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Changing procurement culture to enable the successful adoption of collaborative practices in construction: A model for client change



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Abstract

Collaboration has been touted as a solution to construction procurement problems reflected in fragmentation, poor quality, delayed completion, project overruns, scope creep, reworking, adversarial and slave/master relationships. While it has been proven that collaboration works in mitigation of these problems, there is limited information available on the actual process of implementing collaborative change successfully. The aim of the research was thus to determine the process through which clients can change to a more collaborative procurement culture which would enable successful adoption of collaborative practices. The research specifically dealt with such change in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa.

In modelling the problem, various theories were considered. Principal Agent theory was utilised as a representation of the traditional state of construction procurement. Stewardship theory depicted the coveted state of collaboration while stakeholder theory emphasised one manner in which collaboration could occur. Of note was Elite theory which spoke to the existence of an elite that has power to change a society. In this particular case, expert clients were determined to be the elite class best equipped to enable change in construction procurement.

The research followed a post positivist philosophy with an abductive approach. An embedded case study was utilised focusing on Wits Campus Planning and Development (WCPD). The particular case was chosen as it was proven to be a critical case; they managed to successfully change to a more collaborative construction procurement culture. In addition to this, WCPD was hand-picked by THE Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to oversee the management of the first phase of the development of the New Universities. In essence they managed to replicate the successful results from their own projects. Data collection was in the form of semi-structured interviews and document analysis with samples collected from WCPD stakeholders (e.g. management, project team members) and senior management in other public HEIs.

The study found that there are prerequisites to the implementation of change. These are a portfolio of projects, management buy in and a team to actually shape the change. Of vast

importance is a change leader within the team who understands and can push the change agenda. In the case of HEIs, the major processes for implementing change are in two parts; administrative change and capacity change. A model was developed from the data which depicted this change process. Administrative change includes the development of a construction procurement policy separate from that of goods and services, an improved financial system that pays stakeholders efficiently and on time, standardized procurement documentation and a dedicated document controller to deal with the extra paperwork from setting up procurement systems. In terms of capacity, for collaborative working the use of Project Managers is preferable and there is need for the increased use of inhouse consultants. While collaborative procurement is not dependent on the use of a single type of contract, the use of a contract such as the NEC reflects a move to being more collaborative. The study also made it clear that change is not easy especially when project stakeholders are used to working a certain way with a specific type of dynamic; treating each other as equals was one of the most difficult behaviours to adopt.

The major contribution of this study was the development of a model for change for HEIs in South Africa. WCPD implemented its change all at once in reaction to their circumstances. While they did succeed in implementing change, there was no specific model available for them to follow and they implemented change as the circumstances dictated. The developed model looks at a structured implementation of change. It would especially be of use for HEIs who want to adapt to the changes in legislation and the directives from DHET. The model is generic in that it provides guidance on how to approach change and highlights the possible issues that could be encountered in implementing change.

One troubling issue that surfaced was that of reduced funding from government in terms of infrastructure development. Further work would be necessary on how to implement change and remain collaborative with limited resources and infrastructure programs. It would also prove useful to further investigate how decentralised Facilities Management (FM) departments can implement lifecycle collaboration as integration between the capital projects divisions and operations and maintenance was found to be lacking.

Key Words: Collaboration, Culture, Procurement, Procurement Culture, Client Change, Higher Education Institutions, NEC