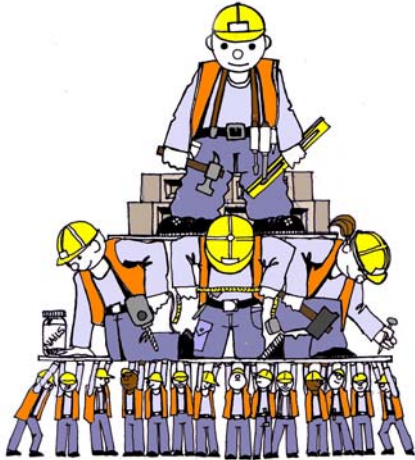


## Summary of findings for small-medium construction firms



### Which kind of firm are you?

A study for CITB-ConstructionSkills has examined how small-medium sized firms in construction manage change. We want to know how best to provide you with information, advice and training to help improve your performance.

The study has identified two very different kinds of small-medium firms in UK construction. Those that are outward looking and believe that outsiders can help them improve their business. And those that do not.

These two kinds of firms typically have quite different characteristics. Answer the questions below to see which kind of firm you are likely to be.

	Tick the box that most resembles your firm	
How many employees do you have?	2 or less <input type="checkbox"/>	More than 2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have subcontractors?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
How old is your firm?	Less than 5 years <input type="checkbox"/>	More than 5 years <input type="checkbox"/>
What type of firm are you?	Specialist contractor <input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor/consultant <input type="checkbox"/>
Have you ever used outside advice to help you improve your business?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Type A</b>	<b>Type B</b>
	<b>Inward-looking</b>	<b>Outward-looking</b>

*Add up the number of ticks in each column. The column with most ticks indicates the type of firm you are most likely to be.*

### Inward-looking firms

There is a commonly held belief among small-medium construction firms that they can solve problems on their own. More than half of small firms surveyed have survived through the difficult early years with no outside assistance at all. This makes them trust their own judgement and encourages self-reliance. On top of this, they are sceptical about the value of outside advice. About a third of firms who responded to a survey fit this description. Of course, no one from outside knows your business as well as you do, but sometimes fresh ideas from outside can improve your performance.

### Outward-looking firms

A smaller group, representing about a tenth of small construction firms surveyed, is keen to come forward and learn from people outside. This group has typically already taken outside advice, mainly from business support organisations, and benefited from the experience. Fewer outward-looking firms have been involved in informal networks, but more than four-fifths of those who have found such contact useful or very useful.

## Summary of findings for small-medium construction firms

### What advice do most firms want?

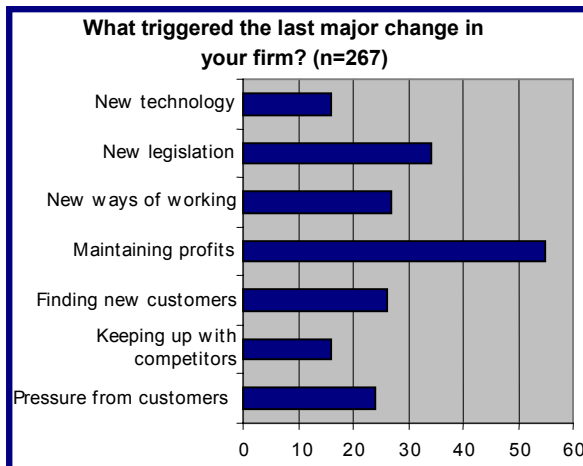
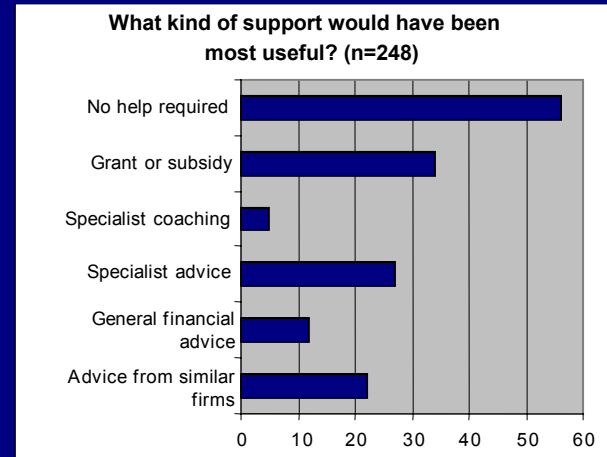
In general, firms who replied to the survey wanted low cost training, tailored to their needs and offered locally, ideally on site. Some firms said they wanted seminar-based sessions, and training on specially targeted issues like finance, tax, legislation and management as well as construction-specific subjects.

The most common sources of advice used were the people closest at hand: work colleagues, friends and family.

However, the most useful sources of past advice came from accountants, banks or solicitors. Almost two-thirds of respondents who had received such support found it 'very useful'. (Nearly twice as many as the next highest rated source of advice.)

There appeared to be a wide variety in the sort of support respondents wanted. A fifth of them signalled that no help was required. About a tenth asked for a 'grant or subsidy', 'specialist advice' or 'advice from other similar firms'. 'Financial advice' was half as popular, while 'specialist coaching' was least popular, mentioned by just under 2%.

Overall, firms were appreciative of past help from any source. Only a tiny proportion (1.5%) of firms that had used outside advice in the past said it wasn't useful at all.



### Views on managing change

Most firms saw themselves as facing wide-ranging problems. They appreciated the need to change, but typically saw their own capacity to manage change as effective. This helps to explain why only half of the firms had ever sought help from outside to improve business management.

The most commonly cited trigger for making a change was maintaining or raising profits. Other important triggers were new legislation, pressure from customers, finding new customers and new ways of working. Keeping up with competitors and new technology appeared to be less important as prompts for change.

### Where to go for help

Support for small construction firms is available from many organisations, some national and some local. Nationally, CITB-ConstructionSkills provide assistance in all aspects of recruiting, training and qualifying the construction workforce. You can see information on their website – [www.citb.co.uk](http://www.citb.co.uk), or phone 01485 577577.

The Business Link network also provides practical help for businesses in all sectors ([www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk), tel 0895 600 9006).

Locally, you could try talking to a bank, accountant or solicitor, listed in Yellow Pages.

### About the study

A representative sample of 4410 firms were canvassed in a postal survey, using a specially commissioned sample. The questionnaire was also posted on four websites, and sent by e-mail to 116 firms.

Overall, the corrected response rate was 9.2%. Respondents were a reasonable match for the composition of all UK small-medium construction firms in terms of size and sub-sector.

Further information is available from Ian Cooper, Eclipse ([icooper@dircon.co.uk](mailto:icooper@dircon.co.uk)) or Jason Palmer, CAR ([jason@carltd.com](mailto:jason@carltd.com)). A more detailed report is available on the CITB-ConstructionSkills website: [www.citb.co.uk](http://www.citb.co.uk)