BUREAUCRATIC CULTURE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract
Projects are commissioned by public and private client organisations, which have different organisational cultures and structures that dictate the rules and procedures to be followed in project procurement. It has long been perceived that public organisations are more bureaucratic than private organisations, yet empirical evidence is not entirely conclusive. The research objective in this study is to examine the extent of bureaucracy and red tape in construction project organisations in the public and private sectors. The methodology comprises two parts: the first part is a questionnaire survey of project participants' perceived extent of bureaucracy and red tape in project organisations, and the second part is a comparative case study of a public and a private client project organisation. The long debated argument of "organisations in the public sector are generally more bureaucratic than those in the private sector" is supported. In addition, it is found that there is some correlation among bureaucratic features and between bureaucracy and red tape. The public organisation in the case study has set up more rules and procedures in both the control and operating systems, and has a greater demand on role delineation/specialisation.

Key words
bureaucracy, red tape, construction project organisations, public sector, private sector

INTRODUCTION

Although bureaucracy is claimed by Weber (1947) to be the most efficient form of organisation structure, bureaucracy and red tape are usually interpreted as representing organisational inefficiencies, especially in government departments. Red tape is one of the bureaupathologies, classified by Thompson (1961) as the dysfunctions and inefficiencies generated by bureaucracy, that serves no functional purpose.

While most people contend that public organisations have higher degrees of bureaucracy and red tape than private organisations, previous research results are not entirely consistent (see Boyne, 2002). Since it is not conclusive that public organisations are more bureaucratic than private organisations, the research objective in this study is to examine the extent of bureaucracy and red tape in construction project organisations in the public and private sectors.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

Construction project organisations are often referred as temporary multi-organisations (Cherns and Bryant, 1984) and shifting multi-goal coalitions (Liu and Walker 1998; Newcombe, 1994). Temporariness is emphasised in the sense that participants join the project organisations only for the duration of the project; after which they depart and join other project organisations.