

# EFFECTIVE LABOUR/ MANAGEMENT RELATIONS ON PRODUCTIVITY OF EMPLOYEES IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Over the years, there is a major manpower crisis facing the building industry. Ineffective labour/management relations and poor wage structure are considered as one of the major challenges that impede the performance of construction employee nationwide. This reflects a weak relationship between labour and management that prompt strike actions, dissatisfaction of labour force on their management behavior, wages and welfare incentives which influence low productivity of employees in the construction industry. In view of these challenges, this paper presents a systematic approach, in order to find out how good effective labour relation's management can influence employees productivity in the construction industry. To achieve this, oral interviews and a cross sectional study, were conducted on a group of 200 skilled and unskilled labour forces from different construction companies within the South East region of Nigeria. Data were collected through a predesigned questionnaire which was analyzed using percentage and a chi-square test carried out. It was observed, that good effective labour relation triggers good wage policy, which influences productivity amongst other strategies discovered. The paper recommended that the management should fulfill the needs of the labour force in the areas of increase wages, training and development. A healthy industrial relation, should also be promoted by means of pursuing labour laws and standards for sustainable growth in the new technology desired in the construction industry.*

**Keywords:** Good Wages, Labour Force, Management Relations, Productivity, Sustainable Growth and Welfare Incentives.

## INTRODUCTION

Construction industry in Nigeria has grown tremendously since the economic boom of 1970's. The industry has been known to be the largest in Nigeria employing a good proportion of labour force (Olubodun, O. 2010). However, over the years, there is a major manpower crisis facing the building industry. This arises due to the unfavorable system of industrial relation currently adopted between the employer and the labour unions both at national and site levels and poor wage structure amongst other factors. The increasing pressure of trade unions in the construction industry also poses great challenges for employers in terms of what to pay, job security, job satisfaction, autonomy, motivation and retaining of employees, which will produce specific leadership behaviour, work values and management style to produce a strong impact on employee's productivity and good industrial relation (IMA 2012).

Achieving good effective labour management relations is an enviable but a complex phenomenon, since it involves the human element. Labor-management relations are the interacting

relations between labour (employees) and management (employers). According to Amir et. al., 2012, the aim of good industrial relations is to achieve a motivated and capable workforce that sees its work as creative and fulfilling. A breakdown in industrial relations can lead to an industrial dispute where one party takes industrial action. Therefore, the need for training of labour force and the demand for expert in labour management relations continue to grow as new legislation and court rulings continuously update standards for employment conditions in the new era of technological advancement in construction and contract administration. These require the practical skills and knowledge essential to constructive labour-management relations.

Currently, the labour relations in the construction industry are not strictly organized according to labour laws unlike the manufacturing industries. This may force changes in the techniques used in the industry. According to Gordon (1973), the manufacturing industry has had to work within a rigid framework in respect of its personnel and labour policies. But the construction industry has enjoyed in a large measure, informal relationships

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and a very little codification of its policies. It is therefore, noted that this style of management is derived from the attitude, which is adopted by management towards employees. Also, the structure of the industry and its method of working have contributed to this informality.

However, the larger companies and clients have to change owing largely, to pressures from organized labour for establishment of the basic welfare services, level of pay and in particular, bonuses through collective bargaining. They are also being influenced by the experience of other industries as a result of mergers between construction companies and those of other industries. Therefore, the challenge which this change presents can, more quickly than anything else, lead either to a headlong confrontation or to constructive discords out of which a really healthy industrial relations climate can be created.

This scenario leads to a more centrally dominated personnel policy, and the influence is reinforced by the impetus to codification of procedures brought about by the industrial relations Act of 1971 and its code. There are other influences at work, including the authority of the National Joint Council for the Building Industry (NJCBI), organizations and managements being challenged to revive the decreasing effectiveness of the constituent parties at work. This will improve labour performance and productivity in the construction industry for sustainable growth and development.

