

# Labour management in construction projects management essay



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Labour management is one of the important techniques used by managers in construction project management. A good project management in construction should vigorously pursue the efficient utilization of labour. With a proper labour management, the availability of labour will always sufficient to carry out all construction work and completed on time without any delaying of work. Thus, time and cost loses will be minimized.

First of all, we look at the labour job-site productivity. Labour productivity in construction is the amount of goods and services that a laborer produces. For example, brick laying, pouring concrete, plastering or surface finishing. Labour with good performance may lead to high productivity. However, there are several factors that would affect the job-site productivity which are labour characteristics, project work conditions and non-productive activities.

Construction labourers can be found at construction sites where they performing a wide range of tasks from the basic to the most difficult. Nevertheless, they are having different labour characteristic include their age, skill and experience of working. Besides, leadership and motivation of labour also different among each others. For example, a young teenager requires little skill and can learn quickly how to operate a machine. In addition, certain skill and experience is needed to apply in construction site such as determining the slump of concrete whether concrete is suitable to use or not. Furthermore, a supervisor with good leadership can motivate and influence their workers to work loyally and happily without any prejudice among labourers.

Equally important, quality and contribution of workers are being assessed by using performance analysis. In this performance analysis, several factors that can be evaluated involve quality of work being completed, adequate quantity of work, initiative (able to do work without any instruction from others), job knowledge (apply knowledge, method and skill lead to high performance), communicative ability (ability to communicate with supervisor, subordinate and top management in the way of written or spoken), judgment (fairness on decision making, conclusion and allocate tasks), related work knowledge (have some basic knowledge and understanding to carry out task), resource utilization (able to coordinate the need of the project and effectively use of resources available), dependability (a person who being trusted to perform responsibility), analytical ability (able to analyze problem and come out with conclusion), interpersonal skills (good relationship between people) and ability of labour to work under pressure.

Furthermore, labour characteristic also include security sensitive (how a labour able to handle their confidential information correctly in the sense of secure), safety consciousness (labour/worker has the awareness towards their own and other's safety as well as safety practices on site), profit and cost sensitivity (ability to look out, giving or contribute idea on how to making revenue), and planning effectiveness (capability on planning, foretell future, and set goal). Thus, managers have to forecast the conditions on the site first before can employ labours to carry out schedule work. Otherwise, low quality of labour can results in low quality of work and hence delays timing that will bring unsatisfactory from clients.

Similarly, project work conditions involve job size and complexity, job site accessibility, labour availability, equipment utilization, contractual agreements, local climate and local cultural characteristic. Besides, a specific set of work conditions can be used to estimate labour productivity for each type of craft and construction. The manager of the project can specify a base labour productivity (work condition) as a purpose to monitor and evaluate their labour performance at a certain period of time. Then, a labour productivity index is used to measure the relative labour efficiency of the project. Hence, productivity of labour can be supervised with this type of measurement. Labour productivity index is referring to the ratio of the job-site labour productivity to the base labour productivity.

As an example, for a construction project to build two condominiums at city, as the project size is bigger and tougher, then the labour productivity will decrease because project is more complex with strict rules and regulations to complete. Besides, job-site accessibility can also contribute to the decrease of labour productivity such as raining while pouring concrete; labours have to keep away from traffic for repaving roads and working under hot sun. Labour availability in the local market is another dilemma and this scarcity of labour will permit contractor to seek foreign labour to replace vacancies left by local labour. Local labours are preferred to join profitable working environment compare to work at construction site. In this kind of situation, labour efficiency has been affected and decreases gradually because new comers have no experiences and skills on the site. Thus, they learn skill and gain experiences indirectly from the site lead to incur waste of time as well as reduce labour productivity.

Moreover, climate of a country will directly affect the construction work. The labour productivity will be reduced if weather is not good such as raining which are not suitable for construction work. Besides, the labour efficiency will be affected if equipment are not fully utilized such as misused of equipment or totally do not know how to use the equipment for work. In addition, the contractual agreements in the employment of union and non-union labour as well as degree of supervision give a consequence to the labour productivity.

