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The Effects of Different Cultural Backgrounds on Teamwork on Construction Site

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES: The intent of this research is to investigate the impact of different cultural backgrounds on construction teams. Human relations have an important role in the productivity and rate of disputes of a project team when there is a good relationship between the team members, the team may be more effective in achieving the planned goals.

PROBLEM INVESTIGATED: The human resource aspect of any given construction project is a crucial issue. People from different cultural backgrounds come together in a project. They are then put together to form a team. The rate of success of the team might be affected by the relationship of the team members to one another. The team's productivity and frequency of disputes is influenced by their cultural backgrounds.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY: The study is a combination of both primary and secondary work with special focus on human relations management. The author will gather, evaluate and use information from both the national and international frontiers to conduct the study and come up with potential solutions to the problem stated.

FINDINGS: Attitude is important and it dictates the relationship among team members. It also has an effect on the productivity of the people on a project team. This report challenges the managers of construction projects to do more to make people aware of positive working relationships and value them, as they are important on the sociality of projects and more importantly the production scales.

CONCLUSION: The manner in which teams communicate is very influential to the performance of the team, team coordination and the productivity of the team. The Construction Managers need to take seriously the impact of the influence of culture on a team and monitor the teams so to come up with ways of promoting a spirit of a rainbow nation that works well together.

Keywords: Culture, cultural backgrounds teamwork, project team, productivity, human resources, construction industry.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a word taken from the *Latin* word 'Cultura' which stems from Colere which means "to Cultivate". Culture is a word with many different meanings and varies in accordance with the context it is being used. For example, in 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions of "culture" in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (*Wikipedia Website, May 09, 2009*).

According to Wikipedia, the word Culture is most commonly used in the following basic concepts:

- ❖ Excellence of taste in fine arts and humanities, also known as High Culture.
- ❖ An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning.
- ❖ The set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterises an institution, organisation or group. (*Wikipedia Website, May 09, 2009*)

A set of people working together is referred to as a team (Oxford school dictionary, 2001). The dictionary defines work, as "some thing you have to do that needs effort and energy "and" the use of effort and energy to do something. Emphasis is put on the fact that one has to put in effort or/and energy to work. Therefore, from these definitions one can derive the phenomenon of teamwork as, 'A set or group of people who together put up an effort and energy to do or achieve something'.

Culture dot com defines culture as "The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted, through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next".

Culture is a very important subject on both the national and the international perspectives. On the national or local side culture can have a negative influence since we have such a diverse country with different languages, beliefs and religion, races, ethnicity, educational backgrounds, and since we have a capitalist country, this makes the people in South Africa to have a very different living standard. South Africa has another problem since we have a fresh democracy and for the longest time the country was in turmoil because of the 'Apartheid Regime'. During the apartheid time, there were laws in the country that separated and dictated the level at which different races must be viewed in the country. The white people were ruling the country and dictated that other races were inferior to them. This process ran for many years and the races were segregated. People living under those conditions had to accept that the white people were superior. This then started a culture of viewing different races in a different manner and even after the South African black people obtained democracy and freedom; the attitude is still embedded in some people from both the races. This is a scenario that has in a way happened to many countries in the world and to some worse than others. This means that probably the whole world has a perception of viewing other people in a different eye whether it is because of the way they look or the language they speak.

CONSTRUCTION TEAMS

The construction industry is one of the biggest industries in the world with many different projects all over the world. The World Construction Industry's contribution towards the global GDP revolves around one-tenth of the total amount (economywatch.com, July 15, 2009). It is also a potential employment generator and provides work to almost seven percent of the total employed people in the whole world. The extent of this industry has become so vast that the energy, in the form of electricity or fuel, consumed by it hovers around two-fifth of the total energy consumed all over the globe. The

resources that are utilized in the construction industry is also staggeringly high and itself consumes fifty percent of the total world resources (economywatch.com, July 15, 2009). Projects range from small informal private construction projects to multi billion government projects. The construction projects are all unique but all have one goal; give a certain planned output in the agreed time, keeping to the allowed budget and the product must meet the prerequisite specifications. Well skilled people and teams that are familiar with the processes and techniques involved must undertake a construction project. The people involved in managerial positions must know the steps to be taken to reach the required goal and most importantly, they must work as a team to acquire it.

