Understanding the Construction Client

David Boyd
Professor of Construction
University of Central England

and

Ezekiel Chinyio
Senior Lecturer
University of Central England
Understanding the Construction Client

David Boyd
Professor of Construction
University of Central England

and

Ezekiel Chinyio
Senior Lecturer
University of Central England
# Contents

**Foreword**
Graham Farrant, Chair CCG

**Preface**: buildings are not about building!

## Chapter 1  Clients in Perspective
1.1 Introduction  
1.2 The nature of the problem  
1.3 The categories of clients  
1.4 What clients want  
1.5 A problem of delivery  
1.6 Structure of this book  
1.7 A concluding remark  
References

## Chapter 2  A Model of Clients
2.1 Introduction  
2.2 The basic thesis  
2.3 A model of clients  
2.4 Fundamental awarenesses and the model  
2.5 Model for sector analysis  
2.6 Summary  
References

## Chapter 3  The Client at Rest
3.1 Client’s knowledge and processes  
3.2 Clients see the world differently
### Contents

3.3 Organisational knowns 44  
3.4 Normal organisational unknowns 54  
3.5 People in organisations 64  
3.6 Conclusions 71  
References 71

**Chapter 4** The Client in Change 75  
4.1 The project means and ends 75  
4.2 Means and ends as values 77  
4.3 Building involves organisational change in the client 84  
4.4 Building involves unknowns that are unformed 87  
4.5 Emotion of change 91  
4.6 Change creates gaps and contradictions 93  
4.7 Means and ends of engagement 96  
4.8 What is to be done? 111  
References 111

**Chapter 5** Property Developers as Clients 114  
5.1 Introduction 114  
5.2 Business environment of property development 116  
5.3 Finance and risk of projects 123  
5.4 Business constitution: strategy to operations 125  
5.5 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends 132  
5.6 Key issues 144  
References 145  
Resources 145

**Chapter 6** Supermarkets as Clients 147  
6.1 Introduction 147  
6.2 The business environment: strategy in the world 148  
6.3 Business structure and processes: the tactical plan 152  
6.4 Business operation 155  
6.5 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends 158  
6.6 Key issues 161  
References 162  
Resources 162
Chapter 7  NHS Acute Trusts as Clients  163
7.1 Introduction  163
7.2 The environment of NHS acute trusts  169
7.3 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends  181
7.4 Means and ends of building  187
7.5 Key issues  189
References  190
Resources  191

Chapter 8  Governments as Clients  192
8.1 Introduction  192
8.2 The political domain: service in a political environment  193
8.3 The managerial domain  205
8.4 The operational domain  209
8.5 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends  214
8.6 Key issues  219
References  219
Resources  220

Chapter 9  Airports as Clients  221
9.1 Introduction  221
9.2 Business environment of airports  225
9.3 Business structure processes and operations  235
9.4 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends  239
9.5 Key issues  244
References  245
Resources  246

Chapter 10  Housing Associations as Clients  247
10.1 Introduction  247
10.2 Business environment of housing associations  250
10.3 Management of housing associations  255
10.4 Operations in housing associations  262
10.5 Experience of building: from unknowns and contradictions to means and ends  264
10.6 Key issues  267
References  267
Resources  268
### Chapter 11 A Toolkit for Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.1 Introduction</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2 Outline of toolkit</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3 Working with clients’ change processes</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.4 Understanding the client’s business</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5 Managing the industry’s fragmentation</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6 Developing the approach</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 12 Postscript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: The Interviewees</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Author Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author Index</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Subject Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Index</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This book is what I, and a great many in the construction industry, have been waiting for. The behaviour of clients is one of the most – if not the most – important ingredients in improving the performance of the construction industry. Therefore, understanding clients, by understanding what underpins and prompts their attitudes and actions, becomes critically important to the supply chain in collectively taking the construction industry forward.

At the Construction Clients’ Group (CCG), which represents a wide range of customers of the construction industry, we need to understand the industry as a whole, not just the client side, an understanding that we use to encourage clients to procure construction in support of improved performance across the construction industry. Performance improvement must include better value for clients, sustainable outcomes, and a prosperous and successful construction industry. The CCG’s actions are a continuation of the client leadership theme, which our two predecessor bodies, the Construction Clients’ Forum (CCF) and the Construction Clients’ Charter (CCC), both pursued.

