

# THE POWER OF COLLABORATION: AVOIDING CONFLICT THROUGH BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHT

**Ashley Beighton** MCIOB, Managing Director at Teal Ventures, discusses with **David Crowson**, Editor, how conflict in construction seems inevitable, but collaboration can prevent it. Success relies on behavioural awareness, not just technical skills.



Ashley Beighton  
MCIOB, Managing  
Director at  
Teal Ventures

behaviours serve not just as conflict resolution tools, but as proactive strategies to prevent disputes altogether.

"Construction is a complex business, and conflict has often been viewed as an inevitable by-product of operating in such a high stakes environment. However, this need not be the case. There is a different narrative – one where collaborative

"At the heart of this approach is the recognition that technical expertise, whilst essential, is not sufficient on its own to ensure project success. Human dynamics – how people behave, communicate, and engage with one another – can be equally decisive. The root of many conflicts doesn't lie in poor planning or design flaws, but in misaligned expectations, breakdowns in communication, and an absence of trust. These are not engineering problems; they are behavioural ones," said Ashley.

## Collaboration: A behaviour, not just a buzzword

Ashley explained that collaboration is often spoken about in contractual terms –

alliances, partnerships, or joint ventures. But the real work of collaboration happens at a human level. It's about how individuals behave in meetings, respond under pressure, and navigate competing priorities. He said: "Collaborative behaviours go beyond simply agreeing to work together. They require a willingness to listen, to adapt, to be open to others' perspectives, and to make decisions that serve the collective good."

"The behavioural science underpinning this approach has now been distilled into practical frameworks, such as the NEC suite of contracts and the RICS Conflict Avoidance Process (CAP), which encourage organisations to approach projects with a collaborative mindset. But translating aspiration into action demands that individuals – at all levels – develop the self-awareness and interpersonal skills to engage constructively."



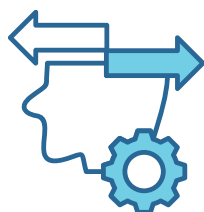
**PROMISE**



**CONCLUSION**



**COMPETENCE**



**BEHAVIOR**



**TRUST**



**SUCCESS**

## Behavioural drivers of conflict

Ashley explained that his research suggests the root cause of conflict in about half of construction projects can be traced back to poor interpersonal behaviours. These include siloed thinking, a blame culture, and an over-reliance on positional power. He said: "Such behaviours erode trust and stifle innovation. Left unchecked, they create an environment where small misunderstandings escalate, and collaboration becomes increasingly difficult. "For example, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities often leads to assumptions, gaps and duplication. When things don't go to plan – as inevitably happens in construction projects – this ambiguity fuels finger-pointing rather than problem-solving. In contrast, environments that promote psychological safety and mutual accountability tend to resolve issues more efficiently and avoid the escalation that leads to formal disputes."

## Collaborative behaviours in practice

David asked Ashley: "So, what does collaboration look like in behavioural terms?"

Ashley said: "It starts with active listening – truly hearing what others are saying, rather than just waiting for your turn to speak. It involves asking open questions, showing empathy, and being willing to adjust your position in light of new information. It's about building rapport, even when you disagree."

"Collaborative behaviours also require curiosity and humility – the readiness to admit what you don't know, and to seek input from others with different expertise. This creates a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement, which is especially valuable in environments like construction where innovation and adaptability are key."

"Importantly, collaborative behaviours must be modelled by leadership – including clients and main contractors. When senior figures demonstrate openness, transparency and respect, it sets the tone for the wider team. Conversely, when leaders tolerate or engage in adversarial behaviour, it becomes normalised, and conflict becomes more likely."

## Creating a culture of collaboration

Ashley said: "Developing collaborative behaviours is not a one-off training exercise; it actually requires a sustained effort to shift organisational culture. This begins with recruitment and onboarding, where values-based hiring can ensure that individuals are aligned on both skills and mindset. It continues through performance management, where collaborative behaviours should be recognised and rewarded, not sidelined in favour of technical outcomes alone."

"There are some great tools such as 360-degree feedback, coaching, and behavioural assessments that can help individuals and teams develop greater self-awareness. When people understand their own conflict triggers and communication styles, they are better equipped to manage differences constructively."

"Crucially, collaboration must be supported by systems and processes that enable it. This includes structured communication forums, clear decision-making protocols, and mechanisms for early conflict resolution, such as CAP. These structures create a safety net that prevents issues from festering and encourages resolution before formal disputes arise."

## The 'next steps' approach to meetings

Ashley explained a simple yet powerful strategy for making meetings more purposeful and results-driven: the 'next steps' approach.

The approach ensures every meeting ends with clearly agreed actions, ownership, and deadlines. To maximise its value, this approach should also include attention to meeting dynamics at the beginning and end – specifically, checking for unspoken agenda items at the start and ensuring everyone has had their say before the meeting closes.

Meetings often go off track when hidden concerns surface partway through. To avoid this, the person leading the meeting should begin by reviewing the agenda and then asking, "Are there any other topics we need to be aware of that aren't listed here?" This brief check-in allows participants to raise legitimate concerns early, reducing the risk of the agenda being hijacked later on. This also builds trust and inclusivity, as people feel their priorities are being acknowledged.

