

Original Research Article

Management of Bidding Activities of Construction Enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract: In the context of rapid urbanization and increasing demand for infrastructure development, bidding activities in the construction industry in Ho Chi Minh City play an essential role in selecting competent contractors to ensure the progress and quality of works. This paper focuses on analyzing the current situation and proposing solutions to effectively manage bidding activities of construction enterprises, through qualitative research methods combined with surveys of 97 related subjects, including business owners, contractors, bidding parties, investors and appraisal teams. The survey results show that there are still many shortcomings such as cumbersome administrative procedures, lack of transparency, inappropriate intervention from related parties and uneven capacity among enterprises. Based on the theory of project management, fair competition and transparency of the bidding process, the article proposes a system of improvement solutions including: enhancing the application of digital technology in bidding management, improving the capacity of appraisal staff, making project information transparent and establishing an independent monitoring mechanism. The article aims to contribute to perfecting the bidding institution and improving management efficiency in the construction industry in the largest city in Vietnam.

Keywords: Construction bidding, enterprises, bidding management, transparency, Ho Chi Minh City.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research context

In recent years, Ho Chi Minh City, the largest economic center of the country, is witnessed strong development in the fields of infrastructure construction, urban transport and civil works. As an economic locomotive, rapid urbanization has created an urgent need to implement a series of public and private construction projects, leading to a significant increase in bidding activities. The bidding system is not only an important tool for selecting competent contractors, but also a mechanism to demonstrate transparency, competition and efficiency in the use of investment capital.

However, in reality, bidding activities in the construction sector in Ho Chi Minh City still have many shortcomings: from the lack of transparency of bidding information, the quality of bidding documents is not uniform, to the situation of bid collusion, external intervention, or poor management of some small and medium enterprises. This not only affects the efficiency of public investment but also undermines social trust in the current bidding mechanism.

In that context, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive scientific study to survey the current situation and propose solutions to improve the effectiveness of bidding management, contributing to building a transparent, competitive and sustainable construction market.

1.2. Research issues

Bidding activities in construction are currently facing many challenges in management. Some businesses report difficulty in accessing bidding information in a transparent manner; others face obstacles in preparing bidding documents

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following legal and technical requirements. Meanwhile, investors and appraisal teams also face pressure to ensure fairness and objectivity in the bidding process.

The lack of a transparent contractor capacity assessment system, ineffective violation handling mechanisms, and especially the limited application of information technology in bidding have created bottlenecks in management. This leads to the failure to optimize costs, time and quality, and affects the quality of construction works and the development of the construction industry in general. Therefore, the research question is how to improve the efficiency of bidding management of construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, ensuring transparency, fair competition and optimizing investment resources?

1.3. Research objectives

The general objective of the paper is to analyze the current status of bidding management in the construction sector in Ho Chi Minh City and propose solutions to improve management efficiency based on practical surveys and modern theoretical foundations on bidding management.

Specific objectives include: (i) Surveying the current status of bidding activities of construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City; (ii) Analyzing the difficulties and challenges in bidding management from the perspective of stakeholders (enterprises, bidding parties, appraisal teams, investors, etc.); (iii) Identifying factors affecting bidding management efficiency; (iv) Proposing appropriate management solutions to improve the efficiency and quality of construction bidding.

1.4. Research questions

From the above objectives, the article raises 04 main research questions: (i) What is the current status of bidding activities of construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City? (ii) What difficulties and limitations exist in bidding management from enterprises and related parties? (iii) What factors affect the effectiveness of bidding management? (iv) What solutions can be proposed to improve the effectiveness of bidding management in the current practical context?

1.5. Research object and scope

Research object: is bidding management activities of construction enterprises, focusing on processes, mechanisms, human resources, technology and legal factors related to bidding.

Research scope: Focused on Ho Chi Minh City, an area with many construction activities and large-scale bidding. The survey was conducted with 97 subjects, including construction business owners, bidders, bidding parties, investors and appraisal team members, and representatives of forces directly involved in the construction bidding process.

