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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF SUPERVISORY REWARD TECHNIQUES ON CONSTRUCTION WORKERS PRODUCTIVITY IN BELLVILLE, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to assess to which extend current trends in supervisory motivational strategies can improve worker productivity through the use of reward techniques on construction sites. A qualitative approach was adopted by conducting a semi-structured interview to construction workers including bricklayers, plumbers, concrete workers, electricians and earthworks workers. The interviews were done in Bellville in the Western Cape at two conveniently selected construction sites. The data was analysed using content data analysis. Most prevalent in the findings of this study is the fact that the workers complained that a lack of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards negatively impacts their productivity. The intrinsic rewards techniques investigated was responsibilities and training. The extrinsic rward techniques investigated was salaries and bonusses. This research was conducted within the borders of the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Data obtained from only two construction sites, the exploration of other sites would have brought more insight into the subject matter. Data was only obtained from the construction workers, excluding their supervisors. This research has significance for contractors, supervisors and workers in terms of improving productivity. An increase in productivity of motivated workers results in an increase in contractors' revenue. Construction supervisors will reflect on their shortcomings in worker supervision, and gain more insight of the supervisory techniques and skills that will boost the productivity of their workers. Workers feel more relaxed in a conducive supervisory working environment; as a result, the increased productivity leads to financial rewards, and or promotion within their organisation.

Keywords: Motivation, Productivity, Rewards, Supervision, Trends

1 Introduction

Supervisors take up crucial positions in construction projects, because they are the channel through which management and the workforce do communicate (Unakweh, 2005). Thus, supervisors are regarded to be able to understand human behaviour and administer management principles (Catt & Miller, 1991). According to Dubrin (2005), supervisors plan, establish and regulate the project. The supervisor will also assign and utilise resources within the construction company in the quest of the targets set by the owners. However, supervisors get tasks completed through other people where a supervisor's elementary responsibility would be

to initiate decisions, designate resources, and more importantly direct the tasks of workers to reach company targets (Robbins, Odendaal and Roodt, 2006).

Mansfield and Odeh (1991) state that even with the advent of more sophisticated technology, the construction industry continues to be pre-dominantly labour intensive and this suggests that a proper emphasis should be given to such matters as communications, participation and motivation. Motivation has been defined as the cognitive decision making process through which goal directed behaviour is initiated, energised, directed and maintained (Buchanan & Huczinsky, 2000:40).

Olomolaiye and Ogunlana (1988) indicate that the construction environment in developing countries is different in terms of site organisation, quality of supervision, availability of production resource, and also is their socio-economic environment which produces a different worker; probably motivated by different factors. Also, it is a common appearance that workers in the construction industry have long been considered expenses, while stock, work in-progress, materials and structures are regarded on the balance sheets as assets (Dell, 1997:23). However, these days the adept employers are now becoming aware of the fact that construction workers are the assets of the company. Additional concerns are now contemplated as being less essential to the success of the company (Dell, 1997).

In 2004 it took the lowest paid worker within the construction sector 167 years to earn the average annual income of a CEO (LRS: online). At 2013 levels this has increased to 287 years, an increase of 71% when we compare the wage gap 2004 to that of 2013 (LRS: online) There is thus a trend in the widening of incomes and increasing inequality within the construction sector. This trend in the wage share within the construction sector, coupled with low level of real wage increases with profitability far outstripping wages and the huge increases in the wage gap all contributed to overall inequality in South Africa (LRS: online).

The general trend also has been for construction companies to down size their workforces to fewer core site employees. Subcontracting arrangements became increasingly popular with up to 70% of building and 30% of civil engineering projects subcontracted out (LRS: online). The majority of employers in the industry also rely on sourcing skilled people. The estimated composition of an onsite construction workforce is normally 50% unskilled, 26% semi-skilled, 19% skilled and 5% supervisory. This trend indicates that there is no real interest in the skilling of the vast majority of unskilled and semi-skilled workers who make up 76% of the general construction production process (LRS: online).

Therefore in order to better the construction workers productivity, worker motivational concerns must be determined and investigated (Doloi, 2007). Knowledge of these concerns and the befitting measures aids the construction industry in creating an efficient motivational environment to improve worker performance, job satisfaction, and to attain high construction productivity (Doloi, 2007). The most basic distinction of rewards is between intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards (Ryan and Deci, 1999). The objective of this study is to determine to which extent reward techniques influences productivity on a construction site.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Employee Rewards

Rewards spread far outside money into the array of non-monetary benefits. Fringe benefits would not be if money were all that is significant to workers. The reality of the business world is that money, fringe benefits, culture and leadership all make a motivational change because workers relate to them (Cox, Issa and Frey, 2006). For most workers a fringe benefit and a good old fashioned pat on the back can take the place of a few more rands, which helps explain why effective organisations offer worker benefits as well as encouragement. Different

incentives matter in different ways and in different amounts to different workers. It is management's job to identify and clearly comprehend what matters to their workers and what motivates them; then integrate that information into an incentives program that is effective and equally beneficial (Cox *et al*, 2006).

