

COLLABORATION UNDER A TRADITIONAL CONTRACT

A collaborative approach resulted in the first Pathfinder project being completed on time and under budget.

By **Charissa Snijders**, Charissa Snijders Architect Ltd, Auckland

The Hopkirk Research Institute in Palmerston North (see Table 1) is a great example of adopting best practice principles into a project that began life in the traditional mould.

By the start of construction, the contract was the only part of the traditional process remaining. The Project Control Group (comprising the client, consultants, cost consultant and contractor) agreed on an informal charter that was then used to manage the process. This shift towards a more collaborative, inclusive way of working was motivated by a budget blowout identified at tender.

The outcome was a 'fast-track' construction, based on a preliminary assessment of costs estimate and a preliminary and general plus contractor's margin. It was built under budget, and the majority of the project was completed on time, subject to some minor specialist laboratory clearances.

Open book policy meant no surprises

During construction, the Project Control Group collectively identified the risks and actively monitored and managed them. They moved to an 'open book' policy, where all approvals including costs were automatically shared amongst the group. A project website featured up-to-date documentation, audit/progress reports and photos. Sharing this information meant that, at meetings, there were no surprises. Discussions were encouraged when an issue arose, and decisions could be dealt with on time. Project service coordination meetings also enabled all the service subcontractors to talk with each other.

Tops for health and safety

The team's health and safety record resulted in zero 'loss time incidents' on site during construction – an excellent achievement on such a significant and complex project.



Hopkirk Research Institute (MAP) building project in Palmerston North.

As part of being an official Site Safe site, all individuals who entered the site had to have a Site Safe card or be escorted by a Site Safe approved member. The client project director set an example by completing the Site Safe course. Many of the subcontractors were on the course together, and that helped to create a positive team culture.

It is now becoming popular for clients to request that sites are fully compliant to Site Safe.

Working collaboratively the logical choice

The client was a joint venture between Massey University and AgResearch, but by making the project director solely responsible to sign off variations, costs were controlled throughout the project. Genuine variations were debated by the Project Control Group, and formalised by motions that were included in the minutes. Hence, cooperation became the norm as people realised that the variations would be resolved in an open, fair and timely manner.

To ensure quality, the contractor instigated a defects inspection about a month before

practical completion. Inviting the architect to be involved was a big change in attitude, but the contractor felt that the good working relationship between them warranted such action.

The project manager was enthusiastic about the way the informal charter worked, saying all jobs should be run like this. 'It makes sense to work this way – it's a logical choice. Integrating the design and construction and working towards building trust in relationships helps the team to work together and find solutions.'

Like all projects, there were things that could be improved on. On reflection, two areas were highlighted. The first was to plan at the beginning of the project for practical completion to be achieved at different stages. Secondly, continuity could be better achieved by keeping the same team until the end of the defects period, rather than bringing on someone new after practical completion.

Positive steps to a holistic approach

This Pathfinder project shows that, in the face of a traditional mindset, the construction industry can make positive steps towards change, even if

the clients do not agree to formal collaboration. Such positive results will ultimately create a groundswell towards a more holistic approach.

Here are a few tips you can take from this project:

- Include the client in key decision-making as part of the project team.
- Identify the risks together as a team, and work out ways to minimise/monitor them throughout construction.
- Adopt an open book policy and share information with all key team members. This includes having one source where all key information is kept.

Each Pathfinder project will find different ways towards true collaboration, but they highlight the advantages of working this way. The results are projects that are delivered on time, on budget and to an agreed quality and that the whole team enjoyed working on.

For a more detailed analysis of this project, visit www.branz.co.nz. ◀

Project	Hopkirk Research Institute (MAP Building), Massey University
Client	Joint venture with Massey University and AgResearch (Joe Hollander – project director)
Architect	S2F, Melbourne, Australia (Stan Karaoutsadis – project architect)
Contractor	McMillan & Lockwood (PN) Ltd (Paul Booth – project manager)
Region	Palmerston North
Sector	Commercial/specialist work
Total value	Planned budget \$17.45 million Final project value \$16.92 million Construction costs \$14.71 million
Timescale	July 2005–March 2007
Defects period	12 months after practical completion
Form of contract	NZIA SCC1, 2000

Table 1: Pathfinder Project 1 specifications.