According to Christopher (1994), traditional labour or management relations lay emphasis on contract negotiations, grievance procedures and discipline administration and arbitration procedures. Also, relations between labour and management have been strained through the years. The management practices that were sufficient 50 years ago, do not work with today's work force. It is time that these practices changed to reflect the current work force (Piderman, 1995). There is also, a distinct trend towards the larger construction firm showed by the sort of labour force employed by contractors. In 1965, the method of classifying the size of firm was changed from classification according to the number of operatives employed to classification by the total number of employees. The latter now include clerical, administrative and highly trained technical

personnel such as Engineers, Technologists, Technicians, Tradesmen, and a very few unskilled personnel.

According to Gordon (1973), the influence of firms with over 600 employees on the pattern of industrial relations, and particularly, on the earning level within the industry, has commensurately increased. This is clearly going to lead to a greater conformity in the numerous management practices either in the form of authoritarian or sometimes paternalistic style of management. While the size of firm has been changing, recent years have witnessed some major changes in the trade union structure in the industry. According to W. S. Hilton, in his book *Industrial Relations in Construction* (1965), there were 19 unions affiliated to the then National Federation of Building Trade operatives with a total number of 420,000 members.

According to Olubodun (2012), construction productivity is affected by a host of other factors, very subtle and difficult to assess such as current economic climate on the job site and how it affects the attitudes of local labour force. Most inefficiency other than actual working tradesmen, points more directly to variables within the control of project managers. The inability of the management to identify incentives that motivate their employee, have led to decline morale, wide spread discouragement, complacency to bottom approach adopted by the management of organization and absenteeism found among employees, which reduce the performance productivity earning and high turnover (IMA, 2012).

However, these changes in the construction industry and the challenges for construction organizations and managers are positive developments for a new feature of industrial relations to arise. What effective and sound industrial relations require among many things, is an acceptance of a responsibility for seeing that the agreements are observed. The absence of any sanctions against defaulting employers can only emphasize the importance of the bodies concerned, and this, in turn, does not make for a healthy climate for industrial relations.

## **The Influence of the Industrial Relations Act on Employers and Employees**

The method, by which the industry secures its work through competitive tendering for various sizes and type of contract, creates a measure of uncertainty, which affects the continuity of employment. Also, continued changes in the location of the place of work, coupled with the sequential nature of the specialist tasks to be performed and the difficulty in organizing the labour force within a trade union, affects labour relations. Yet, the act recognizes and influences the following:

- (i) The role which organized unions should play.
- (ii) The role of management to initiate comprehensive employment policies i.e. policy that forecasts future needs and making decisions on what should be done to meet these needs.
- (iii) The training aspect of manpower planning needs, which could as well, lead to a re-appraisal of the extent of casual employment within the industry.
- (iv) The restriction placed on management's freedom of action in relation to dismissal rules and conditions.
- (v) The introduction of the Redundant Payment Acts, which makes a number of firms cautious of their policy to keep labour permanently employed (Gordon, 1973).

The Industrial Relations Act 1971, is designed to reform labour relations' procedures as well as to initiate them where they are non-existent. It seeks to reduce the incidences and effects of friction and discord, as well as to give rights in law on a more extensive scale than hitherto. This presents in many ways, a challenge to the traditional way of conducting industrial relations in the construction industry and in particular, to the traditional style of management it adopts.

## **Strategies for Improving Labour Relations and Productivity in the Construction Industry**

The objectives of an industrial relations' policy are not something different from the overall company objectives. The goals of such a policy should include a provision of good wage structure, good incentives and good methods of retaining staff in construction for the attainment of the highest level of satisfaction among employees compatibility

with the overall company objectives (Ugwu and Coker, 2012).

However, the assumption that monetary reward is the only form of motivation, has been challenged over time, so much so, that money on the contrary, may be seen as a source of discontent. When inadequate, money reduces productivity effort, but when sufficient, it seldom provides the additional spur to productivity (McGregor, 1960).

The need to establish objectives concerning industrial relations and the study of the needs and aspirations of the people, apply equally to the whole industry as it does within a company. This is because, it presents a challenge to management, and a collective view helps those companies which are in difficulty to fill up the grave risk of disorder. Maslow (1943), is best known for his concept of hierarchy of needs, which he used to explain employee's motivation. He classified needs in ascending order of urgency (Paul.D.Sweeney, 2002): (i) Physiological needs, (ii) Safety needs, (iii) Social needs, (iv) Ego needs and (v) Self-actualization needs.

