

TO IDENTIFY THE MOST EFFECTIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION STRATEGIES REPORTED IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE FOR ENHANCING COST AND TIME PERFORMANCE IN JOINT VENTURE ROAD PROJECTS

Kotagedara Liyanage Tharangani Dilrukshi Perera

Senior Quantity Surveyor / Visiting Lecturer, Faculty of Technology, Horizon Campus,
Malabe, Sri Lanka

Madanasinghe Arachchilage Pradeep Madanasinghe

Senior Quantity Surveyor & Contract Administrator / Visiting Lecturer, Faculty of
Technology, Horizon Campus, Malabe, Sri Lanka

Ashini Yashodha Adikari

Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Technology, Horizon Campus, Malabe, Sri Lanka

Correspondence: tharanganidilrukshi@gmail.com

KEYWORDS:

Dispute Resolution,
Joint Venture Road
Projects, Project
Performance,
Systematic
Literature Review

DOI :

JEL Classification :
L74

ABSTRACT

Joint venture (JV) road projects combine finance, expertise and capacity, but differences in objectives, governance, contracts and communication can create disputes that harm cost and time performance. Research covers dispute-resolution techniques, but lacks integrated evidence specific to JV road delivery. This research identifies strategies and develops a phased approach to protecting performance. A literature review searched discovery platforms. Peer-reviewed studies on construction JVs, international infrastructure, conflict management and alternative dispute resolution were screened with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Twelve publications were retained and coded by context, methods, mechanisms and performance implications using thematic synthesis. Results showed no superiority of any mechanism. Negotiation was the first response because it is quick, economical and relationship-preserving when representatives have authority and reliable records. Mediation or conciliation is appropriate when negotiations are deadlocked but agreement remains possible. Adjudication, expert determination and standing dispute boards provide decisions, protecting cash flow and progress. Arbitration is important in high-value complex cases requiring binding final decisions, but is not best for early disputes. Successful conditions included clear contracts, early-warning systems, trust, behaviours, records and joint governance. The study recommends a five-step process: Dispute avoidance, Project negotiation, Facilitation, Rapid neutral determination and Final arbitration or litigation. The framework guides JV road-project teams in choosing mechanisms based on urgency, relationship value, technical requirements and enforceability. It is recommended to validate this empirically for the road in question.

1. Introduction

Road infrastructure projects are both organizationally and contractually complex. These include long delivery periods, variable site and ground conditions, several interfaces, public sector controls, design development, variations, and large cash-flow risks. A construction joint venture may combine complementary resources and share risks, allowing firms to do more than what they can manage alone. However, the same situation creates another form of inter-partner dependency. Commercial priorities, risk appetite, technical practices, and expectations of authority, national or organizational culture, and management systems may vary among partners. These disparities can quickly escalate from project problems to JV governance problems when combined with typical construction disputes.

The impact on performance was significant. Construction conflicts consume management time and delay decision-making, payment, and progress, diminish cooperation, and can result in costly formal proceedings. International construction projects have shown that internal conflict negatively impacts performance, and management through cooperation can mitigate the negative effects of cultural differences (Al-Sibaie et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2020). The selection and order of resolution mechanisms in JV settings are important because maintaining an existing partnership is essential. This solution may be legally correct, but it could have disrupted the road works, supply chain, or cash flow of the project, and thus fail to achieve the required project result.

The existing literature covers construction dispute causes, individual alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods, international construction, and JV conflict management. However, the evidence is limited and disjointed, with numerous studies being country-specific and others concentrating on building projects, relational conflict, or formal dispute mechanisms separately. Studies directly incorporating a component of governance for JVs and road project performance in the context of staged dispute resolution are still scarce. This means that there is a practical need to link three areas of knowledge: dispute avoidance, handling conflict within the context of relationships between JV partners, and formal dispute resolution mechanisms that can produce enforceable results.

Based on this, the study questions are: What are the most well-supported dispute resolution tools from

the literature for safeguarding cost and time performance in JV road projects, and what are the circumstances that make them effective? The goal is to collate the evidence and develop an action plan framework, rather than to determine the best mechanism. The value of the contribution is the connection between the choice of mechanism and the maturity of the dispute, its urgency, the value of the relationship, and the need for finality of the dispute.

