

Investigation of the Factors Influencing the Construction Planning Process Using Participant Observation Method

Authors : Ashokkumar Subbiah

Abstract : This study investigates the impact of factors that influenced the success of construction planning for a major construction project in Qatar. An approach of participant observation is adopted which is informed by the principles of ethnography: one that reports the participants' view of their world rather than imposing an artificial theoretical framework upon it. As participant observant, key factors were observed and identified that had an impact on the management and execution of the construction planning. It is found that a 'shadow culture' exists between the project participants which, it is argued, is only observable from the perspective of an embedded participant observer. The shadow culture acts to enable the management of the planning process, and its efficacy relates to the 'quality' of human inter-relationships amongst immediate stakeholders. Whilst this study uses the concept of shadow culture, it is treated as both a methodological stance and one of the findings of this research in the context of the major construction project in Qatar. The concept of shadow culture is not imposed upon the findings, but instead is used as a research tool: respondents report their own worldview and this is reported from the view of a participant observant in a manner that is understandable and useful to those who are not part of the construction project. The findings of this study identify similar factors influencing the planning process of the Qatar project, but the shadow culture predominantly influences these factors towards the failure of planning process. The research concludes by questioning the assumption that construction planning is a mechanistic process that has to be conducted solely by the planning team. Instead, it is a highly social phenomenon in which the seemingly mechanistic process is made workable by the quality of relationships that exist in the project. Drawing on this the final section provides a series of recommendations that may be helpful in enhancing the efficacy of project planning; these include better training/education at the pre-construction phase; recognition of the importance of shadow processes at management levels, and better appreciation of the impact of contract type and chosen procurement route.

Keywords : construction planning, participant observation, project participants, shadow culture

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