

Book Review

The Soft Power of Construction Contracting Organisations

Cheung, S. O., Wong, P. S. P. and Wing Yiu, T. W. eds., 2015. *The Soft Power of Construction Contracting Organisations*. London: Routledge. 226 pages. ISBN – 9781138805286.

This book looks into aspects such as culture, organisational learning and collaborative partnerships in construction contracting organisations (CCOs). These are particularly important issues in construction, mainly due to the often adversarial mentalities (as noted in Chapter 4) and “cut-throat” nature of the industry. As such, there is a need for CCOs to enhance their competitiveness and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Doing so will enable the industry to uplift itself as a whole, and this book highlights some of the key issues that needs to be looked at for this to happen. Differentiation in particular is challenging within the construction industry, again due to its cut-throat nature and clients’ tendencies to go for the lowest price bids. Overall, the book provides some good insights into the above topics.

Chapter 1 highlights the need for “soft” power in CCOs in order to establish competitive advantage and identifies the ingredients organisations need to work collaboratively in a competitive environment. This sets the stage for insights on understanding organisational culture and its impact on performance, which is covered in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss highly related aspects for trust and cooperative drivers, where theoretical frameworks are presented. The framework presented (Figure 3.1) in Chapter 3 is particularly interesting in that communication and knowledge are categorized together under cognition-based trust. These two aspects complement each other and lead to knowledge exchange between stakeholders.

Organisational learning (OL) is discussed in Chapter 5. OL both within a CCO and between partners are crucial for supporting the aspects presented earlier in the book on collaborative working in a competitive environment. Along this line, Chapter 6 covers the important topic of inter-organisational learning. This is very challenging for CCOs because of the highly competitive nature of the industry and the previously-mentioned often adversarial mentalities between client, consultant, contractor and sub-contractors. This would be important for uplifting industry performance in general as teams can collectively make improvements so that they would be in better positions to compete with other teams.

Chapter 7 offers an overview of the development of project monitoring systems in construction and presents a conceptual model to illustrate the relationship between the practice of organisational learning, attention to project monitoring feedback and anticipation of project performance. Chapters 8 and 9 are related to behaviours and relationships with the emphasis on conflicts and negotiations. This is another major issue in the industry since (as mentioned in the book) disputes and claims are common and increase with projects of greater complexity.

The book presents many conceptual models and theoretical frameworks based on studies with robust research methodologies. The topics covered are highly relevant to many of the current industry’s shortfalls. It is evident that great effort has been put into justifying the reliability and

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credibility of the findings from the studies in a scientific manner. These models and frameworks should serve as useful references for researchers, academics and practitioners.

The authors pack a lot of interesting material in about 200 pages. Some readers, particularly practitioners from the industry, might want some elaboration on the content and we suggest that the authors consider a companion volume with case studies and examples that could include studies and lessons learned from other industries as well.

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