

ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF SEWA

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Abstract: Behind the production of every product or service there is human mind, effort and man hours. No product or service can be produced without the help of human beings. Human beings are the fundamental resource for making or constructing anything. Today many experts claim that machines and technology are replacing human resource and minimising their role or effort. An un-ignorable fact here is machines and technology have been built through human aid and despite the technology companies have been constantly in search for talented, skilled and qualified professionals to further develop and work with the latest machines and technology. No field is more dependent on human resource than the construction sector. This paper tries to get a clearer understanding about the role of interpersonal communication and employee involvement in the construction sector, with special reference to the work done by SEWA.

Index Terms- Human Resource, interpersonal communication, construction workers, employee benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management is the process of recruitment, selection of employees, providing proper orientation and induction, providing proper training and the development of skills, assessment of employees (performance appraisal), providing proper compensation and benefits, motivating, maintaining proper relations with labour and with trade unions, maintaining employees' safety, welfare and health by complying with labour laws of the concerned state or country.

Human resource management is the process of proper and maximum utilisation of the available and limited skilled workforce. The core purpose of the human resource management is to make efficient use of existing human resource in the organisation. The Best example at present situation is, construction industry which has been facing serious shortage of skilled workforce. It is expected to triple in the next decade from the present 30 per cent, the shortage will negatively impact the overall productivity of the sector, warn industry experts.

Every organisations' desire is to have skilled and competent people to make their organisation more effective than their competitors. Humans are the most important asset for the organisation rather than land and buildings, without employees (humans) no activity in the organisation can be done. Machines are meant to produce more goods with good quality but they should get operated by humans in the first place.

For any organisation to function effectively, it must have resource of men (Human Resource), money, materials and machinery. The resources by themselves cannot fulfil the objectives of an organisation, they need to be collected, co-ordinated and utilised through human resources. And, the effective management of human resources is also vital. Hence, Human Resource Management (HRM) has emerged as a major function in organisations. Human Resource Management is the organizational function that deals with issues related to people such as compensation, hiring, performance management, organization development, safety, wellness, benefits, employee motivation, communication, administration, and training.

Every organization has specific goals to be achieved depending on what it is about. With this in mind it is important to know that the tools and techniques used are different based on what is to be achieved. For instance a road sweeping company would need tools like

brooms and dust pans which would not be useful in a baking company which would mainly make use of cookers and baking equipment. The human resource department spells out the tools, techniques and methods necessary to make the employees work efficiently and feel comfortable while they are at it. It becomes easier for the employees to work where all the necessary tools are provided. These are just some of the roles of the human resource department in an organization and through these roles; they make the work place run smoothly without any trouble. It is largely through the interpersonal communication network that information passes back and forth making the communication of messages seamless and organic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Construction provides much needed work opportunities for some of the poorest and most marginalized sections of society in developing countries. Construction output, by value, is heavily concentrated in the developed world. The high income countries of Europe are responsible for 30 per cent of global output, the United States for 21 per cent and Japan for 20 per cent. The figure for India, is only 1.7 per cent; for China, despite its huge size and rapid economic growth in recent years, is only 6 per cent.

While three-quarters of output is in the developed countries, three-quarters of employment is in the developing world. Many construction workers in these countries are informally employed and not counted in official data, so the real number is likely much higher. Technology is the reason for this disparity. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), in richer countries where labour is expensive, machines have largely replaced workers in many new construction tasks (although repair and maintenance is still very labour intensive). In developing countries, where labour is cheap, most tasks are still done by manual methods with minimal use of machinery and equipment. With the worldwide trend towards decentralization, the role of local authorities in promoting local economic development and decent work has become prominent. This is particularly notable in the construction sector, where local authorities can exert considerable influence through procurement or policies to regulate local building practices. Nevertheless, information and knowledge about their potential for promoting decent work in the sector are still poorly understood. Publications on decent work have not acknowledged the potential role of local authorities; instead, they have largely focused on the private sector. In addition, many development and aid agencies have not explored the full potential of such an approach, despite the debate launched by the United Nations Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul in 1996.

The construction industry is notorious for the denial of basic workers' rights, particularly of Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining. Harsh behaviour by employers and contractors in attempting to prevent the organization of trade unions is commonplace. There are numerous examples of construction workers being sacked or victimized for legitimate union activity. Experience reveals that through communication intervention of the positive kind much of the frustration and angst on either sides of the continuum gets resolved and minimised.

