



Call for papers

Special issue:

”Purchasing and Supply Management in the Construction Industry”

This special issue deals with the particular challenges involved in purchasing and supply management in the construction industry. Papers for this special issue could concern a wide range of topics. However, we would like to place special emphasis on four themes that are both key to the general area of Purchasing and Supply Management, and as such highly relevant to JPSM readers, and ones that are particularly challenging in the construction industry context. These related themes are coordination, supply risk management, relationship management, and learning/knowledge sharing.

Coordination

Construction supply networks differ from most other manufacturing industries. Material flows converge at the construction site, where highly specialised activities are carried out by a range of different companies (Shirazi et al., 1996; Vrijhoef & Koskela, 2000). Managing construction projects therefore involves several forms of coordination (Kornelius & Wamelink, 1998; Håkansson & Persson, 2004; Håkansson & Jahre, 2005). Characteristics that set the terms for the complex coordination situation are the temporal nature of supply networks (project based) (Cox & Thompson, 1997), the separation between design and production (Korczynski, 1996), demand for synchronisation of a multitude of site activities and deliveries (Vrijhoef & Koskela, 2000), and a focus on competitive tendering that hampers collaboration, which is an important condition for advanced forms of coordination (Dubois & Gadde, 2000 and 2002).

Supply risk management

Ball (1988, p. 96) notes that “*the fragmentation of the building process between different enterprises involved in design, surveying, contracting, plant-hire and materials creates a minefield of dispute, delay, avoided responsibilities...*”. Hence, methods for reducing losses originating in the supply base, or in other words supply risk management, are highly relevant. Reliance on methods such as passing risk to suppliers (Korczynski, 1996) and litigation to resolve disputes (Saad et al., 2002) has characterised the industry. ‘Partnering’ has lately become a means to manage risk between contractors and clients (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Anvuur & Kumaraswamy, 2007; Kadefors et al., 2007; Eriksson & Pesämaa, 2007; Bresnen, 2007; Eriksson & Laan, 2007) and is related to the next theme.



Relationship management

Unlike in most other industrial contexts, individuals who interact intensively in one project may not meet again, even if the companies continue to do business on the organisational level (Kamann et al., 2006). This relational instability is accompanied by a reported high level of competitive behaviour (Egan, 1997; Kadefors, 2004), a dominant blame-culture (Khalfan et al., 2007), an adversarial culture (Cox & Thompson, 1997), and a low level of trust (Korczyński, 1996) adding complexity to relationship management in the industry. Recently, however, an increasing focus on relational efforts and practices, such as partnering contracts, has appeared in the industry (Saad et al., 2002; Dainty et al., 2001).

Buyer-supplier learning and knowledge-sharing

The construction supply network has suffered from weak relationships, fragmentation, and disintegration of activities, which has reduced the possibilities for knowledge-sharing and learning between buyers and suppliers (Saad et al., 2002). Inter-organisational learning is complicated further by the unique nature of projects – the parties have to climb new learning curves with each new project (Cox & Thompson, 1997). Lack of adaptations (Dubois & Gadde, 2000), fixed-design approaches (Eriksson & Pesämaa, 2007), and a focus on standardised supplies (Dubois & Gadde, 2000) represent barriers to learning and knowledge sharing.

Although there have been some studies of the construction industry reported in the purchasing literature, the majority of papers seem to date back to around 2000, including several of the papers cited in this Call for Papers. Some of them can be found in the 2000 EJPSM special issue on construction supply chains, edited by Peter Love. Many of the papers of that time called for changed PSM attitudes and practices. This special issue will seek to shed light on these developments. It will provide a picture of the current state of PSM research in the construction industry one decade into the new millennium.

All manuscripts should adhere to the guidelines of the Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management, and be submitted through the on-line submissions system (EES).

Deadline for submission: 3 July 2009

Expected publication date: Second half 2010

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Journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/pursup>, submissions: <http://ees.elsevier.com/jpsm>

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