The managers in a project must be able to plan the project before hand from Conception to the finishing and commissioning phase. The manager must understand the processes and do all the necessary calculations and allowances to get the project done with all the requirements fulfilled. He must plan, organise, lead and control the project effectively. However, as a manager during the planning an important resource must be catered for, the Human Resource.

The Human Resource aspect of any given project is a critical issue. From the people to fill the top positions and run the project to the people at the bottom doing the labour physical work. Human resources are essential because they are the only resource in a project that has a brain; emotions, skill and can talk back. They are the controllers, determiners of the project progress, the atmosphere surrounding the project, the motivation of the other person on a project, and the overall attitude needed to achieve a certain goal in a project; from meeting deadlines, staying within budget and client satisfaction. People are the ones who control the equipment, use of time and materials and the progress of a project. Therefore, this shows how important the human resources are on any given project.

The Human Resource is important and yet scarce. The whole world is in dire shortage of skilled people who are capable of playing a great part in a construction project (*Department of Public works website, June 15, 2009*). From engineers to the labourers a shortage is announced. In most cases, one finds people with the knowledge but lacking skill. Since now the construction industry plays a big part in the Gross Domestic Produce (GDP), Gross Domestic Fixed Investment (GDFI) and the employment rate of most countries, it is essential to keep the industry going at all costs (*Department of Public works website, June 15, 2009*). People from all over the world move around looking for a better life and mostly end up working in the construction industry. They end up working in the industry as a manager or labourer or anything in-between. When people from different walks of life get to meet on one project and have to all work together to achieve one goal, it is not easy an assignment. People from different places live differently with their own distinct beliefs, customs and attitudes. When someone lives in a surrounding where certain customs are followed, rituals performed; this then develops a culture in the place. The culture is the way that distinct group of people live and carry on through life. Culture forms to become a part of life for the people. They subconsciously live the culture and embrace it and will blindly protect it. It is a way of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

South Africa is the largest national economy in Africa (International Monetary Fund, 2007). In 2007, South Africa's Gross Domestic Product measured on purchasing power parity basis was estimated at \$467.4 billion (International Monetary Fund, 2007). The World Bank classifies South Africa as an upper middle income economy with \$5,915 Gross Domestic Product per capita. The South African macroeconomics performance in the recent history: in the decade before 1994 political transition, the macro economy of South Africa was characterised by very poor economic growth & high inflation

rates. The government deficits before borrowing had deteriorated to a level of 7.2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 1994 came and the political transitions occurred. This seems to have been a great transition for the country statistically. The macroeconomic performance improved. The Gross Domestic Product improved from 0.8% pre 1994 to 3.1% post 1994, inflation rate declined from 14.1% to 6.4% in the same period and the levels of foreign reserves improved considerably. (www.imf.org, May 10, 2009).

The construction industry contributes about 8.6% to the GDP of South Africa and this means that the industry is very connected with the country's economy and the construction industry is a major player in the growth of the country. The construction industry includes and/or effects infrastructure developments, manufacture, imports & exports and a section of the mining sector. Infrastructure has a major effect on the country's development and economy. The construction industry contributes 35% to the total Gross Domestic Fixed Investment (GDIF) and employs approximately 230 000 employees (Department of Public works, 1999). The government is the major client with 40-50% stake in the entire domestic construction expenditure.

South Africa is the proud owner of the 'Rainbow Nation' status. A title which shows how culturally diverse the country is. 'The population of South Africa is one of the most complex and diverse in the world. Of the 45 million South Africans, nearly 31 Million are black people, 5 Million white People, 3 Million coloured People and 1 Million Indian people. The population density is 32.9 people per Km²' (www.sa-venues.com). South African population is divided into different races, which are also divided into subgroups. The black people are divided into Four (4) major ethnic groups, The Ngunis, The Sotho, Shangaan and Venda people. Within the ethnic groups are subgroups distinguished by language spoken, Zulu and Xhosa are the two subgroups of the Nguni. Afrikaans people are the majority of the white population with 60% and the remaining 40% being of British descent (www.sa-venues.com). South Africa has 11 official languages.

