

Adoption of Voluntary Environmental Building Rating Schemes: A Reasoned Action Perspective on Building Professionals' Behavior

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Problem Statement

The interaction between the built environment and human behavior has a longstanding research tradition. A lot of research has been conducted on human decisions and behavior when a building is finished and habitable; less has been written about the behavioral processes involved in the building construction process. The built environment is known to influence the quality of the natural environment to a great extent-hence the decisions leading to the creation of sustainable urban structures is crucial. The adoption of pro-environmental practices is not only based on cognitive but also on social factors. Since the latter part has been understudied, we focus in this paper on the underlying beliefs, norms, attitudes and control perceptions that influence building professionals to adopt sustainable building practices in the form of voluntary building rating and assessment schemes. Professional pro-environmental behavior is of crucial importance to mediate climate change and reduce damaging impacts on the environment. To understand building professionals' behavior, it was decided to adopt the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010) as the predominant model to determine the underlying factors of professionals' decisions and behavior, while other emerging factors have been considered as well. The Reasoned Action model has been tested in and applied to this specific context.

Methodology and Measures

In line with the recommendations by Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) this paper builds on the results of two studies: first, a qualitative elicitation interview study designed to understand the underlying beliefs

of building professionals and other stakeholders in the construction process. Secondly, a questionnaire instrument destined to measure variations in adoption of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) across several building profession groups in the United States.

Findings

The elicitation study analyzed behavioral, normative and control beliefs of engineers and architects that might influence their decision to work with the scheme and obtain professional accreditation. The results revealed that the uptake of the LEED scheme is intrinsically linked to the importance of government support, the role of client demands, individual attitudes as well as group efforts, educational factors, and communication aspects as well as the position of LEED in the overall green building governance structure. The questionnaire study built on these insights and further tested the constructs within the Reasoned Action Approach across professional groups. This information is valuable for planning future studies evaluating adoption motivations, intentions and subsequent behavior of building professionals regarding Voluntary Environmental Programs. In addition, the knowledge gained has also the potential to improve the design of future VEPs. Without identifying the behavioral foundations of these schemes, programs are more likely to face resistance, to fail or to be misused within the policy mix for sustainability.

References

Fishbein, M. and Ajzen, I. (2010). *Predicting and changing behaviour: the reasoned action approach*. Psychology Press, New York.