A Church Decides to Build: A Qualitative Study of Congregational Delivery Systems

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This paper describes a research project that surveyed different project delivery methods that church leaders chose when deciding to design and construct a new church building. A *structured interview* method was used to determine if there was any evidence to the idea that protestant churches were moving away from the traditional design and construction delivery method to other options available in the marketplace. Persons interviewed included pastors, church administrators, church building committee members, construction firms, and architects. The results of this qualitative research were presented using Macromedia's Flash program. Flash allowed a large amount of media: video, photos, voice, graphics, etc. to be arranged in a logical format for presenting the data and arriving at conclusions. Flash also made it easy to disseminate the research results to a wider audience than the typical construction and architecture journals. A demonstration of the Flash application is proposed for the conference.

Keywords: Project Delivery Methods, Churches, Qualitative Research

Introduction

Churches in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s experienced a building boom driven, in part, by the era of baby boomers (Barrett, 2002). Since 2002, it appears another increase in church construction is underway. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported "Area pastors say there's a plethora of reasons behind the building spree, including baby boomers finding religion" (Barrett, 2002). Barrett also states some pastors feel it is due to the growing suburban population and their desire for spiritual connection. Barrett cites a U.S. Department of Commerce statistic for 2002 that shows a significant increase in church construction spending. The government data shows that there was $8.8 billion in religious building construction in May of 2002, up from $7.6 billion in May 2000 (Barrett, 2002). With such an increase in church construction, there has been a concentration in general contractors turning their attention to this sector of the construction market. However, unlike the 1950's, churches now have multiple project delivery options in the design and construction of their facility.

"The economy may be slow, but church construction in Birmingham is booming." Is the first line in an article from the Birmingham business journal in 2002 (Nicholson, 2002). It was projected that in Birmingham alone, for 2002, the church building industry would create 1,900 new jobs and generate $125 million dollars in new revenue (Nicholson, 2002). The church building boom is partially being attributed to suburban population growth and baby boomers searching for spiritual connection. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, the church construction boom shows no signs of waning. For some, it is the first time they have been involved in church since they were children in the 1950's and 1960's, the last major building boom (Barrett, 2002). "River Glen is only 5 years old, but its congregation has more than doubled in size and wants to

move out of a rented facility." said associate pastor James Calder (Barrett, 2002). For some like River Glen this boom means building a new facility, but for others like Emanuel United Church of Christ in Hales Corner, the building boom means updating a facility that has not been renovated in more than 30 years. Emanuel is adding an elevator and disabled-accessible restrooms to its building (Barrett, 2002).

With such a rise in church construction, it is important for congregations to be able to differentiate between project delivery systems that are available to them and how to choose the one that will best meet their needs. From the congregation's perspective, prior to 1970, the cost of the work was the general contractor's main competitive advantage in church construction. Whoever had the lowest price in the bid process won the construction contract. However, changing roles between Architects, Engineers, and Contractors during the past 30 years have allowed builders to move away from a commodity-based product (construction only) to more of a service-oriented product involving programming, design, and construction.

Purpose of the Study

During the spring of 2003, the authors researched various project delivery systems used by churches to develop a case study. From this qualitative exploration, the authors identified an interesting issue, namely, churches seemed to be moving away from the traditional process (design-bid-build) of design and construction to other options in the marketplace such as design-build, and construction management. In addition, pastors and building committee members interviewed for this case study had various conflicting perceptions about these other project delivery systems. Furthermore, interviewees had different perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of the different project delivery systems. Therefore, the authors became interested in the following research question:

Are Protestant churches in the southeastern United States moving away from the traditional design-bid-build project delivery system to other options available in the marketplace?

The purpose of this research was to investigate project delivery systems used in church construction in order to determine if there is any evidence that points to churches moving away from the traditional design-bid-build system. This research investigated new church building projects prior to 1998 and from 1998 to 2003 in order to provide background information on choices of project delivery systems. A set of structured interview questions were developed (see Appendix A) and interviews were conducted with church leaders, contractors, and architects. These interviews provided information on project delivery systems used in the past, differences in church construction, and trends in project delivery systems selected for future church projects. In order to reduce the scope of this research to a manageable size, the project was limited to church leaders in protestant churches in Alabama, Georgia and North Florida.