The plight of industrial relations within the construction industry should not be ignored as it seems to be by so many employers. Nationally, there is a need for strong and effective leadership in construction industry unionism. Also, according to Tseng and Wooden (2001), firms with high rate of union membership were more productive and received higher wages than firms with no union members. In contrast to the above, a consultant report was commissioned to show that reforms of the building industry, achieved 10 percent productivity gain through reducing union influence (Econtech, 2007). Its core data, have since been discredited as either forced or subject to selective or inappropriate interpretation (Allan, Doungam and Peetz, 2010).

According to Hammad, Omran and Pakir (2011), labour relations and productivity can be improved strategically through the following ways:

- (i) **Stable Labour Force:** A basic ingredient of a sound industrial relation's policy is a stable labour force. This should be the first important positive policy to adopt in order to decasualize the construction industry. Why this is necessary, an employer wants to stay in business as it provides him with security. Likewise, continuous employment does the same for the employee.

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Security at home and at work, is one of the basic needs of the large majority of employer and employee in order to concentrate on an employment.

**i Staff Training/Requirement:** Manpower requirement of the industry and the methods of labour-use must be critically examined. Also, highly experienced personnel are required to improve productivity. As such, improved and over sea's training and provision of adequate facilities to expose staff to modern industrial operations, should be encouraged in the construction industry. This will improve good labour relations in the construction industry.

(ii) **Good Wages' Policy:** No wages' scheme can ever be effective without recognition of the different levels of skills even within a trade. Once the need to establish differential awards for skill has been accepted, it follows that the basic wage must provide a standard of living acceptable to the employees. The establishment of a revised wage structure, which is based on a higher basic wage, will hit the maintenance sector of the industry to quite a degree. But firms which deny their employees, adequate basic rate and, which are forced to use other devices such as over time and incentives to establish a living wage, will fail to face up to reality (Steer, et.al.,2004). Overtime must not be regarded as a means to increase wages; it should be used solely as a device to overcome bottlenecks and so, enables other trades to complete their work on subsequent stages without delay.

(iii) **Trade Unionism:** Trade union structure and attitudes are a direct reaction to the stand taken by employers. Considering the task that needs to be performed by the union and the employer, there is a need for continuous and very close contact between unions and employers in the industry.

(iv) **Consultation:** To bring out the best in the industrial relations, consultation as an active form of cooperation is needed between the two parties. Consultation demands dedication and must be developed steadily and satisfactorily in order to achieve positive results in the implementation of other facets of the strategy. However, trade unionism simply facilitates a regular exchange of views between an employer and the employee or trade union. It cannot be taken beyond the aspiration of both parties, but a move towards mutual understanding from which other spheres of co-operation develop.

(v) **Adoption of a Code of Industrial Relation's Practice:** In the construction industry, this code is required and intended to assist managers to improve their industrial relations by establishing the appropriate procedure required under the Act. It should help to develop relationship in such a manner that it is possible to obtain the maximum contribution of all engaged in a contractors' business with the satisfaction of each receiving his or her due reward (Sherleker and Raut, 1979).

(vi) **Improved Communication:** All employees should be adequately informed of the organization's decisions, plans and policies. When given the right information, the workers can then direct their energies towards the realization of the company's objectives. They need to know their responsibilities and limits of their authorities. They also need to know what is going on in the establishment as they affect the organization and the individuals. There should be an avenue for open communication of information, ideas and grievances.

(vii) **Adequate Compensation Plan:** The establishment should map out a comprehensive compensation plan. The compensation plan must include incentives and bonus and profit sharing bonus. The compensation plan should be communicated to them to arouse their interest on the job, and should be well administered.

(viii) **Healthy Working Environment:** The employees should be given healthy working environment for their mental and physical health. Reminders and notices should be displayed at strategic places to remind them of safety precautions.

**Job Enrichment:** Finally, the management could make the jobs more interesting to workers through job rotation and job enrichment, praise for the work well done and freedom of initiatives.

