

Job satisfaction in the South African construction industry: Towards sustaining productivity

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Abstract:

Workers' satisfaction has been discovered to be fundamental to continuous productivity in the construction industry. This might not be unconnected with the fact that construction in developing nations tends to be mostly physically intensive. Therefore, the need to find measures that ensure job satisfaction among workers in the South African construction industry to sustain productivity. In order to achieve this, this study appraised the measures to ensure job satisfaction among workers in the South African Construction industry. A survey design was adopted. A total number of one hundred and twenty-five (125) questionnaires were administered to construction professionals and workers in Guateng Province and eighty-six (86) were returned and found suitable for analysis. Collected data was analysed using percentage, mean item score, standard deviation and Kruskal-Wallis. The findings show that reward, approved leave and rest days, employee empowerment, and training for career development are most of the significant measures that should be in place for job satisfaction among workers. As a result, this study made meaningful recommendations such as construction firms putting in place a structure that will lead to the career development of workers for maximum productivity.

Keywords:

Construction, job satisfaction, South Africa, productivity, workers

1 Introduction

Construction in developing nations tends to be mostly physically intensive as they tend to use hand equipment and tools. It has been discovered that between 30% and 50% of the cost of construction projects are related to labour (Robles *et al.*, 2014). Despite this significant percentage being consumed by labour, the construction industry is still plague by poor labour productivity. Chan (2002) identified construction projects with high and low labour productivity. It was discovered from the study that among the differences in projects characteristics was the job satisfaction of workers. Therefore, a low job satisfaction among workers could have a significant negative effect on the construction industry. There have been several concerns as regards job satisfaction in the industry for some time. As a result, Yirenkyi-Fianko and Chileshe (2012) considered the issue of a decent working environment for workers within the industry as a way of motivating the workers. However, Cotton *et al.*, (2005) posited that issues such as safety

is still a major challenge in the industry as the industry in comparison with other industries is among the least in terms of safety. This and other factors affect the job satisfaction and productivity of workers in the industry which in turn affects the productivity of the industry. It is paramount to understand that job satisfaction is fundamental to a sustainable and productive industry.

To improve and sustain labour productivity, Olabosipo (2004) opined that in the Nigerian construction industry, establishments are as of now applying different non-monetary incentive plans planned for giving satisfaction to representatives to improve workers' efficiency. This he noted, has essentially improved bricklayers' productive time and represented 6 % to 26 % expansion in gain in block laying and cementing exercises. This corroborates Greenberg (2011), that workers job satisfaction is crucial to the success of any organisation, because the workers are motivated to achieve the organisation's goals. In fact, different studies have revealed that issues like unionism, absenteeism and staff resignation in establishments are as a result of lack of job satisfaction among workers. For this reason, Oduro-Owusu (2010) posited that establishments need to device mechanisms to assist workers find satisfaction in their tasks, as this will improve not only the work efficiency, but client satisfaction, profitability of the establishment and the overall productivity of the industry.

There have been various studies conducted regarding job satisfaction in various industries, however few has been conducted revolving around the South African construction industry. Chileshe and Haupt (2007) confirmed that there are job satisfaction related issues within the South African construction industry. Having established that workers satisfaction is fundamental to continuous productivity of the construction industry, it is therefore important to determine measures that ensures job satisfaction in the South African construction industry, which is the focus of this study. However, it is important to note that this study was restricted to construction professionals and workers within the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

2 Brief Literature Review

According to the cidb (2012), the South African construction industry contributes significantly to the economic growth of the country. This it does not only by producing critical infrastructures, but also by providing jobs for the professionals, the skilled and the unskilled labourers. However, Windapo & Cattell (2013) identified some challenges still bedevilling the industry. Amongst these challenges identified is the shortage and mismatch of skills. There has been a huge cry over the shortage of skills in the South African construction industry. Cidb (2004) & Mbande (2010) highlighted this and opined that the resulting skill gap is a hindrance to the growth and development of the industry. It is believed in some quarters that the lack of job satisfaction of the workers in the industry is partly responsible for the shortage of skills witnessed in the sector. Haupt & Harinarain (2016) opined that young people in particular believe that other industries offer more job satisfaction than the construction sector. Hence, they would always prefer to choose a career in those sectors as long as their qualifications matches what is required.

