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Motivators of Construction Workers in South African Sites

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Purpose: Construction industry involves hard and rough work. Because of its demands, it requires energetic and enthusiastic people and these are the attributes that in most cases young people possess. Unemployment of young people is a serious problem the country is facing. It is for this reason that the different stakeholders should change their attention and prioritize motivating young blood into the industry because the sector has a way of cubing poverty and uplifting the county's economy.

Problem investigated: Because of being labeled as "dirty, difficult and dangerous" industry many people shun it and it is a more serious problem when it comes to attracting young people. Can job satisfaction change this mentality?

Methodology: The study is a combination of primary and secondary work with special focus on leadership and human resource management. A descriptive survey was conducted in different parts of Gauteng on both employers and employees regarding motivation on construction site. From the findings, recommendations are made towards addressing the problems.

Findings: Every person has different reasons for working. The reasons for working are as individual as the person. Also employees work because they obtain something that they need from work and that something obtained from work impacts morale, employee motivation, and the quality of life. Workforce motivation affects productivity. Because most of the activities are done under difficult conditions including harsh weather conditions, to make it attractive employees should be motivated to carry out different activities. Motivators in different forms should be applied and this could improve the chances of the industry's competitiveness both locally and internationally.

Value: The racially constituted workplaces in South Africa under apartheid and its implications such as in terms of skills development were identified as obstacles to better industrial performance in the mid 1990s. Educating new entrants into the industry could be an opportunities for employment creation.

Conclusion: Work motivation is one of the key areas of organizational psychology. Employee retention, especially the best and most desirable employees is a key challenge in an organization today. Again, employees who feel that they are valued and recognized for the work they do are more motivated, responsible and productive. With the passing of different acts by the government, the legacy of apartheid can be reversed successfully; poverty and inequality can be addressed with the inclusion of effectively fast-tracking of the housing backlog.

Keywords: *productivity, motivation, job satisfaction, morale, human resource, construction industry*

Introduction

When one thinks about it, the success of any facet of the business can almost be traced to motivated employees. This is especially true and important in today's turbulent and often chaotic environment where commercial success depends on employees using their full talents. The ability to attract, retain and develop talented employees is a key feature of a successful business. People are an organization's most valuable asset and this is especially true in relatively low-tech labour intensive industries such as construction, but again, people also represent the most difficult resource for organizations to manage.

Unlike physical assets, people have their own individual needs which must be met and habits which must be managed if they are to contribute to organizational growth and development. They are individuals who bring their own perspectives, values and attributes to organizational life, and when managed effectively can bring considerable benefits to organizations (Mullins 1999). However, when managed poorly they have the potential to severely limit organizational growth and threaten the viability of a business. In any company, whether it is a construction company or any other trade, its core is its employees; their presence and contribution is very important in such a way that they determine if the company is going to be a success or failure. A company may have good manager, a good vision and a good goal; however, if it neglects its employees, that company is practically in turmoil. Unsatisfied employees produce unsatisfactory results, therefore, it is very vital for top management to take care of their employees to ensure that they are satisfied in their jobs; when they are satisfied; they strive for the company's goals and aim (Latham 1994; Egan 1998). Construction is an industry with unique characteristics which may have special effects on employee motivation and it should be noted that even though a construction project takes months to complete, daily satisfaction surely accompanies the work as it is done. In a work environment of any field, motivation of the workforce influences productivity. Job satisfaction plays an important role in enhancing construction labour productivity (Smithers and Walker, 2000) and forms the basis for identification of the work environment factors.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper was to establish the motivators of the construction workers in South Africa because it is only when satisfied can the employees become productive, take pride in their jobs and be loyal to their employers. Is it possible to identify any demotivators and how best can the workers be retained and limit job hopping. And also can the young entrants people be attracted to the sector and forget about seeing the sector as dangerous, dirty and dangerous.

Research Methodology

In order to aid the development of the employee based motivational model, a survey was conducted whereby the target population of the study was the managers and the employees of construction companies based in Gauteng comprising housing, public utility, industrial and commercial. The size of the companies ranged from small, medium to big companies and the study embraced both the main contractors and sub-contractors. A preliminary set of semi-structured interview was carried with managers and employees at various levels of an organization in order to establish the motivators and its effect on construction productivity. In addition to the qualitative interview data, quantitative data was collected via structured questionnaires. A field survey was carried out on 45 construction companies. The study target population included 100 contractors who held valid registration from Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB). The questionnaire was distributed to 90 managers in all different capacities; directors, partners, project managers and construction managers. Also were 150 workers occupying different trades and occupations namely; bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, carpenter, etc. The response rate was good as it was more than 80%.

