WORKFORCE MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

LUKAS VAN NIEKERK and CHRISTOPHER AMOAH
Dept of Quantity Surveying and Construction Management, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Workers in every industry are motivated in various ways to enhance their performance. This study sought to determine what the South African construction industry workforce perceives as motivational factors. A quantitative research approach was adopted, where questionnaires were randomly distributed to 85 different construction companies. A total of 43 completed questionnaires were received. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The data analysis proved that the topmost factors that the workforce regards as the most effective motivational factors are the nature of the work, job satisfaction, achievement of potential, job security, self-growth and development, responsibility assignment, and recognition. This means the expected factors, such as monetary motivations, might be less significant. The general view of monetary incentives as the prevalent motivation factor may not be effective. Thus, employers must examine individual needs before implementing the motivational strategy to effectively impact productivity in the construction industry. This study identifies and evaluates the motivational factors of the South African construction workforce, thus serving as a guideline for employers to motivate their workforce to increase productivity.

Keywords: Construction, Employee, Employer, Workers.

1 INTRODUCTION

The workforce environment is changing because a new generation of employees is coming into the picture. The current generation of employees vastly differs from the previous generation, especially in South Africa (Heyns and Kerr 2018). This is due to the difference in the priorities and values of the current employees. These differences led to the present generation’s more profound understanding of what motivates them to perform in the work environment (Heyns and Kerr 2018). Some previous generations were disadvantaged, leading their children to appreciate what is theirs and what happens if they work hard for it. Therefore, managers must solve the problem by creating a more motivational environment for their employees because individual preferences are divergent.

With South Africa’s construction industry being so culturally diverse, it is also important to remember that not all cultures will be motivated similarly (Barg et al. 2014). The construction industry in South Africa plays a huge role in the country's socioeconomic development. For instance, the construction industry contributed 3% to South African gross domestic product (GDP) and employed approximately 1.3 million people in 2020 (Zingoni 2020). Wells (2007) suggests that the construction industry in developing countries started to adopt informal workforce practices in the construction industry some years back. However, the informality of the workforce in these countries significantly impacted construction productivity and quality of work. Adebowale (2014) stated that the workforce’s contribution to the construction industry is directly proportional to
resource use on site. This also affects the efficiency of the workforce on site. The workforce
ccontributions to the industry, especially in developing countries like ours, need to be increased,
affecting the completion of construction projects in the country. Therefore, if the workforce were
to make more significant contributions to the construction industry, their handling and use of
resources on site need to be evaluated (Adebowale 2014). Workers in every sector are motivated
in various ways to enhance their performance. This study aimed to ascertain the motivational
factors for the South African construction industry workforce.

2 MOTIVATION FACTORS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

According to Smithers and Walker (2000), construction researchers have had problems when it
comes to identifying the motivational factors of the workforce. It has been found that the
construction site's environment is a massive influencer on the workforce's motivations. Factors such
as chaos, colleagues' aggressive management style, no recognition for work done, and long work
hours affect worker's motivation (Smithers and Walker 2000). According to Lam and Tang (2003),
it is essential to remember that a construction laborer's short-term needs must be addressed first;
this ensures that the employee will later consider his long-term needs and motivation. In the
construction industry, there are many factors for employers to consider. One of the factors that the
workforce considers to be motivational is the remuneration for work completed and job security.
Due to the construction industry's cyclical nature, the workforce does not know when or where to
get their next job, which can be a substantial demotivating factor. Another factor to consider is the
feeling of belonging that the workforce should have. If the employer fails to make the workforce
feel essential, it can negatively impact performance (Lam and Tang 2003).