Mullins (2005) posited that job satisfaction is more a varied idea that means different things to several individuals. It is a greater amount of a demeanour, an inward state. For instance, it could be related with a personal sense of accomplishment. It is how much individuals like their employments. It can also be a general mentality towards the activity, the contrast between the measure of remunerations representatives gets and the sum they accept they ought to get. The study of Hinzema & Smallwood (2004) showed that there is a relationship between job satisfaction and declining labour productivity within the South African construction industry. Job satisfaction according to Love and Edwards (2005) impacts on the health and well-being of workers. Thus, it is important to appraise the measures that ensures job satisfaction in the South African construction industry. This is to improve and sustain labour productivity in the industry.

3 Measures for improving Job Satisfaction

Sageer (2012) identified reporting regular feedback as a measure for improving job satisfaction of workers in an establishment. He opined that rather than waiting for critical situations to occur before availing workers of feedbacks, employers must give employees regular constructive feedback regarding their performance, building loyalty and “keeping it real”. Another measure identified includes empowerment of the employees. Making sure that the employees know that you trust them to do the job to the best of their abilities. What is also important is stepping up new levels of responsibilities for employees. Allowing employees that are closest to the issue make their own decisions. Furthermore, Sageer (2012) stressed the need for team creation. This can be accomplished by hiring the right person for the right position which is clearly defined and communicated. The company should invest time in instilling liability and accountability and building a practice centred around working as a team to meet objectives. Then establishments must create a pathway for career development for workers. Establishments should allow employees to use their skills, abilities and creativity freely and develop programs to uplift all titles in the company. Shaito (2019) opined that career development helps to retain workers who are productive within an establishment as they are able to grow their skills while advancing the organisation.

Also, Omolawal & Bawalla (2017) identified reward as a significant tool for making workers satisfied with their jobs. Employees naturally remember their individual accomplishments. The organisation needs to come up with policies of compensation and benefits. These are the important aspects. Another measure includes investing in adequate equipment that will encourage employees to be successful. Giving them the best equipment in order for them to perform at the best of their abilities towards clients and customers. Sageer, (2012) further posited that giving training and education that increases the employees’ competence shows your interest in your employees’ success and their preparedness for new responsibilities. Other measures to ensure job satisfaction of workers from literature includes creating a work environment that is flexible, job enlargement like knowledge and task enlargement as well as job enrichment, building a culture that allows employees to be part of the organisation, satisfactory working hours, which if not addressed, employees become dissatisfied, and finally, availability of leave and rest days. These identified measures from literature are crucial in ensuring job satisfaction in establishments for the purpose of improving and sustaining the labour productivity.

4 Research Methodology

This study appraised the measures for ensuring job satisfaction in the South African construction industry for the purpose of improving and sustaining labour productivity. The research approach deployed was quantitative with the use of questionnaires as data collection instrument. This is due to the ability of research questionnaires to cover a large pool of respondents (Tan, 2011). The study area was Gauteng Province of South Africa. The target respondents for this research were professionals in South Africa, both in the private and/or public sector. They were identified as quantity surveyors, architects, construction managers, project managers, civil engineers, construction project managers and other relevant personnel involved in the construction of projects in Gauteng, South Africa. The information obtained from the review of relevant literature informed the design of the research instrument used which was a multi-scaled questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section elicited the demographic information of the respondents, while the second section enquired of the level of agreement of the measures for improving job satisfaction in South African construction industry. The questions were rated on a libertarian scale of 1(=strongly disagree) to 5(=strongly agree). A total of 125 questionnaires were distributed with 86 of the questionnaires returned and considered appropriate for analysis. In the analysis of the data gathered, percentage and frequency were used to analyse the demographic information whereas Mean Item Score (MIS) and standard deviation were used in the ranking of measures for improving job satisfaction. Finally, Kruskal-Wallis was used to compare the opinions of the respondents based on years of experience. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha reliability test that was carried out to examine the data sets' reliability gave 0.838 as its value, which indicate a high level of consistency.

5 Findings and Discussion

The background information of the respondents revealed that 50% of the respondents have between 1-5 years' experience, 37% of the respondents have between 6-10 years' experience and 13% of the respondents have between 11 – 15 years' experience. Furthermore, 34.8% of the respondents worked as consultants, 35.7% worked as contractors, 29.5% worked for government.

