Talking About Construction Innovation

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Abstract
Lots of people talk and write about innovation. This is not a new phenomenon of course, nor is it restricted to the construction industry. Innovation is important, we are told, for organisations to secure competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic, turbulent and contested marketplace. Firms are urged to adopt technological and process innovations in order to survive. There is a large body of published work on innovation in the field of construction management that generally supports this view and seeks to understand, and help to foster, successful innovation. Current research is described that examines the way people in the industry have come to talk about innovation. Innovation is a word that has been applied in many settings to a wide range of phenomena that are conceptually and practically distinct. Using a word so flexibly can lead to confusion rather than clarity. Important features of the phenomena that it subsumes can be obscured. Innovation is a word that carries positive connotations in its definition. It cannot help being a good thing. Combined with its flexibility of use, this gives innovation significant rhetorical weight. It becomes a useful word: a legitimising device and a political lever. From a theoretical perspective that stresses the social construction of technology, construction innovation is considered empirically using a discourse analytic approach. This is undertaken both as an antidote to determinist approaches and in the belief that adopting multiple perspectives on complex issues is analytically and practically useful.

Keywords: discourse analysis, innovation, social construction, technology