

Promoting construction for sustainability transformation: the perspective of institutional theory

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Abstract

Purpose

Sustainability transformation in the construction industry is vital for the attainment of sustainable development goals. While conventional construction has been at the expense of social and economic sustainability, sustainable construction can enhance environmental, social and economic outcomes for the construction industry and society at large. However, the industry struggles with new initiatives because its stakeholders are products of unique institutions which shape their decisions and intentions to adopt new practices. This study assessed the institutional pressures that influence the adoption of sustainable construction to enhance our understanding of other factors that can promote and accelerate the adoption of sustainable construction.

Design/methodology/approach

The study adopted a quantitative research design with the use of online questionnaires to elicit information from construction professionals in South Africa. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data obtained from the survey. Linear regression was also used to assess the influence of institutional pressures on the adoption of sustainable construction.

Findings

Mimetic pressures were found to have a significant influence on the adoption of sustainable construction. The decision to adopt sustainable construction was based on the sustainability actions of industry leaders (mimetic pressure). Normative and coercive pressures had no significant influence on the adoption of sustainable construction.

Practical implications

Mimetic pressure from competitors and normative pressures is already exerting some pressure on stakeholders to adopt sustainable construction. However, there cannot be a long-term commitment that will yield the needed sustainability transformations without additional normative pressure from learned societies and coercive pressure from the government. As one of the pioneering works from the global south, this study provides empirical validations of the influence of institutional pressures on the adoption of sustainable construction. It also enhances understanding of how institutional pressures from the social context can promote and accelerate the adoption of sustainable construction.

Originality/value

The findings present one of the pioneering efforts to empirically validate the influence of institutional pressures on the adoption of sustainable construction

