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Project partnering in Norwegian construction industry

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Abstract

Although partnering is one of the preferred methods of project delivery to address adversarial behavior, there is still a lack of a thorough and descriptive definition over this concept. Certain requirements must be met if we want to classify a project in the partnering cluster. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to break down partnering into a list of tangible elements. In order to do that, we formulated the following research question: What is Partnering in construction industry?

A comprehensive literature study was carried out to identify a theoretical list of elements used in partnering projects. Data from 26 partnering projects within Norwegian construction environment was collected during face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted with key actors in the construction industry. Collected data utilized with findings from literature to develop a definition of partnering. Partnering is defined as a collaborative procurement form, focusing on integration of the project design and delivery by weighting collaboration and coordination between involved parties. In this paper, partnering is broken down to elements such as: value based procurement, compensation form based on open books, dispute resolution method, start-up workshops, joint objectives, follow-up workshops and early involvement of contractor etc. One or preferably more of these elements should be obtained in order to tag the project with partnering. By adding more elements, the purity of partnering would increase toward full collaborative environment.

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1. Introduction

Latham [1] identifies the UK construction industry's existing industry practices as adversarial, ineffective, fragmented, and incapable of delivering for its clients. It urged for reform and advocated as well partnering as other manners of collaboration. Today, there is still a widespread acknowledgement that the UK does not get full value and has failed to exploit the potential for public construction and infrastructure projects to drive growth [2].

A report to the Norwegian parliament in 2011-2012 states that fragmentation and adversarial behavior resulting in a decline in productivity equally characterize the Norwegian construction industry. The report requests a priority on cost efficiency, smart building and improved quality, and upholds the government's role in the development of the construction industry[3].

One of the main role player in Norwegian construction industry is Statsbygg. Statsbygg is the Norwegian Government's key advisor in construction and property affairs, building commissioner, property manager and property developer. One of its five main business objectives for 2011-2015 states that it shall "deliver within budget, on time and to the agreed standard". The matching key strategy for this objective is to "guarantee results through systematic work and continuous improvement". Equally, having a long-term, innovative perspective that contributes to development of the industry. Statsbygg should be a role model for the building, construction and property management industry [4].

Statsbygg initiated their partnering effort in 2001 to contribute to a change of the culture from adversarial to cooperative, and give both faster completion and more value for money. In this way, partnering is Statsbygg's way of reducing waste and increasing the value of their construction projects.

By increasing, the popularity of partnering due to the traditionally adversarial culture and the high level of conflicts other big public clients such as Norwegian public road administration (NPRA/Statens Vegvesen) also developed their own partnering models.

This study investigates a broad range of cases, executed by different clients in Norway to find a common practical understanding over the topic and compare it with findings from literature. Furthermore, it identifies the challenges related to practical implementation of the concept.

At present time, number of partnering projects are increasing in the construction industry. This underline the need for identifying the partnering project characteristics that is essential to address the challenges related to implementation of this concept in Norwegian construction projects.

2. Method

The methodological approach is divided into two with a literature review and multiple-cases study (based on a survey, interviews and a document study). based on Yin (2011). The case study was done based on a survey, interviews and a document study on 26 selected projects. The projects were identified through the authors' network of practitioners, and chosen on basis of being partnering projects. Selected projects were executed by different organization presented in Table 5.

The literature study, following the prescription of Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler [5], was undertaken to develop the theoretical background for partnering. A combination of both journal articles and conference papers were used to get a broad perspective of the current views of the topic. A document study was performed on a number of key government and industry publications covering partnering concept. The case studies were designed based on the principles as describes in Yin [6] with both triangulation of methods and perspectives to strengthen the analysis. The methodological approach is divided into two with a literature review and a case study.

Using a combination of the literature study and document study was an effective way to gain a theoretical insight into concept of partnering. With the theoretical background in place, interviews were performed to gain practical insight. The combination of theoretical and practical insight helped to analyse how the elements of partnering help to achieve desired outcomes.

The discussion presents the authors' interpretation of the studied literature and information from case investigations.

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