

THE EXTENT TO WHICH HUMAN RELATIONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTES TO PRODUCTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The construction industry has an essential feature of been classified as a labour intensive sector. The workforce plays a vital role in the Construction process. As a result, the performance and improvement in construction productivity are achieved through prudent resource allocation, human efficiency and human relations. Human relations within an organization cease only on employee relationship, but it goes beyond and also promotes extrinsic factors that enhance productivity. The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which human relations within the construction industry contributes to productivity. The research was exploratory in nature and made use of structured interviews with professionals from the construction sector selected via purposive sampling technique. The study established that successful human relations within the organization creates harmony, encourage employee satisfaction and enhances employee's operational efficiency. The study recommends Managers of construction firms to institute good human relations in their corporate objectives due to its associated benefits that emanate from such practice.

Keywords: Construction Industry, Human Relations, Impact, Productivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human relations refers to the daily interactions between human and their fellow humans and dealing with their needs in their immediate environment be it an organization, firm, association or groups and amongst others (Highland 2007). Human relation is an integral part of Human resource management and in the context of the Construction industry; the human management is considered the backbone of the industry. The Construction sector has an essential feature of been classified as a labour intensive sector. This due to the enormous and vital roles labour plays in the Construction process as confirmed by Moselhi and Khan (2010) that labour productivity plays a significant role in the successful delivery of engineering procurement and construction projects. Missbauer and Haube (2006) pointed that contractors within the sector perceive proper planning, attractive labour rate, adequate and experience skill labour among others. As this attributes to the success and failures of construction projects without paying much attention to the human relations aspect of employed labour within the organization or on a project. The Construction industry has been characterized as a fragmented sector where the worker (skilled and unskilled) are grouped to work in teams under an activity. These workers in group/ team develop a standard unit and their behaviour and conducts impacts on the firm's productivity. As a result, attitudes, emotions and prejudices exhibited by workers (labour) are hugely influenced by the human relations that co-exist between employer and employees. The nomadic nature of the construction industry makes the industry prone to recruiting people from the various ethnic background, groups and cultural environ to work cooperatively and productively in a work situation. This integration of human relations performs a very vital role in every organization as well as all levels of human endeavour. Human relations have an effect on performance (Rivera 2002). Employees have many needs beyond those satisfied by money. Teams/ groups have a powerful influence within a firm. The behavioural science of groups/teams in a works situation is not a new science but depends on

psychology and sociology theory and practice as captured by Hawthorne in as early as 1927. However, huge research on this human resource management is silent on human relations aspect and how productivity is achieved through this relationship. Blyton (2008) revealed that employees do not put up their best performances at workplaces when they are unhappy with management, government, or even their fellow colleagues. If an organization is to succeed, the relationships among the people in that organization must be monitored and maintained. This study, therefore, seeks to spark a debate on the extent to which human relations affect productivity in the construction industry.

2. Significance of Human Relations

Maintaining healthy employee relations in an organization is a pre-requisite for organizational success. Strong employee relations is required for high productivity and human satisfaction (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2002). Highland (2007) stressed that Human relations deal with avoiding and resolving issues concerning individual that might arise out or influence the work. A strong human relation depends upon healthy and safe work environment. Highland (2007) further established that perhaps the single most important aspect of designing any work environment is the plan that links all workers and supervisor with multiple channels of communication. Good communication may be referred to as the critical component of sound human relations. A good human relationship is fitting people into work situations so as to motivate them to work together harmoniously. The process of fitting together should achieve higher levels of productivity for the organization while also bringing employees economic, psychological, and social satisfaction. Human relations covers all types of interactions among people their conflicts, cooperative efforts, and group relationships (Highland 2007). It is the study of why our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours sometimes cause interpersonal conflict in our personal lives and work-related situations. Human relations in a firm also installs integration. This is referred to as the bringing together of people from the various ethnic background and varying groups and association to work cooperatively and productively, with economic and psychological means including social satisfaction with the ideology of motivation in a work situation.