Non-productive activities are also one of the factors that affect job-site productivity. In non-productive activities, productive labour yield need to be determined. The productive labour yield is defined as the ratio of direct labour hours granted to the actual work done to the potential labour hours. So, the non-productive activities include rectify of the work for correcting inadequate work, cumulative of labour absentees, late start and early go off work, non-working holidays, indirect labour (no contribution of produce goods and services), and temporary work being topped due to bad weather. In addition, indirect labours also involve workers direct the traffic when there is on going of road paving at highways or near to city. Similarly, hiring of labour to clean the site and rework to correct the building defects.

Next, let us look at the recent trend regards labours related in construction industries. In general, the Malaysia's market demand of labour in construction has fluctuated significantly within a short period whereby it is unevenly distributed among different places. In Malaysia, especially for construction activities we are facing a problem of labour shortage due to poor participation by local labour. We are much depending on foreign labour  
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extensively during implementation of work mostly from neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia and et cetera. Besides, the poor participation of local labour in construction industries could be due to several factors. Local labour does not willing to work under hot weather, low wage and unattractiveness of a career pathway in construction.

However, although the volume of construction works is steady, certain types of work could be reduced in importance. Subsequently, when under such unstable environment, contractor need to flexibility in hiring and laying off labour for construction work as their volumes of work rise and fall unexpectedly. In such circumstances, construction labours are felt apprehensive and desperate. Nevertheless, labor organizations in Malaysia are few and weak that behave more like trade organization thus can not solve the problem that actually incurred. They would endeavor look for labor organization Thus, manager has to take account this issue regarding hiring labours so that shortage of labour to work would not occurred such that shortage will potentially delaying any works.

In foreign country, their labour management in construction industry is including unionized and non-unionized construction. Most of the industrial and utility constructions are adopted unionized construction. Nevertheless, heavy construction sector is mostly non-union. Besides, in residential and commercial building sector, virtually all contractors are non-union as well.

For unionized organization, the labour union's members (craftsmen) are confined to work on a particular craft only. Thus, construction contractors can only employed those craft men to work on construction site through

different market institution such as jurisdiction rules, apprenticeship programs and referral system. The jurisdiction rule is set hourly wage rate for craftsmen as well as improve their craftsmen's skill by offer them apprenticeship programs training. This program is formal training for workers where typically required three to five years to complete include on-the-job training and classroom instruction. With this program, craftsmen can learn a lot of skills and technique which can contribute to increase productivity.

Next, union shop is a system where actually bind contractors and craftsmen to a collective bargaining agreement. This agreement obligate contractor to observe the work of jurisdiction of different unions and use union operated referral system to hire workers. In addition, the referral system have several conditions to follow such as workers registered under referral system are compulsory attach to the contractor without prejudice on the basis of union membership or other relationship to the union. Commonly, referral system is a trustworthy source to hire worker where they only provide qualified labour to the contractor. However, if the qualification of labour is being distrusted, contractor can reject the labour provide by union organization. Indeed, due to these labours are not permanently attached to contractor, the loyalty and sense of security towards working is reduced.

Non-unionized construction involve open shop or merit shop where contractor can directly employ labours without go through market institutions. Merit shop is generally followed the same policies and procedures as collective bargaining exclusive of union participation. A lot of contractors are using non-union contractors association's policies to carry out work in conjunction with the absence of collective bargaining

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agreements. Nonetheless, other contractor can choose to be totally unorganized with no following union shop or merit shop practices. Merit shop is function national in scope and labours have right to shift among member contractors of this association.

There are several advantages of merit shop include able to manage their own labour in proper manner, maximum employ local workforce than hire foreign labour, encourage individual work advancement with continue enhance of labour skill and flexibility in making appropriate decision.

Nevertheless, merit shop contractors are getting dissatisfaction as incapable to produce skillful labour in construction work. Moreover, different skill of labour perform their job enable achievement of productivity and cost-effective.

Unorganized form of open shop is found mainly in housing construction and involve majority of unskilled labours. They went through informal apprenticeship training such as learn in construction site during working. Over a period of time, as their skill and knowledge accumulates, they become a skill labour.

Figure : Construction labours Thus, the employment of labour to work is very important as it will affect the productivity and the cost of a project. A project with high cost than estimated will make client unhappy and disagreeable. So, manager has to make intelligent decision in labour management technique.