The roles of employers in the motivation of the quantity surveyors: the Malaysian construction industry
THE ROLES OF EMPLOYERS IN THE MOTIVATION OF THE QUANTITY SURVEYORS: THE MALAYSIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The subject of employees’ motivation is important as it is the key to high performance especially in the construction industry since the industry is related to human management. Thus, it is important to maintain the quality of the employees by sustaining and improving the motivation level of the employees in carrying their roles. However, due to the uncertain business environment and temporary nature of the construction industry, employers are unwilling to invest in motivating the employees. There is a paucity of research that has investigated the roles of employers in the quantity surveyors’ motivation towards improvement of job performance in Malaysian construction industry. 200 questionnaires were distributed and received feedback for a total of 71 questionnaires which then were analysed using descriptive and statistical analysis. The research findings indicate that, overall, quantity surveyors assigned to a good team and/ or having good teamwork by the employers, having superior who provides support to employees, been assigned to the tasks that are suitable to the capability of the employees, and having a good leadership and skilled superiors, are among the roles of employers desire by the quantity survey employees.

Keywords: Malaysian Construction Industry; Motivation; Performance; Quantity Surveyors; Roles of Employer.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry plays a substantial role in many economies and is a major productive sector in Malaysia, which made the government of Malaysia focuses on shifting the economy to a high value-added and high income economy through increase in productivity, that is, through human capital (MOF, 2012). Malaysian construction industry is also an important sector for the development of the nation since national construction industries generate one of the highest multiplier effects to other sectors of the economy (Salleh et al., 2011).

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However, the attainment of acceptable levels of quality in the construction industry has long been a problem. Cost overrun (Shehu et al., 2014); delay in the construction completion (Larsen et al., 2016); and late and non-payment (Azman et al., 2014); issues have been among the continuous performance issues in the construction industry, and including Malaysia. About 17% of government contract projects in Malaysia were either delayed by at least three months or abandoned (Sambasivan and Soon, 2007), while more than half of the Malaysian construction projects (55%) experienced cost overruns (Shehu et al., 2014); and consequently, by minimising these construction issues, the performance of the Malaysian construction industry can be improved. The major feature of construction processes is that, the construction professionals especially quantity surveyors need to ensure that the project is able to finish on time; and within the client’s required budget. These create occupational stress on the construction professionals (Gunning and Cooke, 2007); and people-reliant (Smithers and Walker, 2010); hence known as a stressful industry, which contributes to major impacts on performance. Also, due to the competitive nature, the Malaysian construction industry has also encountered the problem of having a shortage of qualified workers, which has also affected the quantity surveying profession (Hee and Ling, 2011) and thus, the problem could distress the profession’s long term survival (Frei, 2010), thus, creating additional pressure in assuring the flexibility in employment and working arrangements (Ofori and Toor, 2009).

Individual employees are the most important resource of an organisation with climate building and motivation of individuals crucial to the success of the organisation (Johnson et al., 2013) and motivation is one of the factors that contribute to the enhancement of performance (Heavey et al., 2011). There are many factors of motivation that can overcome performance problems, and influence job satisfaction as well as the job performance of employees (Machungwa and Schmitt, 1983). However, there is a lack of material to date, dealing with the motivation of professional quantity surveyors (Bowen and Cattell, 2008), notable exceptions being the work of Bowen and Cattell (2008) who studied the job satisfaction of quantity surveyors in South Africa. Although both South Africa and Malaysia are developing countries, what may work in South Africa may not work in Malaysia. Both countries have a different environment and work culture, and therefore, there is a need for local research to address the motivational practices towards Malaysian quantity surveyors.

Therefore this paper wishes to examine the relationship between motivation and job performance. It will therefore focuses on the job performance amongst quantity surveyors specifically from the motivation perspective, and in the Malaysian construction industry.

**CONTEXT**

19 motivation factors were identified in several studies. Among the studies are: Abdullah et al. (2011). 5 main themes derived from the 19 motivation factors. Motivation themes consist of the motivation factors that have similar nature or characteristics. Brian (2014); Lim and Ling (2012); Oyedele (2010); Bowen et al. (2008); and Machungwa and Schmitt (1983); are among the researchers that conducted the studies related to the motivation factors of employees in the construction industry.
a. Growth and advancement opportunity - Some job characteristics contribute to certain psychological states and that the strength of the employees’ needed for growth has an important moderating effect (Sahinidis and Bouris, 2008). All content theories and process theories (Except Adam’s Equity Theory) contain one or more growth and advancement motivation factor variables. In the context of this research, quantity surveyors are more inclined to be motivated to the type of assignment which has the characteristics of which they like or understand more. For example, the strength of the employees (in term of skills) has an important moderating effect (Lim and Ling 2012). Therefore, when quantity surveyors are sent to training, they have a tendency to become experts in their scope of job or new work scope since the confidence level of success is higher.