Current Issues in the Design and Construction of Churches

Gary Davis a Bradley County Executive has this to say about churches deciding to build: "My advice to any church or organization in need of adding to an existing assembly building or interested in constructing a new sanctuary or assembly hall is to first consult with a licensed architect or engineer. These professionals are familiar enough with the plans review and permitting process to save your church both time and confusion" (Davis, 2002). The first stage of a church deciding to build is the process of preplanning (McCormick, 1992). This process entails examining the needs and desires of different groups in the church. The most important thing in this stage is that the church makes sure its desires to build and its actual need to build match up, building is not always the answer (Byrd, 2003). As the church moves past the preplanning stages it must begin to develop an organization that will oversee the building process. This building committee should be made up of not only individuals with construction experience but also people with business, finance, and management backgrounds (McCormick, 1992). To organize a good building committee, church leaders should look for about six to fifteen leaders, depending on the size of the church (Washington, 2003). Jim Baird stated of his church's building committee, "You ask for a church committee to start with, we are fortunate to have some engineers and we have a lot of academicians, who think well and we have some businessmen. We wanted to include a lot of different people because of the activities they were involved with within the overall church" (Baird, 2003).

The church must then move into the master planning stage of the building process. Gwenn McCormick states in his book "this should be a time where studies are mission driven, focus on growth ministry strategy, and avoid data determinism" (McCormick, 1992). Gary Swafford church building project expert for Alabama Baptist General Convention calls this the people plan, the long-range plan that indicates your growth potential (Washington, 2003).

Moving past the planning stage the church now moves into the final stages before typically selecting the architect and contractor, launching a financial campaign. This is a time when the church must look at the church budget and financial concerns facing them during this time of building a new sanctuary, building or addition. This is also a time when the church typically begins to ask the congregation to consider giving above their normal tithe to fund the building project. Or the church will turn to a local financial institution to help fund their church building project (McCormick, 1992). Once the capital campaign has begun or financing from a local institution has been acquired, the church moves into the development or design and construction stages of the building project (Washington, 2003).

The protestant church is moving more to a theater style sanctuary with the offerings of a mall atmosphere. The *mall* concept is catching on in the world of church building, with a one-stop service for all members with coffee shops, Internet café's, multi-purpose gyms, and even skateboard parks (Washington, 2003). Rev. Steve Lawner states "Parishioners have come to expect *one-stop shopping* from their churches. They are drawn toward modern facilities that touch on nearly every aspect of their lives and include amenities such as bookstores and coffee shops" (Barrett, 2002). Nick Harmon, an associate professor with the University of Oklahoma's College of Architecture comments, "We're seeing more educational facilities, more community-center-like activities becoming a part of most contemporary churches. Maybe we're getting

away from such a heavily symbolic role in the architectural configuration of churches and getting into more of a directly functional purpose" (Maile, 2002). All this being said to show that the modern protestant church is in fact moving more toward function driven facilities, however, not everyone is on board with this idea. Dolly Pankey, pastor of Coleman Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church has this to say about the one-stop shopping concept, "I find the trend troubling. It could be because I am more of a traditionalist. I do think it is important to have places for activities for children and youth, but I also think that the church is not supposed to be a mall (Williams, 2003). So, while there is some negative sentiment among today's protestant church, there is an overwhelming majority that is looking for the *mall* concept, with a focus on function.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Design

A series of interview questions were developed to further understand the project delivery systems used by churches. The target audience for these interview questions was architects, general contractors and church administration involved in a church building project within the past 10 years. All of the people who were interviewed were located in the southeastern United States. The church building industry is a very specific and unique industry. For this reason, all of those interviewed have very definite ties to this industry and for most of the individuals the majority of their work is in the church building industry. All of the individuals that participated in the interviews were asked a standard set of questions pertaining to their area of experience in the *structured interview* method. Special care was taken to design each question. The questions were created in such a fashion that they did not lead the interviewee to a specific answer or show any bias toward a particular answer (Fellows & Liu, 2003).

