Emerging Hybrid Practices in Construction Design Work: Role of Mixed Media

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Abstract:
Information technologies are used across all stages of the construction process, and are crucial in the delivery of large projects. Drawing on detailed research on a construction megaproject, we take a practice-based approach to examining the practical and theoretical tensions between existing ways of working and the introduction of new coordination tools in this paper. We analyze the new hybrid practices that emerge, using insights from actor-network theory to articulate the delegation of actions to material and digital objects within ecologies of practice. The three vignettes that we discuss highlight this delegation of actions, the “plugging” and “patching” of ecologies occurring across media and the continual iterations of working practices between different types of media. By shifting the focus from tools to these wider ecologies of practice, the approach has important managerial implications for the stabilization of new technologies and practices and for managing technological change on large construction projects. We conclude with a discussion of new directions for research, oriented to further elaborating on the importance of the material in understanding change.

Keywords: Hybrid practices, Mixed media, Information technology, Innovation, Ecologies of practice, Actor-network theory