Cunningham (2010), opines that if the above points or ways of motivating staff are employed, the ultimate objectives of the construction industry, which are to increase standard, productivity and profitability will be achieved.

### **Reasons for Good Effective Labour Management Relations**

According to Akwara, Abutu and Okwelume (2014), there is the need to establish

good effective labour management relations in most industries for the following reasons:

- (i) To create good human relations between staff and management.
- (ii) To enhance job satisfaction.
- (iii) To make workers display enthusiasm and loyalty to the management.
- (iv) To influence the productivity and efficiency of the workers.
- (v) To increase esteem (ego) and cooperation among workers in the establishment.
- (vi) To reduce tension and conflicts between management and staff, and help to solve disciplinary problems.
- (vii) To help the industry to grow by reducing union cum management conflict that hamper productivity.
- (viii) To encourage the involvement and commitment of staff to the attainment of not only the organizational goals but also staff goals and needs.

**A Model Procedure Agreement Required of Good Industrial Relations**

The construction industry as a whole has not a very highly organized union movement. In consequence, firms may be of the opinion that no action is needed on such matters as a procedure agreement. According to Gordon (1973), a model procedure agreement required of good industrial relations, must incorporate the following items such as employers’ representation, appointment of the representatives, meetings and facilities, work councils or committees, negotiating bodies, disciplinary code for industrial relations on site, consultative machinery and terms and conditions of employment.

**METHODOLOGY**

In view of the challenges in the construction industry and the following specific hypotheses of the study:

H1. There is no link between good wages and labour satisfaction.

H2. There is no link between labour relations with management cum supervisory behaviour.

H3. There is no link between satisfaction with welfare items and productivity.

This paper presents a systematic approach to find out how effective labour relation’s management can boost productivity in the construction industry. To achieve this, oral interview and a cross sectional study was conducted over a group of 200 employees comprising of skilled and unskilled labour forces from different construction companies within the South East region of Nigeria. The use of a predesigned questionnaire and a mixed empirical methodology i.e. a mixed technique of both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data collection was adopted in this study. The questionnaire was analyzed using percentage and a chi-square test carried out with a tabulated P-value.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Wages Satisfaction and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Labor (Skilled and Unskilled)				
	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
The most important element of raising employees moral and performance are wages.	3	6.25	14.80	30.65	45.30
Wage rate should be changed in relation to time	5.55	6.25	14.40	26.75	47.05
Are you satisfied with your present wages at work?	15.30	21.80	35.55	20.20	7.15
Do your wages meet up your expenses?	21.10	37.50	29.25	7.20	4.95
Do you agree that your salary is fair for your present responsibilities?	15.65	45.65	26.45	7.85	4.40
Do you agree that the same rate should be adopted for old and new employees?	18.15	30.00	24.90	17.00	9.95
Do your wage compare with those in similar public sector?	5.65	16.25	39.35	31.25	7.50
Do your wages compare with others in the private sector?	6.90	20.65	43.15	21.80	7.50
Does increase in wages improve workers satisfaction and productivity?	3.75	4.90	18.05	36.15	37.15

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

In the discussion of results on wages satisfaction and employees productivity, it was observed that, out of 200 labour respondents, 45.30% strongly agree with the fact that wages are the important element for raising employee’s moral and performance. 47.05% of the respondents strongly agree that wage’s rate should be in relation to time. 35.55% are neutral about their satisfaction