The industry is an important tool to get people employment (SARB, March 2009). The industry employs a variety of people from different cultural, ethnic and racial and community backgrounds. It employs a huge number of illiterate people who cannot go into other sectors, which need a formal qualification as a prerequisite.

The fact that the construction industry usually has massive projects, especially the government projects that cost billions of Rands, comes up with a problem because the project will employ many people from different backgrounds and they will be put on a team and has to work in synchrony to achieve the planned results.

MOTIVATIONAL THEORIES

The literature review has been done based on research findings on culture that have been conducted during the past two (2) centuries. From the work of Edward B. Taylor (1832 – 1917), Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, 1952; Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888) and Hofstede, 1980. The models used in conducting research whether from an Anthropology or Archaeology point of view until this day are developed from their theories. Although there are some research studies that were conducted on culture, surprisingly there is not much research that has been done over the years on the effects of cultural backgrounds in the workplace, although it is a very important topic.

Findings by Booysen, (1999) show that management philosophies typically evolve in harmony with the cultures within which they function. Although South Africa is a complex amalgamation of several cultures and subcultures, the dominant management practices are for historical reasons, Western (Binedell, 1992; Khoza, 1994; Beaty, 1996; Christie, 1996; Manning, 1997). A study by Lize Booysen in 1999 showed that black managers are more collectivists, communal, democratic and inclusive than their white counterparts. White managers are said to be more individualistic, autocratic dictators and focus on skills and individuals more than their black counterparts. Koopman (1994) found that white managers give primary to the individual, while blacks see the individual's needs to find their place in a societal structure.

TEAMWORK

Once a great American revolutionist said, "we all must hang together, or assuredly shall all hang separately". The normal way of living and work is not the individual but the group. No one lives unto himself (Bakke, 1948). A team is a set of people working together (Oxford school dictionary, 2001). The dictionary defines work, as "some thing you have to do that needs effort and energy "and" the use of effort and energy to do something. Emphasis is put on the fact that one has to put in effort or/and energy to work. Therefore, from these definitions one can derive the phenomenon of teamwork as, 'A set or group of people who together put up an effort and energy to do or achieve something'.

Teamwork has to be controlled in order to produce the desired results. It has to be controlled by the team leader or manager. A team leader should have a sound intuition sensed by the basic laws of human relations and understand how to influence the team in the welfare of the group and weld together the individuals into a working team. The principles of effective human relations will have to be learned by a lot of executives in the industry (Bakke, 1948).

In a diverse country's construction industry, like South Africa, it is near impossible to have a team whether a professional or a labour level team that does not have a mix of two or more people from different cultural backgrounds. "An important area of research suggests that culture may relate to cooperative behavior and it collates as important moderating variables of cooperation Wegner, 1995; Chen *et al.*, 1998)" (Rowlinson S. and Phua F., 2003). Rowlinson and Phua make emphasis on the distinction between individualists and collectivists' cultures. The study by Lize Booysens on cultural difference between African black and white managers in South Africa showed that black people are more of collectivists while white people are more individualists. Tajfel (1978) came up with 'Social Identity Theory'. This is a section of theory that investigates how identification with one's social group and its members can act as a strong psychological motivator for various positive and desirable individual behaviors. Hofstede, 1980; Leung and Bond, 1984; Hui and Triandis, 1986; Wergner and Moch, 1986 all in a way defined collectivism as when the interests and demands of a group take precedence over the desires and needs of individuals. Collectivists look out for the groups' well being, disregarding their own personal interests. Individualism is opposite of collectivism. Individualists put their personal interests before the group's interests, desires and needs.

