

**FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL BASIC
ASSUMPTIONS OF PUBLIC SECTOR CONSTRUCTION
PROJECTS**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Building Economics

University of Moratuwa

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
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Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Name of the supervisor: Dr. Y.G. Sandanayake

Signature of the supervisor:

Date:

Dedication

This piece of work is dedicated to my beloved father and mother for all the sacrifices they have done to create a better future for me.

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Abstract

Cultural differences cause conflicts among construction project participants, deterring success of the projects. Understanding such different cultural manifestations could help removing misunderstandings among sub-cultural groups and removing formal irrationalities. Among different cultural manifestations, basic assumptions better explain a cultural context as unconscious psychological processes in mind, which conceptualise culture as a root metaphor as opposed to culture as a variable. Knowledge on basic assumptions could help to predict the behaviours of project participants in a given situation, contributing for better negotiations, change management and conflict management among team members. Thus, this research aims to develop a methodology to determine the public sector building construction project culture in Sri Lanka, by analysing underlying basic assumptions. The literature synthesis based on construction and management literature led to define construction project culture and identify a methodology to derive basic assumptions by extending Value Orientation Theory (VOT). Positioning this research in interpretive research paradigm, descripto-explanatory case study was adopted as the research strategy. Three public sector building construction projects were selected as the cases, using theoretical sampling strategy. Construction project culture was considered as the main unit of analysis. Cases were restricted to traditional method contracts, which were commonly used in Sri Lankan public sector building construction projects. Team setting of the selected projects consisted of public sector clients, public sector consultants and private sector contractors. Nine semi-structured interviews, observation of two progress review meetings and documentation review per case were used for data triangulation. During data collection, responses for internal integration and external adaptation problems of each project were questioned and observed. Code based content analysis was used in data analysis. Patterns of underlying basic assumptions were derived to determine the basic assumptions of each dominant sub-cultural group of contractor, consultant and client pertaining to eleven cultural dimensions. More insight into the construction project culture could be reached through the analysis of basic assumptions in integration (shared view of basic assumptions), differentiation (basic assumptions shared only in sub-cultures) and fragmentation (ambiguities in basic assumptions) perspectives. A guide to determine basic assumptions of public sector building construction projects in Sri Lanka was designed by mapping the identified basic assumptions with ten key features of external cultural setting. This research mainly contributed to the existing knowledge domain of construction project culture. It demonstrated how VOT could be used to extract basic assumptions to understand construction project culture. Research findings highlighted the possible conflicting and consistent/compatible basic assumptions among client, contractor and consultant, which could bring in negative and positive implications to project. The guide designed could be effectively used for project decision making during change initiatives, conflicting situations and negotiation processes. Further research of this study suggested a longitudinal study along the construction project life cycle, to understand how basic assumptions emerged from new learnings and transformation of culture happened to understand the dynamism of culture.

Key Words: Basic Assumptions, Construction, Project Culture, Public Sector, Root-Metaphor

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List of Abbreviations

CPQ	Cultural Perspectives Questionnaire
CVF	Competing Value Framework
DG	Director General
DGM	Deputy General Manager
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OPD	Out Patient's Department
VOT	Value Orientation Theory

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