b. Work Nature - The second set of items relates to the: nature and characteristics of the works; amount and difficulty level of the work; and how such work is assigned (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). When specific goals were assigned, more effort was exerted than when nonspecific goals were set. However the difficult goals are bearable to be achieved by one (Manchungwa and Schmitt, 1983). Achieve target or goal; interesting work; and work life balance; are among the motivation factors of construction professionals including quantity surveyors (Holmes, 2012). Meanwhile, Bowen et al. (2008) identifies: recognition of achievements; variety of works; non-repetitive work; and having social interaction as the factors that motivate quantity surveyors. This factor reflects that quantity surveyors will be more motivated to do their work if they enjoy the work rather than tailoring their lives to their work. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory; Herzberg’s two-factor theory; and Latham and Locke’s Expectancy theory; are the theories that contain one or more work nature motivation factor variables.

c. Material and physical provisions - The third group of items is related to the amount of material and physical provisions present in the job situation. Quantity surveyors are also affected by the above mentioned motivation factors (Bowen et al., 2008; Holmes, 2012) other than the quality of the work environment (Clark, 2000). For example, an adequate work station, i.e. table with wide surface can help in making the drawing reading and referencing convenient to the quantity surveyors. Also, the facility of the office equipment like photocopy machine and personal computer with sufficient software can help in making the outcome more efficient especially in preparing the tender and contract documents. The motivation factor variables for material and physical provisions theme can be found in: Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory; Herzberg’s two-factor theory; Alderfer’s ERG theory; and part of the reward system motivation factor dimension (Brian, 2014).

d. Relations with others - The fourth set of items is relations with others, which includes: recognition or praise from superiors; co-workers, or subordinates; consultative and participative supervision; degree to which superiors and co-workers are hardworking and competent; good interpersonal relations; supportive family and friends; and the degree of understanding and attention to employees problems shown by the company (Machungwa and Schmitt, 1983), as well as the construction operators on site (Zakeri et al., 1997). Participation in a team and having a good relationship with co-workers are among the factors that motivate the quantity surveyors (Bowen et al., 2008; Holme, 2012). The relations with others theme of
motivation factor variables can be frequently found in all the content theories; and Brian’s (2014) leadership style as well as organisational climate dimension.

e. Fairness in organisational practices - The fifth category of themes pertains to the degree of fairness perceived in organisational practices. Manchungwa and Schmitt (1983) identified two divisions for this cluster, namely: perceived fairness in promotion decisions; pay rises; work assignments; and other personnel practices and decisions; and keeping promises made to employees. This is in line with Adam’s Equity Theory (1963). However, Bowen et al. (2008); and Holmes (2012) argues that quantity surveyors are not affected by fairness in organisational practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applied a mixed-methods research with pragmatism as the philosophical stance. This research employed a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview. A total of seventy one out of two hundred distributed questionnaires were received and twenty two quantity surveyors were interviewed. The respondents were quantity surveyors from three groups, namely, from: government agencies; private consultancy firms; and private contracting firms. Questionnaire surveys were analysed using descriptive analysis and statistical tests using Kruskal-Wallis test of SPSS software. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were analysed using content analysis method with the aid of the Nvivo software. This sample of this research limited to individual quantity surveyors, who registered under Board of Quantity Surveyors Malaysia; who work in the Malaysia’s construction industry only.

Factor analysis
Factor analysis is a technique for identifying clusters of variables. For this research, factor analysis was applied in order to simplify the long list of employers’ roles in the motivation of the quantity surveyors by reducing the number of the factors into fewer dimensions. The dimensions will be useful for the development of the conceptual framework, which is the aim of this research. The new dimensions emerged from the factor analysis process were given new labels and the process of labelling was done based on the thorough study of past conceptual frameworks, theories, models as well as content analysis of the interview transcripts. The three new dimensions are summarised in table 1 and the process involved scientific and artistic effort (Tian and Pu, 2008) and is in line with another study by Machungwa and Schmitt (1983).

![Table 1: Summary of findings of the employers’ roles in motivating the quantity surveyors](attachment:image.png)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>Allocate reasonable time frame to complete assignment</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER2: Organisational support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-16</td>
<td>Create a good teamwork</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-10</td>
<td>Good relations with other workers</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-17</td>
<td>Provides support to workers</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-18</td>
<td>Superiors complements and appreciate employees</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-19</td>
<td>Providing good facilities and resources at work place</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-11</td>
<td>Superior has good leadership skills</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER3: Company’s reward policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-8</td>
<td>Financial incentives</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-9</td>
<td>Non-financial incentives</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>Giving fair pay equivalent to job scope</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>Company honouring promises made</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAIN DISCUSSION**

In literature review, there were 5 themes of motivation but after the data has been collected, the analysis summarised that there are three themes for the employers’ roles. The roles include: employees’ organisational support (ER1); organisational support (ER2); and company’s reward policy (ER3).

ER1 highlighted that employers arrange and plan the task that suits their: capability; ability; skill; and job description; or prepare and support the employees that are not yet competent with positive improvement mediums such as to provide trainings and a reasonable time frame to complete tasks. Skill utilisation and training development facilitate the intrinsic satisfaction of the employees (Boxall *et al.*, 2015) and thus impact on the improved job performance. The findings on some of employers’ roles in the employees’ organisational support (ER1) provide evidence to support Porter and Lawler’s Expectancy Theory, where improvement in job does not only depend on the work effort but also in the skills and the ability of an individual in a particular task.

