COMPETENCIES FOR IMPROVING CONSTRUCTION PERFORMANCE: THEORIES AND PRACTICE FOR DEVELOPING CAPACITY

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Abstract
The focus on improving construction performance has been narrow in many nations using partnering, leaness and supply chain management. This paper asks three practical construction related questions concerning reinventing the wheel across projects, blame culture and continuity of service. In addressing these practical issues, three theories are engaged: organisational learning, emotional intelligence and relationship management. The solutions are enhanced through applying the concepts and, indeed, there is synergy between the concepts. The solutions require investment for the expected return, the theoretical synergy maximising the benefits from the investment. It is argued that such an approach has as much, if not more chance, to yield improvement in construction. The starting point are issues faced in construction and theory is induced through addressing the problems, rather than starting with concepts applied in other sectors and then trying to squeeze them into the construction context.

Keywords
blame culture, competencies, emotional intelligence, organisational learning, performance, relationship management, service continuity

INTRODUCTION

The aim in this paper is to take a fresh look at improving construction performance. Many firms use SWOT analysis as a means to revisit their strategic position (see for example, Johnson and Scholes, 1998). Contractors follow this trend, although there is frequently a focus upon internal factors as external market research data has been neglected. An analysis of strengths can tend to focus on what is done well, rather than those things that yield competitive advantage. Being competent is not the same as being strong in relation to the competition (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Barney and Hansen, 1995; Smyth 2000). The premise is that any firm can develop up to three areas of competency that have competitive advantage. This paper explores shaping the future of construction at the level of the firm by asking three significant questions that are raised by contractors and clients:

1. How can we avoid “reinventing the wheel” across projects?
2. How can blame be avoided within the culture of the contracting firm?
3. How can the client receive continuity of service?

Addressing these three issues has practical application, yet adequate and sustainable solutions require investment that is located in three distinct theoretical areas of management science:

• Organisational learning
• Emotional intelligence
• Relationship management