

# Choosing & using a Lean Construction Consultant

This is a response to the growing interest in lean construction and the growth in the use of lean construction consultants<sup>1</sup>. It aims to help owners, clients, constructors and projects (who we will refer to as “the *client*” in all that follows) to appoint, brief and work successfully with lean construction *consultants*.

## Not all lean consultants are the same

Lean is first and foremost a **philosophy**. It has its origins in the automotive industry in Toyota. Since the label *lean production* was applied to what Toyota does in the late 80s, consultants have applied *lean thinking* to service and to construction as well as to manufacturing. Many of the *thinking* tools developed in Toyota apply in any context. Because construction and design are **project-based** activities not all tools developed to support lean manufacturing work in construction - equally there are tools developed in project-based production settings that have limited applicability in manufacturing. Ditto for Service. Whatever tools you or your consultant choose, their effect will be enhanced if they are introduced in the context of a **lean philosophy**—in a lean enterprise.

For best results work with a consultant who:

- understands the differences between construction, manufacturing and service,
- can give a clear statement of the theory that supports the implementation of the tools and
- is able to explain how you can make and maintain a lean transformation.

Be Aware - this is a difficult journey that will take you and your organisation a decade or more of constant attention.

If you are looking for a consultant to help you implement Last Planner® please read *Learning Last Planner* [www.leanconstruction.org/learning](http://www.leanconstruction.org/learning) and download LearningLPS<sup>2</sup>

Enjoy your lean journey.

## Working successfully with consultants

The success of working with a consultant depends on preparation, negotiation & collaboration. It is important for both the client’s staff and the consultant to be clear about the task and about each others’ expectations. Use this document as a starting point from which to develop a working structure that is clear for both the client and the consultant. Adapt the advice to suit your own circumstances and requirements.

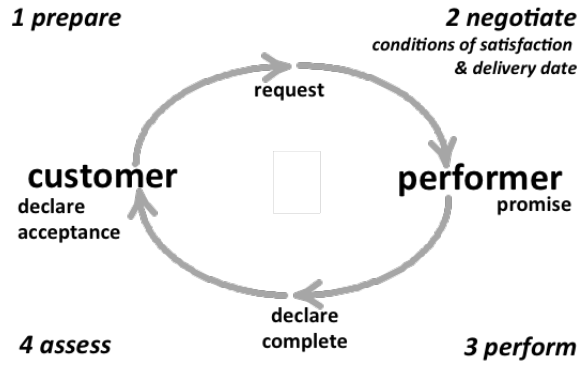
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<sup>1</sup> Written by Alan Mossman with comments from Louise Ebrey, Business Improvement Manager, GB Building Solutions Ltd. It is adapted, with permission, from a document compiled by Ruth Briant, Ytje Hamstra and Alison James in consultation with other members of the Group for Education in Museums (GEM) Freelance Network with funding from the Museums & Galleries Commission UK.

<sup>2</sup> Last Planner is a registered trade mark of the Lean Construction Institute. LCI are happy for construction companies to use Last Planner to improve the reliability and predictability of project delivery. The Institute wants consultants who deliver training in Last Planner to construction companies to have a minimum level of skill and knowledge. See [www.leanconstruction.org](http://www.leanconstruction.org) > learning Last Planner



One way to think about the consultancy relationship is:



In the above diagram the client is the *customer* and the consultant is the *performer*.

Before you go looking for a consultant think about why you are choosing to use one. Are you using a consultant because (tick all that apply):

- you lack time;
- you have a very tight deadline to meet;
- of pressure of work;
- you don't have the resources;
- of a lack of in-house expertise;
- you want an objective approach;
- it's a short-term project;
- it's a one-off;
- it's a start-up project;
- you want someone to deliver a workshop;
- you want someone to undertake a special project;
- you want your people learn how to do *whatever* themselves;
- you want to develop educational provision, such as evaluating and advising on existing services and making recommendations?
- you want ...

## 1 Preparation

Choosing *and working with* a consultant is not an easy option - don't expect it to solve all your problems! You will still have to be involved with and committed to the project and provide support, facilities, finance, time and follow-up. It is a two-way process. The client is accountable too. You can delegate authority, but not responsibility.

## Checklist for clients before taking on a consultant

### Context

- What is the corporate objective, end-result or purpose that this project/task will contribute to? Is this achievable?
- What are the immediate and long-term implications of the project/task on the client organisation?



