



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Management**

**MULTICULTURAL WORKFORCE IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY – CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES**

**KEY WORDS:** Multicultural, Workforce, Construction Industry.

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**ABSTRACT**

In today's global business world, a multicultural workforce dominates new construction organisations made up of teams from various nationalities with varying cultural orientations and values. According to the report, employees' evolving age, sex, religion, nationality, physical ability, race, and sexual orientation all had an impact on health, safety, and the workplace. Language or communication barriers, cultural difficulties, religious disparities, and practice/technological problems are only a few of the issues that project and construction managers must face head-on. As a result, it was suggested that construction firms establish a unit tasked with cultural orientation, language training, and better implementation of government policies governing workforce migration.

**INTRODUCTION**

The term "multicultural workforce" refers to workers of all ages, genders, ethnicities, physical abilities, races, and sexual orientations in all styles and locations of work in a country. Multicultural workforces have become more prevalent in recent years, and many researchers have recognised that multicultural workforce management is an essential part of general human resource management.

"Multicultural teams are used because they are perceived to outperform monoculture teams, particularly when success requires multiple skills and judgement," according to Earley and Mosakowski (2000). Although the term "multicultural workforce" is still used to refer to workers with a range of social, ethnic, and skill characteristics, the definition of diversity encompasses not just the personal characteristics of an Organization's employees, but also how the organisation reacts to a multicultural workforce (Crockett J. 1999).

With the rise of international activity in the construction industry, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of a better understanding of cross cultural management, especially in the construction industry (Torrance, 2004), where the workforce may come from various countries, speak a variety of languages, and have a diverse cultural history. Longford (2000) argues that culture shapes how we express ourselves and perceive others' behaviour.

**Review of Literature**

The use of migrant labour is a global phenomenon, and it is widespread in the United Kingdom. According to Balch and Geddes (2010), the UK construction industry has always had a structurally rooted dependence on inexpensive and "flexible" migrant labour.

In the last two decades, project management has advanced significantly, with a much better understanding of the main factors contributing to a project's overall performance. There has been a significant and visible shift in how construction projects are managed during this period. According to (Weatherley, 2006), this shift is evident in Western Europe, where local investment levels have plummeted. Many contractors are now working on projects in other parts of the world with different cultural orientations. Staff from other regions of the world, such as Asia, Africa, and Oceania, have also been seen operating in Western Europe and the United States.

Carson et al. (1995), the use of electronic communications has resulted in a variety of heavy construction projects being

planned and built thousands of miles away from the actual construction sites. According to J. English (2002), this has culminated in more mixed project teams of representatives from various cultures cooperating. Many writers and academics believe that project success is more difficult to achieve when the project team is from proximity to the construction environment (Weatherley, 2006). The situation is even more complicated for ethnic project teams that are geographically dispersed and have different organisational structures and regional cultures.

Suppose the project is geographically scattered, based locally or abroad. In that case, project managers are likely to face difficulties in bringing such a project to fruition and in such a way that it meets their clients business goals in terms of expense, quality, and time. According to Mahalingam and Levitt (2007), construction projects involving participants from multiple countries often result in disputes and delays due to differing cultural expectations of appropriate safety standards among project participants.

E. Ochieng and A. Price (2010), communication is a technical activity in which appropriate methods and legislation are used to enhance the utility of the data transmitted and a social mechanism of contact between individuals on common or varying issues. Miscommunication is seen as a significant detriment to teams (Schmidt, 2007).

Construction workers from various ethnic groups express themselves and interpret others' behaviour in various ways, each based on a unique collection of cultural experience and conventions. This sometimes leads to intercultural misunderstandings, resulting in health and safety issues. One of the most significant obstacles to effective health and safety management on construction sites is the inability to communicate verbally right away.

Kartam et al. (2000), the most significant challenge facing Middle Eastern construction site managers is connectivity, which impedes everyday communication and causes project delays. English, Hindi, Urdu, Italian, and Greek are often used on building sites in the Middle East. Because of the diversity of the workforce, reading safety signals on the job becomes difficult. Because of the effects of British colonialism, the few people who can speak English are further hindered by their intonation, accent, and fluency, making it difficult to understand and comprehend health, safety, and environmental laws on the job. Mecklenburg (2002) emphasised that language and cultural differences, as well as misunderstandings, can obstruct effective communication

and cause workplace safety issues.

Communication issues arise as a result of ethnic project teams' geographical separation. According to Emmitt and Gorse (2007), many contact problems remain unresolved when it comes to multicultural workforces. For example, losing face-to-face communication may lead to misunderstandings and the lack of nonverbal signs, including eye contact and body language. They reasoned that this might make it difficult for team members to build mutual trust and confidence. It's also difficult to organise or supervise multicultural project teams or to confer or establish relationships without face-to-face interaction (Weatherley, 2006). These can undoubtedly pose a safety and health risk, as discussed later in the document.

Similarly, (Trajkovski and Loosemore (2006) found in their analysis that the Australian construction industry has a high proportion of migrant workers whose native language is not English, as a result of which they rely on their native language to interact on site, obstructing the overall integration of the workforce. According to them, this situation resulted in "linguistic ghettos" stopping the team from adopting a common onsite language.

