Swedish Constructing Excellence: A Tool for Quality Management within Construction Projects

Johnny Lindström\textsuperscript{1} and Per-Erik Josephson\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Stockholm School of Economics
\textsuperscript{2} Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg
E-mails: \textsuperscript{1}Johnny.Lindstrom@hhs.se, \textsuperscript{2}Per-Erik.Josephson@bem.chalmers.se

Abstract

The Swedish construction sector has been criticized in media for being corrupted, unproductive and conservative. Several incidents, e.g. cartels, work on the side without paying tax and moisture problems, have had a great deal of attention. Of that reason has the government initiated a number of investigations in order to identify the major problems in the construction industry. Further, they have initiated a development of a tool aimed for (a) to identify risks, (b) to avoid poor quality costs, and (c) to direct towards increased quality and effectiveness in building and civil engineering projects, from a client perspective. The UK Constructing Excellence has often been held up as a model during the debate. However, the Swedish general culture differs from the British, as well as the Swedish system differs from the British. The purpose of this paper is to describe the program for developing the system, including the purposes with the system, identified starting points and demands and the approach/method for the development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Swedish construction sector has been criticized in media for being corrupted, unproductive and conservative. Several incidents, e.g. cartels in the asphalt business, work on the side without paying tax in minor specialist firms, moisture problems in new built houses and in national museums, have had a great deal of attention. Of that reason has the government during the last years initiated three investigations in order to identify the major problems in the construction industry. ‘Byggkvalitets-utredningen’ (1997) focused on general quality-related problems. ‘Byggkostnadsdelegationen’ (2000) focused on the high costs. ‘Byggkommissionen’ (2002) focused on competition, quality, costs and competence. In 2003, the Swedish Construction Federation presented an own investigation done by external experts (Andersson et al., 2003), which highlighted general problems. Despite some criticism, these

\textsuperscript{†} Corresponding Author
reports have been generally accepted and contributed to a kind of common crises awareness, especially among top managers. The UK national improvement program based on the Egan report (1998) has often been held up as a model during the debate.

The government invited a number of top managers for larger companies and trade organizations and also a number of experts to a meeting in November 2003 in Stockholm. Surprisingly the delegates were in agreement on establishing a common program for improving the sector. They especially emphasized the need of developing a system for measuring the performance.

Partly based on that meeting, the government laid down the need of such an improvement program and suggested that the government would take the initiative (The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, 2004). At a Government meeting on the 7th of October 2004 it was decided to establish a coordinating role for a development program within the building, real estate and civil engineering sectors. The commission was among other tasks to “support and coordinate the development of criteria for measuring the progress in each part of the sector” (Directive, 2004). Informally it was said to develop the sector “from scoring own goals to become world class”.

Several initiatives have been taken to develop systems for measuring performance in the industry. The strongest initiatives has been taken by the Swedish Council for Construction Excellence (BQR), who performed a minor pre study during the winter 2004, and by the Swedish Institute for Quality (SIQ) and Chalmers University of Technology, who won a governmental grant during the spring 2004. These two groups have then joined in order to increase the efforts to develop a system, which fit the Swedish construction system and culture.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the program for developing the system, including the purposes with the system, identified starting points and demands and the approach/ method for the development.

1.2 Purposes

The main purpose of the research project is

*to create a management system which from a client perspective can be used to (a) identify risks, (b) avoid poor quality costs, and (c) direct towards increased quality and effectiveness in building and civil engineering projects.*

Secondary purposes are

*to suggest how a tool can be designed also to (a) indicate strength and weaknesses in the building and construction industries as well as other housing related industries in Sweden, (b) indicate the changes of performance over time and (c) be an instrument for benchmarking.*