



Shortsighted Leadership in Construction

Peter Sarlos

Peter Sarlos, Peter Sarlos Architect, Chartered Building Surveyor, Lawyer, Construction Adjudicator

Contact: Peter@sarlos.archi

Abstract

Over the past 50 years there has been a significant decline in the quality of constructed outcomes in the Australian building industry. The decline can be readily attributed structural changes in project delivery methodologies that have been brought about by the focus of some industry participants on time, cost and profit at the expense of quality, durability and the project encapsulated environmental health. The changes have been stimulated by legislative changes that have increased the complexity of compliance while at the same time reducing the oversight of work to ensure compliance. A striking impact of these changes has been to force changes to the leadership of the project delivery process where the focus of the effort is on project economics to the exclusion of meeting the project brief and the projects long term durability.

Keywords: Defects, leadership, project management, project professional, legislation, documentation, contract, dispute

1 Introduction

The breakdown in project delivery structures has been epitomised in a recent article entitled leadership in Designi in which it was said that “...*the practice of architecture is illusionary...*” pointing to the cause as being the professional development of the specifier, the architectural technician and the growth of integrated construction products and building systems. The break down has been exacerbated by legislative and contractual changes that have, because of the deterioration of project outcomes, have resulted in increasingly complex regulatory and risk aversion contractual controls. This combination of factors are the primary contributors to the increasing rate of defective work and the exponential growth of ignorance, uncertainty and human errors in the building industry. The shift in leadership and the breakdown of responsibilities have and continue to result in the undermining of the coordination, technological and construction skillsⁱⁱ

2 Defective Development

There is more than ample evidence that demonstrates the downgrading of the quality of property development in Australia and based on anecdotal evidence in other parts of the common-law world. This section reviews 5 developments in which the writer was involved as an expert or as a member of a government review panel. The defects expose levels of ignorance, uncertainty and human error that have become prevalent in today's the construction industry in Australia. The failures that the developments exhibit have been caused by increasingly frequent systemic failures that have been caused by the ignorance, uncertainty and human error that pervades the construction industry.

A common theme in these and many other developments around the world is the failure of the documentation and construction certification processes and the breakdown of project coordination through the replacement of