



ENHANCING LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY IN MULTI STOREY BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract:

The Construction Industry, which was badly hit by the demonetisation, is getting back to normalcy with construction activities coming up in full swing. Chennai City and its outskirts are buzzed with building work from small apartments to tall towers.

Next to agriculture, construction industry is the source of employment for a large number of people, mostly uneducated.

The piquant situation is that in some parts of the state the activities have come to a “slow going” due to paucity of river sand and whereas in the City and its outskirts, the work is going on uninterrupted.

While the small builders are worst hit by the non-availability of river sand, the big builders manage the activities. The reason is that they have rate contract with two to three large suppliers for sand. Moreover, they are also using M Sand in the construction activities.

Keywords: Productivity; Accountability; Motivation; Training; Supply Chain Management.

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1. Introduction

The availability of labour in construction sector is always lopsided. In rural areas, during the off season of agriculture, people flock in for construction sector. The labour is cheaply available and hence their wages too.

In City and outskirts, the activities go on almost throughout the year. The demand for labour is more here. Many big builders, in order to ensure, continuous and hassle free availability of labour, enter into Labour Contract. People are migrating from rural areas to urban areas for employment, largely in construction projects.

2. Scope of Research

Personal visit to the site. Observation and Discussion with personnel at the site.
Number of site visited is one and the details are as under.

Contours	Details
No. of sites visited	1
No. of floors	12
No. of Site Supervisors	4
No. of River Sand Suppliers	3
No. of Bricks Suppliers	2
No. of Labour Contractors	2
No. of Personnel at the site	300 (approx.)
No. of Lady Workers	About 25
Facilities offered	Club House, Swimming Pool, GYM, Guest Rooms, CCTV, Mini Theatre, Banquet Hall etc.,

3. Shortage of Construction Labour in Cities

It is a fact that in the City and its outskirts, construction labour is in shortage. There is a heavy demand for qualified construction labour. The people are having very many other opportunities to get job such as Delivery Boys in Courier Agencies and in other companies for similar jobs.

Even for Ladies, they have good avenues open for them in companies where they fit in ideally for housekeeping functions. In fact, they prefer to choose these jobs compared to work at construction site.

Many companies are air conditioned (as opposed to construction sites which are wide open and exposed to sun/rain) and they get excellent treatment in a different work ambience there. Having no other option only, they come for construction work and their activities are chiefly contained to Helpers (in local vernacular "Sitthhaal").

4. Factors Affecting Labour Productivity

While the simple formula for Productivity is output divided by input, this cannot precisely reflect the labour productivity. There are so many other factors which have a direct bearing on labour productivity.

In other words, for the given input, the output of labour would vary depending on the other things which determine the same.

The most important of these are:

- Site Conditions
- Safety Measures prevalent at the site
- Availability of materials
- Quality of Supervisor/Site in Charge and Supervision.
- Work Training/Motivation
- Accountability of Individuals at the site

In the site visited, it was observed that all the four Supervisors/Site In Charge are educated and well mannered.

The Builder, being in the field for decades, is very particular that the Site In Charge should be a person of pro-active nature. The Sr. Official said that they are clear on this as the personnel at the site are guided by the Site in Charges only.

They lay down, apart from work knowledge and other skills needed for the construction sites, three essential qualities for the Site In Charges which are (i) Trouble shooting Ability (ii) Quality of Compassion and Consideration with the workers and (iii) Willingness to shoulder responsibility with Accountability.

The Site In Charges said that they take personal accountability for the work being handled by them. They further said that this infuses a sort of pride and commitment in handling their personnel.

Their Company (the Builder) has a system of crediting them with points for their committed performance and based on this, they get excellent reward at the end of the year. In fact, the builder deserves the commendation for the excellent system being pursued in his organisation. Here, it is worthwhile noting the following.

“An Important determinant of successful strategy execution is the extent to which the firm can create a culture of accountability within the firm”.

(Source: Pages 161 – 165. Book Name: The Work Force Score Card – Managing Human Capital to Execute Strategy. Authors: Mark A Huselid, Brian E Becker, Richard W Beatty, copy right ©2005, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Massachusetts, ISBN: 13: 978 – 1 – 59139 – 245 – 3.) [1]

5. Perform or Go Away

The majority of labours in construction projects are poorly educated. They are people of brown than brain. It calls for tremendous patience and knack of handling them. If they are convincingly explained, they would even redo the whole lot of work without a murmur. On the other hand, if they are rubbed, they would even abandon the work and go away.

Though the builder is having Labour Contract and is free from the bother of maintaining their own personnel, if a bunch of labour shows resistance, the ultimate sufferer is only the builder.

The Labour Contract has a provision that if the builder suffers on account of the misbehaviour of the Labour, such a loss is to be covered up by the Labour Contractor.

One of the Officials made a private remark that they did come across such a situation many a time in the past. The Builder had shown great restraint in not escalating the issue with the Contractor, but got a different bunch of labour, replacing the trouble mongers.

