analysis when problems happen, they should be in the highest-level meetings discussing the real issues that affect the project's performance.

The construction organisation's quality staff are there to ensure the contract's quality requirements are adhered to and to comply with the company's internal quality system. Besides their present duties, quality managers need to undertake more 'lessons learned' activities particularly prior to starting new contracts, to avoid repeating the same errors.

The cost of poor quality within the UK has been estimated as being between £100Bn and £500Bn each year through inefficient working. You use qualified architects to design quality structures, you need quality management professionals to ensure you deliver quality projects efficiently and effectively, and to help you to improve when you do not.

*For more information on the CQI's work within the construction industry, take a look at the '[CQI Construction Special Interest Group \(ConSIG\)](#)'.*

**NB: This piece has been edited and first appeared in full in the CQI's member magazine, Quality World, December 2017, written by Alicia Dimas at the CQI.**

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