But this represents only one facet of the CCG’s role. We must also foster a better understanding of clients among the construction industry. I was delighted, therefore, to be able to support David Boyd and Ezekiel Chinyio in the development of this book. They say it is the construction industry’s duty to learn to work with clients better, and that buildings are not about building – not for clients, anyway. In other words, clients see and experience buildings differently from the rest of the industry. Most clients are preoccupied with their specific world of business and the pressures on this. When a client considers a building
project, it considers the project in terms of its business, not in terms of the detail of construction implementation. The industry, on the other hand, is concerned with the details of design and construction in relation to its effort or liability and may not see the client’s business and business environment as relevant to the industry.

Another issue that is uncovered in this book is that, for most clients, building is a consequence of organisational change, and organisational change creates uncertainty and emotion. Much of this book therefore addresses human psychology. We would make no apologies for that. People are important in organisations, and in most cases one could argue that people embody the organisation. Expectations and perceptions are also covered. As the authors say, if the client’s expectation of parts of the industry is that the industry is profligate in spending someone else’s money, then the client will be sensitive to any suggestions of additional expenditure, even if it would receive some benefit.

David Boyd and Ezekiel Chinyio recognise that clients differ in their internal organisation, objectives, drivers and values, particularly between public- and private-sector clients. I can vouch for that, having been Chief Executive of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham from 2000 until 2004, before transferring to the private sector, where I run Leisure Connection, a national leisure operator. I can also verify the authors’ claim that the differences are less than they once were. Of course, clients are not homogeneous, and that is recognised in this book.

The true importance of the construction industry to the national economy is appreciated fully by few. As emerging texts such as Be Valuable demonstrate, the performance of the wider economy largely tracks the performance of buildings. It is that simple, and understanding clients and breaking down the barriers between the customer and the industry is key to unlocking the potential of construction and with it the wider economy. As explained by the authors, in order to achieve understanding one must have collaboration and joint working. Everyone in the construction industry, and those buying into it as clients, need to foster increasingly close working between clients and the whole supply chain.

In my role at the CCG, I am grateful for the support of all my colleagues. I would like to give special thanks to the CCG’s Vice Chair Peter Woolliscroft, who facilitated a number of the interviews underpinning Understanding the Construction Client.
Foreword

I hope that this book inspires you to take a different perspective on the respective roles of the client and construction industry. If it opens up a new angle of dialogue and understanding, then it will have served its purpose.

Graham Farrant
Chair of Construction Clients’ Group, the only body dedicated to all clients of the construction industry
Preface

The statement that encapsulates this book is:

Buildings are not about building!

This simple, yet provocative, statement has implications for both clients and the construction industry. If you have not dismissed the book already because of this idiocy then you will be asking yourself, well if buildings are not about building, what are they about? Of course, there is no simple answer and you will have to read the book to find out. But in the meantime let us look at the statement.

The noun ‘buildings’ certainly represents the end point of the verb ‘building’. That is, building as a verb is the means and building as a noun is the end. In this, the action of building delivers a building. But note we are saying buildings are not about building. A building has physical reality and more than that has substance. But that is not enough to define what a building is; what it also has is utility and purpose, indeed it may even have presence. All of these, however, start involving some interpretation by individuals or groups. And so it is this distinction between the physical substance of a building and its meaning for people that starts us on our journey to understand why buildings and building are not trivial, and produce considerable problems. It is also the issue that is most often forgotten. Somehow we feel that the way we see a building is the same as others do. The fact that the physical substance is so concrete, and we can agree what is there physically, seems to lead us to believe we are all seeing the same thing. Buildings are complex and like a kaleidoscope may change at every turn and like a modernist painting can be interpreted differently. They
are in the eye of the beholder, indeed they are in the mind and heart of the beholder. This can create a disjunction between the physical reality and the expectation. Buildings can be ascribed with more than their reality; they have a deeper meaning than their substance.

What then of building as a verb. Building is a dynamic activity that is fundamentally about change. In comparison to lots of other business or service actions, which are about maintenance of an activity, building involves a continuous change of activity: conception, design, construction, commissioning and use. It is only at the point of use that we get some stability in activity. Thus building involves a progressive change, one step rests on the previous and is therefore fundamentally dependent on it, i.e. steps are interdependent. In order to engage in this really complex activity, we require some rational planning and management. It is in this that the end (the building, if our assumption is that buildings are about building) requires to be conceived or indeed preconceived. This involves such activities as briefing and design and these again are taken as rational production actions. There is much debate about the degree of rationality in building and different people see this differently, either through personal disposition or through a learnt role. Thus, although the reality is in the end rational, expectations certainly are not. Buildings are conceived and then produced in the future allowing for great disjunctions as reality comes to meet expectation. In all this there is a tremendous emotion. Our expectations are high, but like a gambler we place all on the hope that the building will meet our expectation. Our investment into it is large, which involves a great emotion. If it is deviant there is even more emotion.