Literature Review

Defining Motivation

Motivating is the ability of programming the personnel with a unity of purpose and maintaining a continuing, harmonious relationship among all people. Likert (p5, 1961) has the following description of motivation – “...to organize the efforts of individuals to achieve desired objectives...” This can be seen reflected again in definitions of motivation, such as: “Ultimately we only do things because we are motivated to do so either by choice or by coercion” (Ribeaux and Poppleton, 1985:97). It is a force which encourages and promotes a willingness of every employee to cooperate with every member of the team, and to maintain it is to create and bring about the climate which brings harmony

and equilibrium into the entire work group for the benefit of all who are involved, that is, the company as a whole, Scheer (1979). Motivating is the management process of influencing behaviour based on the knowledge of what makes people tick (Luthans, 1998). Luthans asserts that motivation is the process that arouses, energizes, directs, and sustains behaviour and performance, that is, it is the process of stimulating people to action and to achieve a desired task. He again stress that, like the other cognitive process, motivation cannot be seen, all that can be seen is behaviour, and this should not be equated with causes of behaviour.

Relative to this, Minner, Ebrahimi, and Watchel, (1995) state that in a system sense, motivation consists of these three, interacting and interdependent elements, i.e., needs, drives, and incentives. Motivating is the ability of indoctrinating the personnel with a unity of purpose and maintaining a continuing, harmonious relationship among all people. It is a force which encourages and promotes a willingness of every employee to cooperate with every member of the team. To maintain it is to create and perpetuate the climate which brings harmony and equilibrium into the entire work group for the benefit of all who are involved, the company as a whole (Wilbert Scheer 1979). According to Robin and DeCenzo (1995; 271) motivation is defined as, "the willingness to exert high level of effort to reach organizational goals, conditioned by the effort's ability to satisfy some individual need". Campbell and Pritchard (1976) defines motivation as a set of independent and dependant relationships that explains the direction, amplitude and persistence of an individual's behaviour holding constant the effects of aptitude, skills, understanding of a task and the constraints operating in the work environment.

Motivation has been described in many ways. However, one thing these definitions have in common is the inclusion of words such as "desire", "want", "wishes", "aim", "goals", "needs", and "incentives". In conclusion, motivating is the work managers perform to inspire, encourage and impel people to take action; to motivate the employee, an employee must be reached and to reach him there must be a complete understanding of the complexity his make-up (Allen, 1986). Worker enhancement programs (for an individual, team, company, etc.) that are built on ways to motivate workers (toward self-motivation and long-term motivation) can optimize productivity. Thus, lack of motivation in return affects productivity and a number of symptoms resulting in low morale, low or declining productivity, poor workplace atmosphere, high employee turnover, increasing number of grievances, conflicts, higher incidence of absenteeism and tardiness, increasing number of defective products, rework, higher number of accidents or a higher level of waste materials and scrap (William Day 1978). To add to this people become disengaged but remain present in the workforce, unable to improve and unable to respond to new demands. Motivation of the labour force is of paramount importance because the quality of human performance at the workplace depends largely upon motivation. Productivity is directly linked to motivation, and motivation is, in turn, dependent on productivity.

Motivation Theory

In the past literature of management and organization several models have been presented to explain worker motivation and in some cases the lack of such motivation. These extend back to scientific management by Taylor (1947), through the human centred management of McGregor (1960) to the current issues of power and discourse of Jackson and Carter (2000). However, the following motivation concepts have commonly been applied to increase productivity in construction projects:

- Theory of *Maslow (1954)* based on hierarchy of human needs
- Two-factor Theory of *Herzberg et al. (1959)* based on hygiene factors and job enrichment factors
- Theory X and Theory Y of *McGregor (1960)* based on ways of perceiving workers

- Expectancy theories of *Vroom (1964)* and *Lawler (1973)*
- Theory Z of *Ouchi (1981)* based on holistic concern for employees
- Motivation schemes under the current practice of Total Quality Management in projects (TQM).

