

# Coordination or collaboration?



In each issue of Smart Highways, our editorial board member Lee Woodcock from Atkins will make a proposal about an issue facing the ITS industry and we will speak to various experts on the subject to get their thoughts. This time, Lee asks whether we truly collaborate or just cooperate?

WORDS BY PAUL HUTTON

**C**ollaboration is seen as an increasingly important part of how we deliver new solutions, but I wonder if the sector really understands how to truly maximise the benefits of collaboration? In the main do we truly collaborate or merely coordinate?" he asks.

"I am clear that there is value to build on the synergies of the public and private sector, but how do we ensure we maximise the value of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), academia and the creative sector as part of the services and solutions we deliver to

**Do we as a sector see ourselves at the front of the pack demonstrating truly collaborative behaviours?**

meet customers' needs?

"There are a range of clients that are embracing collaborative working as part of their delivery models such as the Highways Agency, Catapults, Innovate UK and local authorities, so do we as a sector see ourselves at the front of the pack demonstrating truly collaborative behaviours?"

So, with that in mind, we spoke to three other leading experts, Clare Reddington, Creative Director, Watershed; Emma Whigham, Business Change Leader at Atkins Highways and Transportation; and Simon Vaughan, Director of JCP Consultancy.

**Q** Do you think businesses have established why they want to collaborate and the fit with their business objectives or is it a bit random?

**Emma** At 'one' level I think a lot of organisations have established that they want / need to collaborate more. This has often been initiated by clients from which the supply chain must choose how it responds and so the initial driver to collaborate often doesn't sit neatly alongside their business objectives as a method of delivery or creation, as it wasn't part of the same conversation. But as organisations mature their thinking I can see that

it is becoming an integral part of the strategy to deliver within business.

Is it where it needs to be, are we moving quick enough? Definitely not. For those organisations within the infrastructure sector, we face some significant challenges in the very near future, with increases in infrastructure investment, constrained resource, increasing customer expectations in an ever-increasing complex world - we need to do things differently to meet these challenges head on and succeed. Collaboration is key to this and not just through the existing supply chain but also bringing new and diverse partners into the mix, such as academia, SMEs and schools. These partners will bring a diversity of thinking to challenge how we look at engineering and infrastructure. Just because we have done it this way for the past 50 years doesn't make it right for the future.

But are we moving in the right direction? Definitely yes. Different conversations are taking place throughout organisations, finding the best people to partner with to find better ways of solving the problem or seeking out where this has been done before and reusing ideas. How deep these conversations go in organisations can be challenged, but they are taking place and we should feel encouraged to continue and build on this.

**Simon** I think many businesses think they can see the opportunities collaborative working brings and they may be willing to make a start. What is often overlooked is the hard work it takes to collaborate effectively and this means a clear vision of success is essential before you start. And success means for all stakeholders. Take an individual "what's in it for me" view, then you are not collaborating. Which means it may not always align with individual business goals. But, where progressive businesses are truly committed to a different way of achieving programme or project success, where parties are prepared to share risks and rewards and where objectives can be aligned, then alliancing is the most favourable way forward.

**Clare** Businesses that successfully use collaboration to deliver their

## ABOUT THE ATKINS INVESTIGATION

# ATKINS

ATKINS IS A COMPANY which will always work for its clients to understand the issues involved and provides expertise, answers and ideas in ITS, and now more recently in Smart Cities and Intelligent Mobility. Delivering an appropriate and sustainable transportation network for the 21st century is an exciting challenge. Atkins is committed to planning, designing and enabling our clients' transportation programmes.

Atkins has a proven track record of successfully planning, designing and enabling urban transport and environmental improvements across all scales of developments. Successful transport strategies examine the journeys that people need to make in all aspects of their lives and provide realistic travel options. The services provided to clients range from strategic policy advice and performance management, through all aspects of demand forecasting, behavioural analysis, to accessibility, transport for land development, streetscapes and traffic engineering design.