One of the long-term factors that need to be noted is learning programs. If the workforce gets
an opportunity to better their skills through training programs, they will be more motivated to
complete their work diligently. Another long-term factor is communication. If the workforce cannot
communicate with their superiors, it will cause problems in the building project's future. A
rewarding system based on excellent and diligent work can also be a long-term motivational factor.
The workforce will feel more motivated to do their best for their assigned construction projects
(Lam and Tang 2003). Hazeltine's (1976) study found that usual motivational factors cannot be
used in the construction industry. According to Hazeltine (1976), to properly motivate the
construction workforce, employers must focus on the worker's attitudes, build respect and ensure
that the work environment provides a sense of self-fulfilment. However, the above statement
contradicts a study done by Aina (2014). These motivational techniques are categorized as
financial, semi-financial, and non-financial motivations. It was also found that the workers'
productivity increased by applying these theories in the construction industry (Aina 2014). Yankov
and Kleiner (2001) also looked at what influence human resource management has on the
workforce's motivation. They conclude that if human resource management is done correctly, it
can reduce skilled workers on the construction site. With this, it becomes evident that a high level
of consistency can be obtained, and a link can also be created between the industry's and the
individual's needs (Yankov and Kleiner 2001).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach adopted is quantitative. The quantitative approach allows the researcher
to gather data from a large sample group quickly. Thus, closed-ended questions were utilized in
collecting the data. The target population that the researcher has chosen for this study is the workers
in construction firms in South Africa. The researcher selected a convenient sampling method.
Landers and Behrend (2015) stated that convenient sampling is the most common form because it
uses the closest population and is willing to participate in the study. Thus, all construction workers readily available to answer the questionnaire were included, irrespective of their location in South Africa. Creswell (2014) stated that a survey is a primary data collection method that allows for collecting data from a more significant sample population within a shorter time. Thus, questionnaires were sent out to workers in construction firms via email and personal distribution. The workers filled in the questionnaire and emailed it back to the researcher. In all, 85 questionnaires were sent to workers in various construction companies, of which 43 were received back, representing a response rate of 51%. Saunders et al. (2007) suggest that a structured quantitative method of research using a questionnaire made up of closed-ended questions with a sample size of 30 is acceptable. Thus, a study by Amoah (2018) adopting closed-ended questionnaires used 23 respondents for the analysis. The researcher analyzed the collected data manually by entering it into an Excel spreadsheet. The percentages and the mean scores for each variable were calculated and arranged in order of importance. The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1. From Table 1, 79% of the respondents are male, indicating male domination in the construction industry. Again most (79%) respondents are between the ages of 21 to 50, suggesting that they are within their prime working age; thus, their views on what will motivate them to perform in the workplace are very significant. Also, 58% have tertiary education, whilst the majority (67%) have over 6 years of working experience. The respondents are of different professional backgrounds, thus enhancing the divergent views regarding the factors motivating them to work beyond routine tasks.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction manager</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity Surveyor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store facilitator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 FINDINGS


### 4.1 Important Motivational Factors

As indicated in Table 2, respondents were asked to rate motivational factors ranging from unimportant to very important. The mean for the responses was then calculated and arranged in order of importance. According to the analysis, the most important motivational factor for the respondents is the nature of the work, with a mean score of 3.40, followed by job satisfaction and achievement of potential (mean score = 3.37). This means that workers attach great importance to their assigned tasks and expertise. Thus, workers may be motivated and satisfied to execute work they are accustomed to rather than the one they are unfamiliar with, improving their experience and potential. Third-ranked motivational factors are personal growth and development, responsibility assignment, and recognition, with a mean score of 3.35. These findings also indicate that workers consider how they will grow and develop themselves after the task execution; they feel motivated. Workers also want to be assigned tasks, made responsible for executing such tasks, and noticed for well-executed work. This will motivate them to do more in future. Fourth-ranked motivational factor is job security (mean score = 3.33). Job security means workers want to be assured of their work and may not lose the work soon. Job assurance will let them concentrate on task execution.