As with all informal economy workers, government regulation (national and local) – or lack of regulation – affects every aspect of workers' livelihoods, rights and conditions of work. A fundamental and crucial objective of construction workers' organizations is therefore to win recognition and representation in government agencies that have jurisdiction over the sector. Construction is one of the fastest growing sectors in the Indian economy. In 2011-2012 it accounted for 8% of the country's GDP and about 11% of its workforce. As a result, India has the 9th largest construction market in the world. This sector is extremely diverse and complex. Hence, the survey results in the greater Delhi area (the National Capital Region or NCR) should not be taken as necessarily representative of conditions in the whole country. Nevertheless, they reveal some disturbing trends in labour conditions that are likely to be representative, to some degree, of conditions across the country. A central problem confronting workers who want to secure their labour rights in this sector is that their real employers are hidden at the end of a long complicated chain of the subcontracting of construction work and the recruitment of workers. The great bulk of migrant workers (94%) have no formal labour contract. So there is no formal employment relationship. They do not even know who their real employer is. And as the construction industry has grown rapidly and become more concentrated at the top, the chain of subcontracting of both work and workers has become longer and more complicated. A great majority of construction workers report having no access to social security benefits even though several government schemes are in place that could benefit them. These include, for example, access to injury compensation, health benefits and retirement benefits.

METHOD

The method adopted to understand the varied sides of the issue at hand is case study. The case study method helps in highlighting the problems of one sector or enterprise, the solutions adopted by the same and the mechanisms used to get out of sticky situations. A case study is a "published report about a person, group, or situation that has been studied over time. If the case study is about a group, it describes the behaviour of the group as a whole, not behaviour of each individual in the group. Case studies can be produced by following a formal research method. The case studies are likely to appear in formal research venues, as journals and professional conferences, rather than popular works. Through the case study it is possible to draw generalisations. The present research attempts to get a better understanding by looking at the work done by SEWA.

ANALYSIS: CASE STUDY

SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) the biggest collective of women workers in the informal economy, has a combined membership of more than 1.8 million members. This includes more than 20,000 construction workers in the city of Ahmedabad, many of whom were former textile workers, retrenched after the introduction of new technologies in the mills. SEWA has since been organizing women construction workers into a common fold in Ahmedabad. The workers' leaders have met every month to discuss their problems. The leaders have visited all the 'Kadianaka' (temporary job seeking centres) crossroads where the construction workers stand in the mornings in search of work. SEWA has conducted a survey of the socio-economic and working conditions of the construction workers. It has initiated dialogue with the Gujarat State Labour and Employment Department to include the informal workers in a new national legislation that recognizes the rights of construction workers, including access to welfare benefits which often times gets ignored. As a result, SEWA has been included in a state-wide government task force to investigate the issue, leading to the establishment of the *Gujarat State Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board*. Despite the strong move by the Board the construction workers were still not able to gain access to the welfare benefits they expected, as the Welfare Board ruled that a worker has to present a certificate from the employer and contractor that she/he has worked for 90 days in the prior year. This is, of course, virtually impossible in the informal construction industry, especially in Ahmedabad, given the prevalence of day-labouring, lack of contracts, long sub-contracting chains, and high levels of illiteracy among the workers.

SEWA has therefore negotiated with the Gujarat state government to accept that a certificate issued by the union itself is sufficient proof of 90 days' work to gain access to welfare benefits. Although the proposal was accepted, the detailed arrangements effectively still exclude the workers concerned, and are still under negotiation. Nevertheless, an essential principle has been established: that SEWA is recognized as a legitimate representative voice of informal construction workers in Gujarat state, and that there are established channels for bargaining and consultation. In the late 1990s, SEWA formed the *Rachaita Construction Workers Mahila SEWA Cooperative* with 200 members. The objective was to establish a self-reliant organization that would increase and regularize income, independently bid for and undertake construction contracts directly with the clients, collectively provide capital items (tools and equipment), facilitate and encourage vocational training for its members, and produce and market low-cost construction materials. It has won a number of construction contracts, as a result of which SEWA's members have been able to access the "mainstream" construction market. They are now learning how to prepare their own business plans, attract investment from banks, and build new business skills which are raising earnings and regularizing their employment.

CONCLUSION

Human resource management is important in all sectors, more so in a labour intensive industry like that of construction. There are limitations to what HR department can do for the construction workers. What can be achieved for the betterment of construction workers can be done by the workers themselves rather than expecting government organisations or HR department officials/members. By a judicious use of communication and dialogue SEWA has successfully seen to the resolution of conflicts within the construction workers.

The case of SEWA is a clear case of people helping themselves. The women workers who are the chief beneficiaries of the work done by SEWA is a case of workers being pro-active and being independent, which is the ultimate achievement in any sector.

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