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## Retaining Steel Tips: Motivation of Construction Managers in South Africa

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**Abstract.** The world economy continues to grow at an ever-increasing pace and as a result, has created additional demand for new buildings. This has placed an ever-increasing demand for experienced construction managers with learned and practically applied skills to competently deliver successful projects. South Africa is no exception to this phenomenon. To retain skilled construction managers projects must be well managed from the outset. Having the correct policies and procedures in place will assist with this requirement. Motivating factors play a large role to assist construction managers in achieving their best and keeping their focus. Thus, how to motivate them is key to ensuring that a project delivers on; quality, time and within budget. This paper attempts to identify factors that motivate construction managers and assist construction companies to retain them. For this purpose, structured interviews were conducted at the University of Pretoria and a mixed-method approach was followed. Data was collected from construction professionals with a minimum of 10 years of construction site experience within the Gauteng Region of South Africa. The decisive factor was the work environment conditions and this included factors like; creating job security, give employees a sense of belonging, mentors giving constructive criticism, listening to problems, acting on them and thus giving support, reducing long working hours, improved site office facilities, regular relaxing social events within the company. Results from a recent research project have identified three items that are needed to retain construction managers. These included; a good work environment and extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. It was found not uncommon that if an offer to be employed at an alternative company with less salary, but with a more comfortable work environment was available, then this would be a viable option. Con-

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struction companies should invest more effort to improve their work environment and further tailor-make their extrinsic and intrinsic awards systems.

**Keywords:** Construction Manager · Motivation · Well-being · Gauteng · South Africa

## 1 Introduction

The construction industry faces challenges to attract and retain skilled construction managers. The perception and in reality is that the construction industry needs improvement. Some of these areas of concern include; poor health and safety, competitive annual income packages, well-being, work stability, the image of the industry, productivity and females in construction. Addressing these will ultimately come from improvements in technology, processes, upskilling of construction managers and a different way of approaching the motivating environment on construction sites [1] [2] [3].

The construction manager, the stalwart of a team, who is charged with the responsibility of leadership throughout a project's delivery will ultimately be a crucial team member that ensures its success [1]. Clients of modern construction projects can be arduous when their expectations regarding key performance indicators of, time, cost and quality are not met. The multi-effect nature of this matter makes the remedy or management of these issues extremely complex.

The South African construction industry continues to experience both internal and external issues that directly influence the psychological and physical performance of constructions managers. Some of these can affect their motivation levels and their behaviour in the workplace. These include; absenteeism, grievances, alcohol and drug abuse, accidents, conflicts, commitment issues, quality of work and high divorce rates. The multi-effect nature of the issue makes the remedy or management of these issues extremely complex. One approach may be for construction companies to move away from traditional approaches to motivate their construction managers. This is based on the premise that as individuals, each construction manager will be motivated in different ways.

## 2 Literature Review

The principle role and function of the Human Resource Management Department within a construction company is to know how construction managers perform as they do [4] [5] [6]. Some of the key issues and factors which could influence behavioural traits of construction managers are discussed in this section.

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## 2.1 Motivation

Motivation is derived from the Latin word *motivus*. Motivation (a moving cause) can then refer to people's actions, or to the events that ensure people behave in a specific way [6]. Motivation can be defined as "the willingness of individuals and teams to exert high levels of effort to attain organisational goals, conditioned by the efforts capability to satisfy individual and team needs" [7]. Motivation can also be defined as the "willingness to do something, and it is conditioned by this action's ability to satisfy some need of the individual" [8] or a "psychological process that arouses and directs goal-directed behavior" [4]. "Even when people have clear work objectives, the right skills and a supportive work environment, they must have sufficient motivation to achieve their work objectives" [9].

There are currently several theories with regard to motivation, and there are various overlaps between them, but still no communal ground between them all [9]. We can divide all the different theories into two main categories: (1) content theories (older) concentrate more on the factors, which cause motivation; and (2) process theories (more modern), attempt to explain how motivation and behaviour narrate to each other. The needs and causes are the main focus in the older content theories; whereas the modern process theories concentrate more on the association between elements that yield, or prevent motivation [7].

It is clear from the above, that motivation is still a very complex topic; and that even with all the experts providing their different explanations for and approaches to motivation – not one can be applied to all the situations. The expectancy, equity, goal-setting theories (three process theories) combined with the job-characteristic theories and some elements of the older content theories are important ingredients for an integrated model for creating a motivating climate [7].

