

EFFECTS OF HUMAN FACTORS ON SKILLED LABOUR MOBILITY IN THE NIGERIAN BUILDING CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to appraise the effects of human factors on the mobility of skilled construction workers in Nigeria. The study employed descriptive survey technique to elicit data. From the results of this study, goal setting, work conditions, nature of construction work tasks, workers' attitude towards improving their skills, role of construction organizations towards improving workers' skills and workers' educational background are all very significant factors responsible for the mobility of skilled construction workers in Nigeria. Following the findings of this study, it is recommended that: Effective and easily achievable goals should be set for skilled construction workers; Work conditions should be designed to be worker-friendly; Skilled construction workers should be given tasks commensurate with their capabilities and specialization; Workshops and seminars should be made compulsory to enlighten construction workers on the need for self-improvement; Construction organizations should endeavour to inculcate training programs as part of further skills development for their workers; and workers should endeavour to attain basic educational qualifications commensurate with their chosen trades before applying for positions.

Keywords: building, construction, skills, mobility, factors, effects

1.0 Introduction

Skill is an essential component of carrying out any form of task. When a worker is skilled, he is motivated to accomplish tasks or set objectives. In the construction company, there are various tasks with varying degrees of complexity and skill acquisition is paramount. Unskilled workers may not have the required ability to perform well and improve construction productivity (Parkin, Tutesigensi &

Büyükalp (2009). Kazaz, Manisali & Ulubeyli (2008) opine that despite such motivation, there is need for competent management to ensure that the worker gets the necessary skills to enhance construction productivity. Hanafi, Khalid, Razak & Abdullah (2010) argue that competency of site supervisors is an important contributing factor influencing labour productivity in installing on-site prefabricated components. When skilled workers face challenges in

their places of employment, they resign and get what they may term better or greener pastures. This phenomenon is referred to as *mobility*.

1.2 Statement of problem

Over the years, in Nigeria, there has been a major challenge of mobility of skilled construction workers. However, there have been factors responsible for this and vary from one construction company or organization to another. Some of these have been traced to lack of adequate educational background, poor communication, inadequate training or developmental schedule by organizations for their staff, lack of motivation, poor remuneration and incentives, lack of contracts or full time jobs; advances in technology, complexities of projects, individual worker's attitude to self-development and continuation in service, lack of funding and prioritization of projects, civil unrests/ communal clashes, and so on. The human factors among them form the bane of this study.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to appraise the effect of human factors on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry. The specific objectives are to appraise the effect of:

- a. Goal setting on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;
- b. The nature of construction work tasks on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;
- c. Work conditions on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;
- d. Workers' attitude towards improving their own skills on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;
- e. The role of construction organisations towards improving worker skills on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;
- f. Workers' educational background on skilled labour mobility in the Nigerian building construction industry;

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Goal setting in the building construction industry

Productivity in building construction industry can be achieved through effective goal setting. Specific emphasis on the importance of conscious goals in explaining motivated behavior is placed by goal setting theories (Orando, 2013). Latham (2006) states that the goal setting theory depends on three factors namely: the level of difficulty

of the task, the specificity of the task and commitment to the task performance. According to Kreitner & Kinicki (2007) the level of difficulty refers to the extent to which the job or task is challenging. Gravett (2001) opines that a challenging task is thought-provoking and stimulates the worker's effort or interest to accomplish it.

With regard to a task's specificity, Erasmus *et al.* (2016) indicate that the task given should be relevant (specific) to the job the worker performs. This implies that the training and learning experience by the worker directly relates to the duties and tasks performed in the job situation. It is this relationship that motivates the worker to train and eventually perform better. The third factor (commitment to task performance) relates to the worker's enthusiasm to perform.

This means that the worker views the task as important and commits himself to execute it without any pressure being exerted (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007).