Abraham Maslow (1954)

Maslow introduced the notion of a hierarchy of needs and said that different needs stimulate at different levels and once one level has been satisfied, it ceases to be effective, and a higher level need is sought after. Likewise, a higher level need will not be an effective stimulant if the lower level has not been satisfied. The order proposed by Maslow is (1) physiological, followed by (2) safety, (3) affiliation, (4) self esteem and esteem from others, and ultimately (5) self-actualization. This hierarchy of needs theory is based on the principle that people are motivated by the desire to fulfill their needs and seek goals to satisfy their needs; in the absence of any other needs there would be no motivation.

Frederick Herzberg (1959)

Herzberg offered the concept of dual factor motivation theory, which he termed motivation factors and hygiene factors. According to him, hygiene factors (e.g. company policy, supervision, and salary, interpersonal relations, working conditions, status and security) can cause dissatisfaction either due to a lack of them or their being perceived as inappropriate. Motivating factors (recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth) alone will not bring about motivation if the hygiene factors are not satisfied; likewise the satisfaction of all hygiene factors without the presence of motivators will not bring about motivation. The content factors tend to motivate by their presence while the context or hygiene factors dissatisfy individuals when they are deficient, i.e., dissatisfiers are deficit needs. For example, poor working conditions are commonly named as the source of dissatisfaction, but good physical working conditions are rarely named as being the source of worker satisfaction. Herzberg has developed a theory on the basis that workers' mental health is associated with performing meaningful work.

Douglas McGregor (1960)

McGregor came up with two motivational models calling them "X" and "Y". Theory X model ('authoritarian management' style) was based on the idea that people naturally don't like to work, lack ambition, and therefore need to be compelled to work. It is the traditional view of direction and control whereby the function of management, therefore is to force the employee to work, through coercion and threats of punishment. The main motivator for the worker, therefore, is money. Theory Y ('participative management' style) is the predominant management style used in the construction industry; management holds the power and exerts control over the workforce. It states that work is natural and can be a source of satisfaction and that when it is; the worker can be highly committed and motivated. Workers often seek responsibility and need to be more fully involved with management to become motivated. People prefer to set their own goals and seek responsibility rather than avoid it.

Victor Vroom (1964)

Vroom's research was on expectancy theory which is based on the belief that employee effort will lead to performance and performance will lead to rewards. This theory argues that the motivational force to perform or expend effort is a multiplicative function of the expectancies that individuals have concerning future outcomes and the value they place on those outcomes (Vroom 1964; Nadler, Lawler 1977; Maloney 1981; Laufer, Jenkins 1982). Rewards may be either positive or negative. The more

positive the reward the more likely the employee will be highly motivated. Conversely, the more negative the reward the less likely the employee will be motivated.

William Ouchi (1981)

In his model (Theory Z) he advocates a combination of the best of theory Y and modern Japanese management, placing a large amount of freedom and trust with workers, and assumes that workers have a strong loyalty and interest in team-working and the organization. Many Japanese employees are guaranteed a position for life, increasing their loyalty to the company. He described the characteristics of the Japanese companies that produce high employee commitment, motivation, and productivity; careful evaluation occurs over a period of time, and the responsibility for success or failure is shared among employees and management. Most employees do not specialize in one skill area, but work at several different tasks, learning more about the company as they develop. According to Ouchi, Theory Z management tends to promote stable employment, high productivity, high employee morale and satisfaction.

Findings

Gauteng is one of the nine provinces that make up the country of South Africa, which is located in the Southern part of Africa.