Table 1 below shows the measures of improving job satisfaction in a ranked order from the highest mean to the lowest mean. It can be observed that measures with the same mean were ranked based on their standard deviation (SD) from the mean. A sample mean standard deviation can be defined as the mean standard error (SE). Standard deviation shows the mean was of the observed data. A scenario in which most data are close to the mean is represented by a small standard deviation, while a large standard deviation shows that data point is widely apart from the mean (Field, 2005). Hence the measures with the same mean were ranked based on this. The mean of each measure is the average of the responses obtained from each respondent.

The results show rewards as the highest ranked measure (MIS=4.17, SD = 1.10). This was followed by availability of leave and rest days (MIS=3.98, SD=1.02); empower the employees (MIS=3.96, SD =1.03); training (MIS=3.96, SD=1.19); career development (MIS=3.93, SD=1.06); create a team (MIS= 3.85, SD=1.17); invest in equipment (MIS=3.74, SD =1.16); try new ideas (MIS=3.69, SD=1.13); work itself (MIS=3.69, SD

=1.09); reporting regular feedback (MIS=3.69, SD =1.28); satisfactory working hours (MIS=3.65, SD=1.25) and ranked last was creating corporate culture (MIS=3.63, SD =1.23).

Table 1: Measures for improving job satisfaction

Measures	Mean	SD	Rank
Reward	4.1739	1.10160	1
Availability of leave and rest days	3.9783	1.02174	2
Empower the employees	3.9565	1.03186	3
Training	3.9565	1.19176	4
Career development	3.9348	1.06254	5
Create a team	3.8478	1.17317	6
Invest in equipment	3.7391	1.16304	7
Work itself	3.6957	1.09280	8
Try new ideas	3.6957	1.13274	9
Reporting regular feedbacks	3.6957	1.28010	10
Satisfactory working hours	3.6522	1.25109	11
Creating corporate culture	3.6304	1.23574	12

The findings of this study show that reward is a critical measure for ensuring job satisfaction among workers in the South African construction industry. This corroborates Omolawal & Bawalla (2017) who described reward as a potent tool that increases employees' efficiency in the delivery of service. Oduro-Owusu (2010) had posited that the improvement of employees' efficiency improves client satisfaction, profitability of the establishment and the overall productivity of the industry. Furthermore, the study reveals that availability of leave and rest days, training and career development are other critical measures for job satisfaction in the industry. Sageer (2012) opined that, workers be allowed enough time to rest and holidays on festive occasions. Female workers be allowed a longer leave during pregnancy. He further posited that giving training and education that increases the employees' competence shows your interest in your employees' success and their preparedness for new responsibilities. Also, Shaito (2019) opined that career development helps to retain workers who are productive within an establishment as they are able to grow their skills while advancing the organisation. These measures are fundamental to the job satisfaction of workers in the South African construction industry which can improve and sustain the level of labour productivity required for a successful industry.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out to compare the opinions of the respondents based on their years of experience. It was discovered that there is no significant difference in mean values for measures of job satisfaction in the South African construction industry such as reward, empower the employees, training and career development while for other measures there is a statistically significant difference in the mean values of each category of respondent.

Table 2: Kruskal-Wallis test showing p-values for measures

Measures	P-Values
Reward	0.078
Availability of leave and rest days	0.031
Empower the employees	0.052
Training	0.064
Career development	0.827
Create a team	0.000
Invest in equipment	0.000
Work itself	0.004
Try new ideas	0.013
Reporting regular feedbacks	0.000
Satisfactory working hours	0.002
Creating corporate culture	0.000

6 Conclusion

This study appraised the measures for job satisfaction in the South African construction industry for the purpose of improving and sustaining labour productivity in the industry. Extant literatures were reviewed from which the measures were identified. The study findings revealed that reward for employees is the most significant measure for job satisfaction in the industry. Other critical measures include training and career development. These measures revealed by the study as significant and critical are so referred because there is a significant agreement on these measures between those at the entry level and those who have spent years in the industry. It is important to note that job satisfaction of employees do not only benefit the establishment in question in terms client satisfaction and profitability but the productivity of the entire South African construction industry. Hence, establishments within the industry both public and private must be encouraged to implement schemes that rewards diligence and contributes to the career growth of workers as this will ensure job satisfaction of workers, thereby improving and sustaining productivity. Furthermore, this study was restricted to construction professionals and workers within the Gauteng Province, South Africa. For this reason, there should be similar studies in other provinces in the country.

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