The opening statement could less provocatively be ‘buildings are not just about building’. However, to start to understand clients we must avoid falling into discussing the construction activity and consider more ‘what a building means for the client’, not its means of production or its physical realisation. Clearly the production of buildings involves change, but more importantly everyone associated with them is changing, in particular the client. The answer then to the question of what buildings are about is:

Buildings are about changing and developing the client!

Thus, the subject of this book and what we say is required to understand clients: that is, how clients develop through buildings, how they perceive buildings and how they perceive and experience the process
of building. Most texts on clients spend their time on improving the construction process. They see improved briefing or improved design or improved procurement or improved construction as the means for delivering better buildings for clients. We do not deny that these are important, but they do displace our gaze from what we think is a critical action of understanding the meaning of building for the client. What we are saying in this book is not new, we are just emphasising something already understood in order to develop thinking about building. This emphasis helps us to escape from our (industry and clients’) current conceptions about building, which are part of the problem and which cause us to reproduce the difficulties of working with clients. The structure and processes of building embody these conceptions and so embody the difficulties.

What, then, can we do about it? First, and as the title of the book alludes to, we must understand the client. However, this is clearly not sufficient, we must also act differently and the line we are taking is that we should work as a ‘process consultant’ to the client. This idea relates to management consultancy, but we believe it can help us to work with the complexities of the change taking place in the client. We do recognise the difficulties in this. We are still expected to be technical experts and build buildings; thus, when can we develop the skills? When have we the time to do these extra tasks and when do we get paid for this extra work? Partly, of course, we are saying it is not extra work, it is THE work and our conventional task is made easier and will deliver more satisfactory outcomes for all if we do this. As with all proposed changes in the industry, there is a lot in our history, current structures and the current business environment to prevent it happening. It is this we need to work on.

It may look at times as if we are criticising the client. This is far from our intention. Clients need their problems managed by the industry when they build. Thus, we need to identify and analyse what some of these problems are. However, as we are focusing on client problems, it means that we exaggerate their significance. This does not mean that these problems are the fault of the client; they are, in fact, consequences of the client’s world. This does not mean that these problems occur all the time and that clients cannot deal with them. We are merely identifying that there is the potential for such problems to occur that require support from the industry. As problems are context-dependent, it is unlikely that they will occur in the same way. Thus, these problems that we focus on are only indicative examples
and it is up to the industry, along with the client, to identify similar problems as they occur in practice.

The ideas for this book came from many years of working with MSc Construction Project Management students at the University of Central England in Birmingham. This course asked students to explore the realities of the industry rather than work on idealised conceptions. The work of Alan Wild with this course and on the ideas surrounding this book is gratefully acknowledged. The students were from clients as well as consultants and contractors. They revealed in their discussions together the inadequacy of the current arrangements that they had to manage and the potential for working differently. This book is a testament to their experience, their reflections and their abilities. Several undertook dissertations about clients: Adrian Wheeler; David Cant; Byron Pountney; Tony Catchpowle; Eamonn Kerr; Steve Gilbert; Kevin Small; Paul Baker; Martin Jarrett; Claire Charman and Linda Cresswell; who provided priceless insights into practice. We thank them all.

The book is based on developing a number of positions on the industry; we would like to acknowledge these sources as fundamental to our inquiry. These are Graham Winch of UMIST on Construction as an Information Processing System; Peter Barrett of the University of Salford on a wider systems perspective of construction and the importance of Facilities Management; and Stuart Green of the University of Reading for his critical sociology of the realities of the industry. In addition, we would like to acknowledge the work of the late Steven Groak, who saw problems of construction as part of the constitution of construction rather than a mistake. There is also a psychodynamic thread which comes from the work of Jean Neumann of the Tavistock Institute, London and the cooperative inquiry work of John Heron. Finally, the complexity work of Ralph Stacey at the University of Hertfordshire allowed us to acknowledge the unknown in the development of the future.