1.6. Scientific and practical significance

In terms of theory, the article contributes to systematizing concepts, principles and models of modern construction bidding management, based on the theory of public administration, fair competition and administrative reform.

In terms of practice, the study provides specific recommendations that can be applied to improve the bidding management process at enterprises and state management agencies, thereby contributing to improving the efficiency of construction investment and sustainable development of the construction market.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH OVERVIEW

2.1. Concept of construction bidding

Construction bidding is the process of selecting contractors with sufficient capacity and experience to implement construction projects in a competitive, public and transparent manner, regulated by specific legal regulations. According to the Bidding Law No. 43/2013/QH13 and Decree 63/2014/ND-CP, bidding in the construction sector includes forms such as open bidding, restricted bidding, competitive bidding and designated bidding. Of which, open bidding is the main form, aiming to ensure fairness and optimize resources.

Bidding is an important management tool in construction investment project management, contributing to ensuring economic efficiency, avoiding waste and negativity, and enhancing the competitiveness of enterprises. However, the effectiveness of bidding depends not only on the legal process but also on the way of management, implementation and supervision.

2.2. Bidding Management: Theoretical Approach

Bidding management is the process of organizing, operating, checking and supervising activities throughout the entire bidding cycle, including: bidding planning, preparing bidding documents, organizing bid opening, bid evaluation, selecting contractors, signing contracts and supervising implementation. According to the theory of modern public administration (New Public Management), bidding management needs to ensure three basic principles: (i) efficiency, (ii) transparency, and (iii) accountability.

Some theoretical models that can be applied to explain bidding management activities include:

Principal-Agent Theory: Explains the relationship between the investor (principal) and the contractor (agent), thereby proposing appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to minimize the risk of information asymmetry and opportunistic behavior.

Value Chain Management Theory: Emphasizes the role of each stage in the bidding and construction process, in which bidding management is a key link that affects project costs, quality and progress.

Transparency Governance Approach: It is believed that information disclosure, establishing social control mechanisms and independent monitoring are core factors that help improve bidding management efficiency and limit negative behavior.

2.3. Factors affecting bidding management efficiency

From the above theories, it is possible to identify several key groups of factors affecting the effectiveness of bidding management, including:

- **Legal and policy factors:** Asynchronous legal framework, conflicting regulations, and complex procedures can reduce the effectiveness and transparency of the bidding process.
- **Organizational - institutional factors:** The capacity and organizational structure of the bidding party, the internal monitoring mechanism, the role of the appraisal team and relevant parties determine the quality of management.
- **Human factors:** The professional qualifications, public ethics and practical experience of bidding officers directly affect transparency and effectiveness.
- **Information technology factors:** The application of electronic bidding systems, digital data management and data analysis helps improve transparency and minimize the risk of bid collusion.
- **Competitive environment factors:** The existence of interest groups, collusion in bidding, or unfair competition will break market principles and reduce the quality of management.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative methods combined with practical surveys to deeply explore factors affecting the effectiveness of bidding management in the construction sector in Ho Chi Minh City. Data is collected through two main techniques:

Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with 12 subjects, including business owners, bidding officers, appraisal team members and investor representatives, to clarify their views, experiences and assessments of the current status of bidding management. The interviews last from 30 to 60 minutes, are recorded and processed to encode content by topic.

Questionnaire survey: With a sample of 97 participants, including the following groups: (i) construction business owners (32 people), (ii) people directly participating in bidding (18 people), (iii) representatives of the inviting party (15 people), (iv) investors (17 people), and (v) members of the appraisal team (15 people). The questionnaire was designed in a 5-level Likert format, focusing on the following contents: level of transparency, management efficiency, human resource capacity, technology application and fairness in bidding.

