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I trust you, I trust you not: a longitudinal study of control mechanisms in incentive contracts

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Abstract

The relationship between trust and control in client–contractor interactions is explored, focusing on the control mechanisms used in a construction project. A longitudinal case study of a large laboratory construction project found that the client used a variety of control mechanisms to ensure that the contractor behaved trustworthily. Empirical data were gathered through interviews and non-participant observation. The results indicate that the use of control mechanisms is part of a complex and dynamic socially constructed process that requires ongoing discussion and evaluation, and to which informal control mechanisms are central. Business relationships built solely on trust are seemingly rare; even in trust-based collaborative settings, such as partnering arrangements; the contracting parties must pay attention to trust-nurturing actions.

Keywords:

Longitudinal study | trust | control mechanisms | partnering arrangements | target cost contracts

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