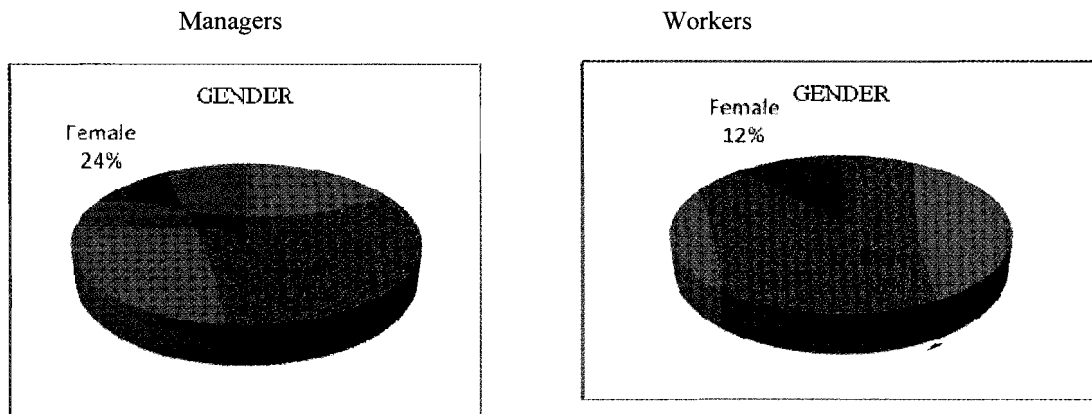


Figure 1a

Figure 1b

The charts above indicate that out of 100% of managers (Figure 1a) majority of respondents are males (76%) and 24% being females. And in the case of workers (Figure 1b) the same situation applies where (88%) of the respondents are male and 12% is female. The reason for the high number of females could be attributed to the fact that the figure included the administrative staff whilst the study was aimed at craft workers. In both cases the dominance of males exists. This reinforces what has been studied by Dainty et al (2000a; 2000b) and Maloney (1997: 53) regarding the dominance of men in the industry. But again the increase in percentage of females especially on managerial positions could be because of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) requirements for tender adjudication purpose. The ages of managers varied from 33 to 77, however, majority (43%) is between 41 and 50 years, 33-40 and 61-70 made up 18%, and 51-60 made 17%, with the least percentage being 4% for 71-77years. On the results of the workers, the ages of the participants that dominated was 31-40 with 71%, 23-30 making 20% and 41-50 making 9%. Regarding ethnicity, 61.4% in managerial positions

was black, 23.9% was white and 14.8% was coloured. Again black workers dominated, making 85%, 6.1% white and 6.8% was coloured. Regarding economic status 98% of the managers said were on average and only 2% below average. And 99% of the workers said they were poor with only 1% that said they were below average.

Managers

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? – Your workforce is best motivated when...

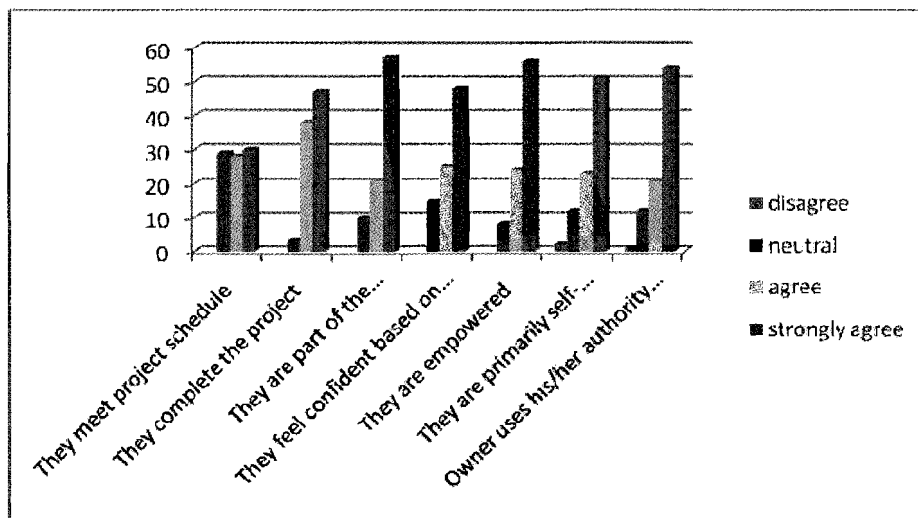


Figure 1

The data suggests that all motivators are important; as a result all of them had the biggest numbers, but “being part of the team” (57) and workers’ “empowerment” (56) were seen as the most important motivators by the employers. On the other hand “meeting project schedule” (30) was the least motivator by the employers when it comes to their workers. “Being part of the team” had a percentage value of 64.8% and “empowerment” had 63.6%.

