Emergent discourses of construction competitiveness: localized learning and embeddedness

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Abstract:
Research is described that sought to understand how senior managers within regional contracting firms conceptualize and enact competitiveness. Existing formal discourses of construction competitiveness include the discourse of ‘best practice’ and the various theories of competitiveness as routinely mobilized within the academic literature. Such discourses consistently underplay the influence of contextual factors in shaping how competitiveness is enacted. An alternative discourse of competitiveness is outlined based on the concepts of localized learning and embeddedness. Two case studies of regional construction firms provide new insights into the emergent discourses of construction competitiveness. The empirical findings resonate strongly with the concepts of localized learning and embeddedness. The case studies illustrate the importance of de-centralized structures which enable multiple business units to become embedded within localized markets. A significant degree of autonomy is essential to facilitate localized entrepreneurial behaviour. In essence, sustained competitiveness was found to depend upon the extent to which de-centralized business units enact ongoing processes of localized learning. Once local business units have become embedded within localized markets the essential challenge is how to encourage continued entrepreneurial behaviour while maintaining a degree of centralized control and coordination. Of key importance is the recognition that the capabilities that make companies competitive transcend organizational boundaries such that they become situated within complex networks of relational ties.

Keywords: Competitiveness; contractor; case study; discourse; embeddedness; localized learning