We must also thank the interviewees from the sectors who had to suffer our inquisition. A list of these is presented in the Appendix. We investigated other sectors than those published here but we discovered that it was extremely difficult to encapsulate a sector and this took longer to describe. We limited it to six sectors. The ideas for the final outcome developed through these interviews rather than being preconceived by us. In addition, several read and commented on the sector chapters to ensure their accuracy. The remaining errors
are entirely our fault through our misperceptions about the complex world of clients. The industry is extremely keen to work better for clients and great interest has been shown in the book. Also, clients are interested in getting the industry to work better with them and are themselves working on the problem. We must thank the Construction Clients Group for giving us access to this activity, especially Christopher Morley, the Chief Executive, and Graham Farrant, the Chair.

We must also thank the people in our lives who suffered as a result of the book, our work colleagues, our students, but most particularly Gill and Rachel, whose support was critical for its completion.

In the end, we all need to change to survive!

David Boyd
Ezekiel Chinyio

Birmingham
May 2006
1 Clients in Perspective

Today, more then ever before, business is about fulfilling client satisfaction.

Pries et al. (2004)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This book is written for the construction industry in order to help it provide a better service to clients. Clients are the reason that the industry exists; therefore, clients are always in the industry’s thoughts. However, the relationship between clients and the industry is not one of mutual enjoyment. In many cases, there is mutual dislike and distrust, which ends up in acrimonious encounters. Clients see the industry as a problem and often express this feeling in public. The industry sees clients as problems, and although the industry pretends to work for clients, behind closed doors it complains about them.

The fact that construction has its own court system (the Technology and Construction Court is in the Queen’s Bench Division of the court service) for dealing with problems pays testimony to the fact that the engagement is not working well. Not all cases that are heard deal with disputes between clients and the industry, but this litigation is the tip of the problem: most disagreements never end up in court, and possibly all construction projects have disagreements between clients and the industry. Although the number of cases in court is reducing, this is a result of new dispute-handling procedures rather than a reduction of disputes. Indeed, such disputes occur everywhere in the world and have occurred throughout history. Thus, our task is momentous. If the problem has not at least been encapsulated so far, is it possible to do it at all? Many have tried, but none has succeeded.
In this chapter, we detail some of the current thinking on clients, considering the way people see their problems, on who clients are and the nature of some of the solutions. This is in no way intended to criticise this other research work, which is well founded and honourable. We then lay out how we intend to present our attempt at grasping the problem and the structure of the book.

### 1.2 THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

The construction industry has been considered problematic for many years. The industry has been the subject of many government reports, which have sought solutions to these problems. Many of these reports are summarised in Murray and Langford (2003), who state:

> The intervention of most of the government reports . . . has been driven by only two groups of powerful clients: in the period 1944–1980 this would have been the powerful government or parastatal clients; while the period 1980–2000 became the era dominated by powerful private clients.

(p. 4)

Government is interested in the construction industry not only because of the influence of powerful clients (including itself) but also because the industry is a national economic driver. Construction creates the buildings and infrastructure that support all other economic activities and so is a necessary component of economic development. In addition, construction is a major employer and user of resources, which creates a stable state. In these respects, then, the government is interested in problems of procurement, continuity of work, fragmentation, productivity and performance (Murray & Langford, 2003). An added complication, however, is that government uses the construction industry for economic stimulus or suppression by instigating (or cancelling) its own projects (Hillebrandt, 1985). With regard to clients, it is fragmentation, productivity and performance of the industry that generate most concern.

In all of the reports summarised by Murray and Langford (2003), what is being emphasised is the failure of the industry to deliver for the client. These failures include:

- lack of value for money
- budget overruns
non-delivery on time
suspect quality of work
inappropriate buildings
poor client relationships.

The relationship between client and industry is fraught because of its complexity and adversarial nature. Clients see the industry as too complicated to deal with because of its numerous professions and organisations and its convoluted processes and procedures of operation. Furthermore, clients have to experience the industry’s internal conflicts that are exposed in projects. Clients suffer the adversarial responses of claims and protective actions, making the experience unpleasant and leading to a continuing lack of trust in the industry’s actions and the litigation mentioned above (Banwell, 1964; Egan, 1998; Latham, 1994).

Many reports refer to a better operation of the industry in other countries and to more efficient practices in other industries. There is a clear message that construction in the UK is backward and that its practices need to change (Woudhuysen & Abley, 2004). Each subsequent report, however, laments the fact that the industry has not changed and that the recommendations of earlier reports have not been implemented effectively. This has become the driving force of the reports of the past decade, starting with the Latham Report (Latham, 1994).

