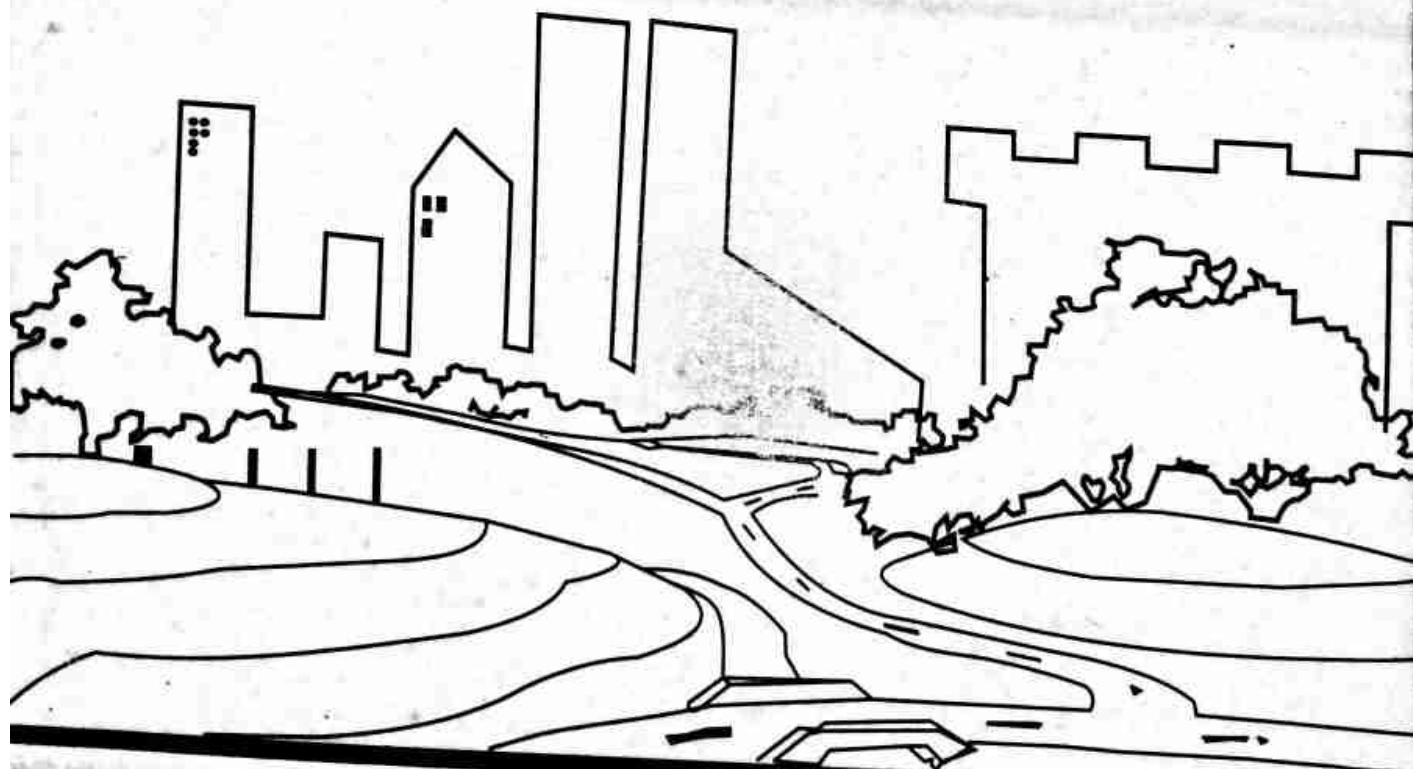


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THE IMPACT OF SUPERVISORS' INTER PERSONAL SKILLS ON CONSTRUCTION WORKTEAMS PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

The need to develop effective work teams in construction organizations necessitated this research. The study aims at highlighting the influence construction supervisors' interpersonal skills have on the development of effective work teams in construction organizations. The method of study was by exploratory cross-sectional survey of medium to large scale construction firms located in the five south-eastern states of Nigeria. The population of study involved 101 Supervisors, from which a sample size of 80 was selected using Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling (PSRS) technique.