Therefore in order to keep construction workers motivated their expectancies must be addressed as project goals are reached. Satisfying workers expectancies can be viewed as distributing rewards when certain objectives are achieved. Employees have expectancies that they want to meet and employers have goals that they want to reach and they can work together as a team to satisfy the wants of both the employees and their employers. Workers who are motivated to help reach the goal of the employer and do so should be recognised with a reward. When considering what type of rewards to use there are two types to be aware of, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Cox *et al*, 2006).

2.1.1 Intrinsic Rewards

There are primarily two types of rewards. These are extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards are positively valued labour outcomes that the individual obtains directly as a result of job performance; they do not entail the contribution of another individual or source (Pettinger, 2006:201). A sense of accomplishment after completing a particularly interesting task is an illustration of an intrinsic reward (Roa, 2009).

Therefore intrinsic motivation is that behaviour which an individual produces because of the enjoyable experiences related with the behaviour itself. Workers who are intrinsically motivated feel satisfaction in executing their work. This satisfaction may originate from any of several factors, including relishing the actual work done, the sensation of achievement, responsibility, meeting the challenges, etc. (Mosley, Mosley Jr. and Pietri, 2008). Supervising intrinsic work rewards offers the added challenge of planning a task so that workers can, in effect, reward themselves for a task well done (Pettinger, 2006). Providing constant training of construction workers aids in intrinsic rewards. Feelings of competence during task completion can enhance intrinsic motivation for that action allows satisfaction of the basic psychological need for competence (Ryan and Deci, 1999).

2.1.2 Extrinsic rewards

By comparison, extrinsic motivation is implemented not for its own sake, but rather for the consequences associated with it. Workers are motivated to perform at a high level only if they think that high performance will lead to outcomes such as salaries, job security, bonuses, or good working conditions (Mosley *et al*, 2008; Maurer, Weiss and Barbeite, 2003).

Supervisors can also offer a selection of extrinsic rewards, such as honest praise for a task well done, or figurative symbols of achievement such as worker of the month rewards, consist of low cost to the company (Schemerhorn, Hunt, Osborn and Uhl-Bien, 2005).

Salary is a particularly complicated extrinsic reward. It can help companies entice and hold on to vastly skilled workers, and it can satisfy and motivate these workers to work hard to attain high performance. But if there is unhappiness with the salary, salaries can also lead to strikes, grievances, absenteeism, turnover, and sometimes even poor physical and mental health (Schemerhorn *et al*, 2005). Table 1 reflects the differences in approach in reward strategies by Southern Africa countries against their global peers.

Table 1. Global and Southern-African trends in rewarding employees

Global approach	Southern-African approach
Companies follow a highly individualise towards managing compensation	A large proportion of South-African companies still struggle to find the correct link between individual performance and rewards.
Companies offer a wide variety of remuneration options customised to individual needs	Most companies grapple with finding the right balance between equitable rewards that acknowledge individual performance and achievement.
Companies extensively use IT in managing and administrating performance and rewards.	A large group of companies are still following a ‘’one size fits all approach in managing rewards.
Most companies are able to measure performance accurately and effectively link it to rewards.	In recent years, large companies have increasingly implemented flexible benefit plans.
World class companies measure high on performance and commitment.	

(Source: Adapted from Robbins *et al.*, 2006)

According to Nicolaou, (1987) organizations can no longer depend merely on extrinsic rewards to motivate and reward their employees, as these employees are less eager to accept work that gives them little freedom, and they are not easily motivated by work that does not utilise their skills, abilities and education. Rosenbaum (1982) indicates that there are five action principles designed to help supervisors become effective people motivators, namely: a style of interacting with employees in ways that will maintain and enhance their self-esteem, active listening that shows understanding of and respect for employees.

3 Research methodology

An exploratory study was undertaken to determine the degree of motivational strategies used by supervisors on construction sites. The motivational strategy explored in this study was communication.

Two construction sites in Bellville, Cape Town were conveniently selected for the purpose of this study. The study was qualitative in nature and semi structured questionnaires were used to conduct the interviews. Biggam (2008) indicates that qualitative research is linked with exploratory studies. Two open ended questions were posed to the workers. The first questions asked the workers how management motivate them by using rewarding techniques such as salaries, bonuses, responsibility and training to motivate them. The follow up question was how the techniques used by the supervisor influences the workers’ productivity.

Five respondents from each construction site were interviewed. The respondents were selected by using purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method employed was maximum variation sampling or heterogeneous sampling, where the workers were purposively selected from various trades. The trades in which these respondents specialise in are earthworks, concrete, plumbing, bricklaying and electrical work. The data was analysed by using content data analysis.