ER2 is consisted with the most favoured roles of employers in motivating the quantity surveyors. The most preferred role that employers implement onto their employees is ‘assigning employees to a good team and employees having good teamwork (item 11-16)’. This is in line with Lim and Ling (2012) whom agree that the productivity and job satisfaction can be achieved when professionals are given the chance in making crucial decisions while being in a problem-solving team, which indicate that item 11-16 is the important choice of role by employers to adopt in their organisations. Numerous interviewees also agreed that item 11-16 is the favoured employers’ roles in the motivation of quantity surveyors in their organisations. “...*We have regular discussions among the top management team to discuss and update everything regarding the projects, office, and the future of the company*” (QS9). This shows that the employee might appreciate the roles of the employer in ensuring the employee is involved in the organisation’s matter as well as obtaining direct information from the employee regarding: the progress of projects handled; and problems regarding projects or in the office. Provide support to workers (item 11-17) is among the top employers’ roles in quantity surveyors’ organisations. Several interviewees also supported this. QS8 is a superior at his organisation and he shows his support by being present when there are times that require his subordinates to stay back at the office where there are
tight deadlines. “... if the staffs need to stay back during tendering time, I usually buy them take-away dinner”. Support to workers is not limited only by physical support, but also moral support like providing guidance and direction, which make employee’s feelings and self-determination be revitalised, and hence increase the motivation level of individuals (Oyedele, 2010); sharing experience “...the best way to motivate my juniors is by sharing your previous experiences and previous job, so that they know how things work out...” (QS9); and motivating staff regularly ”...provide motivator to the office to boost up the motivation level of staffs...” (QS1).

Company’s reward policy (ER3) is a concept focusing on the policy of the organisation in rewarding the employees. The rewards are given when a particular job scope agreed during discussions or mutual understanding is achieved. The rewards policy in the form of profit sharing; gain-sharing; and stock option; other than the normal rewards such as annual bonus; maternity leave; and lunch coupon; creates the feeling of belongingness within the employees. The incentive of employee ownership can affect firm improved performance but with the involvement of participation (Kruse et al., 2004).

Almost all employers’ roles show there are statistically significant to different types of organisations, except: providing trainings; provide appropriate tasks according to ability; and provide accurate job description. This shows that the employers’ roles in each type of organisation may differ in terms of the level of importance of the roles.

**Conceptual framework**

The central element of this framework is the improved performance of quantity surveyors in their job (component 5). There could be two possible outcomes in this framework. The first possible outcome is that the quantity surveyors achieve performance improvement in their job. This can be achieved if they have self-motivation (component 2). The second is that the quantity surveyors have not gained performance improvement and hence further evaluation of their current motivation factors as individuals and in the current organisation should be made. Other motivation factors should be implemented on the quantity surveyors if the current motivation factors do not impact and affect the individuals.

Concurrently, employers or the management team of the organisation shall play their part in accelerating the motivation of the individual quantity surveyor with relevant motivation factor or factors from one or more dimensions in the employer’s roles theme listed in: ER1; ER2; and ER3 (component 1). By doing so, it may accelerate the motivation of quantity surveyors. Different stages of the construction development
have different nature of works (component 3) and this might also affect the motivation of the quantity surveyors differently.

Accordingly, the employers may employ the same motivation factors during all the construction stages; and employ different strategies in the motivation of the quantity surveyors by implementing different motivational factors when the quantity surveyors show signs of demotivation. This can be seen in component 4, ‘performance measurement’ such as low in productivity; job dissatisfaction or low job satisfaction; delay in completing their task; and lack of communication. The impact of the effectiveness of the motivation factors can be identified through job performance measurements but for this research, we do not focus on the performance measurement of the quantity surveyors.

CONCLUSION

The top four employers’ roles are: creating good teamwork; providing support to workers; assigning tasks that suits employees capabilities; and superior has good leadership skills. The least effective employers’ roles are offering non-financial incentives.

The leading three employers’ roles for government agencies are: providing appropriate tasks to employees according to their ability; assigning employees to a good team that has good teamwork; and providing an accurate job description to employees. Similar to objective 3, non-financial incentives has been the employers’ least choice in the motivation of quantity surveyor employees. The least required motivation factor is non-financial incentives. The principal three employers’ roles for private consultancy firms are: superior provides support to workers; assigning employees to a good team that has good teamwork; and assigning tasks that are suitable to the capability of the worker. The least favoured employers’ role is off-the-job training. Top employers’ roles for private contracting firms include: providing accurate job description; granting job promotion to performing employees; granting financial incentives; achieving good relations with other workers; company honouring any promises made; and giving fair pay equivalent to job scope. The least employers’ role is off-the-job training.

The result of this objective shows that employers’ in different groups of quantity surveying organisations do not play similar roles in motivating their quantity surveyor employees. The dissimilarity of the employers’ roles among these groups may be due to budget allocation; purpose of the organisation; and expectation of the employers from the employees.

REFERENCES