The main analysis method is content analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for survey data, to clarify trends, assessments and relationships between influencing factors. Data processing is supported by Excel and NVivo software.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Evaluation of Bidding Management Effectiveness

To evaluate the effectiveness of bidding management activities in construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, the study developed a survey with 4 specific contents. The collected results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Evaluation of bidding management effectiveness (n = 97)

Order	Survey Contents	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Average	Effective	Very Effective	XTB
1	Overall effectiveness of procurement management	7	21	38	23	8	4.04
2	Clarity of procurement process	5	18	41	24	9	4.14
3	Conformance between tender documents and reality	6	22	40	22	7	4.02
4	Ability to select the right contractor	8	20	36	25	8	4.05

The survey results in Table 1 reflect relatively positive assessments from participants regarding the overall effectiveness of bidding management activities. Specifically:

The highest average score (4.14) was for the criterion “Clarity of the bidding process”, showing that most participants assessed the process as having a relatively clear and easy-to-understand structure, especially for experienced units.

The criterion “Ability to select the right contractor” also achieved a fairly good rating (4.05 points), reflecting some confidence in the appraisal and bid evaluation capacity of bidding units.

However, the criterion “Conformity between bidding documents and reality” only achieved 4.02 points, showing that there is still a gap between the requirements of the documents and actual conditions, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises - which are often not capable of meeting overly strict technical standards.

Notably, about 28.90% of respondents (total number of respondents choosing levels 1 and 2) still believe that the effectiveness of bidding management is still weak, reflecting the existence of shortcomings and the need for improvement in the organization, supervision and selection of contractors.

4.2. Assessment of information transparency in bidding

Information transparency is a core principle to ensure fairness and efficiency in bidding activities. The study conducted a survey of 5 specific criteria to assess the level of transparency in the stages of bidding, evaluation, announcement of results and processing of documents.

Table 2: Assessment of information transparency in bidding (n = 97)

Order	Survey Contents	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Average	Effective	Very Effective	XTB
1	Bidding information is disclosed promptly	12	20	34	21	10	3.97
2	Evaluation criteria are clearly announced	10	22	30	23	12	4.05
3	Bid results are transparent and accessible	11	21	33	22	10	3.99
4	No signs of bid collusion or internal interference	18	26	28	17	8	3.70
5	Bid participants are treated fairly	9	24	31	25	8	3.99

The data in Table 2 show some positive signs, but also reflect many worrying issues regarding transparency in bidding activities:

The criterion “Evaluation criteria are clearly announced” scored the highest (4.05), indicating that the majority of respondents highly appreciated the clarity of the criteria in the bidding documents, especially in large projects undertaken by professional units.

“Bid information is publicly disclosed in a timely manner” and “Participants are treated fairly” both scored fairly (3.97–3.99), reflecting the efforts to improve the bidding side in disclosing and handling information.

However, the criterion “No signs of bid collusion or internal interference” scored only 3.70 points – the lowest in the group, warning of the existence of doubts within the enterprise and the contractor. Up to 44 people (45.3%) chose level 1 or 2, showing a lack of confidence in the absolute fairness of the bidding process.

Similarly, the transparent and accessible bidding results only reached 3.99 - showing that there is still a phenomenon of late announcement or incomplete information after bidding, especially in bidding packages with fierce competition.

In general, this result shows that although the bidding system is improving in terms of publicity mechanism, it still needs to increase transparency in the evaluation, processing of documents and communication of results to build sustainable trust for the participants.

4.3. Assessment of capacity and organization of human resources for bidding management

The quality of human resources plays a central role in ensuring that the bidding process is carried out in accordance with the law, objectively and effectively. This sub-section focuses on surveying 5 contents related to professional capacity, practical experience and human resources organization in construction enterprises.

