

How to add value

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The role of contract administrator can be carried out by a variety of construction professionals, but building surveyors can offer a particularly valuable set of skills, argues Alistair Allison

A contract administrator (CA) requires knowledge and skills across different areas of property and construction, which puts building surveyors in a good position. Not only is contract administration a core building surveying competency in its own right, the other core and mandatory competencies and our day-to-day work also complement the role well (contract practice, legal/regulatory compliance, inspection, conflict avoidance etc.).

Equally, our breadth of experience across property types and sectors, our pragmatism and ability to solve problems means that we can understand and react to a variety of situations.

However, we are not perfect and there are a number of ways that we can add value to what we do and how we do it.

Management knowhow

Contract administration requires the management of the contract between the employer and the contractor as well as other important stakeholders. We can be diligent, technically astute and contractually aware, but without core project management skills we will struggle to be effective contract administrators.

The development and application of project management skills is extremely valuable and will provide a more robust and effective approach. Particular skills that may not be second nature to a building surveyor, but are extremely valuable to the CA role are:

- project control and tracking ranging from complex to simple schedules and effective meeting minutes
- strategic, rather than construction-related programming and programme management
- effective leadership and stakeholder management, steering the project and managing expectations and relationships
- risk analysis and management

Clarity is key

We often include the design and specification of works within the scope of CA services, or combine it in a hybrid lead consultant role. But although this may be considered cost-effective and logical, it can sometimes blur the scope of the 2 separate roles.

Design is not strictly part of a contract administrator's services and we should therefore

remember that if we combine the roles we must approach both in different but complementary ways. An obvious example is giving proper consideration to how the design and specification will affect the administration of the contract. Reducing ambiguity, clear specification, and minimising provisional sums will all improve the CA's ability to effectively administer the contract. Similarly, as CA, careful procurement decisions and drafting of documents can assist the designer to achieve the best solution while reducing the risk of changes to the programme or budget.

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There is a danger that contract administration becomes too much of a set process and that we do not take the opportunity to maximise our advice during the pre-contract stages. Impartiality is key for the role post-contract, as is the knowledge and skill to understand and correctly apply the relevant contract conditions, but tailored advice to clients pre-contract on design, cost, procurement and programme is arguably where we can add the most value.

We would all agree that detailed risk management procedures and documents are generally unnecessary for simpler and less complex projects. However, a sound understanding of the identification and mitigation of risk is important irrespective of the size and nature of the project.

Attention to detail

As building surveyors, we tend to take a qualitative approach to the design of construction works. This is certainly a strength, but we must not forget the importance of proper cost management. There is much to learn from our quantity surveying colleagues, which will add value when we are called to produce pre-tender estimates, value variations, certify payments, and assess prolongation, loss and expense claims.

These are key parts of the CA role on smaller projects but are often not given the level of detail needed or implemented in strict accordance with best practice; through ignorance rather than negligence.

In conclusion, it is clear that building surveyors are very well placed and equipped to act as CA but there are areas where we can add real value by looking slightly outside the core building surveying 'toolkit'. Rather than being competent 'jacks of all trades', by developing the strong position we are in we can really improve and refine the contract administration services we provide to make us the profession of choice.

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Further information

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- [Contract practice](#)
- [Legal/regulatory compliance](#)
- [Inspection](#)

- [Conflict avoidance](#)
- [Contract administration](#)