

## The Bedrock: Fostering Collaborative Mindsets for Infrastructure Success

The complexity of contemporary projects, delivery risks, government policy and legacy goals are generating a shift in Queensland's infrastructure industry. Resource constraints and the traditional linear 'design-bid-build' or 'bid-design-build' approaches to projects have increasingly resulted in time/cost overruns, delays and disputes leading to sub-optimum infrastructure outcomes. Tangible problems brought about by the current models of project development and delivery have underscored the need for a more effective approach; a collaborative one. It is taken as a given now that the benefits of collaboration in infrastructure are many, and accepted by senior leaders within the sector.

There is a real opportunity to make a significant and enduring change in the industry - the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games have brought about a tangible deadline to implement important changes. Queensland's infrastructure industry, over the next 8 years, should work to create a lasting collaborative culture, where stakeholders work together to not only deliver projects but to achieve a common goal. More specifically, the legacy goal — or ensuring the sectors/industries ecosystem, the state's communities and the economy benefit from the new infrastructure and approach.

A collaborative approach, however, cannot be effectively utilised without a significant shift in the culture of our industry and the alignment of drivers between stakeholders. It is more than simply adding buzz phrases like 'open communication' and 'risk sharing' to signed agreements between the involved parties. Each collaborative project brings with it new perceptions, experiences and delivery models. Despite this, there are commitments that stakeholders can make to promote and ensure the effectiveness of collaboration in the industry. One example in Queensland comes from the Transport and Main Roads (TMR) Charter.

The TMR Charter, developed in conjunction with stakeholders and peak infrastructure associations including IAQ, demonstrates how a successful collaborative model needs shared culture and behaviours. It outlines how TMR and the infrastructure industry will engage with each other to promote collaborative behaviour and improved ways of working.

1. Build trust in each other by communicating openly, honestly and transparently promptly - even in challenging environments.
2. Share our learning from collaborative experiences with each other and our industry and apply them in the future.
3. Listen to, understand and appreciate different business models, motives, roles, constraints and risk-sharing ability.
4. Provide a safe space to challenge each other with respect, listen to feedback and remain solutions-focused.
5. Remain flexible, open to change and able to communicate.
6. Be accountable for actions, follow through on commitments and be proactive in raising issues early.
7. Collect and share data and embed digital engineering to create a common standard across the whole-of-life value chain

Committing to core tenets like these is fundamental to creating a productive culture of collaboration. It fosters an environment where different stakeholders feel motivated to collaborate, where they can

learn from and avoid repeating mistakes, where feedback is encouraged and where continuous improvement is valued throughout and beyond project lifecycles.

This is, however, easier said than done. Unlocking collaboration requires us to let go of outdated ways of thinking, challenge our own beliefs and biases, and genuinely seek to understand the perspectives and needs of others. By doing so, stakeholders are able to find common ground and work together more effectively than if they were working within the traditional linear approach.

It is also not just about getting people to work together in their teams. It means aligning horizontally and vertically - connecting leaders at all levels and ensuring there is a shared understanding of goals, processes, and decision-making across different projects and organisations. It is not enough for leaders to simply speak about collaboration and the processes it entails. They need to make sure their actions and the messages they send are in sync and are reinforced throughout their organisations and projects and put in place frameworks to allow collaboration to flourish.

To break it down simply, at IAQ, we firmly believe the following 5 areas are the key to making this a reality.

1. **Collaboration is a game-changer:** When people in the infrastructure industry come together and collaborate, it leads to better project outcomes. It's something that senior leaders have been championing for years because they understand the positive impact it has on communities and project success.
2. **Aligning our actions with our words:** It's not enough for leaders to just talk about collaboration; they need to make sure their actions and the messages they send are in sync. This means aligning things like goals, KPIs, and performance measurements with the collaborative vision so that everyone is working towards the same objectives.
3. **Creating a culture of collaboration:** Middle-level leaders play a vital role in fostering collaboration. They need to create an environment where people feel motivated to collaborate, where they can learn from their mistakes without fear, and where feedback is encouraged. It's about building a culture that values collaboration and continuous improvement.
4. **Breaking free from old mindsets:** Collaboration requires us to let go of outdated ways of thinking. We need to challenge our own beliefs and biases, and genuinely seek to understand the perspectives and needs of others. By doing so, we can find common ground and work together more effectively.
5. **Aligning vertically and horizontally:** Collaboration is not just about getting people to work together within their teams; it's about aligning vertically and horizontally. This means connecting leaders at all levels and ensuring there's a shared understanding of goals, processes, and decision-making across different organisations and projects. It's about creating a harmonious ecosystem where collaboration can thrive.

Keep watching for more detail on how IAQ suggests we can all help to drive the change required to deliver true collaboration within the sector. The following article will focus on imparting this mindset to sectoral agreements.