2. Literature Background

2.1 Disputes, Conflict and Project Performance

There is a difference between conflict and formal dispute. Task disagreement can be beneficial in enhancing decision-making, while relationship conflict and unmanaged process conflict are typically harmful. The performance effect of conflict depends on the behaviour that was the strategy, and collaboration allowed both task and process conflicts to have a positive impact, while competing behaviour had a negative impact on the performance of the conflict types (Wu et al., 2017). Contractual, cultural, and legal issues do not work separately in international work. In Chinese international projects, Chan and Suen (2005a) concluded that negotiation was the most common preferred response, followed by arbitration, and that internal and social conflict played a significant role as influences on performance in international projects (Al-Sibaie et al., 2014).

The main causes of construction conflicts are related to contract formulation, scope changes, unexpected conditions, ineffective contract administration, payment delays, time failure, and design problems (Silva et al., 2024). These are particularly important in road construction projects, where site conditions regarding utility interfaces, access to the site and measurements, temporary works, and changes in design can impact the cost and program. Resolution and prevention go hand-in-hand: risk allocation, records, and early decisions decrease the occurrence of disputes, as well as the eventual transaction cost.

2.2 Joint-Venture-Specific Conflict

There can be a JV dispute among the project organisation and the employer, within the JV, or between the JV and the employer. Internal JV issues can include leadership, control, resource sharing, distribution of profit and loss, support from the parent company, personnel, procurement authority, and how the JV agreement is interpreted. These

issues may be exacerbated by cultural differences, yet there is evidence in the literature that these cultural differences do not guarantee that these issues will be experienced. Liu et al. (2020) found that the negative impact of national cultural differences on the performance of international construction joint ventures was reduced by cooperation in conflict management and enhanced by competition in conflict management. Evidence from Sri Lanka also supports a shift from legal measures to collaboration and compromise prior to legal action, supporting the idea of advancing the peace process (Thilakarathne et al., 2023).

A lifecycle aspect is added based on recent infrastructure evidence from Sri Lanka. Jayasinghe et al., (2026) identify two phases of partnership, inception and formation and operational, with attention to the importance of carefully selecting partners, finalizing joint venture agreements and managing operational conflicts. It helps ensure a combined approach to prevention through governance, early resolution through authorised negotiation, and escalation to neutral intervention where necessary.

2.3 Governance through contracts and relationships

According to the literature, there are two complementary forms of dispute governance: formal and informal dispute governance. Contractual governance establishes rights and obligations, authority and responsibility, allocation of risk, notice, and formal remedies. Relational governance is built on trust, information, collaborative problem-solving, and a lack of opportunistic behaviour. No detailed contract can predict all events that could occur on a long-term road project, nor can trust be without rights if financial risk starts to bite the contractor. Therefore, successful JV setups blend both. The agreement should provide a solid procedural framework, and behavioural norms should enable partners to be flexible in the face of unexpected developments.

This difference should be considered when considering dispute resolution methods. Relational capacity is essential for negotiation and mediation; it involves sharing information, compromising, and trusting that commitments will be kept. Adjudication, dispute boards, and arbitration are visible forms of contractual procedures, and the speed and acceptance of these processes still rely on cooperation, records, and procedural fairness. Therefore, the review will consider not only whether

a mechanism is likely to achieve an outcome but also whether the governance context allows a mechanism to achieve that outcome.

2.4 Resolution Mechanisms

Negotiation is the least expensive and least time-consuming process and has the most control over the parties. It has a low dependency on bargaining behaviour, authority, and information quality. Mediation and conciliation involve an impartial facilitator and do not take control away from the parties, so they are beneficial where there is a breakdown in communication, but a commercial resolution is still possible. Adjudication, expert determination, and dispute boards are new elements of project delivery that introduce a neutral decision or recommendation. Their power lies in their speed and expertise in the topic, which can help maintain a steady workflow and cash flow. Similarly, standing boards obtain the context of projects before disputes are formed (Harmon, 2003; Menassa and Peña-Mora, 2010). Arbitration is confidential, offers parties a choice of arbitration tribunal, and arbitral awards are generally enforceable internationally, but can be like litigation in terms of duration and cost. Litigation provides coercive power and precedent and typically has the greatest relationship and program implications.