4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Demographics of respondents

A Total of 10 respondents took part in the study. The respondents were all male. The participants in the study as shown in Table 2 were mainly experienced workers. About 80% were in the construction industry for more than 5 years.

Table 2. Working experience

Years of experience	No	%
1-5	**2**	**20**
6-10	**5**	**50**
11-15	**3**	**30**
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 3 shows the status of the workers employers. 80% of the workers are employed by sub-contractors and 20% by the main-contractor.

Table 3. Employer status

	No	%
Main contractor	**2**	**20**
Sub-contractor	**8**	**80**
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 4 shows the skill level of the construction workers. 70% of the workers were unskilled, 20% semi-skilled and 10% skilled.

Table 4. Worker level

	No	%
Unskilled	**7**	**70**
Semi-skilled	**2**	**20**
Skilled	**1**	**10**
Total	**10**	**100**

Table 5 shows the trades of the respondents were involved in. The trades include bricklaying (20%), concrete (20%), plumbing (20%), electrical (20%) and earthwork workers (20%).

Table 5. Trades of workers

Trades of workers	No	%
Bricklayers	**2**	**20**
Concrete workers	**2**	**20**
Electricians	**2**	**20**
Plumbers	**2**	**20**
Earth workers	**2**	**20**
Total	**10**	**100**

4.2 Reward techniques used

The first question required the respondents to indicate whether the reward techniques used on site, in terms of salaries, bonuses, responsibilities and meaningful work motivated them towards higher performance. The different reward techniques are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequency of use of reward variables (techniques)

No.	Variables	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1	Salaries	10	100	0	0.0
2	Bonuses	2	20.0	8	80.0
3	Responsibility	1	10.0	9	90.0
4	Training	1	10.0	9	90.0

4.2.1 Salaries

In the study, all respondents (100%) stated that they receive their monthly salary. Salaries are an extrinsic reward. However, workers complained that monthly basic salary alone fails to motivate them to higher production levels. Actually the workers felt that salary increases are long overdue. Therefore (Schemerhorn *et al*, 2005) state that unhappiness with salaries can lead to strikes, grievances, absenteeism, turnover, and sometimes even poor physical and mental health.

4.2.2 Bonuses

In the study only 20% of the workers receive annual bonuses. Bonuses are an extrinsic reward. Furthermore 80% of the workers stated that they do not receive bonuses or any other form of reward from their employers. Workers actually indicated that they are reluctant to perform at higher levels, because they will not be rewarded for it. Mosley *et al*, (2008) and Maurer, *et al.* (2003) state that workers are motivated to perform at a high levels only if they think that high performance will lead to outcomes such as pay and bonuses.

4.2.3 Responsibility

In the study 90% of the respondents state that the supervisor, do not entrust them with the majority of the given tasks. Responsibility serves as an intrinsic reward (Ryan and Deci, 1999). The workers feel less empowered because the supervisor crowds them with his presence and will not let the workers take responsibility for some tasks. However, supervisors can boost expectancies through expressing confidence in their workers capabilities (Luthans, 2005).

4.2.4 Training

The study further indicates that 90% of the respondents complained that they do not receive any form of training to ensure that they can produce at higher levels. Training serves as an intrinsic reward (Ryan and Deci, 1999). The workers would like to excel in their various trades but are not given the necessary training in order for them to equip themselves. Jones (2009) states that supervisors can also boost workers expectancy levels and motivation by providing training so that people have all the expertise needed to perform.

4.3 Resulting productivity of construction workers

The follow up question asked whether these reward techniques used by supervisors improved the workers' productivity on site. The findings revealed that 80% of the respondents'

productivity was adversely affected by the rewarding techniques or lack thereof used by management. Workers indicated that management show little interest towards their empowerment. Workers feel that they need to be rewarded more in order for them to produce at higher levels.

5 Conclusion and Further Research

Supervisors are the link between management and the workforce. Therefore in order to gain sustainable productivity it is vital that the supervisor, through management, reward the workers to ultimately reach the organisation's ideals and goals.

The findings revealed that 80% of the respondents were working for subcontractors. The trend in this regard is towards outsourcing of the general workforce. In regards to extrinsic rewards the findings revealed the unhappiness of the workers towards their salaries, as they complained that their salaries were too low. The workers also complained about the absence of bonuses. In regards to intrinsic rewards, workers complained that supervisors do not give them enough responsibility. The workers also complained about the lack of training available to them.

The findings indicated that workers need both extrinsic and extrinsic rewards to better their productivity. The literature and empirical findings confirm the relevancy of Victor Vrooms expectancy theory. The theory indicates that motivation is at its peak when great levels of effort leads to performance and that performance gets rewarded with desirable goals (Mosley *et al*, 2008; Maurer, Weiss and Barbeite, 2003). Workers indicated the possibility of an enhanced performance at higher levels if there is an appropriate on job-training or feel that there may be no significant increase in reward for higher performance.

Further studies are recommended to determine how reward techniques can be properly designed to improve the productivity of construction workers.

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