

# Construction Employees' Interpersonal Relationship: A Review of the Literature

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**Abstract**—The construction industry involves substantial human activities globally. The human undertakings need to be bound and consolidated by an interpersonal relationship among employees to achieve all the associated benefits that come with the industry. Construction employee's interpersonal relationship is perceived as the foundation of all activities performed at the construction site. Further, it allows the supervisor or manager to build a relationship with the entire working groups without alienating any employee in the work environment. This study seeks to explore the interpersonal relationship among employees within construction sites. To achieve the aim of the study, published and unpublished papers were reviewed. The study revealed that interpersonal relationship among employees influences the performance of both individuals and the entire progress of the project positively or negatively. The study also established that interpersonal relationship among employees fosters cordiality among employees, enriches communication and reduces interpersonal clashes. The study concludes that when good interpersonal relations is established within the construction industry, employees would relate well to each other and work in an encouraging environment that would avoid delays in the project.

**Index Terms**—Construction, employees, interpersonal relationships.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**T**HE construction industry is dominated by operations within the sector that engages substantial human activities globally. The human undertakings need to be—

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bounded and consolidated by the interpersonal relationship among employees to achieve all the associated benefits that come with the industry. Velmurugan [1] demonstrated that one of the vital machinery of human relationship is an interpersonal relationship. An interpersonal relationship is an association between two or more individuals that may range from transitory to permanent [1]. This relationship may be based on inference, love, solidarity, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment.

Interpersonal relationships are formed in the context of social-cultural and other influences including work environment. Similarly, Hui [2] pointed that the perspective of interpersonal relationship can differ from family or kinship relations, friendship, and marriage, relations with associations, work, clubs, neighbourhoods, and places of work. This relationship may also be regulated by law, custom, or agreement, and are the basis of social groups and society as a whole [1]. In the context of the construction industry, the dominance of labour driven activities makes interpersonal relationship among employees' imperative for the sector.

The construction industry is a vital sector not only in South Africa but to the most globally economy and a significant employer. Construction employee's interpersonal relationship is perceived as the foundation for all actions at the construction site. This is because the most operations within the construction fraternity usually involve some level of interdependence. Further, it allows the supervisor or manager to build a relationship with the entire working groups without alienating any employee in the work environment. For this reason, employees must be encouraged to relate well to them and with management to foster growth both at the firm level and at the industry. The good interpersonal relationship among construction employees tend to influence each other, share their thoughts and feelings, and engage in activities together [1]. Because of this interdependence, most things that affect one employee of the relationship will have associated level of impact on the other employee resulting in an entire impact of the set objectives of a project and its performance. It is alongside with this backdrop that this study seeks to explore how interpersonal relationship will be instituted among construction employees.

## II. A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

The term of “interpersonal relationship”, emanating from the field of psychology. Fritz Heider conceptualised this terminology in as early as 1958. The terminology suggested denotes relations between a few people and how one person thinks, feels, expects, and reacts in response to the actions of others. However, along with the field of psychology, various other disciplines such as sociology and communication remain vital contributors to the interpersonal relationship concept [3].

All discipline tends to dialogue on the interpersonal relationship relation differently. For example, sociologists examine the associations between macro-societal forces and the changing forms and stability of family or group relationships as well as outcomes such as marital satisfaction [4]. Experts within the field of communication, which are interested in interpersonal relationship research, view relationships as being formed across repeated communicative connections; each new transaction adds new information to the one that came before which builds a cumulative database of information about the relationship [4].

Herington et al [5] stressed that for firm’s employees to ascertain an enhanced interpersonal relationship strength in at the work environment; there must be viable cooperation, the balance of power, communication, attachment, shared goals/values, trust and absence of damage conflict. Herington et al [5] further stressed that each these factors in the model enhancing employees’ interpersonal relations truly depicts a model that sought to enrich employees’ relations.

### A. *Interpersonal Relationship*

Interpersonal relationship is the mutual link between two or more persons. Most often, this link is based on the emotion of love or liking one other [1]. This is because interpersonal relationship at any level is sustained by emotion, particularly at the higher levels. Obakpolo [6] found that anything that would bring two individuals together to make them remain in a relationship includes their desire and the aspiration of achieving a goal. For this reason, when the interpersonal relationship is born, it must be fed and nurtured to encourage growth, but if ignored, the relationship would deteriorate and die [1].

Establishing interpersonal relationship is a severe activity that yields dividends to those committed to it. Interpersonal relationship is the social association, connection or affiliation between two or more people. Additionally, interpersonal relationship within a firm will also enhance the interpersonal skills of the people at work. Therefore, interpersonal relationships in the work environment have a valuable impact on both the individual the entire organisation.

### B. *Benefits of interpersonal relationship*

Interpersonal relationship is acknowledged in literature to have many benefits. Sias [7] remarked that relationships are indispensable for existing systems and are the hub of organisations. It is through relationships such as interpersonal that organisations maintain stability [8]. Similarly, Wheatley

[9] further suggests that academics should give attention to how a workplace organises its relationships; not its tasks, roles and hierarchies, but also, the form of relationships and capacities built to maintain and transform them. This is because workplace relationships are beneficial and comprise of interpersonal relationships in which employees are involved in performing their jobs. Such relationships include supervisor-subordinate relationships, peer worker relationships, workplace friendships, romantic relationships and customer relationships [7].