Latham (1994) placed ‘value for money’ at the top of his list of client concerns. His call was for a 30% reduction in the real cost of construction through greater productivity. He identified that this could be achieved by teamwork in the industry. For the first time, however, he also placed a duty on clients to act in ways that would allow this to happen, both in their use of contracts and through their selection of contracting parties on a basis of quality rather than cost only. Latham placed a burden on public-sector clients to work with this idea. The issue of improving value for money in construction was taken up by Atkin and Flanagan (1995), who saw it as part of understanding the client’s business needs.

In order to achieve construction customer satisfaction, Egan (1998) proposed five key drivers of change for the construction industry: committed leadership, focus on the customer, integrated processes and teams, quality-driven agenda and a commitment to people. Egan presented the need for benchmarks to be the method of implementing
improvements. Benchmark improvements were stated for reductions in cost, time and defects, and measurement of key performance indicators became the driver of change. The methods of improvement that were proposed were process re-engineering and supply chain management, but there was recognition that client leadership was critical and the notion of a best practice client was established. The sequel report, *Accelerating Change* (Strategic Forum, 2002), listed 12 targets and established client satisfaction as a measurable indicator of performance.

The reports before 1994 problematised the industry, and it is only recently that the problem of clients has been acknowledged. In many ways, it has not been possible to criticise clients, as they are paying and should get what they want. It has now been identified, however, that powerful clients can not only get government reports written analysing the problems of the industry but have a duty to develop the industry. This is the theme of the Construction Clients Group, which has established a client’s charter and methods of achieving best practice client status. There is a growing realisation that it takes two to tango, and the outcomes of the industry are affected by the actions of the client. Thus, texts not only explain the industry to clients (National Economic Development Office, 1974; Pearce & Bennett, 2003) but also seek to explain to clients how they can act better with the industry for their own benefit (CABE, 2002, 2003; Connaughton & Green, 1996; Construction Industry Board, 1997; Hill, 2000; IOD, 2001; RIBA, 2004).

### 1.3 THE CATEGORIES OF CLIENTS

In many ways, the problem of clients is contained in the definition of the term ‘client’. There is a duality in the term between being a customer paying for goods/services and being a dependent under the protection of another. The term probably was first used as a result of a requirement for legal advice or protection. Nowadays, it is used more broadly and is constituted as a legal entity in a relationship. As Heron (2001) adds, a client is someone who is freely choosing to avail themselves of a service. This wider use includes counselling, social work, hairdressing, beauty therapy, and relationships with bank managers, accountants, management consultants and architects. This root in professional service reinforces the expectation of protection by the client.
The literature on construction clients views clients as the initiators of projects and those that contract with other parties for the supply of construction goods or services (Atkin & Flanagan, 1995). At the end of this relationship, the client has ownership of the outcomes (Miller & Evje, 1999), with legal jurisdiction of the economic advantage (Hillebrandt, 1985). A client can, however, be a representative of the owner and act with delegated authority on the owner’s part. This idea of the outcome of the relationship being tied to economic advantage distinguishes construction clients from, for example, counselling clients, where the outcome is individual advantage.

The word ‘client’ has connotations of an individual as a result of historical and other uses. The historical use has conceptions of a king, nobleman or gentleman instigator of big houses (Hampden-Turner, 1984), which leaves a residual belief in the significance of the individual. In construction, however, it is unlikely that a client will be an individual; most clients are organisations or groups of people. Even when the client is an individual in legal terms, the client’s family and associates are part of the decision surrounding the development, as they are beneficiaries or bear a loss. Thus, the client needs to be seen as a plural and involving a set of stakeholders with different viewpoints and different needs (Newcombe, 1994; Rowlinson, 1999; Salisbury, 1998). The perception of clients as unitary entities is constituted in law as the signing party, and this confusion between legal clients and the wider functional clients continuously complicates matters. This is confused further by the representative of the client with delegated authority also being seen as the client.

There are many different categorisations of clients, and Mbachu (2002) distinguishes these as client system-based and client need-based. Client system-based categorisation includes:

- nature of the organisation
- source of the project finance
- type of business activity.

Client need-based categorisation includes:

- building form types
- building use types
- ownership type
- experience of building.
These describe the starting point of a classification, but there is a choice about the next breakdown at each level, so that the overall classification can unfold in different ways. There is no ideal hierarchical classification system, and problems of interdependence of final categories cause an inadequacy; for example, building use types are linked directly to types of business activity.

Starting with client systems classifications, construction clients can be private individual, private corporate or public sector (Blackmore, 1990). The main distinction is between public and private, and this forms the basis of the Mbachu (2002) breakdown shown in Figure 1.1.