2.1 Human Relations in Organization

Organizations recruit labour to accomplish various tasks for clients on behalf of the organizations. The relationship becomes the focus as labour renders services to clients. Relationships are becoming more vital than physical products (Highland 2007). In any service firm, there are thousands of critical incidents in which customers come into contact with the organization and form their impressions of its quality and services. Employees must endeavour to project good human relations in terms of a favourable image of the organization they represent. Internally within the firm, teams must have good relations to encourage harmony. Management must also endeavour to have human relations as part of the company's policy to foster good working environment.

2.1.1 Types of relationships

Human relations occur at all levels settings such as supervisors, subordinates, mates and friends. At whatever level relationship is built. Relationships exist in various forms within firms including the following:

- ***Inter-personal***

An interpersonal relationship is an affiliation, connections or associations between two or more people. This relationship also exists in firms and among project managers and has become more prominent (Project Management Institute 2008). Dinsmore (1990) argued that charts and schedules are useless if the human factor of projects is not taken into consideration. The project takes place in a complex environment where the vast background of the workforce will be managed by a project

manager (Ida 2012). As a result, a project manager in an organization must be aware of an excellent interpersonal skill with everyone to be able to communicate with everyone to fine-tune diversity in his team. Further, interpersonal relations also enable team leaders first to know their needs in order to understand how to reacts to the workforce under their control.

- **Inter-group relations**

Inter- group relations as defined by Sherif (1966) ensue wherever individual belonging to one group interact collectively or individual with another or its members in terms of their group identification. Further, whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, together, or individually, to another group or its members in terms of their group identification it means that inter-group relation has taken place (Sherif, 1966). Sociological theory and relations have focused on the structural determinants of inter-group behaviour. These theories emphasize the importance of cognitive factors such as stereotyping, as well as motivational underpinning of intergroup behaviour including the presumed desire on the part of the group members positive social groups.

3.0 Labour Productivity

Considerable effort has been demonstrated to understand productivity concept (Gundecha 2012). This resulted in different definitions (Oglesby *et al.* 2002). Productivity has a great significant in construction. Productivity of Labour constitutes an essential part of production input for Construction projects. Productivity expresses the relationship between outputs and inputs (Gundecha 2012). Productivity is one of the major components of every company’s success and competitiveness in the construction market. A Construction firm stands to gain or lose, depending on how well the company’s productivity responds to competition. Construction firms may gain advantage over their competitors by improving productivity to build projects at lower costs; yet, most contractors do not systematically and adequately address this strategic issue or evaluate its impact on the project’s profit (Mojahed and Aghazadeh 2007) cited in (Enshassi 2012). Construction productivity improvement is a crucial issue for businesses and nations to increase profitability, reduce costs, create and sustain competitive advantage. In order to remain as unique players in a highly competitive global market, construction decision-makers must promote individual productivity strategies that match business needs (Flanagan *et al.*, 2005). Construction tasks are complex and hard to quantify when assessing and measuring productivity (Janssen, 2008). In many countries, the construction industry attracted criticism for low productivity and poor quality (Eriksson and Westerberg 2011). Improving productivity is a management issue, and the introduction of new techniques or technologies may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Enshassi (2012) affirmed that in order to improve productivity at the construction site, there should be the need to develop methods, improve training programs, enhance worker motivation, improve strategic management and improve procurement management. Table 1 depicts the factors that affect Labour productivity on a construction site.

Table 1

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Lack of Providing Labour with Transportation |
| 2 | Working Overtime |
| 3 | Crew Size and Composition |
| 4 | Unrealistic Scheduling and Expectation of Labour Performance |

| | |
|----|--|
| 5 | Incentive scheme |
| 6 | Early Quite and Frequent Unscheduled Breaks |
| 7 | Delay in Inspection by Site Management |
| 8 | Material Shortage |
| 9 | Unavailability of Suitable tools |
| 10 | Proportion of work subcontracted |
| 11 | Lack of Human Relations |
| 12 | Material Shortage |
| 13 | Lack of Adequate motivations |
| 14 | Lack of suitable Rest Area Offered to Labour on Site |
| 15 | Lack of Training offered to Operatives |
| 16 | Sequence of Work |
| 17 | Communications between Site Management and Labour |
| 18 | Late Arrival |
| 19 | Lack of Construction Manager Leadership |
| 20 | Delay in Payment |
| 21 | Construction Methods |
| 22 | Labour Supervision |