Workers also want to be respected by taking their views and including them in the decision-making process, which is fifth and sixth, with mean scores of 3.30 and 3.28, respectively. This also means that when workers are respected and included in the decision-making process, they are motivated to do their best in the job environment. The seven-ranked motivational factors are good working policies, good working conditions, and safety from danger, with a mean score of 3.26. Again, the safety level of the work and the environment where workers execute their tasks is significant. Good working policies and conditions that benefit workers also play a significant role in workers’ motivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of the work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement of potential</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth and development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility assignment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect from others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in the decision-making process</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety from danger</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good working policies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good working conditions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration process</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical aid scheme</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of shelter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward for extra work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work supervision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of food</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of pay</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other incentives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The administration process follows these (mean score = 3.19), good relationship (mean score = 3.16) and medical aid scheme (mean score = 3.14). This also shows that the worker's management approach and how workers are made to interrelate in the job environment serve as critical motivation factors.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings indicate that several critical factors will motivate workers in the South African construction industry (see Table 2). These findings align with Lam and Tang (2003), who mentioned that job security is the most crucial factor that one needs to consider in the construction industry. However, the remuneration one receives as a critical motivational factor mentioned by Lam and Tang (2003) contradicts the finding of this study, as pay adequacy was ranked 14th. According to Yankov and Kleiner (2001), human resource management is the most important motivational factor in the construction industry, contradicting this study's findings. Smithers and Walker (2000) identified the workforce’s motivational factors as the construction site's environment and recognition for work. Job security has also been recognized by Lam and Tang (2003) as one of the critical work motivations for employees. Due to the construction industry's cyclical nature, the workforce often wonders when or where they might get their next job, thus demotivating them to concentrate. Again, suitable working environments where workers feel a sense of belonging can positively impact the worker's performance. Aina (2014) also suggests that employers applying financial, semi-financial, and non-financial motivations in the construction industry will increase workers' productivity. He mentioned non-financial worker motivation as a conducive working environment, worker involvement in decision-making, and respect for workers' rights. Again, funds can also be implemented for the workforce members who need help to afford them. Doing this will motivate the workforce to work diligently and provide job security. Specific communication channels can be set in place when communicating with workers. In turn, these channels need to convey that the supervisors and superiors are willing to talk to the workforce regarding any problems or concerns to ensure effective relationships between workers and managers. This will encourage open communication, which in turn can motivate the workforce. Lam and Tang (2003) state that a reward system can be motivational by establishing incentive plans, behavior modification strategies, and recognition programs. This will motivate the workforce because they now have goals to work towards and will be rewarded for using their skills to their best abilities.

Implications of the findings: The study's findings imply that using monetary incentives to motivate workers may not necessarily be an effective mechanism. Like many other African countries, South Africa has a high youth unemployment rate, and many of these youth seek jobs troupe to the cities for greener pastures. This situation has compounded city unemployment levels; thus, people are prepared to work without demanding wages and salaries commensurate to their position in the organization or the work nature. Again, the South African construction sector is dominated by small contractors, popularly known as emerging contractors. These emerging contractors need more financial muscle to pay the workers adequately in their project execution. This might have contributed to a situation where workers in the South African construction industry look for other incentives and working conditions aside from monetary rewards to motivate them to execute tasks assigned and even go further to ensure the efficient and effective achievement of project objectives. For employers to effectively motivate workers in the construction industry, aside from monetary incentives, employers should consider issues such as helping employees achieve their potential in the work environment and encouraging personal growth and development.
6. CONCLUSIONS
Workers’ motivation is a contentious issue that organizations and employers are battling to improve work performance and increase productivity in the construction industry. Worker motivational factors may differ from person to person; thus, effective measures should be implemented to ensure employers’ strategies meet workers’ expectations. The study sought to identify the factors that construction workers believe, if implemented, will motivate them to improve their performance and increase productivity in the construction industry. The findings indicate that the nature of the work, job satisfaction, achievement of potential, job security, personal growth and development, responsibility assignment, recognition, respect from others, and involvement in the decision-making process are the main factors that will motivate them to perform beyond their capacity. The findings also indicate that money or remuneration given to workers as the main motivational factor may be ineffective. It is, therefore, recommended that employers should re-evaluate their current motivational strategies and make amendments where needed. This can be done by applying self-induced motivational factors such as assigning suitable work to the individuals based on their capabilities, ensuring workers are satisfied with their jobs, making room for workers to achieve their potential, ensuring job security to workers, allowing personal growth and development among workers through training, making workers responsible assignment and recognizing workers performance where necessary. With more emphasis on these factors aside from monetary incentives, employers may see improved performance among workers and increased productivity in the construction industry. Further research may widen the sample size to see if the findings correspond with this study’s findings.

References