3. Methodology

3.1 Review Design and Scope

This study employed a systematic literature review structured with thematic synthesis. The unit of analysis was a scholarly publication that provided empirical results, a tested framework, or a substantive review that addressed one or more of the following: construction JV conflict; dispute avoidance or resolution in construction; conflict in infrastructure projects built internationally; or cost and time implications of dispute resolution processes. The focus of the road project was not used in the exclusionary search but rather as an application context because the road-only search would yield insufficient evidence for a useful synthesis.

3.2 Search and selection procedure

In September 2026, searches were conducted in the following publisher databases and scholarly discovery records: the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Library, Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) Virtual Library, and open scholarly repositories. The

following combinations of keywords were used for the search: (construction OR infrastructure OR road) AND (joint venture OR international construction) AND (dispute OR conflict); and construction AND (negotiation OR mediation OR adjudication OR dispute board OR arbitration) AND (cost OR time OR performance). Foundational studies and related empirical research were identified through backward and forward citation-checking.

Studies were accepted if they were published in English, peer-reviewed, clearly related to construction/infrastructure, and provided evidence that could be used to assess the effectiveness of the mechanism or conditions for its success. Items that lacked methodological and finding information, duplicated another record, were only promotional commentary, or did not address non-construction adjudication were excluded from the review. The first assessment of relevance was from the article title and abstract, followed by the accessible article record. A focused synthesis of 12 core publications was performed, with additional contextual publications included. While the review covers as much of the literature as possible in Scopus and Web of Science, it does not attempt to be comprehensive to ensure methodological transparency.

3.3 The assessment of the quality and relevance of the work

Four practical quality questions were used to assess each candidate: (1) Was the research context and participants described? (2) Was the method identifiable? (3) Could findings be traced back to reported evidence? (4) Did the findings answer questions relating to: (a) mechanism choice; or (b) conflict behaviour; or (c) project-performance consequences? It was not possible to use a numerical quality score due to the mixture of qualitative cases, surveys, legal comparison and

reviews in the corpus. Instead, emphasis was placed on the results of work with the empirical samples or on the transparent synthesis, and the results of the conceptual work were used only to explain the mechanisms. JV and infrastructure studies were given priority, and construction-dispute studies were followed that had a general relevance.

3.4 Data extraction and thematic synthesis

Data were collected regarding geographical context, project setting, research design, dispute or conflict strategy and the reported performance implication for each core study. Initial codes included speed, direct cost, preservation of relationship, decision authority, expertise, prevention, cultural fit, record quality and finality. The codes were organised into four analytical themes: preventive governance, consensual early resolution, project-centred neutral intervention and final binding determination. For this, the cross-study comparison led to the discovery of some common enabling conditions and contradictions. A statistical meta-analysis was inappropriate given the use of different research designs and outcome measures, and conclusions are drawn through convergence and contextual interpretation rather than pooled effect sizes.

4. Results

4.1 Profile of the evidence

The evidence ranges from construction JVs, international construction, dispute boards, and construction disputes in general. It may contain surveys, interviews, case studies, conceptual or analytical frameworks and literature reviews. Asian and developing countries are well represented, enhancing contextual relevance but reducing the ability for general conclusions. There is very little literature that explicitly covers JV road projects, and the majority is evidence of governance mechanisms that can be transferred.

Table 1: Summary of the Literature- Selection Process

Study	Context/Method	Principal Evidence	Contribution to Synthesis
Chan & Suen (2005a)	International construction in China; 40 practitioner interviews	Contractual, cultural and legal issues; negotiation preferred, followed by arbitration	Supports negotiation-first escalation