### Your knowledge

- Do you already have the expertise to do the work you want done, but lack the time to do it? If yes, you will be fairly certain of the answers to the following questions.
- If you lack the expertise that you believe is necessary to do the work, your answers below will be your best guess unless you work with a consultant to help you answer them.

### Task

- What is the project/task you want to consultant to do or to help you with? Define it.
- Is the consultant's role executive (i.e. to make decisions), advisory or a training/coaching one in which all responsibility for decisions lies within the client organisation?
- Assess the scope of the work. How long do you think it will take?
- What is the timescale of the project, including details of interim meetings and reports?
- What skills will you require the consultant to have?
- What do you expect the consultant to do and what will the client organisation have to do in order to enable the consultant to complete the task successfully? – or will the consultant work as part of a team made up of people from the client organisation, or of
- Will any outputs need to be piloted? Who will carry this out?
- Can the consultant sub-contract any of the work?
- What needs to be done to sustain the results long term? Will you have a long term relationship with the consultant? Will they train you/your people so that they can do this themselves?
- Who is the in house sponsor of the task? What is their role? How will they ensure that everyone does what they need to do to make the project successful?

### Resources

- What is your budget and what are the budget implications?
- Will interim payments be made? At what stage(s) in the project?
- Does it include preparation time, travel time and preliminary meetings?
- What are the resource implications of embarking on this project?
- Do you have approval from management?

### Relationships

- Are staff happy about working with a consultant? Are there training or management implications?
- Who is going to liaise with the consultant throughout the project? Who will be responsible for managing the project and monitoring progress from the client side? What authority does s/he have?
- Who will co-ordinate the people the consultant may need to liaise with in the client?
- Who else is involved?
- What will the lines of communication be between you and the consultant?
- What facilities, administration, working space and equipment will be required? What are you willing/able to provide?



### The consultant

- Will the consultant work from home, in the client's offices, or both?
- What facilities, support and back-up will the client provide?
- Are you willing to cover the consultants' expenses such as travel, board and lodging, or should they be included in the fees?
- What induction training will the consultant require and how will this be remunerated?
- Are you prepared to pay the consultant for speculative meetings and initial preparation?
- Will the consultant require any special security clearance or clearance to work with children or young people?
- Should there be a confidentiality clause?

### Timetable

- Allow time to prepare the brief, attend progress meetings and provide support.

### Admin

- Is the consultant covered by the client's insurance policy?
- Does the consultant need public liability insurance or professional indemnity? If so bear in mind that this overhead will be reflected in his/her fee.
- Can your administration staff deal with payments to consultants? They need to be aware that consultants are responsible for their own tax and national insurance payments. How quickly does your company pay its invoices?

### Selection process

- Is there enough time to advertise? Consider using the LCI-uk website and consultants' newsletter
- How will you select? Do you require consultants to tender proposals? Will you take up references? Will you interview applicants? Will you ask to see CVs and examples of their work? Do they have any case studies which give examples of the results they have achieved?
- How long have they worked in Lean? Do they have any other experience which is relevant and which you can utilise?
- Do they understand construction?
- Are you applying an Equal Opportunities policy? Does the Disability Discrimination Act apply? Do you need police clearance for the consultant?
- Request lists of consultants from LCI-uk.
- Ask colleagues at other organisations who may have used a consultant for a similar project.
- What is their attitude towards you and your business? Do they believe in empowering or do they just implement? Do they take a genuine interest in you as an individual or are you just another 'customer'? Do they get a little impatient or uncomfortable when you ask them probing questions such as the ones on this page?
- How will they evaluate results? How will they measure and report back to you?

Now that you have all this information you are in a position to make a request to one or more prospective consultants. The request may be in the form of a brief or a conversation. A well-prepared request covering all or most of the issues listed above will benefit everyone involved in the project. You should provide an outline of the proposed



work and its wider purpose, a description of the client, your mission statement, copies of relevant policies and your professional code of conduct.

## 2 Negotiation

You have a choice here - what you choose depends on whether you already have the expertise to do the work you want done or not.

**If you lack the expertise or knowledge** if you have chosen to work with a consultant because you lack the expertise or knowledge to do the work in-house remember that much of what you decided in step one Preparation is your *best guess*. The next stage of the process should help you to refine your picture of what needs to be done with the help of the consultants you negotiate with.