Table 3: Assessment of capacity and organization of bidding management personnel (n = 97)

Order	Survey Contents	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Very Agree	XTB
1	Bidding officers have appropriate expertise	14	21	30	21	11	3.94
2	Be well-trained in bidding operations	18	24	28	18	9	3.75
3	Have a specialized bidding department in the enterprise	20	22	25	20	10	3.77
4	Officers have experience in handling real-life situations	10	19	32	24	12	4.09
4	Workload is appropriate to the capacity of the officers	11	20	31	23	12	4.05
5	Bidding officers have appropriate expertise	14	21	30	21	11	3.94

The survey results in Table 3 clearly reflect the current situation of instability and lack of uniformity in the organization and human resource capacity for bidding in construction enterprises:

The criterion “Staff have experience in handling real-life situations” scored the highest (4.09), showing that many bidding management staff still develop their capacity through accumulated experience rather than through formal training. This creates flexibility in handling situations, but also contains the risk of subjectivity or lack of process standardization.

“The amount of work is appropriate to the capacity of staff” scored 4.05 points, showing that in some large enterprises, the division of work is reasonable. However, 31 people chose the level of “Neutral”, reflecting the lack of uniformity among enterprises.

On the contrary, the two criteria “Being well-trained” (3.75 points) and “Having a specialized department” (3.77 points) scored the lowest, showing that the problem of human resources and organizational structure is still a systemic weakness. Up to 42 people (43.3%) disagreed that staff were well-trained, and more than 2/5 of enterprises did not have a specialized department for bidding.

This result shows that construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City are facing a shortage of professional and stable human resources for bidding work. Proper investment in training, organizational restructuring, and reasonable assignment of work are urgent requirements to improve the quality of bidding management.

4.4. Evaluation of technology application in bidding activities

In the context of digital transformation, the application of information technology to the bidding process plays an important role in improving efficiency, shortening time, and limiting negativity. This section examines five aspects that reflect the current state of technology application in construction enterprises.

Table 4: Evaluation of technology application in bidding activities (n = 97)

Order	Survey Contents	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Very Agree	XTB
1	Enterprises regularly use the online bidding system	19	21	28	18	11	3.80
2	The electronic bidding system is easy to use and friendly	22	24	26	15	10	3.66
3	Timely technical support when there is a system problem	28	26	23	13	7	3.43
4	There is a specialized IT staff to support bidding	25	27	24	15	6	3.48
4	Data and bidding documents are digitized and fully stored	18	22	27	20	10	3.81
5	Enterprises regularly use the online bidding system	19	21	28	18	11	3.80

The survey results in Table 4 reflect the unevenness in the ability to apply information technology to bidding activities of construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City:

The criteria with the highest average scores are “Data and bidding documents are digitized and fully stored” (3.81 points) and “Enterprises regularly use the online bidding system” (3.80 points). However, they only reached the “fairly average” level, reflecting the fact that only a part of enterprises with strong technological capacity are proactively digitizing the process.

“The electronic bidding system is easy to use” only reached 3.66 points, showing that there are still technical barriers or the system interface is not user-friendly, especially for non-IT staff.

The two criteria with the lowest scores were “Receiving timely technical support when there is a system problem” (3.43 points) and “Having specialized IT staff to support bidding” (3.48 points), reflecting the lack of technology human resources and the lack of on-site technical support mechanisms. Up to 54 respondents (55.60%) disagreed that the unit had specialized IT staff, indicating that this was a serious gap.

This result shows that although there has been initial change in the use of the electronic bidding system, factors such as human resources, technical support and system operation capacity are still limited. It is necessary to promote training, improve the system interface, and arrange specialized IT staff to ensure practical effectiveness.

4.5. Evaluation of the mechanism for monitoring and handling violations in bidding

Monitoring and handling violations is a key factor to ensure fairness, transparency and discipline in bidding activities. This subsection examines the level of assessment of enterprises, investors and stakeholders on the effectiveness and efficiency of the current monitoring mechanism.