Public-sector (central and local government, nationalised corporations) and semi-public clients collectively form the major segment of construction clients (Hillebrandt, 1985; Egan, 1998) and procure over 40% of construction output by value in most countries (Spencer & Winch, 2002). The significance of public-sector clients is changing in the UK as a result of governmental beliefs that public services can be better provided by the private sector. Thus, the distinction between the public and private sectors is being blurred, although achieving a profit still defines the private sector. There are now private not-for-profit organisations, such as housing associations, that provide social services. The pressures from government on this type of client are to provide greater value for

---

**Figure 1.1** Categorisation by organisational form and use.
Source: Adapted from Mbachu (2002).
Clients in Perspective

money for the public through numerous initiatives, such as Modernising Construction (NAO, 2001) and Achieving Excellence (OGC, 2003), which have been set in place with this explicit delivery target.

On the private for-profit client side, some clients build for direct profit while others build for self-use (Spencer & Winch, 2002). Most private corporate clients want a building to enhance the value of their other assets, such as to improve a service or to cope with a change in the environment, either because of expansion or because of technological change (Blackmore, 1990). Such desires in buildings, however, potentially also yield greater direct profit if the asset is disposed of, demonstrating the inadequacies of any hierarchical classification system.

Clients’ understanding of construction is diverse. Newcombe (1994) and Rowlinson (1999) use three categories: uninformed (or naive) clients, who tend to procure projects on either a one-off or a very infrequent basis; partially informed clients, who have procured a few projects, often spaced apart; and well-informed (sophisticated) clients, who either build on a regular basis or are from the industry.

The majority of construction-industry organisations view clients through their business type or sector categorisation. This is both a marketing strategy and an attempt to provide a better service. We have extended the analysis above to provide us with a categorisation of sectors, as shown in Figure 1.2, and have broken these down into three divisions: public, private and mixed. The public division has two subdivisions: national, whereby services are provided throughout the country, and local, whereby services are resourced and controlled locally. Clearly, the advent of regional government may add other tiers to this. The private division has two subdivisions: industrial and service. These categories are used in economic categorisation and agencies such as Business Link. The final division is more complicated and involves a degree of mix of public and private enterprise. The divisions are not-for-profit and private regulated. The not-for-profit company is a privately constituted organisation that provides a public service but channels its surpluses back into the service. A private regulated organisation undertakes a public service, often with a monopoly, but it is allowed to make a profit. The regulation defines and monitors the service that is offered and tries to limit the profit through pricing controls.

This list is not comprehensive and there may be anomalies. Some of the sectors mentioned can appear on both the public and the private
sides, for example education and healthcare. In most of these cases, however, it is the public sector that dominates. The only exception is social housing: most social housing is now provided by not-for-profit organisations, with the public sector providing only specialist accommodation.

Moving on, we can start to look at specific clients. The scale of client business is clearly an important issue, as larger organisations procure a larger amount of building on a more regular basis. Both Building magazine and Construction News provide regular lists of the top 50 clients by expenditure. The list for May 2004 to April 2005 is shown in Table 1.1.

This list is dominated by the public sector, with the top two and five of the top ten. It is clear that one or two projects can dominate the statistics, which means that in the following year this work may not be ongoing. As Hewes (2003) points out, infrastructure clients will
Table 1.1  Top 50 UK clients by expenditure from May 2004 to April 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Total (£m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>2,637.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>Department for Transport</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1,135.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>News International</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>678.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Land Securities</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>433.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>289.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>English Partnerships</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>278.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>Scottish Executive</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>275.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>ASDA</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>269.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>National Grid Transco</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>268.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>Leeds City Council</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>259.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>224.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Westfield</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>203.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CTP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>189.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14*</td>
<td>Liverpool City Council</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>119.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15*</td>
<td>Sunderland City Council</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>177.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tesco</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>175.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wilson Bowden</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>164.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18*</td>
<td>Home Office</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>157.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Union Railways</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>154.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20*</td>
<td>Exeter City Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>142.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>British Land</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>138.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22*</td>
<td>Network Rail</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>126.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Wm Morrison</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>125.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>ProLogis</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>124.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Scottish Hydro Electric</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>120.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Allied London</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Rosemound</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>118.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28*</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>116.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29*</td>
<td>Southbank Centre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>113.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30*</td>
<td>Solihull MBC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>112.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31*</td>
<td>Renfrewshire Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>106.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32*</td>
<td>Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>102.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33*</td>
<td>Bolton Borough Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>101.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34*</td>
<td>Cornwall County Council</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Rolls Royce</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36*</td>
<td>West Sussex County Council</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>99.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>J Sainsbury</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38*</td>
<td>National Assembly for Wales</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39*</td>
<td>Telford &amp; Wrekin Council</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Scottish Widows</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Barratt</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42*</td>
<td>DEFRA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>London Bridge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44*</td>
<td>University West of England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Gladedale</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>London &amp; Amsterdam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47*</td>
<td>Doncaster MBC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Redrow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49*</td>
<td>Dept Regional Development</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50*</td>
<td>Wrexham CBC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Public sector.
dominate because this sector lends itself to a small number of large firms. In other sectors, there is a large number of smaller clients or, as in food retailing, four large clients and the remainder very small clients.