Results

Interviews

The goal was to interview five individuals from each group: architects, general contractors, and church administration. Each individual was able to answer all of the questions in the interview and each participant was very responsive to the overall research. As planned, interviews outside the Auburn, Alabama area were conducted by phone and recorded for multimedia purposes. With only one minor glitch of the recorder not working properly, all the interviews were recorded on the first time the question was asked. The one interview where the recorder failed to record the audio during the interview, the interviewee was asked the same questions a second time and answered with the same answers. The individuals who were interviewed are shown in Figure 1.

Name	Position	Company or Church	Description
Gary Pike	Deacon over Finance	Chesterfield Presbyterian	Church
Jim Baird	Church Superintendent	First Presbyterian	Church
Hardin Byars	Head Building Committee	Grace Fellowship Church	Church

Rusty Hudson	Senior Pastor	Cornerstone United Methodist	Church
Tim West	Administrative Pastor	Lakeview Presbyterian	Church
Rick Kramer	Senior Vice President	Group VI	Contractor
Alan Dobbins	Project Development	Myrick Gurosky & Associates	Contractor
Tim Songster	President	Cosco & Associates	Contractor
Doug Strickland	Project Administration	Moore Corporation	Contractor
Gary Swafford	Director of Building	Alabama Baptist Convention	Contractor
Mike Thompson	Owner	Thompson Sound Inc.	Contractor
Glen Davis	Owner	Davis & Sons	Contractor
David Payne	Principal	Payne & Associates	Architect
Paul Davis	Principal	Paul Carpenter Davis	Architect
Davis Byrd	Director	Church Architects	Architect
Lance	Church Consultant	Black Design Architecture	Architect

Figure 1. Individuals interviewed for qualitative research.

Upon conclusion of the interviews, an assessment of the interview results was conducted and the interviewees yielded four major issues regarding church project delivery systems. In no particular order, the first issue is the difference between church building projects and other commercial building projects. A number of the interviewees felt that there was a major difference in the number of people involved with the project from an ownership side and the close personal relationship with those people. Paul Davis, an architect, said this "Church projects a lot of times you are dealing with a committee, that can be large, and it is harder to get a consensus out of a church committee" (Davis, 2003). Others felt that the main difference in church building projects was the planning and development stages of the project. Alan Dobbins, head of project development at Myrick Gurosky and Associates had this to say, "The biggest difference is the upfront planning process and what is involved and walking a church through the process" (Dobbins, 2003). The final reason that one of the interviewees felt that church building projects were different was the diversity of building components involved with each project. The president of Cosco and Associates, Tim Songster said "What makes church construction different is that it is a very unique field because it is so diversified… In church construction you have all the facets of all different type of designs, pooled into one design. So, you need to understand not only how do churches function, how do different denominations function, and what is critical to that denomination" (Songster, 2003).

The second issue that arose in the interview process was that in church construction communication is key to success because of the large number of people you have involved during the duration of the project. Gary Swafford is the director of church buildings at the Alabama Baptist Convention and in his interview he makes this statement. "You have the church, the architect, and the contractor in the same room for the planning process, therefore, that enhances communication greatly" (Swafford, 2003). The principal at Payne and Associates, David Payne states "All the communication between architect and building committee and the architect and the contractor, it is essential that you try to maintain and do maintain regular dialogue between all of the parties" (Payne, 2003).

Another one of the issues that developed in the review of the interviews was the fact that architects, a large percentage of the time, design a building beyond the budget of the church. Paul Davis the owner of an architecture firm said. "I think architects do have a reputation of projects going over budget. I think unfortunately it is an earned reputation, I don't think it is a

misconception" (Davis, 2003).   Alan Dobbins also makes this comment about architects designing over budget. "The biggest problems that we see is that a church goes out and hires an architect, architect would design a great looking facility. Then they put it before the church and say here is what we are going to build, this is the amount of money we need to raise, and this is how much we think it is going to cost… And then the design and cost don't match up with what you thought it was going to be" (Dobbins, 2003).