In a study of construction safety in Kuwait, Kartam et al. (2000) found that there was extensive use of foreign labour; that workers had different labour cultures and customs, which reflected in human relations, work practices, orientation, ethics, and communication issues; and that workers were emotionally fragile and preoccupied with their problems. A combination of these factors can impair a worker's focus and attention, resulting in a mistake that could lead to a fatal accident on the job.

A construction site is a multi-religious setting. This distinction must be recognised and appreciated, especially when working in religious countries such as Saudi Arabia or Iran, where women and men wear religious dresses that cover their faces and ears. As such dresses cannot allow clear vision of moving site equipment or a dropping item, Inter-Faith Organization UK observed that this might present a specific problem on health and safety rules when working on-site, hindering site interactions and relationships.

There are notable variations in industrial practice in different parts of the world, and these procedures are peculiar in their own right. They are tailored along with specific standards that employees in certain environments must adhere to. It's possible that technology doesn't exist in the countries where migrant workers come from, making it difficult to implement modern technology. Workers' lack of working awareness of emerging technology in a new setting poses a protection and health threat. Workers' participation in safety ideas, according to Haslam et al., (2005), will help to minimize accidents.

**Multicultural Workforce Challenges**

For modern businesses, organisational diversity is a big obstacle. The basic idea is to recognise and maximise the workforces strengths and abilities as a valuable asset to any company, for-profit or not. Businesses today face a pressing need to identify and successfully adapt these latent abilities and strengths to a diverse workforce. Conflict may arise as a result of a multicultural workforce. Staff behaviours (for example, recruitment, firing, and promotion) are due to a person's state of diversity, and there is the risk of confusion, misinterpretation, or improper conduct amongst individuals. Individuals or parties. It can also trigger anxiety, mistrust, or prejudice among individuals. Employees who are valued at work and feel like they are a part of the team are more likely to stick with their employer. Staff retention lowers recruiting costs and has a significant effect on outcomes. A workforce where people are heard and interact efficiently will function together productively in collaborative teams. Conflicts and

tensions would be easier to resolve. As a result, multicultural workforce management becomes critical.

**Strategies To Overcoming Safety, Health And Environment Challenges In A Multicultural Construction Industry**

Clarke (2003), it is challenging to incorporate workers from various backgrounds into a corporate safety culture. Still, human resource managers must develop strategies and procedures to create and sustain positive safety attitudes for all employees, as seen in Hofstede's cultural model (1984). Individualism versus collectivism, broad or small power gap, powerful or weak ambiguity avoidance, masculinity versus femininity, and short-term versus long-term time orientation are all aspects of the model that may help employees interact efficiently at work.

**Solution to Religious Challenge (Tolerance)**

To effectively address the previously identified problem of safety, health, and the environment on the construction site, it is critical that the site manager receive appropriate training on employee cultures. To avoid offending them, he needs to know their religious beliefs, such as the time for prayers, fasting, or holidays. For example, a site manager may refuse to allow a fasting worker to work on a height for safety reasons because he may not be fit enough in such conditions. Furthermore, proper religious orientation should be given to site workers, especially on the issue of health and safety by informing them of the need to follow specific safety rules and regulations on site, such as providing them with a reflective jacket that covers their entire body from head to toe, a safety helmet that covers their entire head, and other dresses that cover their entire body.

**Solution to Communication Challenge (sign interpretation/ use of images)**

Translation of safety information, use of interpreters, and a variety of visual methods such as sign and poster, fact sheets, brochures, guides, forms, logs, checklist....to communicate essential health and safety information to the migrant workforce could solve the issue of communication as a challenge to safety, health, and the environment in the UK and some other countries.

**Solution To Language Barrier (train And Being Trained)**

Language differences are a subject that has both positive and negative connotations, according to the literature. It has had a negative impact on an organization's competitiveness, especially when viewed through the lens of health and safety. The builders of a tower in Genesis (11:1-9) were incapacitated due to the differences in language that existed, and as a result, they were unable to complete their project.

As a result, site managers should take the following steps to address the problem of health and safety issues on construction sites:

- i. take language classes in the languages that are most commonly spoken on site.
- ii. improve your listening skills so you can understand the popular site language.
- iii. Create a language learning centre.
- iv. Cultural sensitivity training (When speaking or writing to workers from other countries, site managers should choose their language carefully.

**Solution To Cultural/traditional Challenges (good Rapport)**

A manager can create a link with his multicultural workers by learning about their traditions and showing genuine interest in their culture. Better communication will be possible as a result of this. As a result, expenses can be reduced while efficiency is improved.

### **Solution To Technological Challenge (Body Language)**

Globally, technological innovation and implementation are not the same. These differences are a major cause of accident for migrant workers who are unfamiliar with how to use modern machines and equipment because it is not close to what they are used to. Demonstration using body language or some other means of communication to point to the specific equipment being referred to will help to reduce the likelihood of an accident occurring.

### **CONCLUSION**

Multicultural workforces are an important part of today's global business climate, and they are made up of people from various nationalities who have diverse cultural perspectives on the world. The key problem that is challenging health, safety, and the climate in the construction industry is miscommunication among the multicultural workforce, which results in misunderstandings. One of the key risks of such linguistic ghettos is migrant workers' inability to understand site safety notices, resulting in accidents. The best approach to the problems of multicultural workforce appears to be communication through the use of interpreters, body language, visual methods such as sign and poster, fact sheets, brochures, manuals, forms, records, and checklist to convey critical health and safety information to the migrant workforce.

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