South African Construction Craftsmen's Perceptions of Effective Personnel Management Practices

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Abstract. The recent skill shortage within South Africa has raised the need for proper management of the available craftsmen in the construction industry, as a large portion of work executed within the industry is done by this set of workers. It is based on this knowledge that this study assessed South African construction craftsmen's perception on how effective personnel management can be achieved. A survey approach was adopted and a structured questionnaire was used in harnessing information from craftspeople within the construction industry in Johannesburg metropolitan area. Data analyses were done using percentage, mean item score and standard deviation. The reliability of the questionnaire was also tested using Cronbach alpha test. The study revealed that provision of competitive pay, effective leadership, recruiting the multi-skilled workers, the reward for dedicated workers, and paying attention to employee's needs were the key measures for improving the management of personnel. The study further recommends that managers of construction organisations should give attention to the identified measures of improving management of employees and implement them to recruit and retain employees within their organisations. The study adds to existing knowledge on the theme of measures for effective personnel management in the construction industry.

1 Introduction

The construction industry plays a vital part in the development and economic growth and accords a noteworthy ratio of the gross national product (GNP) and gross domestic product (GDP) [1]. Furthermore, the South African state has shown that this sector creates employment and employs more than 1.4 million people in the country. However, [2] highlighted that the construction projects are confronted with numerous problems every day in their business. The major difficulty faced is the management of employees in the construction industry. Management of employees known as personnel management (PM) which is likewise alluded to as Human resources management (HRM), was defined by [3] as a way used in employing suitable employees into an organisation and offering them opportunities to advance their skills or grow to ensure that they apply their knowledge for organisational success. This was a further affirmation of [2] submission that HRM in basic words implies utilising individuals, building up their capacities, using, keeping up and repaying their effort which is turned into the activity at the organisational prerequisite.

[4] articulated that labour force is the most profitable resource for a productive result of any association, and this is particularly in the situation where industries use more labourers like in the case of the construction industry. Nevertheless, it has been detected that the

labour force is the most complicated resource to control when compared to other resources essential for successful project completion. It has been noticed that the construction industry frequently encounters complexities in meeting the delivery of the project because of the non-availability of adequate numbers of skilled workers to complete arranged work. [2] accentuated that even though this industry utilizes more labour in its activities when compared to other fields, its HRM is yet lacking and inadequate. Furthermore, the ability to attract, advance and retain labour force is a key element of any effective business [4]. Individuals being people have their own viewpoints, qualities, and properties in the organisational setup and if these are overseen viably human identity can bring impressive advantages to associations. However, poorly managing labour can possibly extremely constrain the organisational growth and threaten the suitability of a business. [5] posited that one approach to expand the performance of this industry is to invest more on human capital using HRM.

Thus, in improving PM practices within the South African construction industry, understanding the measures to be put in place to achieve this becomes pertinent. Based on this background, this study assessed the measure for achieving effective personnel management from the perspective of construction craftsmen in Johannesburg metropolitan area, Gauteng.

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2 Literature review

2.1 Concept of personnel management

According to [3], PM can be traced to the period of the Industrial Revolution in England in the late eighteenth century. It was additionally attested that the political and monetary conditions common after the Second World War expanded the interest in labourers and workforce masters, and this prompted the present time of PM where faculty or staffs are seen as assets. [6] stated that PM is the way toward drawing in, holding and propelling individuals.

The term PM as a depiction of the procedures associated with overseeing individuals in an organisation has generally been supplanted by the term Human resources management [2]. The term HRM defined as the important and comprehensive method to handling the association of a relationship's most viewed resources - the all-inclusive community working there who autonomously and everything considered add to the accomplishment of the objectives of the business. HRM objectives are all around to reinforce the relationship in achieving its objectives by making and completing (HR) frameworks that are facilitated with the business strategy (key HRM); add to the headway of a first-class culture; ensure that the affiliation has the ability, skilled and attracted people it needs; make productive work association among organisation and delegates and a climate of regular trust; invigorate the use of an ethical approach to manage people organisation [7].

In overall, HRM intends to manufacture responsibilities of labourers in associations. Those responsibilities are new contemplations, beneficially working and accomplishment. HRM should be responsible for social focuses. This infers HR supervisor should bear on acceptable to social good models and meanwhile, they should constrain the negative powers on the relationship by their solicitations from affiliations. HRM is in like manner accountable for affiliations this it can be guessable from the thought. Their focuses immediately develop adequately and higher gages of working spots for every expert [8]. [7] specified that HRM is for the most part worried about all parts of how individuals are utilized and overseen by the organisation. HR divisions in the organisations are fundamentally in charge of numerous exercises including rewarding, training and development, employee recruitment, and performance appraisal [9]. [10] noted that human resources management practices are training, performance appraisal and employee reward, recruitment and selection.

2.2 Improving personnel management in the construction industry

[2] observed eight methods of improving PM in the construction projects these are; ensuring frequent communication between personnel and labourers, appointing experienced or well-trained project managers to handle the project, assigning more skilled workers,

ensuring participation and team belonging developed in the construction team, evaluation of personnel and workers conducted regularly, provide sufficient and efficient training, starting team building even before project commencement, providing reward for personnel and labourers with good performance.