Question 12.1 – 12.10 in order to motivate your workforce, how important are the following needs?
Please indicate your answer using the following 3-point scale

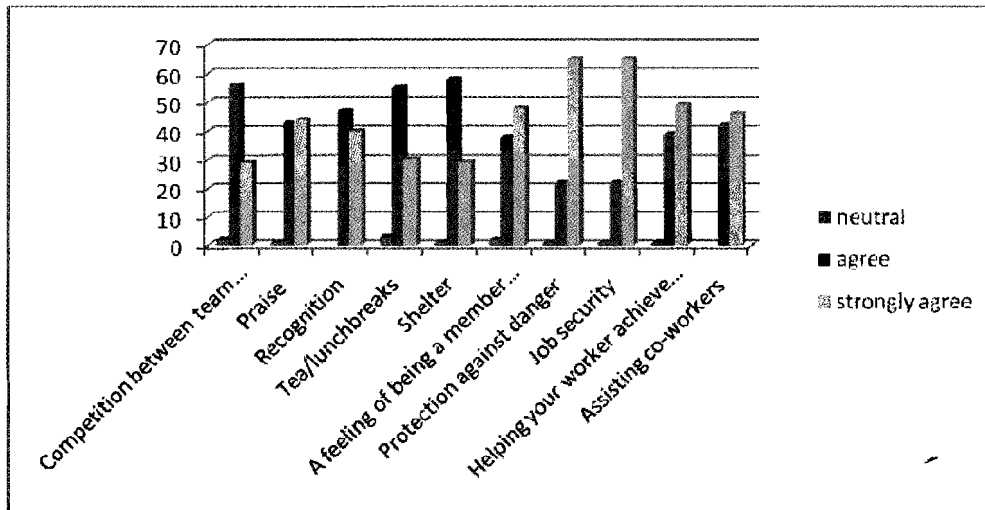


Figure 2

Regarding the best manner of motivating the workforce, the employers strongly agreed that job security and protection against danger (65) were the most important needs, whilst competition between team members, shelter (29) tea/lunch breaks were least important to the workers.

Question 13-15

Employee-based productivity improvement techniques

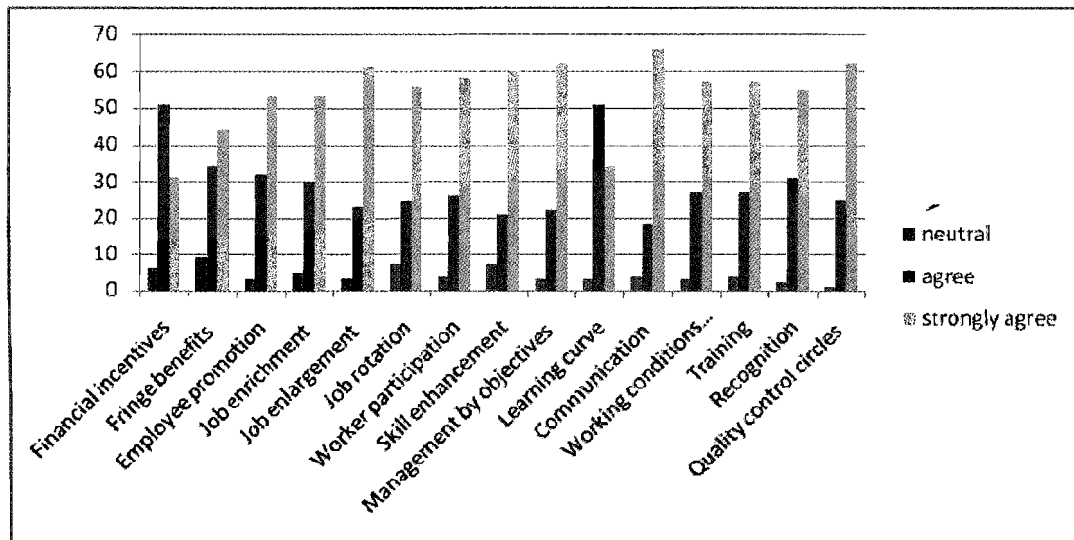


Figure 3

Almost all employers strongly agreed that communication (66), quality control circles (62), management by objective (62), job enlargement (61) and skills enhancement (60) are most important employee-based productivity improvement techniques. And surprisingly financial incentives (31), learning curve (34) and fringe benefits (44) were not seen as productivity improvement techniques

Workers

Question 8

To what extent do you agree with each of the following state statements? Please indicate your answer using the following 3-point scale where:

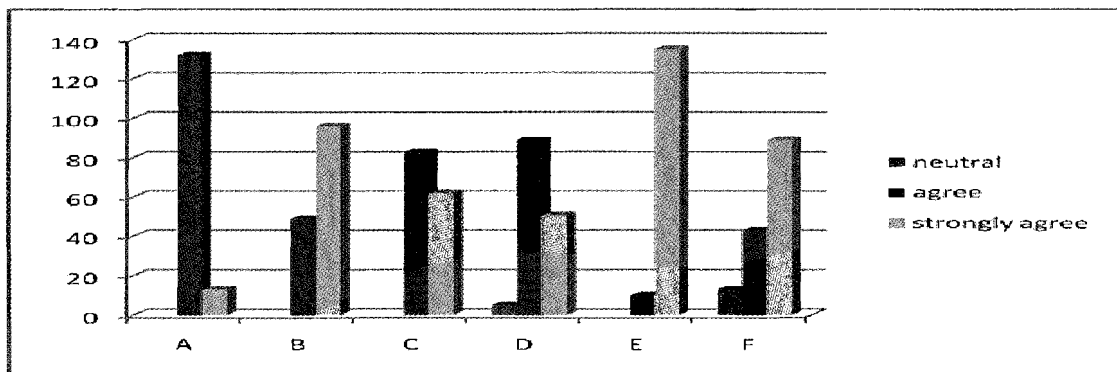


Figure 4

Majority of the workers strongly agreed that being empowered (135), completing the project (96), and being self-motivated (89) are the most important motivators; on the other hand meeting project schedule (13) was not a big motivator the workers.

Question 9.1 – 9.10

How important is each of the following worker needs in terms of motivation?

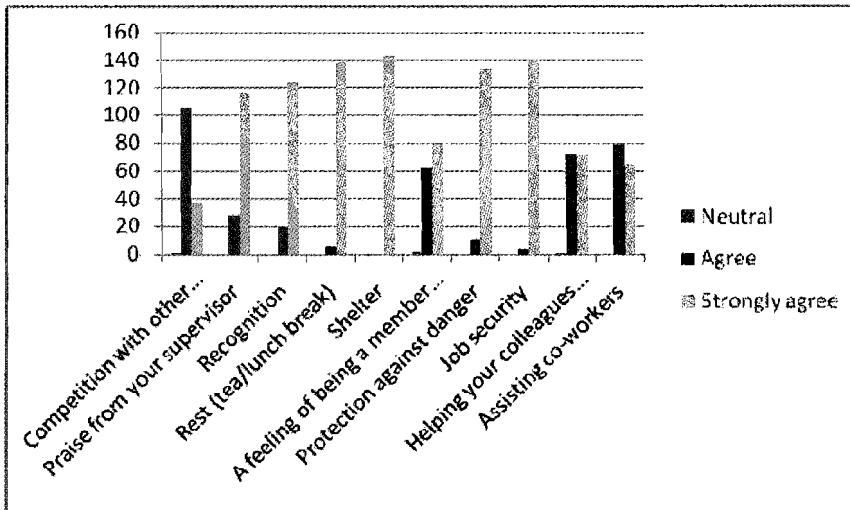


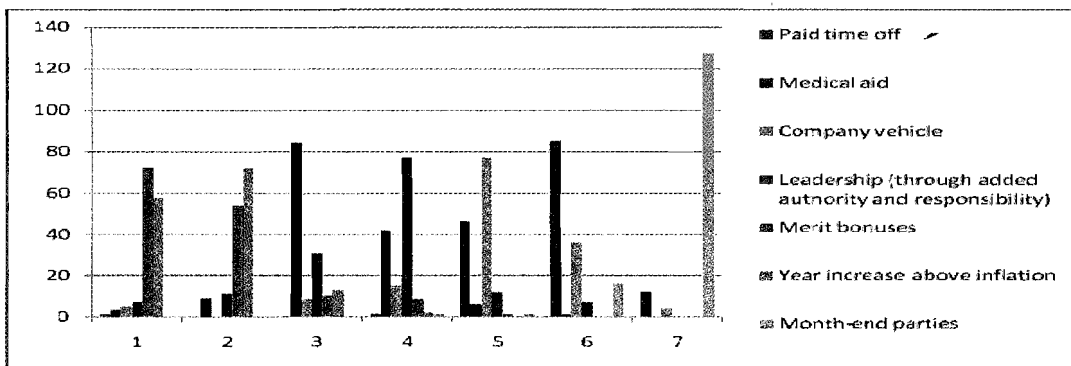
Figure 5

Shelter (143), job security (140), rest (Tea/lunch breaks) (138), protection against danger (133), recognition (124), praise (116) were more favoured by the workers. And the remaining motivators: competition with other team members (37) had the least value of 37.