The final issue that came out of the interviews was the fact that everyone that was interviewed did in fact feel that the church building industry was moving away from design-bid-build. Gary Swafford makes this statement "We are seeing more churches using design-build professionals, as apposed to the architect and then contractor" (Swafford, 2003).   Alan Dobbins comments, "But we are seeing, have seen, churches in the last ten years move more toward a design-build concept" (Dobbins, 2003).   Payne states, "Are we seeing more churches move away from the typical design-bid-build process, and of course, we are" (Payne, 2003).   "I do see some churches going more toward the design-build approach" was a quote made by Paul Davis (Davis, 2003).

Macromedia Flash

By organizing most of the interview data into Macromedia Flash buttons, individuals interested in the project can receive as much detail as desired when drilling down into the application. The application is divided into five sections: background, delivery systems, qualitative (results), quantitative (results), and conclusions (see Figure 2). (Note: This paper only deals with the qualitative aspect of the project, but the quantitative section of the project was quite extensive and will be published at a later date.)
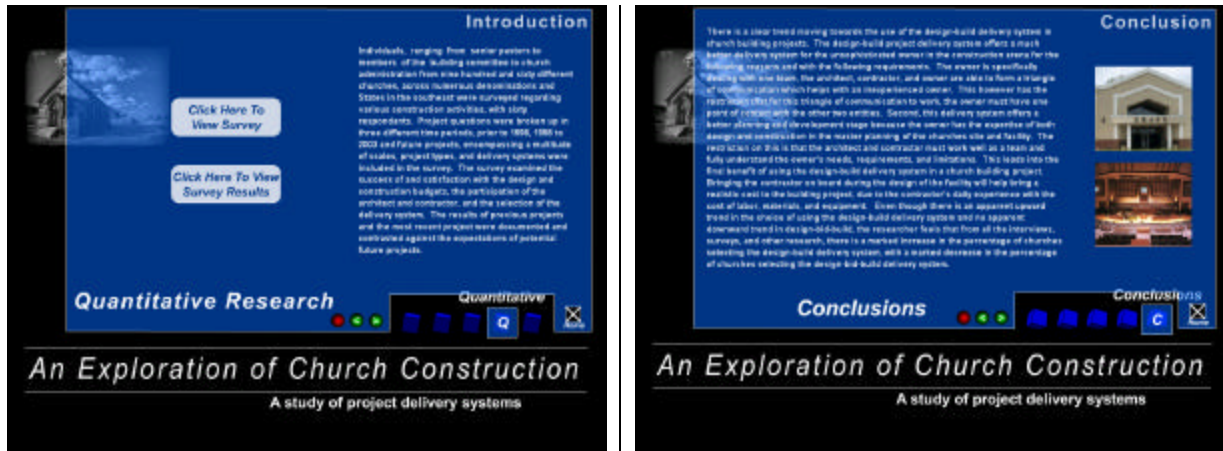
Figure 2. Flash Application Buttons: Background, Project Delivery, Quantitative, and Conclusions.

As mentioned earlier, there were several issues that surfaced after analyzing the interview data. Four of the issues have already been discussed, but there were actually six total issues that were made into Flash buttons. These issues were arranged so that the user could click on the issue and drill down into actual audio transcripts of the interviewees (see Figure 3). For example, after clicking on the issue *Difference in Church and Commercial Construction Projects*, the user is taken to the next screen where the choices diverge into four sub-issues: *Planning & Developing, Number of People, Personal Relations*, and *Diversity of Building Type* (see top of Figure 4).   If the user clicks on the Flash button *Personal Relations* (highlighted in top of Figure 4), then the user is taken to the next screen which contains the actual audio transcripts of the interviewees (see bottom of Figure 4). Hearing the spoken words complete with voice inflection and rhythm, in addition to seeing the highlighted quotes, is very powerful versus simply reading the words in printed form.