Atkins supports the Atkins Investigation in *Smart Highways* because the investigation, like Atkins, gets to the heart of an issue in order to understand it, and then utilise the knowledge and understanding to help its clients translate and navigate difficult issues in order for them make the right decisions safe in the knowledge they have the facts.

objectives are those who are trying to create something new, or those trying to change the way things are done. Watershed's first large collaboration was with HP Labs - they knew that designing the future of mobile phone content would involve an understanding of human experience - so they built a collaboration with us that involved artists and creatives as well as computer scientists and psychologists.

A few years ago we came across John Seely Brown's work on creation nets and the notion that to deliver real innovation in a fast-moving market place, you need to collaborate with people who aren't like you, in culture, sector, focus or organisational type. We have found that collaborating leads to new business, unexpected creativity and substantial value, but

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getting collaboration right is an active process - not a random one. You have to be realistic about the risks you are taking and be aware of where you draw the line. If the product is more valuable than the research, consider hiring a supplier instead of entering a collaboration.

**Q** What do you see as the risks to collaboration?

**Simon** Collaboration is not a simple transaction or one dimensional. At individual, group, infra-organisational and inter-organisational levels it is complex and strategic. And it has to be a conscious act. It takes hard work and, particularly at times when the alliance is under pressure, it can take people out of their comfort zone. Collaboration is certainly not an easy option. But like many things that are hard won, the rewards are huge. Another risk is the degree to which collaborative working reaches. Many organisations encourage collaborations only at the top levels (tier 1 and 2), often missing the wealth of efficiencies and benefits that can be gained closer to the front-line. When collaborative working is embraced throughout the organisation, more opportunities for smarter working can be found.

**Emma** I think it's to do with understanding how to collaborate. I am not convinced we have built up a significant mass of those who truly understand it. Collaboration isn't about being best friends, or even necessarily liking everyone you're working with. It is about putting all and any baggage aside, being present to contribute the best you can in a focused way to achieve a common goal. This doesn't happen very often and you can tell when it has, because great things are achieved.

**Clare** The risks in collaboration are mission creep - being diverted away from what you set out to do. Then there's bureaucracy - being stuck in endless contracting and not being able to get on and do something. And then you get institutional ego or over-claiming credit - these make it difficult to build the trust that long-term collaborations need. Honesty is

a key ingredient of any collaboration - partners all need to be clear about their expectations from the outset. These don't necessarily have to match, but there needs to be clarity on why the collaboration is taking place and what each partner hopes to achieve. Another way to make sure collaborations work is to make sure that the will to collaborate is understood at every level of the organisation - not just in the board room, or at the top.

**Q** Do organisations provide the environment for collaboration to thrive and generate new ideas?

**Emma** There are many who work in this sector who are passionate about what they do and if left to their own devices will find ways to collaborate, draw in ideas to find better solutions and ways to deliver. Barriers have and are being created through commercial / procurement arrangements which make this challenging - if not at times impossible - and so preventing the best possible solutions being delivered for our customers. There are those who will find a way through this by themselves, but we have a duty to take a more pragmatic view in order to create environments for collaboration to thrive and for new ideas to be generated.

**Clare** Collaborations are messy, mercurial things. They take up time, can lead to weeks of negotiations and sometimes don't produce the things you hoped for. Quite often, therefore, organisations are not structured to make the most out of collaborations, and are also not the best at applying learning. This is where working with a neutral brokering partner can help - to look after the collaboration, spot problems and help capture and codify the learning that can be applied. With the right partnership, an investment of time and a fair wind, collaborations can deliver new ways of working and types of output that will outshine anything you could have done on your own.

**Q** What are your best examples of collaboration and feel free to share the worst (if you can)?

**Emma** A really strong example of collaboration is the 'Traffic Modelling Community' - set up initially to prove



"We have a duty to take a more pragmatic view in order to create environments for collaboration to thrive and for new ideas to be generated"



**EMMA WHIGHAM** is a Chartered Civil Engineer and the Business Change Leader for the Atkins Highways and Transportation business. She has substantial experience of the transport sector, having worked in major disciplines of transport planning, highways design and asset management, her focus more recently has been on change and transformation in the transport sector. She is part of the Highways Agency (HA) Roads Academy and in 2013 successfully completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management (2013).

the sector's ability to undertake and deliver models. It was made up of traffic modelling professionals from across the highway sector. As a group they have made significant progress and have dramatically improved and developed the way this is undertaken.

