Master thesis proposal: Absorptive capacity in construction – the capability to learn and innovate

Many researchers and practitioners agree that innovation is the prerequisite for competitive advantage. A process towards a viable and sustainable construction industry, therefore, relies on its ability to foster and transfer innovative products, services and practices. Absorptive capacity is a theoretical concept that is used by Cohen and Levinthal (1990) as predictor of innovative activity. The concept has been applied in several studies on innovation within manufacturing organizations but less in organizations that are dependent on inter-organizational collaboration to innovate, for example construction clients. A company’s absorptive capacity is dependent on external knowledge sources and past experiences and that this knowledge is acquired and assimilated in the organization, meaning that the company’s has routines and processes that allow it to analyse, interpret and understand the information obtained from knowledge sources. In addition, a company also need the capability to develop and refine these routines so they yield new insight, facilitate the recognition of opportunities and alter the way the firm sees itself and its competitive landscape. Considering the innovation inertia in the construction industry, it is of great interest to investigate if the ACAP theory and model on innovation can help understand the different mechanisms behind innovation and performance in the industry. This is focus of the proposed thesis work.

The teachers have contacts with several companies that have an interest in ‘innovation and change’ that can be involved if student interest.

Contact: Pernilla Gluch (examiner) pernilla.gluch@chalmers.se, Div. Service Management and Logistics, Technology Management and Economics.