ASSESSING THE CAPABILITY OF WOMEN CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGERS BASED ON LIBERAL FEMINIST THEORY

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Abstract

Studies on the involvement and capability of women in the construction industry are rare in developing countries. Although a minority in the industry, women construction project managers have the same level of importance as men. In a construction organization, the position of a project manager is the most challenging task. This study aims to explore the capabilities of women construction project managers in the Malaysian construction industry in comparison with their male counterparts. Liberal feminist theory is applied as an underpinning theory to explain the concept of “equal capability of women.” This study adopts the mixed methods approach. It covers Grade 7 construction companies listed in the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) directory in Peninsular Malaysia. From a sample of 48 companies known to have women project managers, only 15 responses were received. Based on the responses, only five agreed to be interviewed. Descriptive analysis reveals that the employment of female project managers is based on merit, which is closely associated (in ranking) with their experience, skills, personal attributes, and level of education. Moreover, male and female project managers in the construction industry are assumed to possess equal capability. This study contributes to the extension of knowledge on the equal employment opportunity practiced in construction companies in Malaysia.

Keywords

Equal capability, competency, merit, women project manager, construction industry

INTRODUCTION

Liberal feminist theory claims and believes that men and women are essentially the same (Harding 1987; Greene, 1999; Brewis and Linstead, 2004) because the capacity to reason, as the defining characteristic of being human, is not gender specific (Greene, 1999). This theory is often applied as the foundation for adding women to organizational positions in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as the construction industry (Greene, 1999). Equal opportunity is the main variable in liberal feminist theory (Wollstonecraft, 2004; Richards, 1980; Okin, 1989; Evans 1995; O’Brien, 1983).

The construction industry is traditionally known as a demonstrably male-dominated economic activity (Gale, 1992; Gale and Cartwright, 1995). Gale and Cartwright