

MOI's industry insider gives you his trade secrets for the smooth management of your building or extension project to avoid those costly delays.

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Having building works undertaken, whether the projects involves minor alterations, an extension or a whole new house, involves an array of different trades. From bricklayers to plasterers, electricians to plumbers, they all have their part to play. Perhaps the most difficult challenge of any building works is to manage and co-ordinate all these people and it is here that so many problems with building projects can occur.

My general advice to any homeowner considering some building works is to use a main contractor, and resist the urge, no matter what the apparent cost savings may be, to fragment the contract. What I mean by this is that it is generally speaking far better to run all the works through the main contractor rather than engage separate tradesmen or sub-contractors directly yourself.

Most builders will not directly employ all the different tradesmen that your project will need. Generally they may have carpenters or general workers on their books, who can undertake such tasks as plaster-boarding, maybe even brickwork. In the main however they will need to sub-contract out the electrical work, plumbing, plastering, maybe decorating and any specialist installation work. For these your builder will organise and co-ordinate the

necessary people and will charge a percentage on top of their cost.

The temptation will be to find your own people for some or all of these tasks. It may be that a family member is an electrician or you have a friend from the pub who is a plasterer. People often think they will be able to get a better deal if they negotiate these arrangements themselves and avoid the main contractor's percentage on top.

What people tend to forget however, is that it is more often than not the interface between the different trades on site where problems arise. That cash the main contractor charges for this role is usually money very well earned and if he is not charging you for this, then it is not his responsibility to sort it out. I can think of an excellent example where the homeowner insisted his friend would do the plastering on a sizeable renovation project. This element was taken out of the contract works, but when the time came, the 'friend' did not turn up when he said he would. The programme was thrown out of kilter and the electricians (who had been booked in to do their second fix works) had to be rearranged, but this clashed with another project for them and more delayed ensued. When the 'friend' eventually did come to do the work (over a long weekend) he left the site in a terrible mess and the main contractor was very unhappy with the quality of the work undertaken, which left a huge amount of making good for his decorating team.

All in all, the decision to take this element from the contract (in order to save maybe £200) added nearly 2 weeks to

the programme and extra costs considerably in excess of the saving, not to mention the loss of goodwill in various directions.

Another misconception is that this problem can be overcome by engaging a 'Project Manager'. However, I have yet to encounter a satisfactory definition of what a project manager actually does, but don't imagine they will take responsibility for co-ordinating the interaction of various different contractors on site. There are such people who will do this, but they will probably charge heavily and this would accordingly mean little saving is actually made.

On large projects, there is certainly a valuable role to be played in co-ordinating consultants with the client, but the true 'Manager' of any project, in my opinion, is (and should always be) the main building contractor.