Hofstede Reference states in his book that 'the difference in childhood socialization between individualists and collectivists societies lead to differences in model personality characteristics and in behavior patterns. Researchers like Hofstede say that in individualist cultures, independence seeks independence from others and relationships with others are relatively unimportant. In contrast, with collectivists whose emphasis is on attending to the needs and goals of the in-group and maintaining social harmony within the group members. From this one can say that logically the group or team composed of people from collective cultural traditions would be more cooperative and work well as a

team and all work in symphony to get the job done. However, this also suggests that there may not be good teamwork between team members who do not belong to the same social background, so this opens space for conflict within the team.

If the construction industry is to be successful in building good teams, the leaders/managers need to learn the principles of teamwork, which are:

- How to organize men
- Learn the nature of the organizational devices that provide the structure within which men work together as a group
- What makes these devices effective in promoting the purpose of the enterprise and efficient in satisfying the desires of all those who participate (Bakke, 1948).

Bakke (1948) looks at the beginning with the most basic question; what makes a team out of a crowd of individuals? People coming from all walk of life; socially, religiously, politically, culturally, economical background and they have been brought up differently. When one is faced with the challenge of turning this crowd into a functional team one has to use and follow organizational devices, Bakke (1948) calls them 'Bonds of organization', the devices are as follows:

- I. Job specification and requirement
- II. The communication system
- III. The status system
- IV. The system of rewards and punishments
- V. The organizational chatter

Triandis (1995) links collectivism and individualism with the explanation for the highly differentiated nature of the construction industry in terms of occupational background, professional roles, educational experience and organizational circumstances. Cherns and Bryant, 1984; Loosemore and Tan, 2000; Moore and Dainty, 2001 are some of the researchers who according to their research agree to Triandis's statement. Literature suggests that, since a central component of individualism and collectivism concerns group membership and how it defines an individual's self concept, it can be assumed to the extent that a particular in-group membership is salient, individuals perceived similarities to others in the in-group is increased (Brewer, 1979), and members are more likely to cooperate with in-group members (team mates). While this is a good characteristic to have in a team, it is also argued that it might not work well when the two different characters work together in a team. Two strong arguments coming from this were:

- When individual project participants come largely from a collectivist society their treatment of other organizational members who are regarded, as individualists will be laced with much conflict and differentiation.
- Therefore, the same self-definition dynamics that make collectivists identify more strongly with their own society tradition and make them feel morally obligated to cooperate with their in-group can lead to negative effects that will also likely make them less cooperative with team members from other society traditions.

Tambe (1997), discusses an implemented general model for teamwork called STEAM. STEAM is based on the joint intentions theory (Lavesque et al. 1990) and also works with shared plans theory (Grosz, 1996). STEAM uses joint intentions theory whereby team members build up a complex hierarchical structure of joint intentions as individual intentions and commitments being driven by communication. Team members may communicate to attain mutual belief while building and

disbanding joint intentions. STEAM also facilitates monitoring of team performance by looking at team goals and plans (Tambe, 1997). STEAM is just one of very few implemented general models of teamwork. Others include Jennings's joint responsibility framework in the GRATE system (Jennings, 1991) and COLLAGEN system (Rich and Sidner, 1997).

Teamwork has a big impact on the Quality of work and the Governor's Commission on Productivity in Colorado; USA launched Quality Management Program (QMP) (Adams, 1991). The QMP was to positively improve productivity and impact the culture. The initiative was guided by 5 key principles:

- i. Teamwork
- ii. Customer focus
- iii. Work systems
- iv. Continuous improvement
- v. Long range thinking and data-based decision making

Project teams would implement the QMP. Then a work unit or team would be recruited, given orientation briefing and interests are ascertained. The teams would then work 3-6 months on their project with assistance from Quality Management staff (Adam, 1991).