Chan & Suen (2005b)	Sino-foreign JV construction; survey	Examines disputes and resolution systems particular to JV delivery	Confirms JV-specific governance need
Harmon (2003)	Review of construction dispute methodologies	Compares resolution methods and describes proactive value of DRBs	Supports mechanism matching and early neutral involvement
Menassa & Pena-Mora (2010)	US construction DRB applications, 1975-2007	DRBs successfully applied across construction sectors	Supports standing boards for continuity
Al-Sibaie et al. (2014)	161 professionals in overseas projects	Internal and social conflict significantly related to performance	Links conflict management to project outcomes
Wu et al. (2017)	667 Chinese construction professionals; SEM	Collaboration changes conflict effects; competition is destructive	Supports cooperative rather than positional behaviour
Liu et al. (2020)	143 ICJV responses; PLS-SEM	Cooperation mitigates cultural-difference effects; competition aggravates them	Supports culturally responsive collaborative governance
El-Sewafy et al. (2022)	Framework for dispute-board implementation	Identifies structured conditions for effective dispute boards	Supports board design and procedural clarity
Thilakarathne et al. (2023)	Sri Lanka ICJVs; survey and expert interviews	Collaboration and compromise before ADR or litigation	Strong local support for staged resolution
Silva et al. (2024)	Systematic review of dispute causes	Contract, change, site, payment, time and design causes recur	Connects prevention controls with resolution
Lopez & Amara (2018)	Comparative legal analysis	Compares dispute boards with statutory adjudication	Clarifies interim neutral mechanisms
Jayasinghe et al. (2026)	Four Sri Lankan CJV infrastructure cases	Lifecycle framework; partner selection, complete JV agreement and negotiation	Provides infrastructure-specific lifecycle logic

4.2 Theme 1: Prevention and Early-Warning Governance

The most significant multi-cut finding is that the effectiveness of resolution starts prior to a dispute. Consequences of clear main-contract/JV-agreement

provisions, along with defined contribution and loss-sharing, authority matrices, complete records and early-warning obligations minimize ambiguity and opportunistic behaviour. Silva et al. (2024) demonstrate that ongoing issues of contract quality, administration, payments, contract design, and

change are the sources of conflicts. The importance of partner selection and a comprehensive JV agreement is also highlighted by Jayasinghe et al. (2026). For road projects, preventive controls include a joint risk register, a shared document platform, agreed measurement and valuation processes, up to date programme updates, notice processes, and a standing executive forum.

4.3 Theme 2: Negotiation and Facilitated Settlement

Negotiation is the most regularly supported response as the initial formal response. It is quick, inexpensive and can maintain the relationship with the JV and employer. They must have authority to settle, and the facts must be reliable. If these conditions are not met, then the meetings can become a stall. Time-limited negotiation window, therefore, preferable. If direct negotiation breaks down, mediation or conciliation can re-open the lines of communication, explore positions and help develop options without being binding on the parties. This level is especially recommended for disputes that involve more than one issue and/or have a potential relationship component.

4.4 Theme 3: Adjudication, Expert Determination and Dispute Boards

Where time and cash flow are critical, project-centred neutral mechanisms are useful. Adjudication gives an interim determination in a fixed time period; expert determination can be used to help resolve narrow technical or valuation issues; and dispute boards can help settle problems during delivery. Their comparative advantage isn't just in terms of their speed. The standing board gets used to the contract, site and parties, so that there can be informal assistance and informed recommendations early. However, the literature shows that implementation quality is involved: the level of neutrality of the implementers, the timing of their appointment, the clarity of jurisdiction, the rules and procedures, the availability of records, and the enforcement provisions must be guaranteed beforehand (Harmon, 2003; Menassa and Peña-Mora, 2010; El-Sewafy et al., 2022).

4.5 Theme 4: Arbitration and Litigation As Final Safeguards

Arbitration is suitable for more complex or internationally bound arbitrations with high stakes, which will result in a final and binding award. It also works well in cases where confidentiality and the

skills of the Tribunal are relevant. The process, however can cause significant legal cost, management diversion and delay. Litigation is needed when statutory rights, pressing court powers, third parties, fraud or non-arbitrable issues occur, but not well suited to a situation where the relationship needs to be preserved. The synthesis thus treats arbitration and litigation as remedies at the very end of the escalation ladder as opposed to tools in the project-management process.