2.2 The nature of construction work tasks

According to Ramlall (2004), the nature of construction tasks is important in motivating and inspiring construction workers to improve their productivity. Perry *et al* (2006) propose a set of features that should be built into jobs/tasks in order to be

satisfying and motivating. The features proposed include the notions of horizontally enlarging work tasks to provide motivation. Smith (2016) indicates in this regard that the organisation increases the number of tasks a worker does. Thus, simple additions to specific tasks are made. Grant (2007) observes that the job characteristics theory could be used to identify the nature of work tasks that can inspire and motivate construction workers to improve their productivity.

This observance on the job characteristics theory is based on the idea that the task itself is key to employee motivation. It is important because the way a task is designed can either motivate or demotivate the worker. In this regard Kreitner & Kinicki (2007) are of the view that the tasks must be challenging, independently designed by the worker, interesting and fairly varied.

2.3. Work conditions

Hemamalini & Washington (2014) introduce the expectancy and equity theory and argue that work conditions are equally important for influencing conditions that improve worker capacity and skill development. The expectancy and equity theory of motivation is based on equity and fairness in a workplace. It is a theory of

motivation based on the beliefs and values that construction workers are likely to be more satisfied if they feel their good performance will be equitably rewarded. According to Hemalini & Washington (2014), a worker chooses among alternative courses of action, which are lawfully related to physiological events occurring contemporaneously with behaviour.

Work quality, work economy and work equal opportunity could be part of that equity and fairness at work as advocated by expectancy and equity theory of motivation. These factors are identified as factors for skill capacity and productivity improvement.

2.4 Workers' attitude towards improving their own skills

Schenk (2016) notes that workers have a responsibility to play in their own skills development. Among several other things they do not only have to accept ownership of their tasks but they also have to keep their skills and knowledge current, help establish and meet performance objectives in addition to accepting developmental opportunities and support available to them. This means that workers ought to have a positive attitude towards their own skills development.

With regard to attitude, McGregor's human theory Y is important. Wong (2007)

notes that theory Y supports the view that workers want to do well and that most workers will meet high-performance expectations when appropriately motivated in a supportive climate. It further maintains that workers are creative, imaginative, ambitious and committed to meeting organisational goals. They are also self-disciplined and self-directed, desire responsibility, accept it willingly and are motivated by fulfilment of their own needs, including skills development needs.

Theory Y further assumes that the physical and mental effort involved in work is natural and that workers actively seek to engage in work. It also is assumed that close supervision and the threat of punishment are not the only means, or even the best means, for inducing workers to exert productive effort. Instead, if given the opportunity, workers will display self-motivation to put forth the effort necessary to achieve the organizational goals.

This means that avoiding responsibility is not an inherent quality of human nature, as workers seek responsibility under motivated conditions. According to McGregor's theory Y, the ability to be innovative and creative exists within the human population and rather than workers valuing security above all other rewards at

work, they desire to satisfy self-esteem and self-actualisation needs (Barnett, 2011).

According to Wong (2007), theory Y supports the idea that workers want to do well and that most workers will meet high-performance expectations when appropriately motivated in a supportive climate and that workers are creative, imaginative, ambitious and committed to meeting organisational goals, are self-disciplined and self-directed, desire responsibility and accept it willingly and are motivated by higher-level needs such as training to acquire the desired work experience (self-esteem and self-actualisation). It would seem that staff ability to willingly accept responsibility, training at work, work experience and self-esteem are important factors for building capacity and improving construction productivity.

2.5 The role of construction organisations towards improving worker skills

Organisations play a critical role in empowering workers with vital skills. Schenk (2016) notes the need for organisations to create a work environment that supports training and learning. In this regard it is important for organisations to allow workers time to train and provide

resources for development and training. Construction organizations have to provide opportunities for the upper-level needs to be met in the workplace. Without such opportunities, workers would not be satisfied or motivated in their jobs.

According to Perry, Mesch & Paarlberg (2006) the upper-level needs could include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and growth. There are a number of ways in which construction organizations could train their workers. For example, Enshassi, Mohamed & Ekarriri (2009) prefer staff mentoring at work as a training method. Uwakweh (2005) proposes work facilitation and achievement orientation support as training methods.