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in their current wages and 37.50% disagree that their salary cannot fulfill their expenses while 45.65% disagree that the salary is not fair for their responsibilities. 30.00% of the respondents disagree with the issue that the same wage rate should be adopted for old and new employees. 39.35% are neutral about their wages, when compared with other public sectors and 43.15% are equally neutral about their wages when compared to those in similar private sectors while 37.95 strongly agree that increase in wages of the workers can improve worker’s satisfaction and productivity.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Management/ Supervisory Behaviour and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Labour (Skilled and Unskilled)				
	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Does management seek information from employees’ in setting up their remuneration policy?	18.15	30.00	24.90	17.0	9.95
Do your supervisor considered your suggestions for change?	17.15	25.50	28.70	22.75	11.30
Do you agree in confidence to defend and justify your supervisor’s decisions?	9.05	23.60	35.65	21.40	10.30
My working relationship with management is effective.	15.80	22.95	23.50	21.40	16.35
My supervisor makes fair and balance decisions in terms of ethics.	18.60	44.00	21.60	20.85	33.90
My supervisor provides me with sound job related technical advice.	13.65	19.80	29.10	22.40	15.05
My supervisor shares with me his /her considerable experience / training.	12.50	21.75	27.25	22.40	16.10
My supervisor makes my work difficult for me	10.65	20.75	35.00	22.40	11.20
My supervisor gives me undesirable job assignment.	13.05	18.45	30.35	26.60	23.10
My supervisor can make me feel valued.	8.45	19.35	29.80	24.50	29.80
Do you think that employees’ representation at management board meeting will contribute to high labor productivity?	5.65	6.30	14.35	26.75	46.95
Do your management comply with industrial relation acts/ code of practices.	16.30	32.15	25.60	15.50	10.45

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

On the issue of management/ supervisory behaviour, the results show that, most of the employees in the organizations are neutral about the following: that their supervisor considers their suggestions for change and have enough confidence in their supervisor’s decisions, they are equally, of neutral opinions as regard to the level of effective

working relationship with their management, whether their supervisor provides them with sound job related technical advice, whether their supervisor shares with them considerable experience or training, whether their supervisor makes their work difficult for them, and whether their supervisor gives them undesirable job assignments. While 29.80% of the respondents are neutral and equally strongly agree about the issue of whether their supervisor makes them feel valued at work place. Similarly, in management behaviour, 30.00% of the respondents disagree that, their management do not seek information from employees in setting up their remuneration policy. 44.00% are neutral about their supervisor making fair and balanced decisions in terms of ethics. 46.95% of the respondents do believe that, employees’ representation at management board meeting will contribute to high labour productivity. 32.15% of the respondents are of the opinion that their management do not comply with industrial relation Acts/ Code of Practices favorably.

**Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Satisfaction with Welfare Packages and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Labour (Skilled and Unskilled)				
	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
The housing welfare facilities provided by the management is satisfactory	31.60	24.25	21.00	14.70	8.45
The medical services provided by the management are satisfactory	16.95	22.65	37.35	15.45	15.60
Do you agree that the canteen welfare facilities provided by the management are satisfactory?	16.90	32.35	25.45	11.90	13.40
The transport welfare facilities provided by the management is satisfactory	23.05	18.40	27.90	16.15	14.50
Facilities such as low cost education for children and job training are essential for workers.	4.20	7.85	18.40	20.35	49.20
Benefits like pension funds, employee’s old age benefits and acknowledgement of performance is a powerful motivator that has substantial impact on employee’s productivity.	7.50	8.75	22.60	38.95	44.80
Your company maintains benefits that compared well with other companies in his area of location.	6.25	11.90	41.50	23.95	16.40

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

On the issue of satisfaction with welfare items provided by the management to the workers, the results are insignificant, in respect to the desired labour management relations. In the results, 31.60% of labour respondents strongly disagree with the statement that, they are satisfied with the housing welfare facilities provided by the management. Similarly, 37.35% of the respondents are neutral about the level of satisfaction with the medical welfare facilities provision and 32.35% disagree with the level of satisfaction with canteen welfare facilities provided by the management. 27.90% of the respondents are neutral about the transport welfare facilities provided to them by their management. 49.20% of the respondents strongly agree with the fact that, other facilities like low cost education for their children and on the job training are essential for workers. 44.80% of the respondents are agree that after retirement, benefits like pension funds and employee old age benefits, have substantial impact on employee’s productivity. 41.50% of the respondents are neutral about their company, maintaining benefits that compete well with other companies in their area.

**Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Wages’ Satisfaction and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Chi-square value	P-value
The most important element of raising employees moral and performance are wages.	4.09	0.39
Wage rate should be changed in relation to time	2.73	0.60
Are you satisfied with your present wages at work?	1.17	0.76
Do your wages meet up with your expenses?	2.54	0.64
Do you agree that your salary is fair for your present responsibilities?	5.02	0.29
Do you agree that the same wage rate should be adopted for old and new employees?	4.09	0.39
Do your wages compete with those in similar public sector?	1.17	0.76
Do your wages compete with others in the private sector?	2.73	0.60
Does increase in wages improve workers satisfaction and productivity?	4.52	0.34

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

On the issue regarding good wage and labour satisfaction, the above table shows the statistical figures of issues related to the wage satisfaction. In which it’s clear from the results that there is no associated link, because P-Value of all issues is greater than 0.05. This implies that both skilled and unskilled labour respondents are unsatisfied with wages offered by their employers.

**Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Management / Supervisory Behavior and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Chi-square value	P-value
Does management seek information from employee in setting up their remuneration policy?	4.09	0.39
Does your supervisor consider your suggestions for change?	1.38	0.85
Do you agree in confidants to defend and justify your supervisor’s decisions?	1.05	0.90
My working relationship with management is effective.	6.10	0.13
My supervisor makes fair and balance decisions in terms of ethics.	2.59	0.63
My supervisor provides me with sound job related technical advice.	7.18	0.13
My supervisor shares with me his /her considerable experience / training.	0.29	0.96
My supervisor makes my work difficult for me	3.20	0.53
My supervisor gives me undesirable job assignment.	1.17	0.60
My supervisor can make me feel valued	5.03	0.29
Do you think that employees’ representation at management board meeting will contribute to high labor productivity?	2.73	0.60
Do your management comply with industrial relation Acts/ Code of Practices	4.09	0.39

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

On the issue of management and supervisory behaviour, and from the results, there is no link also, which means that the respondents are unsatisfied or neutral at the edge of management/ supervisory behaviour. Table 5 above, shows the chi-square and P-value of the issues in which the P-value is greater than 0.05.

**Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Satisfaction with Welfare Packages and Labour Respondents:**

Issues	Chi-square value	P-value
The housing welfare facilities provided by the management are satisfactory.	4.06	0.40
The medical services provided by the management are satisfactory.	5.29	0.26
Do you agree that the canteen welfare facilities provided by the management are satisfactory?	3.84	0.43
The transport welfare facilities provided by the management is satisfactory	5.00	0.29
Facilities such as low cost education for children and job training are essential for workers.	6.00	0.20
Benefits like pension funds, employee's old age benefits and acknowledgement of performance is a powerful motivator that has substantial impact on employee's productivity.	2.54	0.64
Your company maintains benefits that compare well to other companies in his area of location.	2.86	0.58

**Source: Field Survey, 2019**

On the issue of welfare items, the results show that there is no link in relationship, which points to the problem of unsatisfied provision of the welfare items for the labour force. The table 6 above, shows the chi-square and P-value of the issues which are greater than 0.05.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

According to the responses from the respondents of the construction companies, the chi-square and P-values of the three cases in relation to the hypothesis, are greater than 0.05 and it was cleared that, the labour relation with their management is still weak. In this study, we discovered that the labour of the construction industries are unsatisfied with their management in respect to wages for their work, the behaviour of the management at work place and the welfare items provided to the staff for their well-being. The most glaring areas of concern in labour/industrial relations are unsatisfied wage structure which causes low efficiency and labour productivity.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was observed that, good effective labour relation triggers good wage policy. Despite all other strategy discovered, good wages and labour relation were discovered in the literature to have influence on the productivity as employees believed that the strength of a man depends on his pocket for gross value to be added. To this effect, without a sound wage structure, labour relations and payment systems, the conflicts which arise from these, make the time available for the development of constructive strategies and proposals for improved relations very limited.

Therefore, it is recommended that, the management should fulfill the needs of the labour force in the areas of increase wages, training and development program regarding behavioural aspects of both the labour and supervisors and for every labour person to be rewarded by incentives according to their performance. A healthy industrial relation, should also be promoted by means of pursuing labour laws, safe guarding the regulation/remuneration relating to the overall working hour and standards. To this effect, it is equally recommended that, the government should take part in this segment to enforce the labour law accurately in order to protect the rights to the labour force and management for sustainable growth in the new technology desired in the construction industry.

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