

Five Trends Influencing Today's Construction Delivery Patterns

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The construction landscape is constantly evolving. From continuing labor shortages to ready-to-deploy tech solutions, a range of forces is currently influencing project delivery across the U.S. It takes agility, flexibility, and creative operating strategies for construction executives to keep projects on schedule and within budget.

Here are some of the latest construction trends to help your company stay ahead of this dynamic sector's ever-changing curve.

1. RISING LABOR COSTS AND SKILLS GAP

The rise of hybrid working, an aging workforce, and increasing wages across multiple sectors are making it difficult for construction firms to secure skilled talent. This can directly impede their ability to complete construction projects.

Associated Builders and Contractors estimates that the industry's workforce is short by about half a million people. To help address this massive labor shortage, forward-looking construction stakeholders are exploring new ways to source and retain talent, including:

- » **Adopting a flexible and agile workforce strategy:** Alternative work models aren't just here to stay for corporate office work. Project leaders can orchestrate flex schedules to keep projects on track while reducing worker burnout.



- » **Investing in training and career development:** Demonstrating clear opportunities for advancement not only equips potential team members with critical skills, it also helps inspire employee loyalty. That's especially true for Gen Z workers, who prioritize learning and development. Gen Z will represent 27% of the workforce in 2025.
- » **Prioritizing safety:** Several annual safety events, such as National Safety Week, OSHA's Safety Stand-Down, and more, are great opportunities to foster and reinforce a culture of safety. Ensure your company's safety considerations include physical as well as mental health.
- » **Promoting diverse hiring practices:** Construction has been traditionally male-dominated. Closing the gender

gap with purposeful recruiting, equitable pay, and career advancement opportunities can help bulk up the talent pipeline now and into the future.

- » **Leveraging technology:** Project management and virtual collaboration and visualization tools can help improve project operations and streamline communications and workflows.

2. SUPPLY CHAIN AND OPERATING STRATEGIES

Construction costs continue to rise in the second half of 2024, with material prices projected to increase by up to 3% and labor costs expected to go up by 6%. Amid inflation and continuing fluctuations in material and equipment costs, construction stakeholders need to plan and diversify accordingly to stay on schedule and on budget.

Leveraging technology and incorporating sustainable materials into projects can help construction companies maintain project volume while reducing risk and expenses. Though initial costs may be higher, over time these investments can reduce life cycle costs, foster business growth, and create operational efficiencies.

Some considerations:

- » Fixed payment terms or lump-sum cost strategies
- » Engaging with clients early in the project life cycle for better planning and decision making
- » Leveraging supply-chain strategies like working with diverse suppliers

3. TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS

Since the pandemic, the construction industry has had to adopt new ways of working to keep projects moving forward. With the rise of innovative technologies—such as AI, drones, and BIM—firms have an opportunity to leverage digital integrations to improve schedule optimization, safety, site inspection, cost controls, and more.

Using advanced construction technology can improve integrated project delivery, creating a seamless communication loop between stakeholders and the project team. For example, by using 360° construction photo documentation software to monitor construction progress remotely, project team members can add detailed images and notes to specific areas, improving

workflows during punchlists, observations, and requests for information. By harnessing these tools to improve workflow, tracking, and collaboration, construction managers can complete projects more quickly and efficiently, while reducing costs and margin for error.

While advancements in digital technology have revolutionized the building industry, it's important to ensure that human and digital assets work hand-in-hand. After all, human creativity and problem-solving capabilities complement the precision and automation of digital tools. In complex construction projects, effectively navigating the nuanced understanding of local regulations, intricate design requirements, and unforeseen challenges requires human insight.

4. SUSTAINABILITY, ESG, AND EFFICIENCY

As sustainability initiatives, certifications, and practices continue to grow in focus and adoption, construction firms and stakeholders are being challenged to use sustainable building materials and construction practices.

Sustainable construction best practices include minimizing resource usage through eco-friendly materials—treated wood, low-carbon bricks, and electrical steel—and optimizing features, from passive house design techniques to energy-efficient heating and cooling systems. Today's expansive menu of sustainable design can include installing effective insulation and triple-pane windows, designing green roofs, and installing daylight-responsive lighting.

These features can be especially impactful when applied to facilities that are built for energy-intensive uses, such as life-science labs and data-center facilities. Amid increasing regulatory pressure, these industries are moving toward more efficient mechanical and electrical services, such as waste heat recovery technology that harnesses recovered energy for various uses. These innovative techniques not only help reduce energy-related emissions, they also improve efficiencies, decrease waste, and save money.

One key to delivering sustainable and cost-efficient structures is incorporating construction planning from the earliest concept phase.

5. DESIGN-BUILD

In light of economic uncertainty and cost volatility, clients are


looking for stability when assessing their next project. They want cost-conscious solutions that provide budget control and faster delivery.

Design-build solutions are attracting interest, due to their ability to integrate both design and construction processes. This holistic approach can help reduce costs, ensure client involvement through all phases of the project, and create a seamless decision-making process from preconstruction through the finishing touches. Other benefits include:

- » Quality and expertise from the onset of the project
- » Transparency and alignment from the project team and stakeholders
- » Unified vision to bring the design to fruition

As the industry continues to adapt to both a changing landscape and the evolving needs of clients, a design-build approach is a comprehensive, cost-efficient strategy for a successful project delivery experience.

STAYING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Construction has always demanded adaptability. By using technology, incorporating sustainable materials, and thinking beyond traditional norms to navigate industry dynamics, your team can deliver higher quality projects on time and for less money. 



About the Author

As the head of delivery at [Unispace](#), Mike Putnam leads a team of project managers, estimators, site managers, and health and safety professionals who create innovative and efficient workplaces for clients across their workplace, life sciences, and experience design environments. He has over 15 years of experience in engineering, project management, estimating, and procurement.

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