[4] identified six factors that would assist in improving HRM in the construction industry these consist of motivating and retaining the workforce, hiring the right people, developing the right process, helping the employee develop right skill, creating a culture of innovation and succession planning. [11] carried a research on an appraisal of craftsmen turnover in the Nigerian construction industry. Factors discovered include; paying competitive compensation and benefits packages, proper treatment of workers, reward for dedicated workers, creating advancement and promotion opportunities, provision of positive work environment, review of compensation and benefits packages annually, reduced working hours, review of company policy. Furthermore, these measures of diminishing the issue of craftsmen leaving the construction industry are in concurrence with the investigation by [12].

The study conducted by [13] on the causes and effects of employee turnover in the Indian construction industry revealed factors such as; recruiting and retaining valuable employees, providing suitable pay scale, promotion satisfaction, effective leadership, task significance and clear job expectations, job satisfaction, and balancing work and family life. [15] identified measure to improve the challenges experienced by HRM with regards to recruitment and retaining the employees. The identified ways are; providing career development opportunities, invest in training opportunities, ensuring competent line management, considering job design and job roles, considering levels of pay and non-financial rewards on regular basis, managing employee expectation, addressing equality issues.

[16] listed the methods used to retain important talent construction industry. This include, provision of competitive pay, enjoyable work environment, provision of training opportunities, challenging job assignment, ongoing performance feedback, formal or informal mentoring, flexible work schedule, job rotation, defined career pathing, phased retirement. Moreover, Pai *et al* [17] conducted a study on HRM methods dealing with the shortage and holding of trained labour in the construction industry. The study highlighted measure such as; providing training to labours, provide good incentives, proper labour management, and monitoring, recruiting the multi-skilled workers, attract new labour, offering competitive rates. Furthermore, Construction sector counsel (CSC) [18] in Canada discussed the challenges faced by the human resources in the construction industry. The paper outlined methods such as promoting apprenticeship training and delivery, advancing career and workforce training, expanding the partnership to support related skills development organisations, improving the recruitment and retention of youth, providing better research and information on the construction industry.

3 Research Methodology

A quantitative method was used to conduct this study through questionnaires circulated among craftspeople. The questionnaire was conveniently distributed among bricklayers, carpenters, electricians, tilers, steel fixers, plumbers, and plasters working in Johannesburg metropolitan area, Gauteng. The possible measures for effective PM from craftsmen's perspective was ascertain. This is based on the assumption that these craftsmen are at the receiving end of the activities of the PM department. To a large extent, they understand what it should take to keep them productive and satisfied within the organisation and in the discharge of their activities. A total of 59 questionnaires were circulated to gather data, 50 were returned representing 85% response rate and this was deemed adequate for the study, following the submission of Moser and Kalton [19] that a survey could be considered as biased and of little significance if the return rate was lower than 20-30%.

The questionnaire was designed in sections, with the first section designed to harness information as regards the background information of the respondents. Data gathered here served as a quality check for those gathered in the other section. The second section gathered information on the measures for effective PM practices within the South African construction industry. A 5 point Likert scale was adopted in assessing these measures with respondents asked to rate some identified measures based on their level of significance with 1 being very low, 2 low, 3 averages, 4 high, and 5 being very high. Data analyses were done using percentage in analysing the background information of the respondents, while Mean Item Score (MIS) was used to rank the different identified measures. The reliability of the research instrument was tested using the Cronbach alpha test (α). Trizano-Hermosilla and Alvarado [20] indicated that the Cronbach's alpha (α) is the most generally utilised technique for evaluating interior consistency reliability of the study. Tavakol *et al.* [21] clarified that inward reliability represents how much every something in a test measures a comparative thought or construct and in this manner, it is related with the between relatedness of the things inside the test. This study had a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.921 which is above the 0.70 figure suggested. This additionally demonstrated that there is internal consistency.

4 Findings and discussions

4.1 Background Information of Respondents

Analysis of the background information of the respondent shows a 90% male against 10% female. This result further confirms popular believe that the construction industry is mostly male-dominated especially in the aspect of craftsmen. These sets of workers are mostly blacks (94%) while 2% were white, and the remaining 4% are coloured. In terms of the respondent's trade, result revealed that 24% of the respondents were carpenters, 8% were Plasters, 10% were bricklayers/masons, 22% were electricians, 8%

were plumbers, 4% were steel fixers, and 24% of the respondents were tilers. The average age of the respondents is calculated as 32 years, while the average years of working within the construction industry is calculated as 5.9 years. The academic qualification of the respondents is given as; 38% had less than matric or no grade 12, 28% had Grade 12 or Matric, 26% had technical college certificates, 8% had a technical college diploma and none of the respondents had a University national diploma. The employment status of the respondents revealed that 54% of the respondents were working on a temporary basis and 46% of the respondents were on the permanent post. Based on this result it is believed that the respondents have considerable years in terms of age and experience within the construction industry to give reasonable answers to the questions of the study. More so, the different trades were significantly represented in the data collection, hence the result can be relied upon based as it is based on the perception of respondents from different trades.