It is important for a company to understand that if one of the elements of aligning-commitment is absent, they would be unsuccessful. This would result in zero commitment, according to the aligned-commitment formula [7]. He further stated that aligning-commitment can be explained in an equation, i.e.  $\text{Aligned-commitment} = \text{Knowledge} \times \text{Information} \times \text{Empowerment} \times \text{Rewards \& Recognition} \times \text{Shared Vision}$  [7].

## 2.2 High-Performance Construction Teams

The construction industry needs high-performance teams to cope with the industry's demands. It takes between 3 to 5 years to build high-performance teams [4]. The following calculation can be used (peak performance = potential x commitment x motivating climate) to explain what is needed for peak performance [7]. It is important again to note that it is a multiple equations; thus, if one element is missing the effect would be zero.

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Performance should be linked to specific outcomes and therefore it should contain an aspect of positive reinforcement for the behaviour (effort) of each construction manager and for the group as a whole. It is very important for the construction company to link the team's performance with their specific outcomes [7].

Construction companies, in general, need to grasp the concept, that an annual increase in salary is welcomed by construction managers; but very few link these increases directly to the effort they have made [7].

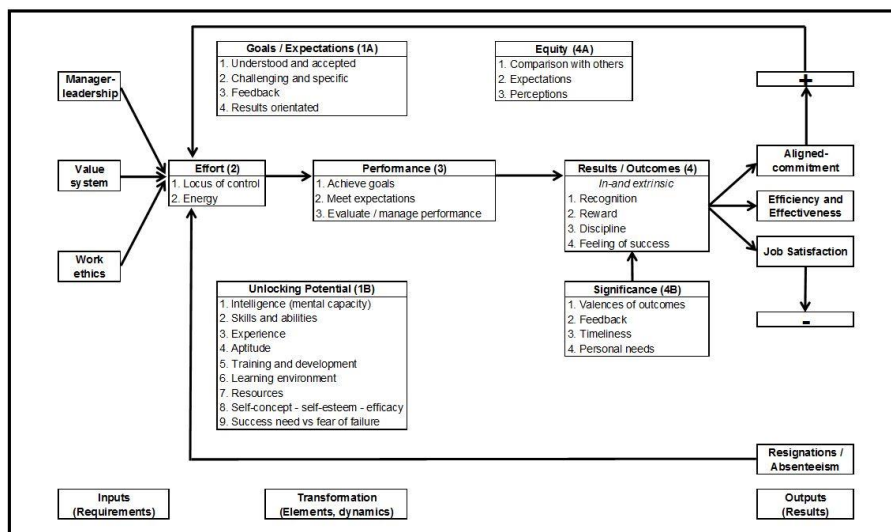


Figure 1: Elements and dynamics of a motivating climate [7]

Construction companies need to further understand that teams will only perform if the reward and recognition schemes are fair and meaningful. Construction managers will compare their rewards with other construction managers within the company, construction industry and other industries. According to the Equity Theory, whether the latter information received is correct or not, they will perceive it as the truth. The satisfaction or dissatisfaction that may sprout from this, may influence the effort and further indirectly link to causes that impact their performance.

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, if any of the elements are missing in the chain, it would lead to dissatisfaction. Under very difficult construction site conditions and project constraints, it is very important for the construction company to have the ability to create a motivating climate for each construction manager to operate within. By successfully creating a motivating climate for individuals and teams on construction sites, their full potential would be unlocked i.e. All the construction workers are divided into teams by using different coloured hard hats. The steel fixers are all wearing a red hard hat, and they are called 'The Scorpions'. For a general labour worker to

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become part of that team s/he needs to improve in various ways, in order to become part of that team.

### **3 Research Method**

A literature review was performed to identify the factors for retaining construction managers. A mixed-methods was applied, making use of a structured interview. The research participants had the opportunity during some of the questions to give relevant responses to their own experiences, insights, opinions, perspectives and attitudes towards the research topic. Audio recordings were made of each individual respondent's interview; so that it could be utilised for later data analysis. The target population was restricted by only interviewing construction managers with a B.Sc. degree in construction management, with 10 or more years' experience in construction site management. The target population was further selected; due to the fact that each respondent gained expertise and knowledge in different sectors of the South African built environment (office/retail, industrial, residential or civil engineering and road-works). The researchers also tried to select individuals with different ages to specifically investigate whether their responses might vary. Ethical clearance for this research study was approved.