4.6 Cost-and-Time Performance Pathways

There are four paths that indicate the relationship between resolution strategy and cost and time. One of the first costs of a transaction is the professional fees, hearing, time spent on document preparation and management. Secondly, there is an indirect cost due to the delay in decision-making, which delays payment, interrupts procurement and extends the preliminaries. Third, harm to the relationship raises coordination costs, and can lead to defensive administration, fewer exchanges of information and escalation. Fourth, uncertainty of outcomes impacts provisions, cash flows and the ability of parent companies to allocate resources. A mechanism can then be relatively cheap to implement, but be expensive to the project, because it allows a critical issue to remain unresolved.

Four pathways explain how resolution strategy affects cost and time. First, transaction cost arises directly through professional fees, hearings, document preparation and management time. Second, decision delay creates indirect costs by holding payments, disrupting procurement and extending preliminaries. Third, relationship damage increases coordination cost and may produce defensive administration, reduced information sharing and repeated escalation. Fourth, outcome uncertainty affects provisions, cash flow and the willingness of parent companies to commit resources. A mechanism can therefore be procedurally inexpensive yet costly to the project if it permits a critical issue to remain unresolved.

Negotiation usually minimises direct transaction cost, but only when it has a deadline and access to decision-makers. Mediation adds a modest external cost that may be justified by restoring communication and avoiding formal proceedings. Adjudication or a board entails neutral fees but can reduce the higher cost of delayed certification or unresolved technical work. Arbitration and litigation can produce finality, yet their cost-and-time burden makes them proportionate mainly where the value,

5. Integrated Dispute-Resolution Framework

The results corroborate a five-stage framework. Stage 1 is avoidance: JV sets up aligned governance, clear risk allocation, shared records and early warning routines. Stage 2: Project-level negotiation between authorised managers, on the basis of an agreed issue statement, evidence file and short decision time frame. If settlement is hampered due

to relationship or multi-issue barriers, the stage 3 process of executive negotiation or mediation will take place. Stage 4 is a rapid neutral determination via adjudication, expert determination or dispute board, when the need for a quick response arises in order to allow for the continuity of work, payment or technical certainty. Stage 5 is final arbitration or litigation that is binding, final, enforceable and/or has legal authority over relationship and cost consequences.

Table 2: Dispute-Resolution Strategies Identified in Literature

Stage	Primary Mechanism	Use When	Cost/Time Logic	Key Control
1	Avoidance and early warning	No crystallised dispute; emerging risk	Lowest transaction cost; protects programme	Clear contracts, risk register, records
2	Project negotiation	Facts are available and parties retain dialogue	Fast and inexpensive	Authorised representatives and deadline
3	Executive negotiation/mediation	Direct talks stall; relationship remains valuable	Moderate cost; flexible timetable	Independent facilitator and without-prejudice process
4	Adjudication/expert / dispute board	Urgent payment, valuation or technical decision needed	Rapid interim certainty; keeps work moving	Pre-agreed jurisdiction and enforceability
5	Arbitration/litigation	Finality or coercive enforcement is essential	Highest cost and duration	Proportionate procedure and evidence control

Mechanism selection should be tested against four questions: (1) How urgent is a decision for cash flow or critical-path work? (2) How important is preserving the working relationship? (3) Is a binding or enforceable decision required? (4) Is the issue technical, commercial, relational or legal? A payment or measurement dispute affecting progress may move quickly to adjudication or a board; a governance disagreement may benefit from executive mediation; and a final cross-border liability dispute may require arbitration. The framework is therefore an escalation logic, not a rigid sequence.

The framework can be applied differently according to the issue. A disagreement over measured quantities should begin with joint verification of records and project-level negotiation; if payment and progress are affected, rapid expert determination or adjudication may be appropriate. A differing-site-condition claim requires early notice, contemporaneous geotechnical and programme evidence, and a prompt contractual decision before delay effects spread. Design-change disputes

benefit from a jointly maintained change register and executive negotiation on entitlement and valuation. Internal JV disagreements over resource contribution, procurement or authority should use the JV agreement's deadlock procedure and, where needed, mediation between parent-company representatives. These examples demonstrate why one uniform process cannot provide the best result for every dispute.

A practical escalation timetable may allocate a short project-level negotiation period, followed by executive review and an equally defined mediation window. Urgent matters should be allowed to bypass consensual tiers when delay would prejudice safety, cash flow or critical-path work. The contract should also clarify whether an interim decision must be complied with immediately and how it may later be reviewed in arbitration. This prevents escalation clauses from becoming procedural obstacles rather than performance controls.

