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Advancing Productivity: Fundamentally Doing More With Less

With construction productivity levels under scrutiny across the UK, a new conference taking place in 2025 will explore what is slowing the sector down and understand how these challenges can be overcome.

The Construction Productivity Conference will get to the core of an issue which has plagued the construction industry for decades. Taking place on 28 January 2025 at 30 Euston Square, central London, the hard-hitting conference programme looks to address the UK construction 'productivity puzzle' head-on.

*With an eclectic career working across a broad range of industries – conference speaker **Trudi Sully, Region Lead for Industrialised Design & Construction at Mott MacDonald** has a track record of tackling challenges and supporting the transformation agenda.*

Trudi was recently asked in terms of productivity, how has the construction industry changed over the last 35 years? Her response was characteristically, swift and pulled no punches.

So the simple answer to the question – is, it hasn't – or at least, not enough in the right direction. That's the problem. We aren't moving forward fast enough in addressing the challenges that we have and looking at ways to do things better.

Industry Inspiration

Reflecting on the 90s, I wasn't actually working in construction. My initial jobs after university were in testing laboratories. The first was water, then dairy and finally environmental testing.

They all used similar systems. Every single sample that came in was expected. As it arrived, it was logged on to an information management system, it had a barcode added to the sample, whether it was water, milk or dirt. That barcode then followed the journey of that sample through its entire life within that environment.

In the system, we knew exactly what needed to happen to that sample and in exactly what order and who would be doing what testing and how long it would take. The laboratory was laid out in a way that made it efficient for flow through of samples, so there was a productivity benefit in terms of transitioning through the system.

And everybody knew what their job was, what they were getting that day, what they would have to deliver, what demand there was coming down the line and what had to happen with those samples.

We had specialists and we had generalists, so those specialists would focus on their particular area and generalists would be able to balance out peaks of demand and be able to help with any bottlenecks or an influx of a particular type of sample.

Throughout the process, all the results were put into the information management system, which automatically flagged any issues with results. Reports were auto-generated and issued to clients exactly when they expected them. This level of efficiency and certainty was essential for upstream and downstream functionality beyond the laboratory environment.

Now, you might say what's that got to do with construction?

Lacking Basic Functionality

Obviously, this isn't a like-for-like comparison, but even at a fundamental level, we are still well behind in adopting systems thinking and process efficiency in the construction sector. And in terms of digital tracking of products, even in the offsite sector, that is still relatively new and exciting technology.

Like many things, the detail is slightly different depending on the source but one of the go-to recognised sources of information about productivity levels in construction is McKinsey. In their most recent report, 'Delivering on Construction Productivity is No Longer Optional', they summarise the position in relation to productivity in the industry.

The report says the aggregated productivity in the industry has improved by ten per cent between 2000 and 2022. But that's compared to significantly higher levels in other industries. From 2020 to 2022, global construction industry productivity has declined by eight per cent, but I think given the period that it covers, that decline isn't any surprise to anyone.

But what is an issue collectively is the stagnant nature of productivity in the industry over such an extended period, when we have seen so many other industries taking significant leaps forward.

Productivity is fundamentally about doing more with less. Now unfortunately, we know we have less in terms of the decline in skilled labour, we have challenges around the cost and supply of material and so on, but we're not addressing many of these well documented challenges with enough effort to change the way that we work, to be able to counter them and meet our societal demands in smarter ways to realise better outcomes.

However, there is such huge opportunity to change this course right now. There has been so much work over recent years developing approaches and tools to support a transition to more efficient and effective approaches that can positively impact productivity. And as we see showcased in the Offsite Awards, there are a growing number of successful pioneers delivering great projects by using them. What we need now is a united effort to mainstream these transformative approaches.

About

Trudi is the Region Lead for Industrialised Design & Construction at Mott MacDonald, where a rapidly growing team is delivering integrated utilisation of DfMA, MMC, and platform approaches to unlock greater social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Prior to joining Mott MacDonald, Trudi spent four years as a director of the Construction Innovation Hub, working with government and industry to develop tools and approaches that enable improved productivity, performance and resilience. She now champions the transition of this work from research and development into deployment, with a vision for the future of construction as a more diverse, inclusive and progressive industry.

Secure Your Place

Established for Local Authorities, Main Contractors, Social Housing Providers and Developers, the Construction Productivity Conference will take a forensic look at the issues affecting efficiency. Taking

place on 28 January 2025 at 30 Euston Square, central London – tickets are £245 + VAT which includes access to the conference, pop-up exhibition and networking area, lunch and refreshments throughout the day. To hear more from Trudi Sully, for the full speaker lineup and to secure your place, head to: www.constructionproductivity.co.uk