1.4 WHAT CLIENTS WANT

There are two problems for clients: expressing what they want and getting this delivered. We deal first with what clients want before handling the delivery processes in the next section.

Groak (1992) declares that the orthodoxy of social demand for buildings is that ‘people have always wanted much the same thing: firmness, commodity and delight’. This reference to Vitruvius, the 1 BC Roman author of *Ten Books on Architecture*, ably sums up a large amount of literature on what buildings are required to be: firmness being technically sound, commodity being of use and created with minimum resources, and delight having a presence in the environment. Boyd and Danks (2000) expand on this, suggesting that there are four economies to be negotiated in building: the functional economy, the financial economy, the social economy and the symbolic economy. Each of these provides us with a list of different needs, not all of which can be provided and some of which are in conflict; however, the resolution is undertaken as a negotiation about meaning and significance. Boyd and Danks use the term ‘economy’ to identify the subject area of the set of negotiated transactions involved in the task of building. These are shown in Figure 1.3; we have indicated that functional and symbolic needs are experiential, while financial and social needs are abstract. This helps us to understand the difficulties in achieving a resolution, as the items are so different and involve different forms of thinking.

The functional and financial economies are well understood, but the social and symbolic economies require explanation. Buildings do not only perform a technical function; nor are they simply aesthetic artefacts. As Zukin (1996) states, ‘Framing architecture is not primarily a visual problem; it is a problem of social power’. Thus, we see on the one hand design as a commodity to be packaged and sold for mass consumption and on the other hand an exclusive statement to declare individual difference and importance to anyone else. The social economy involves a long-term integration of a building into an environment. This has ranged from a belief that buildings can be part of an engineering of society to the upholding of a wider social identity in
towns and cities through the planning system and, recently, of providing for sustainability.

This identifies the problem of the task of establishing clients’ needs. Although some clients’ needs are expressible to the construction providers, other needs remain latent, concealed either consciously or unconsciously (Kamara et al., 2002). Runyon (1980) supports the existence of concealed needs and objectives in the mind of the ‘consumer’, observing: ‘Often, a consumer’s goals for making purchase decisions are complex, not easily inferred from direct observations primarily because the respondent may be unwillingly to release such information.’ Such hidden objectives may include the provision of status and prestige for the client. Bennett (1985) explains that needs and objectives may be concealed because they may have social, cultural, political or religious connotations. Thus, latent needs may not be observed easily and cannot be accessed merely by asking; and yet clients assess overall satisfaction with the procurement outcomes or the services provided by taking into consideration the extent to which these latent needs are met (Green & Lenard, 1999; Salisbury, 1998; Turner, 1997).

These problems are addressed by briefing. Briefing is a dialogue between the client and the construction professionals, normally the
architect (Gameson, 1991; Loe, 2000), where the client’s aspirations, desires and needs are expressed and presented in a written form called the ‘brief’ (BSI, 2002; Construction Industry Board, 1997). Early views on briefs considered it essential for the client to have a clear view of what the facilities should achieve and why they are necessary before starting any construction project. Briefs then needed to be clear and to be fixed early in the project in order to enable the construction team to undertake its job (Kelly et al., 1992). A number of problems were found with this conventional approach: there was a continued lack of satisfaction from construction clients (Green & Simister, 1999), and the effectiveness of briefings has remained problematic (Shen et al., 2004). Sometimes the briefing function was not accorded due priority by clients and thus was not carried out properly. There were calls for large client organisations to appoint a construction champion who would speak for the client. This idea, however, contradicted the awareness that, with bigger organisations, there were many relevant voices and different needs in the project from these. Most often, there was a distinction between the ownership and occupation of buildings, clouding the identity of the client (Newcombe, 2003). The opinions and needs of users are important in briefing, but it was realised that it was impossible to satisfy all users (Blackmore, 1990). Indeed, although the brief could capture the opinions of all stakeholders, it could not help to negotiate compromises. In addition, as projects take extended periods of time, personnel and stakeholders can change and these can challenge the brief in order to have their needs met. Further, clients become more aware with time and realise or discover new needs or opportunities as their projects proceed (Beijder, 1991). Clients’ objectives thus change as they engage with designers and other consultants to determine their real and explicit needs (Powell, 1991). The irony then is that clients attach a high expectation to some of the needs that are discovered after the brief is formulated, which pressurises the delivery of the construction product.