This gave him double benefits – saving his precious time and money on court issues and also facing embarrassment with the contractor.

The smart approach of the builder earned him excellent good will with the contractor which is paying rich dividends to them.

The Builder is very clear in his approach that while he gives absolute freedom to the workers, he takes stern measures in sending out the sluggish workers then and there. The instructions to his own people are “not to tolerate sluggishness in site”.

As the price of the apartments is prefixed by the builder, any creeping costs only eat away the legitimate profits of the builder. The extra expenses incurred on account of the “go slow workers” are only to be borne by the builder. Given the large scale activities, if this goes unnoticed, it will turn out to be a major blow to him. Hence, removal of such people takes place often.

This also gives a sense of commitment (if not fear) in the minds of the workers to be more involved in their activities.

From the point of view of productivity, go slow or sluggish execution only results in mounting of avoidable expenses and ultimate erosion of legitimate profits of the builder.

The official further said that the Builder cannot brook with any insubordination or willful go slow in activities and anybody indulged in will be shown their way out.

Also, since the Labour Contractors are there with him for quite many years, his demands are met without a quarrel or question.

This is, perhaps, one of the reasons for their leadership in the field.

It is to be noted that “if someone believed that he could move further and faster than the current reality dictates, now is the time to tell him, no matter how this might hurt his feelings. If there is still a chance he can meet his career goal at the company, you have a chance to show him that path and reengage him.

If he is not going to reach his career goal at the company, give him a chance to succeed somewhere else”

(Source: Pages 102 – 104. Book Name: One Page Talent Management – Eliminating Complexity, Adding Value: Authors: Marc Efferon + Miriam Ort. By Harvard Business Press, Boston, Massachusetts, Copy right 2010, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, ISBN: 978 – 1 – 4221 – 6673 -4) [2]

6. Tactics of Handling Construction Labour – Supervision

The Labourers are like raw clay. With proper guidance and motivation, they can be made to do wonders. They are always ready to go a step ahead in completing their work. They also would not mind staying back on their own in order to complete the work. In fact, they would be unwilling to leave the site with the work half way through.

It is always the general attitude of workers. A good and smart Supervisor is an asset to both the workforce and also to the builder.

The job of Supervisor or Site In Charge is not merely supervising the work being done. They have to always think ahead and look ahead in planning, organising and executing the work schedule as planned. If any delay has occurred, it only speaks bad of the Site In Charge.

Right from making available the materials for the day to organising personnel at the place of work, the whole responsibility rests with the Site In Charge only. He assumes a crucial role in the construction site.

A Senior Official made an off the record mention that a year ago, two supervisors were asked to leave the site (the job) due to their lack of commitment in performance. A slide in performance is considered as negligence, by the Company.

The management found that due to their miscommunication with the personnel, considerable loss has occurred and that has cost their job.

While technically the Project Manager holds the office, practically, the Supervisors or Site In Charge only do interaction with the workers and they are only held responsible for both the good and bad of the workers' performance.

The Site In Charge must be an expert in both passing on the information to people concerned for execution of the contract and also in receiving the same from Suppliers and Contractors for proper mixing and matching.

It is relevant to note the following.

“A Supervisor must be alert to the working signs of a unit in trouble. Some signs may include potential performance declines, budget deficiencies, unnecessary and cumbersome policies, fear of conflict and taking risks, tolerance of work incompetence and poor communications within the department”.

(Source: Pages 39 – 41. Book Name: Supervision Today – Sixth Edition: Authors: Stephen P Robbins, David A Decanzo and Contributions by Robert M Wolter. Published by Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Columbus, Ohio, Copy right @ 2010, 2007, 2004 and 2001. ISBN: 13 – 978 – 0 – 13 – 503842 – 0 and ISBN: 10 – 0 - 13 – 503842 – 1) [3]

7. Migrated Labour and Communication Problem

It is a fact that construction industry is the source of abundant employment opportunities to migrated labour. People from different States of the Country keep coming to Tamil Nadu and a majority of them get occupied in construction sectors.

Normally, the migrated people find it difficult to cope with the new working atmosphere, in a different state. More than that, the co-workers already working at the site find it cumbersome to get along with the migrated workers.

The problem, basically, is language. The Builder of the site visited has, in his permanent payroll, the people knowing Hindi as well. The officials of the Builder know Tamil, their Mother Tongue, English and also Hindi.

While communication is a problem in other sites, the site visited has no such problem at all.

One of the officials made a private remark that the productivity of the migrated labour is commendable and their work involvement is superb. He further said that it could be due to the fact that they would like to get stuck to the job safely and for that they are prepared to go a mile extra also. They want to show that their commitment level is more than that of the locals.

With no language barrier, they mingle freely with the co-workers, of course, with the guidance of the Supervisors/Site In Charge.

Issuing instructions and understanding the same matter a lot in determining the productivity of labour. Any work instruction, if not properly issued, will not yield any desired result. At times, it may even become counterproductive with misunderstanding.

A small error in concrete mixing or marble fixing will become costly.