Primary data were obtained using personal interview and structured questionnaire. Data obtained were presented, analyzed and interpreted using the z-test hypothesis testing technique. The study revealed among others, a strong positive relationship between construction supervisors' interpersonal skills and team members' performance, increased participation in group tasks, achievement of better industrial relations among team members, and identification/solution of group task related problems. From the study, it was revealed that the apparent low morale and dysfunctional working condition of team members in most construction organizations result from a lack of interpersonal skills among their supervisors. It is recommended that team leaders possess interpersonal skills aside from technical, analytical and conceptual skills in order to build cohesive work teams for improved performance in the construction industry.

KEYWORDS: Interpersonal skills, Work Teams, Group Tasks, Performance

INTRODUCTION

Team building is perhaps the most difficult task in organizing human resources. Unfortunately, the task of team building is most times assumed to be a top management responsibility and the duty of managers at all levels of the organization. The use of project teams in the execution of work is commonplace and assuming a phenomenal dimension. According to Imaga (2003), today's project teams are viewed as a set-up by or on-behalf of the client to undertake a project from inception to completion. Teams of people are now deployed by various consultants, contractors and other project stakeholders to handle an array of task at different phases of project execution. The great uncertainties that pervade group task working arise not from uncertainties of the people being able to work co-operatively to achieve desired project objectives (Choudhury, 2005). Discordant behaviour, lack of esprit-de-corp and similar act of non-cohesiveness are often marked. Lack of co-operation among the team members in group task has been attributed to the near absence of interpersonal skills to complement the technical skills of team leaders. This has led to an abysmal low performance of members involved in group task activity as studies found this scenario dominant in most group tasks performed by workers.

It is expected that at the end of the study appropriate recommendations will be made to the management of team-based project organizations, labour associations and the general public on the imperatives of

supervisors' interpersonal skills in team cohesion and organizational performance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The nature of engagement of construction labour force for group tasks is multifarious. Also, the formation of work teams from a large pool of existing and newly recruited personnel create difficulties in building effective work teams. Discordant work behaviour has taken a toll in most project sites and sometimes remains unabated as a result of a lack of interpersonal skills in most team leaders. Thus, the culture of co-operative working cannot be left to sheer luck considering the dire need to weld team members together for a purposeful achievement of pre-determined project objectives, hence the need for this study.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The specific objective of this study is:
a.to determine if significant relationship exists between supervisors' interpersonal skills and the performance of work teams.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question is crucial for this study to achieve its goal. The question also reflects the objective of the study.
a.to what extent is supervisors' interpersonal skills related to the performance of work teams?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis aids in the provision of answer to the stated research question and also meets the objective of the study:

Alternate Hypothesis (H_a):

There is a significant relationship between supervisors' interpersonal skills and the performance of project work teams.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research has both theoretical and practical significance. It will highlight the role of supervisors' interpersonal skills in developing effective work teams in construction organizations. The study will also add to existing body of knowledge in the area of workforce interrelationship and group working culture for the development of a focused and coherent work teams for improved productivity in project based organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Teams, and Interpersonal Skills.

The team working literature reveals a continuing worldwide, organizational trend towards the introduction of team work (Buchanan & Huczynski: 2004).

Writers on organizations use the term 'group and team' interchangeably, with personal preference of writer's tradition guiding the choice of word, rather than the conceptual distinction.

Imaga (2003) citing Hampton (1999) posited that, teams embody many important cultural values of western society and are seen as a co-operation or a collection that is greater than the sum of its parts, and the indispensability of the individual members.

Teams have a motivating, inspiring influence on the individual, drawing the best out of him or her, to perform feats that would have been impossible as a detached individual.

Hayes (1997) noted the idea of 'teams' as the most widely used metaphor in organizational life. Imaga (2003) posited that whereas groups can be a collection of people working together, a team implies a group of people with different but complimentary skills. Robbins and Coulter (1999) survey of 1,811 companies in the United States found that 68 percent were using formal teams to perform work activities. Stoner, Freeman, and Gilbert Jr (2005) defined a team as two or more people who interact and influence each other towards a common purpose.

Robbins and Coulter (1999) defined work teams as formal group made up of interdependent individuals, responsible for the attainment of a goal, while Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) defined work team as small groups with complimentary skills who hold themselves mutually accountable for common purpose, goals and objectives. Work teams are created

for various purposes and they face different challenges.