The negotiation should include:

- What if the nature of the work changes as the project develops?
- Who can change the terms of the agreement? It is a two-way relationship.
- What provision is there for the postponement or cancellation of the project by either party? How much notice is required?
- What compensations will be paid for last minute cancellations? What counts as last minute?
- Is the insurance liability clear?
- Who has editorial control?
- Who will hold the copyright (of written material)? The author owns the copyright unless they agree in writing to assign it to your organisation. The consultant also has intellectual property rights of his/her ideas which cannot be used without payment; these ideas must be in writing.
- Will the consultant be acknowledged for his/her contribution?
- How will the project be evaluated?
- What arbitration procedures will be followed?

Some of these issues can affect the fee that the consultant is willing to work for so it is important that **nothing is agreed until everything is agreeable**.

**If have the knowledge and expertise** If you have chosen to work with a consultant because you lack the time even though you have the knowledge and expertise then you can choose a consultant in much the same way as you would choose an employee. You know what you want and you know how to recognise that an individual has what you want and whether or not s/he will fit in with your team if that is a requirement too.

**Whether you have the expertise or not**, the negotiation should include:

- What if the nature of the work changes as the project develops?
- Who can change the terms of the agreement? It is a two-way relationship.
- What provision is there for the postponement or cancellation of the project by either party? How much notice is required?
- What compensations will be paid for last minute cancellations? What counts as last minute?
- Is the insurance liability clear?
- Who has editorial control?



- Who will hold the copyright (of written material)? The author owns the copyright unless they agree in writing to assign it to your organisation. The consultant also has intellectual property rights of his/her ideas which cannot be used without payment; these ideas must be in writing.
- Will the consultant be acknowledged for his/her contribution?
- How will the project be evaluated?
- What arbitration procedures will be followed?

When selecting a consultant consider the following:

- Does s/he have the right skills?
- Does s/he have the practical experience and relevant training required?
- Does s/he have an understanding of client ethics and is s/he professional?
- Can you work with him/her?
- Is s/he interested in the client? Is s/he enthusiastic about the project?
- Does s/he offer value for money? (*this is not necessarily the cheapest*).

### The promise

This should include a description of the work to be done, the end-product required, the basis of the charge, payment terms and dates, the start and completion dates, the name of the main client contact and the facilities and resources available at the client. The client and the consultant should each have a signed copy of the agreement. **Both parties must be happy with the terms.**

### 3 Perform

Once the project is underway it will need to be monitored:

- Inform everyone involved about the project and introduce the consultant to them.
- Make sure the consultant has all the necessary information.
- Ensure the deadlines for interim reports or meetings or stages of work are met by both parties.
- Oversee the submission and payment of interim invoices.
- Agree any changes to the project in writing.
- Regular contact should be maintained between the consultant and the designated staff member.
- Use ongoing evaluation to identify potential problems before they jeopardise the project.

### 4 Assure

- Evaluate the project and the consultant's work. *The consultant may request a testimonial.*
- Check that the consultant has returned any borrowed material.
- Make the final payment.
- Create an action plan that builds on the consultant's work.
- Check that the consultant, the client and any funding partners have been credited in the final work.
- What plans are there to publicise the end-product? Will any publicity involve the consultant? Will you pay them for this?



- If appropriate, ensure that the consultant receives a copy of the end-product which is produced.
- Do you wish to maintain some contact with the consultant?  
for example, add him/her to the mailing list;  
provide access to the client library, sites and facilities;  
include him/her in future staff training plans or social activities?

## Getting started

Study Action Teams™ (SAT)<sup>3</sup> are a great way to kick start a lean transformation or a larger project because they help align aspirations. SATs use other people's learning - often in the form of a book - as the basis for getting a team to think about what they do, what they want to be different and developing a strategic change agenda.

## About the author

Alan Mossman is a lean construction & socio-technical systems consultant specialising in *developing people delivering projects* and helping people in projects & organisations make a lean transformation. Find out more at [www.thechangebusiness.co.uk](http://www.thechangebusiness.co.uk) or contact him at [consultancy@thechangebusiness.co.uk](mailto:consultancy@thechangebusiness.co.uk)

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<sup>3</sup> Study-Action Team is a trademark of Lean Project Consulting, Inc. [www.leanproject.com](http://www.leanproject.com) you will find a little more at [www.thechangebusiness.co.uk/TCB/](http://www.thechangebusiness.co.uk/TCB/)