Figure 3. Example Issue: Difference in Church and Commercial Construction Projects.
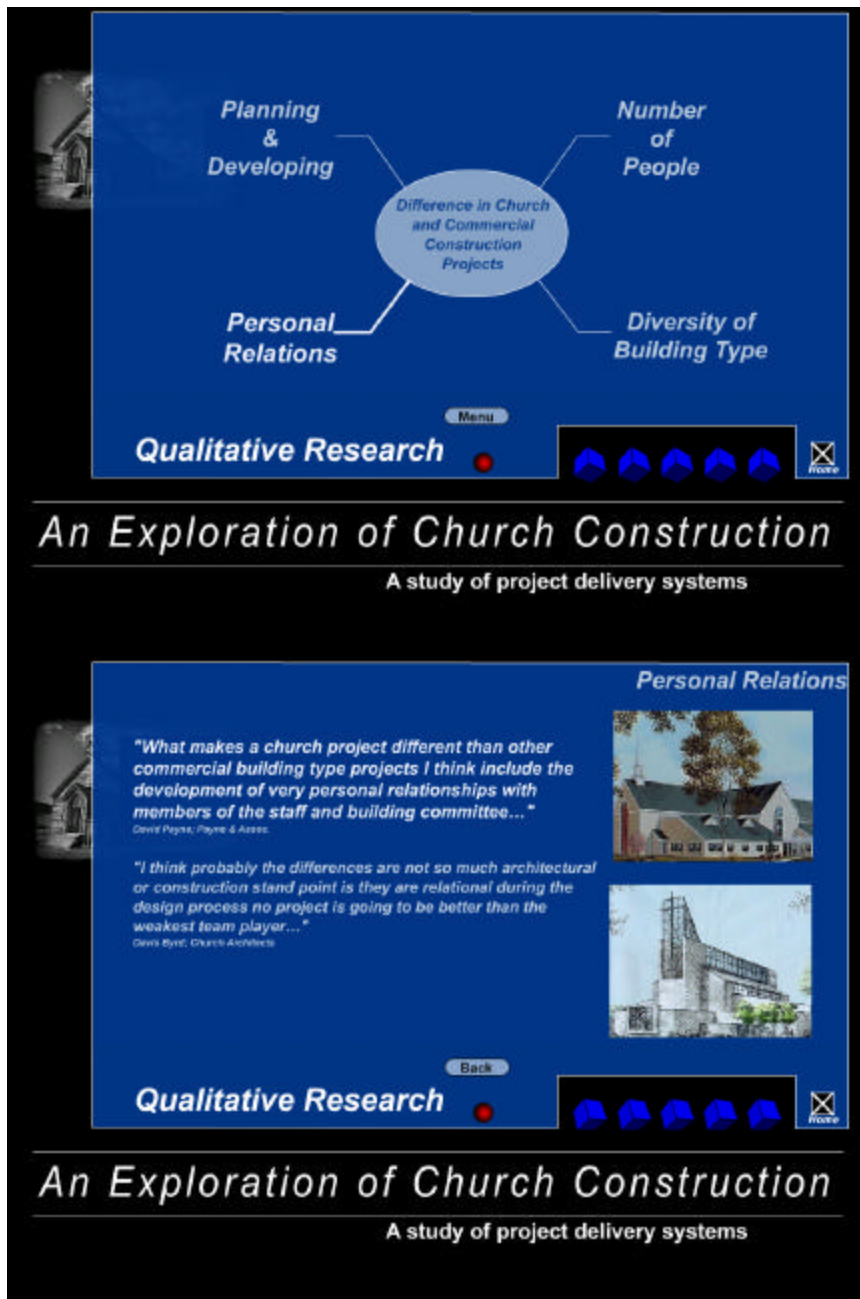
Figure 4.   Sub-issues and audio feedback of actual interviewees' transcripts (top quote highlighted).

Again, Figure 5 shows how the user would navigate from the initial screen of *Issues* to the next screen showing one of the sub-issues such as *Trends in Church Building Project Delivery Systems*. From here the user would choose either the *Architect's View* or the *General Contractor's View*. The subsequent screens show quotes and audio Flash buttons for both views.

Figure 5. Flash buttons and sub-screens for Trends in Church Building Project Delivery Systems.

Conclusions

Based on the interviews conducted in this study, there appears to be an increasing trend towards the use of the design-build delivery system in church building projects in the southeastern United States. The design-build project delivery system seems to offer a better delivery system for the unsophisticated owner who only designs and builds projects infrequently.