Source: Adapted from Gupta and Kansal (2014),

4.0 Research Method

A number of studies on human resource management have focused on productivity and performance with a limited view the human relations aspect. In light of that, exploratory research technique was adapted to determine the extent to which human relations affect productivity. Interview section was conducted among construction professionals and clients via purposive sampling. The targeted population for the study were adequately prepared as a result of the prior notification of the semi-structure interviews. In all, twelve interviews section were conducted with the aid of scheduled guide and recorders and was subsequently transcribed. Each Interviewee had a total of eight minutes duration to answer all the scheduled questions. Table two (2) shows the summarized data of the firms interviewed which was transcribed.

| Firm Name | Designation | No Interviewed | Construction Industry Sector | Category of Employees | Structure and size of firm |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| I | Project Mangers | 2 | Diverse projects such as Roads, Bridges, and Steel Works. | Expatriates and Locals | 25 Employees |
| J | Site Foremen | 2 | Specialist Steel Wks. | Locals | 8 Employees |
| K | Construction Managers | 3 | Public Sector projects, School &Health | Expatriates and Locals | 10 Employees with 17 casual workers |
| L | General Managers | 1 | Both Public and Private projects. | Locals | 10 Employees |
| M | Quantity Surveyors | 2 | Private Sector projects | Locals | 15 Employees |

5.0 Findings and discussions

These exploratory findings from the study are consistent with the literature regarding the fundamental features of human relations within firms. Results from the study revealed that human relationship is imperative in an organization if high productivity is to be accomplished. Moselhi and Khan (2010) affirmed that labour productivity plays a significant role in the success delivery of engineering procurement and construction projects. Targets and core goals of the firm are disrupted by the absence of human relations. Highland (2007) supported that establishing human relations within an organization deals with avoiding and resolving issues concerning individual that might arise out or influence the work. Further, Highland (2007) stressed that right human relations will be enhanced when there is good communication among teams that will motivate employees to work together. Similarly, labour productivity is increased when healthy human relationships ensue among employees at all levels within the firm. Findings indicate that issues concerning Labour are vital in achieving productivity. Dinsmore (1990) stressed that charts and schedules are useless in achieving goals of companies if the human factor is not taken into consideration. As a result, labour productivity is significant as its impact on project or firms profit (Mojahed and Aghazadeh 2007). The study also revealed that labour productivity on a construction site is affected by several factors captured on Table (1). Interviewees indicated that maintaining healthy employee relations in an organization is a pre-requisite for firm success. As a result, strong employee relations are required for high productivity and human satisfaction as supported by (Pilbeam and Corbridge 2002). Interviews with the construction professionals also confirmed as established in literature that good human relations is in a firm installs integration which brings together of people from various ethnic background and different groups and association to work cooperatively and productively with economic and psychological means including social satisfaction with the ideology of motivation in a work situation. Management must also endeavour to have human relations as part of the firm's policy to foster good working environment the will drive employees to work in harmony. Some clients of the sampled population remarked that in principle human relations concepts is essential, but its implementation becomes challenging within a firm.

6.0 Conclusions

The goal of this study was to explore the extent to which human relations contribute to productivity on the construction site using the exploratory technique. Construction professionals and clients were the populations sampled. Interviews were conducted and transcribed with the aid of interview guides. The study concludes that human relations perform a very vital role in every organization as well as all levels of human endeavour. As a result, in the construction industry as a labour intensive sector, management must strive to establish such relationship in order to foster harmony.

The study further concludes that good human relations at the workplace installs integration that brings together of people from the various ethnic background and different groups and association to work cooperatively and productively. This would drive social satisfaction with the ideology of motivation in a work situation. Management must also endeavour to have human relations as part of the firm's policy to foster good working environment the will drive employees to work in harmony.

The study also proved that successful human relationships within the organization creates a union and encourage employee satisfaction that further enhances employee's operational efficiency. The study recommends Managers of construction firms to institute good human relations in their corporate objectives due to the associated benefits that emanate from such good practice.

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