More than the workers, the Supervisor should be attentive at all times. The workers, who are basically sincere and hardworking will show exemplary performance with crystal clear instructions and closer supervision.

The Supervisor or Site In Charge is expected to be a person of vision and clarity. He should be an Enabler in getting things done by his people. There should not be an iota of confusion or misunderstanding in his instructions. He should be an excellent Communicator.

The Builder of the site visited is blessed with such people.

In this regard, it is worthwhile noting the following

“You should not only communicate what you want done, you should also encourage people to communicate with one another. Allow people as much freedom as possible, to develop horizontal relationships. This can facilitate co-ordination far more effectively than rigid and authoritarian control from above”

(Source: Pages 44 – 47. Book name: *How to be an Even Better Manager – Sixth Edition*. Author: Michael Armstrong, copyright @ Michael Armstrong, first edition 2006. Published by: Kongan Page India Private Limited, 4737/23, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002, ISBN: 81: 7554 – 299 – 3) [4]

8. Motivation the Determinant of Productivity

The Supervisor said that the migrated workers are prepared to even stay back, without looking for any overtime or other benefits, just to finish their job of the day, thoroughly. This has led to a sort of inducement in the minds of locals to put in greater efforts in the work and voluntary involvement and mixing with the migrated workers more freely to show their performance and commitment.

The Supervisor, who knows Hindi, also motivates them with reassuring words. This, he said, had produced wonderful results.

Within a week or so, all the personnel at the site, both the locals and also the migrated became closer and their collective performance boosted their enthusiasm and shown a remarkable productivity. It resulted in a healthy competition in execution.

The initial distrust amongst themselves was totally removed and a bond of friendship was established thanks to the approach of the visionary Supervisor.

All the staff of the Builder are enthusiastic, committed and show friendly approach with the site personnel.

Not only the Management Theories but also the practical work ethics show that the people will show greater commitment and larger involvement, if only they are properly guided and motivated. Conversely, a negative approach will end up in chaos.

The success story of the Builder is due to the commitment of his staff and workers.

Motivated people come out of their own barriers and also ensure that others too follow suit. That is the wonderful effect of motivation.

It is quite pertinent to know the following.

“There is a vast number of reasons why individuals may not perform their job effectively. Some of the reasons may be within an individual in terms of lack of motivation or interest in the job. Others may be, due to the individual’s relationship with others”.

(Source: Pages 178 – 184. Book Name: *Human Resource Development – Strategy and Tactics*, Authors: Juani Swart, Claree Mann, Steve Brown and Alan Price. Copy right @2005, Elsevier Butterworth – Heinemann, Linacre House, Jordan Hill, Oxford OX28DP, 30, Corporate Drive, Burlington, MA 01803. ISBN: 0 – 7506 – 6250 - 6) [5]

9. Safety Measures and Site Condition

The safety measures at the site and also the overall atmosphere play an important role in determining the productivity of the labour.

Construction activities are largely risky and even a small slip may prove to be fatal. In small sites, safety measures are not heeded at all. The workers perform in a grip of fear deep in their mind. This definitely dampens their enthusiasm and has a bearing on productivity. Their mind set is to leave the site safely and as quickly as possible.

They are automatically bent towards doing the job in a haphazard manner and this is quite inevitable. This worsens the situation further.

Doing the job more than once and getting peevish in mind leading to bickering with fellow workers and also supervisors. All these end up in a mess.

The site visited is endowed with all safety measures required for a large scale projects. The personnel have a fear free mind and work with a sense of protection. This definitely enhances their productivity.

10. Conclusion

The site is furnished with all safety parameters required for a safe construction.

All the staff of the Builder are positive in mind and show exemplary commitment level. They are compassionate with the workers and give them freedom of operation.

All the site personnel have easy accessibility with the Supervisors.

The Builder ensures that once in a fortnight, Meeting with All Concerned is conducted. This gives him an update of the activities going on and also the corrective action, if any needed.

The Supply Chain Management of the builder is simply remarkable. No halt of work took place for want of materials or any other reason. Probably, this is a common feature with large scale builders and small builders normally run into problems on these things.

Recommendations

- [1] The small builders, in their own interest, follow the Big Builders in ensuring safety parameters, compliance with statutory regulations and timely availability of materials.
- [2] The plan approved must be followed with total adherence throughout the construction.
- [3] No repeat work should be entertained. This silently leads to poor productivity. No labour is interested to do the same job again, even if they are paid for the same. Another important thing is that a rework erodes the profitability of the builder. Frequent reworks weaken the structure too.
- [4] While the large scale builders are always fully equipped in all aspects, the small builders must bear in mind the following to have full labour productivity.

- [5] The labour force should be committed in their work. They must be given freedom of operation. While supervision is a must, it should not be to the extent of irritating them. An irritated worker cannot show full productivity. In fact, it will have negative impact.
- [6] Before start of the work, all materials must be made available.
- [7] Safety measures should not be compromised upon, as construction activities are always risky.
- [8] The Site In Charge/Supervisors must be Enablers and expert in Motivation.

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