There are probably many varied reasons for churches to select the design-build delivery system over other options available. However, further support for design-build can be found in a report published by the Construction Industry Institute (CII) performed at Pennsylvania State University by Victor Sanvido and Mark Konchar (1998). A few of the findings are mentioned in the following statements about the design-build project delivery system:

- "Design-build unit cost was at least 4.5% less than construction management at risk and 6% less than design-bid-build".

- "Design-build construction speed was at least 7% faster than construction management at risk and 12% faster than design-bid-build".

- "Design-build delivery speed was at least 23% faster than construction management at risk and 33 percent faster than design-bid-build".

- "The research used data form 351 diverse general building projects and has clearly shown that there are differences between these three systems. Design-build offers more speed and more certainty in cost and schedule than does construction management at risk and design-bid-build".

The research question used in this study, "*Are Protestant churches in the southeastern United States moving away from the traditional design-bid-build project delivery system?*", is an important question that all churches across the United States might be interested in. Church leaders must face the issue of what delivery system is best for their church and must weigh the pros and cons of each. A father once said, "If I have been through a mine field and know where all the mines lay, I would tell my son the placing of all the mines. For I know that I will not always be there to guide my son through the mine field but at least he knows where to expect a mine." The church faces a similar situation because it is not an institution that builds on a regular basis and when they do build the church leaders seek to be the best stewards of the sacrificial giving of the congregation (McCormick, 1992). When designing and constructing a new church building or restoring an existing building, there will be dozens of potential mines along the way. Hopefully, the results of this study can be utilized by churches in making future decisions.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Architects

1. What type of work does your company typically perform?
2. When do you typically come in to the picture with churches?
3. If you have already drawn the plans, how do you recommend to a church to decide on a general contractor?
4. What types of delivery systems does your company generally prefer?
5. In Church construction what type of delivery system do you feel gives the congregation the best project? Why?
6. Are you as an Architect seeing more churches moving away from design bid build? If so to what?
7. What are the benefits of that delivery system as apposed to design bid build?
8. What makes church design and construction different from similar types of commercial construction?
9. We asked churches in a survey whether they thought design bid build and design build yield the same building for the same cost. What is your opinion on that question?
10. Do you as an Architect ever have contractors ask you to join a design build team or request more of a design build atmosphere?
11. Do you feel like with Design Build that there are any checks and balances missing from the typical building process?
12. What is the advantage in the Design Build delivery system?

Interview Questions for General Contractors

1. What type of work does your company typically perform?
2. Is your work typically Hard Bid, Negotiated or Other?
3. What types of delivery systems does your company generally use?
4. In Church construction what type of delivery system do you feel gives the congregation the best project? Why?
5. Are you as a general contractor seeing more churches moving away from design bid build? If so to what?
6. What are the benefits of that delivery system as apposed to design bid build?
7. What makes church construction different from similar types of commercial construction?
8. We asked churches in a survey whether they thought design bid build and design build yield the same building for the same cost. What is your opinion on that question?
9. Have you seen any architects that are requesting design build or have you ever asked an architect to move toward more of a design build delivery system?
10. What is the advantage in the Design Build delivery system?

Interview Questions for Church Members

1. What type of building projects has your church been involved with in the past 10 years?
2. Were the projects Hard Bid, Negotiated or Other?

3. What type of delivery systems did you use on that project?
4. In Church construction what type of delivery system do you feel gives the congregation the best project? Why?
5. Are you as a church seeing more churches moving away from design bid build? If so to what delivery system?
6. What are the benefits of that delivery system as apposed to design bid build?
7. What makes church construction different from similar types of commercial construction?
8. We asked churches in a survey whether they thought design bid build and design build yield the same building for the same cost. What is your opinion on that question?
9. Have you seen any architects that are requesting design build or have you ever asked an architect to move toward more of a design build delivery system?
10. What is the advantage in the Design Build delivery system?
11. Who or what types of people make up the building committee?
12. Does the denomination your church is affiliated with put out any publication on church construction?
13. How does a church typically finance a church building project?