

Three Opportunities Created by Lean Construction

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Lean Project Delivery provides three linked opportunities -- "Impeccable Coordination," "Projects as Production Systems," and "Projects as Collective Enterprise." These opportunities are like layers of an onion, with each contributing to optimizing the project rather than each piece. Lean Project Delivery makes available levels of performance not possible under current practice.

"Impeccable coordination" creates predictable workflow within and across trades and disciplines. Currently, projects are nearly chaotic, with an average of 55% of work promised in a week actually being completed as promised. This is like driving at rush hour behind a car that keeps jamming on the gas and slamming on the brakes. Taking action to create predictable workflow stabilizes the project environment and reduces both time and cost without sacrificing quality. It also frees up human capacity to focus on innovation and continuous improvement.

Approaching "Projects as Production Systems" opens the possibility of changing the structure of work in both design and construction – who does what, when, where and how. Changing the structure to maximize project performance includes elevating cost and other owner values to explicitly drive design. It also recasts the role of specialty contractors in that effort. During construction, production system design coupled with impeccable coordination makes possible modularization, off-site fabrication, and multi-trade composition of work, with the goal of improving system-wide performance.

"Projects as Collective Enterprise" aligns financial incentives and gives the team the ability to move money across commercial boundaries, with the goal of project-wide optimization, rather than a trade-level or silo focus. Rearview control is replaced by the ability and willingness to invest here and now for returns there and then. The goal is to create an "all for one, one for all" mentality.

Exploiting these opportunities requires new leadership, thinking and practice at every level of the organization and over the life of the project. Organizations must reflect and consider their level of ambition.

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