Development of competencies for the introduction of management innovations:  
the use of Action Learning approach

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ABSTRACT

Lean Construction concepts and principles stand for an innovation to the management of construction processes. For this reason, the dissemination and implementation of these concepts and principles are hampered by cultural issues.

This study focuses on the need for the development of managers’ competencies for a proper appreciation of Lean Construction, assuming that the adoption of this theoretical framework by the industry requires a change in the current construction management paradigm. The author proposes the use of Action Learning approach to promote the development of managers’ competencies concerning the introduction of Lean Construction concepts and principles.

The research process consisted of two learning cycles along which some exploratory studies were conducted aiming to properly plan the final empirical study developed through action research process. The exploratory studies were developed on teaching methods (in the first cycle), and Conceptual Maps and Action Learning process (in the second one). Besides these empirical studies, each learning cycle comprised discussion of the results supported by literature review, and restatement of the research question and propositions for the next cycle.
The action research comprised an Action Learning set in which a cognitive approach was applied in order to examine the relation between conceptual meanings, actions and cognition in the development of managerial competencies. Four construction managers took part in this set, which was developed for seven months. A content analysis was conducted in the full transcript of action learning meetings records.

Some conceptual contributions to Action Learning approach and a better understanding of the barriers to the application of Lean Construction concepts and principles are the main results of this study.