Table 5: Assessment of monitoring and handling of violations in bidding (n = 97)

Order	Survey Contents	Totally disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Very Agree	XTB
1	There is an independent monitoring mechanism throughout the entire bidding process	21	26	26	17	7	3.62
2	Bidding violations are detected promptly	25	27	24	14	7	3.49
3	Illegal acts are handled strictly and in accordance with regulations	28	25	24	13	7	3.44
4	There is a transparent and effective complaint and feedback mechanism	23	24	28	15	7	3.58
4	Enterprises feel secure about the fairness of supervision	20	22	27	20	8	3.73
5	There is an independent monitoring mechanism throughout the entire bidding process	21	26	26	17	7	3.62

Table 5 reflects the significant lack of trust of enterprises and bidding participants in the mechanism for monitoring and handling violations in bidding:

The highest score is 3.73, belonging to the criterion "Enterprises feel secure about the fairness of monitoring". However, this is only a fairly average level, reflecting that trust in the monitoring system has not been clearly strengthened.

Most worryingly, the criteria "Violations are detected promptly" (3.49 points) and "Wrongful acts are strictly handled" (3.44 points) both have more than 50 respondents choosing level 1 or 2, showing a very low assessment of the actual effectiveness of inspection, examination and handling.

Although the “Independent monitoring mechanism” reached an average level (3.62 points), the number of people who disagreed (level 1+2) still accounted for 47 people (48.5%), reflecting doubts about the objectivity and independence of internal and external monitoring organizations.

The criterion “Complaints and feedback mechanism” also only reached 3.58 points, showing that the reception and settlement of complaints is unclear and ineffective, causing contractors to be afraid of complaining.

Overall, the survey shows that the current monitoring and handling mechanism is still formal, lacks independent specialized forces, and has not yet played a deterrent role. This is a serious bottleneck in bidding management, which needs to be comprehensively reformed to strengthen trust and improve the quality of construction project management.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The mismatch between theory and practice in bid management effectiveness

According to the theory of modern public administration (New Public Management), bidding activities need to ensure three fundamental principles: efficiency, transparency and accountability. However, the research results show that the effectiveness of bidding management in Ho Chi Minh City still has a significant gap between theoretical orientation and implementation practice. Although the average score in the criteria of general efficiency, contractor selection or process all fluctuates above 4.0 points (Table 1), nearly 30% of respondents still disagree with the current management method. This shows that on the one hand there is progress in pioneering units, on the other hand there is inconsistency and uneven quality among bidding parties.

5.2. Information transparency: gaps in implementation institutions

The analysis in section 4.2 shows that transparency is an inherent weakness in current bidding practices. Although the bidding law clearly stipulates the disclosure of bidding documents, scoring criteria, and announcement of results, the survey results show that many businesses still have difficulty accessing information or suspect signs of "orientation" of contractors. The average score for the criterion "No signs of bid collusion" is only 3.70 points, the lowest level surveyed.

This shows that there is a need for a mechanism to ensure better implementation, such as requiring the disclosure of time, documents, and criteria on the national bidding portal, along with sanctions for concealment or bias.

5.3. Human resources: a core factor but not properly invested in

One of the paradoxes that is clearly shown is that while businesses are fully aware of the importance of human resources for bidding management, the majority do not have a specialized department or do not organize regular professional training. The results from Table 3 show that up to 42 respondents (43.30%) disagree that staff are properly trained. This is a dangerous gap because bidding management is a field that requires in-depth understanding of both construction techniques and legal regulations.

On the other hand, the highest score (4.09 points) belongs to "experience in handling real-life situations", which shows that most staff are learning through practice instead of through formal training – this management model is a temporary adaptation but lacks long-term standardization.

5.4. Technologicalization of bidding processes: Promises and challenges

The application of information technology in bidding management is considered an inevitable trend, especially when the Ministry of Planning and Investment has issued a roadmap for digital transformation of the public bidding sector through the platform <https://muasamcong.mpi.gov.vn>. However, the survey results in section 4.4 show that the actual situation in Ho Chi Minh City is still quite reserved. Most enterprises use the system only at the minimum level; the average score of the related criteria is below 4.0.