The changing and modern face of construction delivery has demanded a move away from traditional briefing to more elaborate approaches that will decipher the requirements of clients and expectations of stakeholders. Atkin and Flanagan (1995) suggested that a modern-day briefing would include strategic analysis, client analysis, facilities analysis, statement of need, confirmation of need, functional brief, concept design and scheme design. In a sequel, Smith et al. (2001) emphasised the need for strategic clients’ needs analysis.
Green (1994) endeavoured to account for the conflicting and transient aspirations of the project stakeholders using value management. Green and Simister (1999) trialled the viability of three soft operational research methodologies as enablers of strategic briefing, i.e. ‘soft systems methodology’ (Checkland, 1981, 1989), ‘strategic choice’ (Friend & Hickling, 1987) and ‘strategic options development and analysis’ (Eden, 1989). This proved extremely successful for clients in reaching a consensus brief rather than attempting to optimise the brief. Green (1996) sought an even better approach to understanding clients’ requirements by seeing them as social systems that can be mapped against or viewed through the lenses of Morgan’s (1986) eight metaphors, i.e. goal-seeking machine, biological organism, intelligence, culture, politics, psychic prison, ‘flux and transformation’ and domination. Depending on the culture in an organisation, one or more metaphors will be dominant and influential on the client’s requirements and procedures.

McGregor and Then (1999), using a facilities management perspective, saw that what was required was a more detailed awareness of the client’s business. This involved determining the position of buildings in the business and how the client made use of space. Barrett and Stanley (1999) saw the wider processes of engagement with the industry as being important and also redefined the client’s attempts at conceptualising the precise nature of a building and its uses as a journey from uncertainty to certainty and from aspiration to delight. Barrett and Stanley offered a more structured approach to this whole process, involving five key solutions (Figure 1.4). The act of briefing in which these five solutions are evolved is an interactive process that runs concurrently with the construction project and is not a single rational event.

![Diagram of Modern client briefing processes](source: Adapted from Barrett and Stanley (1999)).
The issues with the foregoing are that the client is empowered to play its role in the processes in an effective way but also the client needs to feel that it is in control. However, the changes during the project that constitute Barrett and Stanley's (1999) journey from uncertainty to certainty need to be managed so that they are realistic and integrated. There needs to be appropriate user involvement from within the client to ensure that the wider client is satisfied. There also needs to be a wider involvement from the industry team in the process, and this team needs to learn how to work together. Finally, Barrett and Stanley (1999) believe that new techniques of visualisation can be at the centre of improving communications and of understanding what is really required.

Given the enormous effort needed for developing detailed briefs, especially in complex projects, the role of the briefing consultant has become a recurring theme (BSI, 2002; Hyams, 2001). The briefing consultant has an understanding of clients' businesses and construction and can drive the brief formulation process alongside the project process. The consultant is an independent adviser, playing a similar role to a financial adviser, and is there to help clients decide on their needs and how to achieve them (Myers, 2004).

1.5 A PROBLEM OF DELIVERY

In order to have a building built, the client needs to interact with the industry. This requires engaging with a diverse group of professionals and businesses and entering into contracts. This process is normally called ‘procurement’ and has become the subject of development within the industry. Procurement is the framework within which construction is brought about, acquired or obtained. In the traditional form of procurement, the client decides what is wanted; appoints and briefs a designer (architect or engineer), who designs the building and who also informs the selection of a contractor, who will deliver what has been designed. In this, the client has to face the problems endemic in the construction industry.

The economics of the industry have caused it to have a complex fragmented structure (Ball, 1988; Hillebrandt, 1985). The industry has to face varying demands for its work, which has caused it to fragment itself through subcontracting (Smith et al., 2004). This means that a different group undertakes every project, and that individual organisations may be undertaking any number of jobs at once. Rather