The typology of work teams lists four general types- advice, production, project and action, each identifying a basic purpose. Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) citing Parker (1990) listed the characteristics of effective teams viz-clear purpose, informality, participation, listening, civilized disagreement, shared leadership, external relations, style diversity and self management. Much organizational work is embarked by teams whose performance affects the success of the organization as a whole. Being able to work productively with teams is a very important consideration by management of most organizations. Hayes (1997) averred that modern management of most organizations has become focused on the idea of working with teams. Many management consultants propose organizational restructuring that facilitates teamwork and the importance of teams to the organization. Studies by Proctor and Mueller (2000) revealed a remorseless organizational trend towards group and team working all round the world and in virtually all industries.

Studies show that in the U.S.A, 54 percent of 600 leading enterprises use self directed teams (Osterman, 1994). The Equal Opportunity Commission (E.O.P.C) survey of European workplaces shows that some sort of teamwork existed in 36 percent of them (Benders and Vantooogen, 2000). Also the British 1998 Workplace Employee Relations survey found that 54 percent of employees in the core workforce, who manufactured a product or provided a service, worked in some form of a team (Cully, O'Reilly, Millard, Forth, Woodland, Dix, and Bryson, 1998). Furthermore, in Australia, the percentage of employees working in formal teams rose from 8 percent to 47 percent in the 1988 - 91 periods (Zaki, 1996).

By 1999, 47 percent of manufacturing work places with over 100 employees reported that they had some form of semi-autonomous team working (Morehead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen, and Duffin, 1997). All work teams are groups but only formal groups can be work teams. Kreitner and Kinicki (2001) state that formal work group fulfill both organizational and individual functions. Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) stated that, interpersonal skill include general communication skills, listening, establishing trust and rapport, giving and receiving feedback, recognition, counseling and coaching. This area also includes aptitude in speaking the client language, which is essential in building rapport and credibility, and in maintaining effective helping relationship. Studies by Buchanan and Huczynski (2004) show that the following interpersonal skills guidelines are employed by team leaders in managing teams viz:

- i. ask appropriate questions to bring out ideals and stimulate discussion,
- ii. listen closely and intently to members' ideas and concerns,
- iii. manage group discussions to encourage shy team members to participate,
- iv. establish an informal and non-threatening climate free expression by members,
- v. use the consensus method to reach decisions on key team issues,
- vi. involve team members in setting goals,
- vii. implement meeting guidelines to minimize wasted time in group meeting,
- viii. encourage respect for each others contributions,
- ix. identify and deal with dysfunctional behaviours immediately,
- x. celebrate the achievement milestones, and other team accomplishment, and
- xi. use recognition, task assignments and other techniques to motivate team members.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey research was used in conducting this empirical study.

The population of study includes 101 supervisors of various trades, namely: masonry, carpentry, concrete works and steelworks. The supervisors work for medium to large scale construction firms located in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states, all in south-eastern Nigeria. The 80 supervisors constituting the sample size were drawn from a finite population of 101 supervisors using Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling (PSRS) technique.

A personal interview method was used for the purposes of primary data collection with the aid of a well structured questionnaire.

The z-test technique was used for testing the research hypothesis earlier formulated. The z-test is justified if a study's sample size, $n \geq 30$. It is a standard variable whose value is calculated from sample data and compared with a critical value to decide whether or not to reject the null hypothesis. Nwabuokei (2001) posits that as the sample size increases, a t-distribution equals a z-distribution and the sample mean, an unbiased estimator of the population mean equals the value of the population parameter being estimated. Thus, by using the z-test, at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance for a sampling distribution (one directional or one tailed test), the table value is 1.645, also known as the critical value which is the dividing line between the area of rejection and area of acceptance. For the data analysis, only four (4) out of the five (5) categories of responses based on likert 5-point scale in the questionnaire were used. The 'undecided' category was ignored without any adverse effect on the final result. The resulting 4-point scale were compressed into 2-point scale by summing-up the 'Strong Agree' and 'Agree'

categories and the average value computed to form a single 'Agree' category. Similarly, the 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' were summed-up and the average value computed to form a single 'Disagree' category. Each of the 'Agree' and 'Disagree' categories were computed as a proportion (percentage) of the total responses to facilitate the test of differences between two proportions using the z-test technique.

$$h_0: P_1 = P_2$$

$$h_a: P_1 > P_2$$

$$\text{Test statistic } = Z_0 = \frac{P_1 - P_2}{\text{SE and SE}}$$

$$Z_0 = \frac{P_1 q_1 - P_2 q_2}{\sqrt{\frac{P_1 q_1}{n_1} + \frac{P_2 q_2}{n_2}}}$$

Where Z_0 = observed 'Z' value
 Z_c = expected 'Z' value
 S.E = Standard Error
 N = Total average response.

