A STUDY OF FACTORS CONSTRAINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISION IN CHINA

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Abstract
The use of professional construction project management (PM), known as construction supervision (CS) in China, has significantly improved the performance of construction management. After 10 years of rapid growth, the further development of CS is challenged by a number of arising problems. In order to identify the underlying factors behind these problems, a survey was conducted among CS engineers in four cities in China. The results highlight ten factors based on the consensus of the surveyed respondents. These factors are related not only to CS companies, but also to clients, other construction professionals, and the environment of the CS market. The factors identified in this survey will provide a basis for the strategies to promote the development of CS in China.

Keywords
Project management; Construction supervision; Constraint factors; China

INTRODUCTION

China’s rapid economic expansion has led to a surge in demand for construction and has thus created the most robust construction industry in the world. However, there were no independent professional project management companies in the Chinese construction market until 1988. At that time, the practice of establishing a construction project in China always involved a temporary organisation, the Project Preparatory Office (PPO). This was set up by the project client to take on the duty of project management on behalf of the client. A PPO usually comprised of a number of in-house staff of the client, and a few external technical persons appointed by the client. The majority of the PPO members had not gone through the necessary project management training and therefore lacked sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to manage a project successfully. Moreover, the PPO ceased to exist when the project was completed and the in-house staff involved in managing the project would then shift to other positions within the client’s organisation. The valuable experience and knowledge accumulated by these people through practice was rarely utilised in future construction projects funded by other clients. Under the PPO practice, it was not uncommon to find projects with cost overruns, poor quality and time delays (Flanagan & Li 1997).

Professional construction project management, also known as construction supervision (CS) in China, was introduced by the Ministry of Construction in 1988 to replace the traditional PPO practice. Given China’s unique economic and political environment, it is natural that CS