Fester & Haupt (2006), Verster, Hauptfleisch & Kotzé (2008) indicate that apprentice and workplace learning as a preferred method of training construction workers. The skill advancement and growth of construction workers could be achieved by construction organizations offering staff mentoring at work, self-efficacy, learning and coaching at work.

2.6 Workers' educational background

Before getting employment as a construction worker, it is important that one has some basic education and is literate.

Construction work usually varies from very simple and basic to very complex. For example, a mason tasked with the construction of a gravel road builds simple structures like retaining walls or culverts on a small scale. Such a mason performs a job where technical demands are moderate. Another job may require a mason to work on the construction of a large and complex power station where reading complex drawings is required and finishing work to the required standards is needed.

This kind of project will demand literacy and technical skills, including reading, as part of communication skills (Orando, 2013). This shows that basic education and literacy are vital for productivity in the construction industry. Erasmus *et al.* (2016) note in this regard that apart from the basic technical skills, workers should also have communication, problem-solving and interpersonal skills.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey technique to elicit data from 850 skilled construction workers. Leedy & Ormrod (2010) note that descriptive studies entail the exploration of possible correlations among two or more phenomena and do not involve modification of situations

being investigated. Such studies do not determine cause and effect relationship.

Goal setting (roles) group consisted of three sub-skill factors: task performance commitment, task specificity and task significance. Work conditions skill factors group consisted of three sub-skill factors, namely work quality, work opportunity and work economy. Construction worker attitude factors group consists of four sub-factors, namely worker ability to willingly accept responsibility and accountability, staff training at work, staff work experience and staff self-esteem.

Organizational skill development for staff factors group consists of four sub-skill factors, namely staff mentoring at work, staff self-efficacy, staff learning at work and staff coaching at work. Construction worker educational background factors group consists of two subskill factors, namely basic educational level of staff and literacy level of staff.

The data obtained was evaluated using a Likert scale of one to five as developed by Kazaz *et al.* (2008), where one represents strongly disagree and five strongly agree. It is thus a nominal scale that enables the researchers to determine the mode, the percentage value and the chi-square.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1: Results of the Survey from the skilled construction workers (N = 850)

S/N	Predictor	Mean Likert Score	RII	RANK
A	Goal setting	4.24	0.96	1
B	Nature of construction work tasks	4.0	0.87	3
C	Work conditions	3.70	0.75	5
D	Workers' attitude towards improving their skills	3.86	0.80	4
E	Role of construction organization towards improving workers' skills	3.52	0.70	6
F	Workers' educational background	4.21	0.90	2

From Table 1, above, Goal setting had the highest impact on skilled construction workers' mobility (Likert Mean Score of 4.24, RII = 0.96 and Rank = 1). This is closely followed by workers' educational background (Likert Mean Score of 4.21, RII = 0.90 and Rank = 2). Nature of construction work tasks had a Likert Mean Score of 4.0, RII = 0.87 and Rank = 3. Workers' attitude towards improving their skills had a Rank of 4, RII = 4 and Likert Mean Score of 3.86. Work conditions had a Mean Likert Score of 3.70, RII = 0.75 and

Rank = 5. The role of construction organization towards improving workers' skills had a rank of 6, RII = 0.70 and Likert Mean Score of 3.52. From the findings, all the factors had very significant impact on mobility of skilled construction workers in Nigeria. These findings are corroborated with the results of the study by Endhelom (2021) on why construction workers in Australia have high mobility.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

From the results of this study, goal setting, work conditions, nature of construction work tasks, workers' attitude towards improving their skills, role of construction organizations towards improving workers' skills and workers' educational background are all very significant factors responsible for the mobility of skilled construction workers in Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- a. Effective and easily achievable goals should be set for skilled construction workers;
- b. Work conditions should be designed to be worker-friendly;
- c. Skilled construction workers should be given tasks commensurate with their capabilities and specialization;
- d. Workshops and seminars should be made compulsory to enlighten construction workers on the need for self-improvement;
- e. Construction organizations should endeavour to inculcate training programs as part of further skills development for their workers;

- f. Workers should endeavour to attain basic educational qualifications commensurate with their chosen trades before applying for positions.

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