ENACTING COMPETITIVENESS: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT
The paper draws from three case studies of regional construction firms operating in the UK. The case studies provide new insights into the ways in which such firms strive to remain competitive. Empirical data was derived from multiple interactions with senior personnel from with each firm. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, informal interactions, archival research, and workshops. The initial research question was informed by existing resource-based theories of competitiveness and an extensive review of construction-specific literature. However, subsequent emergent empirical findings progressively pointed towards the need to mobilise alternative theoretical models that emphasise localised learning and embeddedness. The findings point towards the importance of de-centralised structures that enable multiple business units to become embedded within localised markets. A significant degree of autonomy is essential to facilitate entrepreneurial behaviour. In essence, sustained competitiveness was found to rest on the way de-centralised business units enact ongoing processes of localised learning. Once local business units have become embedded within localised markets, the essential challenge is how to encourage continued entrepreneurial behaviour while maintaining some degree of centralised control and co-ordination. This presents a number of tensions and challenges which play out differently across each of the three case studies.

KEYWORDS: competitiveness, embeddedness, localised learning, organisational structure, regional contractors