### **4 Data Analysis and Findings**

Data were analyzed and one can conclude that 70 % of the interviewees were in the age bracket of between [32 – 47]; while 10 % were in the age bracket between [48 – 63]; and 20 % were in the age bracket of [64+]. The results further indicate that 40 % of all the interviewees were the responsible construction managers for a construction project value of between > R40 – R130 million and 60 % for projects above R130 million. What is also highlighted at this stage is the fact that 40% of the interviewees were all under the age of 40 and they were held responsible for the projects greater than R40 million. This might indicate that young construction managers must have the ability to manage relatively large construction projects prematurely in their careers. This can further suggest that the construction companies understand that practical experience is very important and it is difficult to find young construction managers within a short time-frame. Thus, most construction companies use a type of coaching method, in which a young inexperienced construction manager joins an experienced construction manager. After completing different projects with the guidance of the experienced construction manager, the inexperienced construction manager has the opportunity to learn and excel at a faster rate, adding value speedily to the company.

The information obtained from the interviews are classified in Table 1. The key findings revolved around creating a positive work environment. The aim is to improve the work-life balance and the lifestyle of project management staff in construction were it is often neglected.

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The participants believe that a robust and transparent rewarding system is an absolute requirement for an improved work environment. Another important factor is also the availability of resources which can relieve unnecessary stress and create a more productive environment. Other factors such as equity, progression opportunities, fairness, transparency, job security and socialising were also mentioned as enhancing the work environment quality.

**Table 1.** Interview summary of findings

	<b>Positive work environment (leading to Improved lifestyle factors)</b>	<b>Reward system</b>	<b>The current state of job satisfaction (or happiness)</b>
<b>Information classification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A robust and transparent rewarding system is required <b>(100% importance)</b></li> <li>• Availability of the required resources <b>(40% importance)</b></li> <li>• Equality and potentially inclusiveness of project managers by allocating shares <b>(30% importance)</b></li> <li>• Providing progression opportunities; communication of short- and long-term goals, and visions; in addition to professional development <b>(30% importance)</b></li> <li>• Fairness of job allocation and rotating people especially during weekend jobs <b>(30% importance)</b></li> <li>• Job security <b>(30% importance)</b></li> <li>• Socialise events within the company <b>(30% importance)</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Intrinsic reward or performance remuneration,</b> which could be opportunities to progress; more challenging responsibility and recognition</p> <p><b>Extrinsic rewards or performance remuneration,</b> such as bonuses, project incentives and company share.</p>	<p>The dynamic nature of the industry makes it interesting and rewarding for most project managers <b>(positive)</b></p> <p>The opportunity to work with different trade, with different skill sets is satisfactory <b>(positive)</b></p> <p>The possibility to interact with other sides of the company such as corporate level <b>(Positive)</b></p> <p>Lack of transparency at the corporate level <b>(negative)</b></p> <p>However, the issue of work-life balance difficulty especially for those who have families could be problematic <b>(negative)</b></p>
<b>Interviewees</b>	Construction Director; Project Manager; Company MD; Contracts Manager; Senior Site Agent; Site Agent; Contracts Director; Contracts Manager; Project Manager; Site Agent		

This reinforced the idea of having both intrinsic and extrinsic reward system for a more balanced work environment. The extrinsic rewards or performance remuneration, such as bonuses, project incentives and company shares were regarded as more important in relation to the overall positive work environment experience. However, the intrinsic reward or performance remuneration, which could be opportunities to progress; more challenging responsibility and recognition; were also highly regarded

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by the interviewees. An assessment of current job satisfaction and happiness was also done which indicated most of the interviewees were happy of the job they were doing due to the positive effect of the following factors:

- The dynamic nature of the industry
- The opportunity to work with different trade, and skills
- The possibility with corporate level

On the other hand lack of transparency and the issue of work-life balance for those with families was a negative factor.

Table 1 conceptualises the potential strategies and provisions required to create job satisfaction and a positive work environment. This is done to ultimately enhance motivation for the valuable project participants, resulting in construction management retention and stability.

## 5 Conclusion

The extrinsic rewards weight accounted for 26% of the responses and proved to be a little more important than the intrinsic rewards, with 18% of the weighted responses. Although some of the interviewees mentioned that a good salary alone is not sufficient to retain individuals. The results further indicated that it is pivotal to create a positive work environment that accounted for 55% of the weighted responses. Some of the interviewees reinforced this idea by stating that they would rather work for less money, in a positive work environment. This concept is further reinforced by the fact that the construction companies must invest effort into creating this positive motivating environment to unlock the necessary potential and increase the possibility to retain their construction managers within the company. In addition to the above, the results support the fact that all three factors (motivating environment, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards) are needed to successfully retain construction managers in a company.

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