Decision Rule: If the observed ' Z_0 ' value > expected ' Z_c ' critical value, then there is a significant difference between the two proportions, thus leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternate hypothesis (H_a).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A total of eight questions were administered to each of the 80 workmen. Four questions were asked in section A, and four questions in section B. The respondents were required to indicate the degree of their 'Agreement' or 'Disagreement' to the inquiries sought.

SECTION - 'A' RESULTS:

The four questions in section 'A' sought to obtain responses on some identified parameters for appraising team members' performance in group tasks (See table 1 below).

On the average, for all the parameters being considered; 76% of the respondents agree that they can be used in appraising team-member co-operation, while 24% disagree.

SECTION 'B' - RESULTS

Generally, the four questions in this section sought to obtain responses on the extent to which supervisor's interpersonal skills relate to the identified parameters for team-member performance in group tasks (See table 2 below).

Thus, on the average 77% of the respondents agreed that supervisors' interpersonal skills is related to improved performance of team-members, team participation in group tasks, achieving better

industrial relations among team members, and identifying and solving task related problems, while 23% disagreed.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The performance of project work teams is not related to supervisors' interpersonal skills.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_a): The performance of project work teams is related to supervisors' interpersonal skills.

A test of significance between proportions was carried out on the proportion of respondents that agreed (P_1) and the proportion of those that disagreed (P_2) was carried out viz:

$$h_0: P_1 = P_2$$

$$h_a: P_1 > P_2$$

$$\text{Test statistic } = Z_o = \frac{P_1 - P_2}{\text{SE}} \quad \text{and SE} =$$

$$\frac{P_1 q_1}{n_1} \sqrt{\frac{+ P_2 q_2}{n_2}}$$

Where Z_o = observed 'Z' value
 Z_e = expected 'Z' value

S.E = standard Error

N = Total average response.

Z_o Computed = 8.720; Z_e = 1.645 On the

FINDINGS

1. The performance of the team members involved in the group task can be improved by the employment of interpersonal skills by the supervisors.
2. The participation of team members in group; task can be enhanced by their supervisors.
3. Better industrial relations can be achieved among team members by the employment of the interpersonal skills by their supervisors.
4. Identifying and solving group tasks related problems can be enhanced by the employment of interpersonal skills by their supervisors.

CONCLUSION

From the study, the absence of cohesive work teams in some construction firms is attributable to a lack of interpersonal skills by their supervisors. The inexperience of construction team leaders in human relations skills is explained by the arbitrariness of their appointment in the work place. This situation leads to adoption of coercive approach by the supervisors, as they lack necessary interdependent working skills to mesh team members for productive endeavour.

Team spirit and innovation is also lacking among team members since their working relationship lack the required cordiality to bring out their creative talents and internal abilities. The gap created by a lack of interpersonal skill of supervisors leads to a preponderance of dysfunctional teams' resultant from internal conflict and discordant working culture. Thus, aside from possessing technical, analytical and conceptual skills, supervisors and team leaders would need to vigorously develop their human relations (interpersonal) skills in order to command team members' respect create confidence, entrench high performance through collaborative and cohesive working relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Supervisory personnel should undergo a mandatory human relations training programme with strong emphasis on interpersonal skills before substantive appointment to position of responsibility.
2. Supervisory personnel in construction organizations should be chosen from team members with good team working experience.
3. Supervisory personnel should be made accountable to management in terms of their team members' performance, participation in group tasks, including identifying and solving task related problems.
4. Management should orient supervisory personnel on the importance of maintaining a harmonious workforce with team spirit.
5. Management of organization should operate a deliberate human relations policy that seeks to compensate supervisory personnel with good interpersonal skills.

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Table1: Workforce Responses on some identified parameters for appraising the influence of supervisors' interpersonal skills on team working.

		Agree			Neutral		Disagree		
S/N	Description	SA	A	%	UND	%	SD	D	%
1	Improved performance of Team Members in group tasks.	28	31	74	4	5	7	10	21
2	Team member participation in group tasks.	24	25	61	9	11	5	17	28
3	Achieving better industrial relation among team members.	37	21	73	5	6	4	13	21
4	Identifying and solving group task related problem	25	36	76	3	4	9	7	20
Average Response		227 113.50(76%)			Discarded		72 36.0 (24%)		
							299(100%)		

Source: Field Survey (2010)