The reasons identified include: (i) the technical system is not user-friendly, (ii) there is no specialized IT department, and (iii) lack of practical training. In that context, the digitization of records, data storage, and bidding interactions via the network platform requires strong support from the state - both financially and in terms of incentive policies.

5.5. Monitoring and Violation Handling Mechanism: Crisis of Confidence

Table 5 is the clearest evidence of a crisis of confidence in the bidding monitoring system in Ho Chi Minh City. More than half of the respondents said that violations were not detected or were not handled effectively, while many were skeptical about the independence and impartiality of the monitoring apparatus.

The average scores for the criteria of detecting violations (3.49) and handling violations (3.44) were the lowest in the entire study, reflecting the stagnation in applying the law into practice. Building an independent monitoring mechanism, strengthening the role of internal audit, investigative journalism and social criticism are directions that need to be studied in depth to reform the current system.

5.6. Correlation between factors and overall reform proposals

The research results show a clear relationship between factors: low human resource capacity leading to errors in implementation; Lack of technology makes it difficult to publicize information; lack of independent supervision increases the risk of bid rigging. Each factor does not exist separately but interacts with each other in a chain of "systemic fractures".

Therefore, reform solutions cannot be isolated from one stage, but need to be approached synchronously in the direction of:

- Strengthening training and professionalization of the bidding management team.
- Comprehensively digitizing the process, with technical and financial support from the state.

- Establishing an independent supervision mechanism, linking accountability with specific violation handling tools.
- Building a bidding transparency index by sector and by locality, as a basis for publicly assessing the capacity of each unit.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

The research results from a survey of 97 subjects including business owners, bidders, bidding parties, investors and appraisal teams show that: bidding management activities in the construction sector in Ho Chi Minh City are having many positive changes but still have many shortcomings in terms of organization, human resources and technology. Based on the analysis results from 5 main content groups, some important conclusions can be drawn as follows:

The effectiveness of bidding management is assessed at a fairly average level, however, there is still a lack of consistency among bidding units, especially at the grassroots level.

Information transparency, the core foundation of modern bidding, has not been fully ensured, when there are many reflections on "designing winning criteria according to predetermined units".

The human resources for bidding management have not reached the necessary professional level, when the majority of staff in charge of the work lack professional training or specialized departments.

Technology application has potential but is facing technical barriers, lack of support and lack of specialized IT human resources.

The monitoring and handling mechanism for violations has not been effective, creating a gap that allows bidding violations to persist without being thoroughly handled.

These results reflect a fairly clear reality: to improve the effectiveness of bidding management, a synchronous approach is needed from institutions, people, technology and supervision, not one-way or isolated reforms.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research and discussion results, the article recommends several specific and feasible solutions to improve the effectiveness of bidding management of construction enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City:

- (i) Completing the institutional framework and implementation guidelines: It is necessary to supplement clearer legal regulations on the responsibility for publicity and transparency in each bidding step. There are specific instructions on how to build standard bidding documents, limiting the situation of "setting conditions" that are disadvantageous to small enterprises.
- (ii) Professionalizing the bidding management team: Organizing mandatory training courses on bidding and project management for bidding teams at enterprises and bidding units. Requiring agencies and organizations with bidding activities to have at least one specialized department to perform the functions of managing, coordinating and supervising bidding.
- (iii) Strengthening the application of technology and digital transformation: Promote the use of electronic bidding systems, encourage storage, digital record management and real-time monitoring. Invest in developing a technical support platform, promptly responding when businesses encounter difficulties in operating the system.
- (iv) Establishing an independent monitoring and social feedback mechanism: Increase the authority and independence of bidding monitoring teams; expand the role of state audit and professional social organizations in bidding monitoring. Build a transparent feedback system with encrypted identity of complainants to encourage businesses to report negative feedback without fear of retaliation.
- (v) Pilot and replicate transparent bidding models locally HCMC should select a number of districts to build a model bidding model with clear processes, independent monitoring, and public data. After the pilot period, summarize and evaluate the effectiveness to expand to other localities or adjust the city-level bidding management policy.

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