6. Discussion

This synthesis raises the question of the most effective universal method. Effectiveness is conditional in nature. When there is a reasonable balance of power, records are shared, and participants have authority, negotiation is a viable strategy. Mediation is useful when communication and/or risk perception are the central barriers. Adjudication and boards are effective when the continuity of the project is more important than finality. The advantage of arbitration is that it is effective when final enforceability outweighs. However, performance, both in terms of cost and time, is dependent not only on the named mechanism but also on when it is activated and at what level.

The JV context provides two insights. First, relational governance is not a substitute for contractual governance; rather, it complements it. A detailed agreement on role and risk clarity, trust, and cooperative behaviour is required to enable the agreement to function without continuous escalation. Second, the resolution process should differentiate between internal problems in the JV and problems between the employer and contractors. Escalation or mediation to the parent company may also be necessary for an internal deadlock procedure, and it may be necessary to use the dispute procedure in the main contract if a contractual claim against the employer is made. Failure to coordinate the two can create conflicting positions, late notices, and diminished entitlements.

The findings align with previous empirical evidence in Sri Lanka and other developing countries regarding the adoption of negotiation and collaboration in road projects, which are also found in this study (Thilakarathne et al., 2023; Jayasinghe et al., 2026). Conversely, sensitivity in relationships should not lead to permanent avoidance. The framework also helps to prevent issues from festering with deadlines and neutral interventions. A dispute resolution clause should name representatives, time limitations, escalation levels, procedures for the boards/apparitions of the dispute resolution, and the relationship of the interim decision with the final decision.

7. Practical Implication

Prior to mobilisation, JV road-project organisations must develop a dispute-avoidance plan linked to commercial and programme controls. A single issue register should be defined in the plan, with owners,

notice dates, evidence required, financial exposure, program effect, and escalation status. Items that are unresolved from previous months and have consequences for the critical path should be reviewed monthly by the executive. Delegated settlement limits and appointed negotiators by role: In cases where the scale of the project is appropriate, the standing dispute board must be formed early, rather than later, when positions have become entrenched. Contract administrators should maintain current documentation and avoid relationship rhetoric and entitlement analysis. These measures transform the resolution from an emergency legal action into a project-controlled function.

Simple performance metrics are also required for implementation. The JV should track the quantity and age of unresolved issues, average days at each escalation step, disputed value, professional cost, payment held, critical-path exposure, and percentage of payments settled without litigation. A summary of the lessons learned following completed incidents may identify recurring issues related to drafting, communication, or approval. Training should include notice requirements, negotiation preparation, cultural awareness, and the differences between a claim, conflict, and crystallised dispute. The controls ensure that the framework is auditable and enable management to take action before an escalating dispute impacts the road program.

8. Limitations and future research

The review is limited by the few studies that have focused directly on JV road projects and by the lack of access to full-text proprietary publications. These studies are not quantified and do not have the same definitions or performance measures. A great deal of the evidence is from international or other construction and is then taken with a grain of salt for road construction. The search was not intended to be comprehensive for Scopus or Web of Science. It is recommended that the framework is tested through interviews and case studies with the participants of the JV process, quantity surveyors, dispute practitioners and road authorities in Sri Lanka. A longitudinal study should measure resolution time, transaction cost, claim value, cash-flow impact and schedule recovery for the various mechanisms.

9. Conclusion

The literature shows that the best means of resolving conflict for JV road projects is not a single method but a sequence of methods that is governed. The foundation is laid through prevention, early warning, and JV arrangements. If there are communication or bargaining barriers, then, where possible, authorisation for negotiation should be the first step and mediation/conciliation the second. There are valuable alternatives to provide time certainty: adjudication, expert determination, and dispute boards, but arbitration and litigation are essential final backups. These mechanisms will either safeguard cost and time performance or not, depending on whether there is trust, collaborative behaviour, full records, contractual clarity, and timely escalation. The proposed five-stage approach incorporates these findings and establishes a foundation for the empirical validation of the model in the Sri Lankan road construction context.

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