**Simon** There are some excellent examples I have seen in the highways sector. MTR in Hong Kong was a huge success, as well as Highways Agency motorways which have brought about the collaboration between four delivery partners and a mind shift from civil engineering solutions, (pouring concrete and covering green fields) to a mixture of customer and technology led solutions which utilised the assets more efficiently.

But I think we still have a long way to go. I was reminded at the recent launch of the HM Treasury IUK Alliance Best Practice Report, that it is 20 years since Michael Latham's report on the lack of collaboration in the construction sector was published. At the time it was a revolutionary idea but 20 years on, I don't feel we've made as much progress as we should have. It's widely appreciated that the collaborative approach will bring more benefits and deliver on-time, on-spec and on or under budget. But there is still not enough encouragement from Government or within the construction industry to bring a fundamental change about.

**Clare** From Being There - a project with Universities researching the future

use of robots in public spaces, to our annual Playable City Award - which seeks to use new technology in the city in more playful ways - all of Watershed's projects are built on collaboration. Why? Because we believe that technology needs to be developed in human-centred ways, and to do this properly takes a mixed input. This approach is also embedded in the Pervasive Media Studio - a multi-disciplinary lab for artists, creative companies, technologists and academics, where co-location leads to informal knowledge sharing as well as formal collaboration. Our collaborative projects are considered hugely successful by partners, peers and audiences (and have delivered significant social, cultural AND economic impact) in the UK and abroad.

**Q** What do you think the sector should do to embrace BS11000 - Collaborative Business Relationships?

**Emma** BS11000 is a standard, which looks at the mechanics of collaboration and not the behaviours, so I wouldn't get too hung up about the standard. But I do think the BS11000 principles should be used as a framework for the sector to mature (behaviours) and start to create 'adult' relationships with our clients so we break down the barriers and start delivering together as a sector. After all, that's what the customer sees!

**Simon** Honestly I am not a fan of BS11000 - it is a process and structure which is welcome but it does not deal with the fundamentals of bringing



together teams of people with the right attitudes and behaviours - which is the core of collaborative working. Instead of BS11000, what the IUK report and others are talking about is the need for leadership investment through a planned programme of behavioural change. Having the attitudes and behavioural competencies to work collaboratively does not come by accident. Collaborative leadership and an environment where people can make mistakes is a fundamental requirement - and there are few instances where this environment and mindset is encouraged and practised.

**LEE'S SUMMARY**

It's clear to me from the thoughts of the experts that we are at the start of the journey and that work is underway in organisations like Atkins and Watershed, supported by industry leaders such as JCP. But as Simon highlights, it is hard work and requires commitment - this is not a quick win but the

potential value is significant, I think the hard work is worth it.

It strikes me that many of the risks can be overcome by strong leadership, both across the sector and within organisations. Emma's point on the need for a common goal is echoed by Clare and the need to watch out for mission creep. We need to start with the end in mind and define what good looks like for everyone, then lean in to it to make it work!

I asked at the outset are we at the front of the pack? It feels not, but in places we are starting to have the right conversations and already starting to unlock the value that can be created through collaboration. I am seeing this first hand through the work we are doing on Intelligent Mobility but we need more of it and we need to reinforce that this is not process, it's about people... and people with the right behaviours.

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**SIMON VAUGHAN** has almost 25 years experience in applying behavioural-based change as a Behavioural Science/OD/OE professional, with a focus on implementation of collaborative work systems. He possesses extensive high level facilitation skills which are linked to his experience and understanding of large scale organisational change linked to corporate strategy. His commitment to promoting collaborative working as a better way to do business has resulted in him speaking at major conferences.



**CLARE REDDINGTON** is the Creative Director of Watershed. She joined Watershed in 2004 to work with HP Labs on utility computing animation project SE3D. Clare leads the Pervasive Media Studio, engagement and cinema teams in Watershed, working with industry, academic and creative partners to support talent and champion new ideas. Clare was a finalist in the British Council's UK Young Interactive Entrepreneur 2008 and featured in Wired magazine's 100 people who shape the Wired world. Clare is also Executive Producer of REACT Hub and a Visiting Professor at the University of the West of England. Follow Clare on Twitter @claredred

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