4.2 Measures for effective personnel management practices in the South African construction industry

Result in Table 1 shows the ranking of the different identified measures for effective personnel management within the construction industry. From the table, it is evident that all the assessed measures are significant to the attainment of significant improvement in PM practices within the industry, as they all have a mean value of well above the average of 3.0. These various measures include: provision of competitive pay (MIS=4.58; SD=0.859), effective leadership (MIS=4.54; SD=0.930; R=2), recruiting the multi-skilled workers (MIS=4.54; SD=0.930), reward for dedicated workers (MIS=4.44; SD=0.951), paying attention to employees needs (MIS=4.36; SD=0.942) regular communication with workers (MIS=4.32; SD=0.551), providing good incentives right skills (MIS=4.32; SD=0.978; R=5), review company policy (MIS=4.30; SD=0.814), helping employees develop right skills (MIS=4.24; SD=1.098), develop a blame-free culture (MIS=4.24; SD=1.098) praising knowledge workers for work done (MIS=4.14; SD=0.748), provide sufficient and efficient training labours (MIS=4.08; SD=1.067), review compensation and benefits packages annually (MIS=4.08; SD=1.066), develop suitable promotion systems (MIS=4.04; SD=1.068), providing career development opportunities (MIS=3.98; SD=1.097).

The findings agreed with the study of [11] and [16] which revealed that provision of competitive pay is one of the major measures of improving management of employees in the construction industry. The results were also in agreement with the report by CSC [17] where promoting apprenticeship training delivery was identified as the measure to improving personnel management in the construction industry. Effective leadership was identified as one of the strategies to be used in mitigating employee's turnover in the construction industry [13]. Findings of this study agree

with this submission as effective leadership is seen as the second most significant measure in this current study. The results were also in agreement with the study of [17] where recruiting the multi-skilled workers were used as a method of dealing with skill deficit in the construction industry.

[15] submitted that providing career development opportunities, investing in training opportunities, ensuring competent in line management, and considering design and job roles, are some of the major ways of dealing with the issue of ensuring that right skills are retained. Furthermore, the study of [14] identified implementing competency-based pay, praising knowledge workers for work done as the methods that can be used to ensure that organisations retain employees. [14] also identified hiring the right people, developing the right process, and helping employees were identified to be major measures that can assist in improving personnel management. [2] in their study identified; frequent communication between labours and personnel, appointing well-trained project managers, and assigning more skilled workers, as the ways through which personnel management can be improved in the construction industry. Although these measures are not ranked on the top half of the table in this current study, they still prove to be vital to the attainment of improved personnel management within the construction industry as they all gave a mean value of well above average, with the least being providing career development opportunities with a mean value of 3.98. Therefore, construction participants and PM departments within construction organisations will do well be adopting the identified measures in order to improve their personnel management capabilities and in turn obtain maximum workers satisfaction and productivity.

Table 1. Measures of improving Personnel management

PM Measures	MIS	SD	Rank
Provision of competitive pay.	4.58	0.859	1
Effective leadership.	4.54	0.930	2
Recruiting the multi-skilled workers.	4.54	0.930	2
The reward for dedicated workers.	4.44	0.951	4
Paying attention to employee's needs.	4.36	0.942	5
Regular communication with workers.	4.32	0.551	6
Providing good incentives.	4.32	0.978	6
Review company policy.	4.30	0.814	8
Helping employees develop the right skills.	4.24	1.098	9
Develop a blame-free culture	4.24	1.098	9
Praising knowledge workers for work done	4.14	0.748	11
Provide sufficient and efficient training.	4.08	1.067	12
Review compensation and benefits packages annually.	4.08	1.066	12
Develop suitable promotion systems.	4.04	1.068	14
Providing career development opportunities.	3.98	1.097	15

Note: SD = Standard deviation; MIS = Mean item score

5 Conclusion and recommendation

The construction organisations are confronted with numerous problems every day in their business. The major difficulty faced is the management of employees. Moreover, the industry encounters difficulties in meeting delivery of projects due to lack of adequate number of skilled workers to complete arranged work. The workforce is the most profitable resources and it is also known as a difficult resource to control when compared to other resources important to complete the projects. This study, through a survey approach, has been able to determine some significant measures needed in improving personnel management within the construction industry. Based on its findings, the study concludes that for effective PM practices within the South African construction industry, certain measures are necessary and these are; provision of competitive pay, effective leadership, recruiting the multi-skilled workers, reward for dedicated workers, effective leadership, and paying attention to employees needs were identified as the most various means that can be utilized to improve personnel management in the construction industry. Therefore, the study recommend that Managers of construction firms should give attention to the identified methods of improving management of employees and implement them to recruit and retain employees in their organisations. The major limitation of the study lies in the geographical scope of the study and the use of convenience sampling approach. Based on the sampling method adopted, the findings cannot be generalised for the whole South African construction industry. Also the study was restricted to Johannesburg metropolitan area, Gauteng. Therefore, further similar research can be carried out in other areas of the country in order to compare results within regions.

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