Question 10.1 – 10.7

Please mark in order of importance each of the following incentives

Chart 6



When asked to rank the motivators in the order of importance, the surveyed workers ranked “merit bonuses” 1st with a total of 72, “year increase above inflation” ranked 2nd with a total of 72, “medical aid” was ranked 3rd, “leadership” ranked 4th, “company vehicle” was in the 5th position, “paid time off” ranked 6th and majority of the workers were not concerned about “month-end parties”.

Discussions of Results

The findings of this study reveal that a relationship exists between motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment and productivity. No difference was observed in the perceived motivation of the managers and the workers. Moreover, findings also show that differences exist in the job satisfaction of the workers as seen by the managers and the way workers see it. The link that exists in this study

among perceived work motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment corresponds with that of Brown and Sherpard, (1997) who reported that motivation improves workers' performance and job satisfaction. The result also agrees with Chess (1994) who reported that certain motivational factors contribute to the prediction of job satisfaction. The case study revealed that none of the participants denied that motivational is essential in improving productivity According to the results; respondents agree that motivators and job satisfiers are essential to keep the workers happy and productive. Employee motivation is an important part of managing employees. This is because motivation can be directly linked to job performance. There are several different motivation techniques that can be applied, many of which are universal and others which are dependent upon the situation, employee, department, or overall company.

The findings of the study demonstrated that managers feel that employees are best motivated when they are part of the team on social basis, when they are empowered, when they use their own authority, they are primarily motivated, and when they complete the project. And they did not think that employees were best motivated when "they meet project schedule". The findings further reveal that according to the managers the workforce is best motivated by safety needs (job security and protection from danger) which appear on the second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs which are hygiene factors on Herzberg's dual theory. Helping co-workers praise, and recognition which is appeared to be other motivators for the workers. Surprisingly, Physiological needs were not very influential according to the managers, for instance, tea break and shelter were listed last on the ranking by the mangers. On the techniques that could be used for productivity improvements communication was ranked as very important, which was followed by quality control circles, management by objectives , job enlargement, skill enhancement, worker participation, training, working conditions improvement and job rotation. Surprisingly again fringe benefits and financial incentives were least favoured by the managers as motivators. This reinforces the idea that job content factors are more powerful than job context factors.

The results from the workers are not different from those of the managers. However, being empowered was ranked highest by the workers. On the different motivational techniques the physiological and safety needs (shelter, job security, tea/lunch break and protection against danger) were ranked highest. Surprisingly social needs (a feeling of being a member of the team, helping colleagues achieve their lifelong goals in relation to work, assisting co-workers) were least favoured by the workers. Esteem needs were also ranked high by the workers. Chart 6 indicates the ranking of 7 factors under the group related to incentives. These factors were placed in descending order according to their importance: merit bonuses" and year increase above inflation which were followed by medical aid, then leadership. Majority of workers did not see the importance of month-end parties, paid time off and company vehicle. Results demonstrate that merit bonuses and "year increase above inflation" has a high effect on labour productivity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has shown that motivation plays an important role in the South African construction industry. 36 motivational techniques were discussed and examined and the most effective among them seemed to that workers ranked empowered as the first and most important motivator. Once an employee is empowered he grows and his responsibility is enlarged and can decide and solve problems on his own on how to perform his tasks to suit him and the conditions in which he is working. In addressing the challenges faced by the South African construction the author recommends that the different stakeholders take responsibility and participate more fully in development of the construction:

- **Government:** Because of the devastating effects that apartheid has had on the human resource potential of black people and its contribution to the poor economic performance and delivery of social services, the Skills Development Act and the related Skills Development Levies Act should be put more into practice and enforced. If these acts are to be compulsory, there will

be a fundamental improvement regarding the relationship between education, training and the workplace. Measures must be taken in forcing the companies to provide training and skill development of their employees and in increase of levies should be provided for this purpose.

- Construction companies: through their organization structure should motivate their employees for best result, good quality, loyalty, trust and lasting relationship. In investing in their employees, the companies will grow and attract more clients and improve their profitability. It is therefore necessary to use the different motivational techniques so as to achieve better performance.
- Managers/supervisors: communication and feedback are the best part of building trust between the employer and the employee and mostly fair wages address the needs of the employees. Maybe it would be appropriate to develop some sort of formal/informal education and training modules or workshops for management as to how they can get the best out their employees.

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