Further, Sias [7] stressed that interpersonal relationship among employees fosters cordiality among employees, enriches communication, and reduces interpersonal clashes. Also, Morrision [10] emphasised that relationships at work could increase individual staff attitudes such as job satisfaction, job commitment, engagement and perceived organisational support. Song and Olshfski [11] on the other hand stressed that employee’s negative work attitudes could be alleviated when peers act as confidantes to converse bad and unpleasant work experiences, hence the need for proper interpersonal relations. Similarly, interpersonal relationship within a firm will avoid devaluing of employees and bring about the development of a useful listening skill by all levels. This will also permit an excellent communication at all levels between management and subordinates to work towards a common targeted goal and objective.

### C. *Construction Employees*

Construction is a labour-intensive industry and governments around the world to stimulate employment in the face of economic downturns regularly use public investment in construction projects. [12]. Davies et al [13] similarly supported that the construction industry employs a high percentage of the workforce, with the highest record of job losses compared to other industrial sectors. Davies et al [13] further stressed that over the past decades, the employees had experienced a shift from routine work to knowledge work. This involves the continuous process of creation of new insights and beliefs that define problems; develop and apply new knowledge to solve problems; and then further develop new knowledge through the action of problem-solving. For this reason, employees within this sector would need to be bound by a healthy relationship that would tie them together.

Approaches however to increase (labour) productivity in construction are essential; as the comparative cost of human resources rises there is an increasing need to develop systems of work that lead to growth in productivity [14]. However, determining such approaches is challenging. Despite the apparent simplicity of the definition of labour productivity, this indicator is challenging to track consistently, mostly because of the complexity of quantifying and comparing diversified outputs in construction [15]; [16]. Construction employees may be classified as skilled and unskilled. Although the success of employee’s roles leverages on the relationship is dependent on [17].

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The study was solely exploratory to help ascertain the aim of this study. Current literature underpinned the exploratory technique via a desktop study, which made use of related literature on the study themes. Prior research conducted by academics on the theme pertinent to this paper on construction employee's interpersonal relationships on work performance is presented in this section. This technique provided an appropriate investigation, analysis for the study. Accordingly, the general literature of interpersonal relations and was later narrowed from construction industry perspective of employees. The literature however highlighted on the formulation of the concept interpersonal relationship, types, impacts supported by the benefits of interpersonal relationship on the entire construction operation.

#### V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exploring the intricacies interpersonal relations of construction employees have brought to light in this study the vivid information on the need for interpersonal relations among construction employees. The literature established that construction industry is a labour intensive sector, which combines both skilled and unskilled labour in its operation. Further, this suggests that integrating large extent of labour to achieve a set objective either at firm or industry level would need underpinned relations such as interpersonal. Similarly, Sias [7] stressed that interpersonal relationship among employees fosters cordiality among employees, enriches communication, and reduces interpersonal clashes. Therefore, managers of construction firms must endeavour to institute schemes among employees that would ensure interpersonal relations. Davies et al [13] similarly supported that the construction industry employs a high percentage of the workforce, with the highest record of job losses compared to other industrial sectors. An additional finding from the study informs that it is through relationships such as interpersonal, that organisations maintain stability [8]. This is because workplace relationships are beneficial and comprise of interpersonal relationships in which employees are involved in performing their jobs. Moreover, interpersonal relationship within a firm will also enhance the interpersonal skills of the people at work

#### III. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This paper aimed to examine the construction employee's interpersonal relationships at the site. The study contributes to knowledge by expanding an in-depth understanding of the concept of interpersonal relationships. The study highlighted on the relational for an interpersonal relationship to be encouraged among construction employees. Also, the study stressed that the construction industry is a high labour-intensive sector, which needs interpersonal relations among its employees. Another contribution to knowledge, captured in this study, was the suggestion of the factors that could influence interpersonal relationships. These factors include teamwork, respect for employees, communication, equitable

treatment of employees, training, friendly environment, and active listening. The notion of this study was that the addition of any of these factors to interpersonal relationships might positively affect construction employee's performance.

#### VI. IMPLICATION OF STUDY

This study apart from linking it to the construction fraternity has a broader spectrum. The study highlights the various ingredients of interpersonal relationship such as the benefits, what an interpersonal relation refers to as well as where these relations must be instituted among employees. Also, this study infers construction industry must endeavour to encourage interpersonal relations among its employees due to its associated benefits regardless of the some of the challenges that may be accompanied.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was aimed at exploring the interpersonal relations among construction employees. To achieve this purpose, the study adopted the use of existing literature via desktop. The definition of what constitutes interpersonal relations was captured supported by the benefits interpersonal relationship in the context of employees. The study established that human relations contribute to productivity on the construction site. The study contributes to knowledge with the suggestion of the factors that could influence interpersonal relationships as well as the provision of an in-depth explanation of interpersonal relations that makes the theoretical conception of the study comprehensive.

The study concludes interpersonal relations perform a very vital role in every organisation as well as all levels of human endeavour that drive output of firms. As a result, in the construction industry as a labour intensive sector, management must strive to establish such relationship to foster harmony. The study further concludes that good relations at the workplace install integration that brings together of people from the various ethnic background and different groups and association to work cooperatively and productively. This would drive social fulfilment with the philosophy of motivation in a work situation.

Management must also endeavour to have human relations as part of the firm's policy to foster right working environment the will drive employees to work in harmony. The study also proved that vibrant interpersonal relationships within the organisation creates a union and encourage employee satisfaction that further enhances employee's operational efficiency. The study recommends Managers of construction firms to institute good interpersonal relations in their corporate objectives due to the associated benefits that emanate from such good practice.

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