Once the final agenda is agreed, the meeting can proceed. Throughout the discussion, decisions and actions should be captured, preferably where everyone can see them – don't be afraid to use a flipchart or whiteboard, and to stick the flipchart paper on the meeting room walls if several sheets are needed.

In the last five to ten minutes, the group should formally review the decisions and actions that have been captured and together decide:

- That the list of items is complete
- Who is responsible for each action
- When each action is due

These 'next steps' should then be shared promptly after the meeting, ideally in a simple action log. This turns discussion into immediate

action and provides clarity for all the participants.

Before wrapping up, the person leading the meeting should take one final step that often gets overlooked: checking whether everyone has had a chance to contribute and have their say. It's easy for meetings to be dominated by a few confident voices, while quieter team members may leave feeling unheard. A quick prompt – such as, "Before we close, is there anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak or would like to add something?" – can dramatically improve engagement and surface valuable insights.

Starting and ending in this way reinforces the power of the 'next steps' approach by ensuring meetings are not only action-oriented but also inclusive and fair. They help avoid the frustration of unspoken issues emerging too late and make space for diverse perspectives to shape the outcome.

The benefits of this model are substantial. It builds accountability by clearly assigning tasks. It enhances clarity by turning vague conversations into precise commitments. It also improves follow-up, as actions can be tracked in future meetings. It can even be used as a simple way to track resource allocation – if actions aren't getting cleared then it may be because there's insufficient time or resource being committed to the project.

Over time, this approach builds a culture of ownership and trust, where meetings are seen as effective tools for progress, not just as time-wasting rituals.

In summary, the 'next steps' approach creates structured, effective, and inclusive meetings. It ensures nothing important is missed, no one is overlooked, and everyone leaves knowing exactly what needs to be done and when.

## The payoff: Projects that deliver

Ashley explained that the benefits of embedding collaborative behaviours extend far beyond conflict avoidance. He said: "Teams that work well together tend to be more innovative, resilient, and productive. They are better at managing risk, adapting to change, and delivering value for money."

"In an era of increasing scrutiny and constrained resources, the ability to avoid conflict is not just a soft skill – it's a strategic advantage. When collaboration becomes the default, rather than the exception, projects are more likely to be delivered on time, on budget, and with outcomes that serve all stakeholders."

## A final thought

Ashley concluded by saying: "Changes and the odd disagreement in construction projects may be inevitable – but damaging disputes are not. By focusing on behaviours that support collaboration, organisations can create environments where people feel heard, respected, and empowered to work together toward common goals. In doing so, they move from managing conflict to preventing it – and ultimately, to delivering better outcomes for everyone involved"

<https://tealventures.com/>



Len Bunton,  
President of the  
Conflict Avoidance  
Coalition

**Len Bunton**, President of the Conflict Avoidance Coalition (CAC), provided his thoughts on the subject. Len explained that everywhere he turns at the moment, all he hears is the emphasis on the need for more collaboration in the

industry, and Ashley is perfectly correct that collaboration is not a buzzword – it is about behaviour and conduct. He said: “There is no doubt that the industry needs to improve the way it manages relationships with clients and across the supply chain, and the introduction of favourable and equitable conduct is essential if the industry is going to survive.

“In my experience of dealing with a significant number of construction disputes, particularly those involving payment and

cash flow issues – many people in the industry are not good listeners. They are often unwilling to sit quietly, absorb, and genuinely consider what someone else is telling them, for example, about difficulties they are experiencing on a construction contract that is not their responsibility, but are nonetheless causing problems and, inevitably, serious financial consequences.

“To my mind, the most positive aspect of the Conflict Avoidance Process (CAP) is early intervention to prevent issues from escalating into costly and time-consuming construction disputes. Has anyone ever stopped to consider the enormous cost these disputes impose on our industry – often involving consultants and legal advisers, and inevitably dismantling long-standing relationships? The last thing the industry needs is more construction disputes. The money being wasted could and should be redirected toward increasing the number of construction projects across the United Kingdom.

“Conflict avoidance is all about understanding what the problem is, how

it has arisen, and working collectively and collaboratively to find a solution that suits everyone. It may not be perfect, but collaboration allows the issues causing friction to be resolved and put to bed – enabling everyone involved to refocus on completing the construction project.

“So, my message is this: Commit today to signing the Conflict Avoidance Pledge, which can be found at [conflictavoidance.org](https://conflictavoidance.org). Embed conflict avoidance procedures into your day-to-day business model, encourage your clients to support the process, and share the concept with your supply chain.”

Len concluded by saying: “The CAC has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career, having spent over 45 years in the industry. It has brought together more than 100 organisations, all working collectively and collaboratively to drive disputes out of the industry and focus on finding resolutions.

Now is the time for the UK construction industry to stop talking and start delivering real change.”

<https://cac-uk.org/>

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Plasterers Hall, One London Wall, London  
25 November



Wayne Chappelow, Leeds College of Building was the Life-time achievement winner at the 2024 FIS Training Awards Lunch

### FIS Conference at Workspace Design Show

Business Design Centre, London  
25-26 February 2026

For further information of these events visit: [www.thefis.org/events](http://www.thefis.org/events)