Team organisation

Developing a successful multi cultural team with different cultural backgrounds is sometimes not an easy task for a construction manager. It is almost obvious that a team constructed only of members from the same cultural backgrounds will work better than one that is formed of different cultural backgrounds people. The manager needs to ensure this diverse workforce can work together harmoniously toward their common goals and they need to maximise the contribution of each member (Day, 2008). Handling cultural differences means avoiding giving offence to groups or individuals, preventing 'harassment', and managing grievances. It may also have an implicit political objective to reduce the alleged dominance of one culture or another. Cultural differences should be handled as potentially different values, assumptions, expectations and behaviour which people bring to business as a result of their differing collective experiences. Members of a team are not there to represent a 'culture' or particular ethnic group. They represent themselves; hence they should be treated as individuals Day, 2008.

Cultural differences should be seen as individual differences arising out of people's backgrounds. These various points of views must be openly communicated, represent alternatives and choices available to the group for consideration and negotiation. A greater willingness to talk directly about differences helps build trust, facilitate decision-making and opens the way, where appropriate, to compromise. The developmental approach requires sound leadership if it is to take root. It will be nourished by the resources of an organisation which is able to offer both collaborative training to raise awareness and knowledge and extensive expertise in various business cultures and in the challenges and goals of international business. The developmental approach is further enhanced by training that strengthens the skills required to handle difficult situations and to communicate effectively in intercultural settings. Truly 'valuing diversity' means valuing the contributions that 'diverse' individuals can make. A developmental, rather than a purely defensive, approach to dealing with cultural differences will help make that a reality (Day R., 2008).

Some organisations deliberately form multicultural teams as they give the advantage of having different technical background and experience. What managers often ignore are the possible effects of

the relations-oriented diversity that might be present in such a team. Relations oriented diversity can shape behaviour even when there is no association between it and the teams task-related attributes, because it triggers stereotypes that influence the way team members think and feel-about themselves as well as others on the team. Interpersonal relations and interaction patterns follow from stereotype-based thoughts and feelings, and ultimately these determine what information is available to the team, what information is attended to by the team, and who has the most influence in decision-making processes? (Berger & Zelditch, 1985; Devine, 1989; Stephan, 1985; Turner, 1987).

Susan E. Jackson of the *New York University, USA* put together a table of possible consequences of team diversity. The table lists some of the following consequences on long term performance of the team:

Long term: Performance (speed, creativity); Satisfaction with performance of self and team;
Acquisition of knowledge and skills (learning); Establishment of position in communication networks

Short term:

CULTURE

Culture is a diverse topic with different meaning. It is a very important subject on both the national and the international perspectives. On the national or local side culture can have a negative influence since we have such a diverse country with different languages, beliefs and religion, races, ethnicity, educational backgrounds, and since we have a capitalist country, this then makes the people in South Africa to have a very different living standard. South Africa has another problem since we have a fresh democracy and for the longest time the country was in turmoil because of the 'Apartheid Regime' (www.gov.za, 2009). During the apartheid times, there were laws in the country that separated and dictated the level at which different races must be viewed in the country. The white people were ruling the country and dictated that the black people were inferior to them. This process ran for many years and the races were segregated. People living under those conditions had to accept that the white people were superior. This then started a culture of viewing different races in a different manner and even after the South African black people obtained democracy and freedom; the attitude is still embedded in some people from both the races. This is a scenario that has in a way happened to many countries in the world and to some worse than others. This means that probably the whole world has a perception of viewing other people in a different eye whether it is because of the way they look or the language they speak.

Times have changed now from the times of races' segregation to a time now where people are perceived to be equal and no one must be discriminated with because of their gender, colour, ethnicity or creed. Discrimination, racism and apartheid are now illegal, but this does not mean that people around the world have automatically stopped to view each other differently and judgmentally.

Culture is a phenomenon that is passed on from generation to generation (www.antho.palomar.edu, 2009). As a new generation comes it is already tainted with the attitudes, beliefs and practices that the previous generation had or believed in. This is sometimes a dangerous practice because as times change and the people change their lifestyles then some cultural behaviors need to be changed or they will be viewed as being inappropriate. For example since now it is illegal to discriminate against someone because of the colour of his or her skin. If a person would

do the same thing that the oppressors were allowed to do in the apartheid times in South Africa, that person might be prosecuted and punished. This is one of the effects of cultural backgrounds and cultural background is a problem all over the world. We are living in a time where any South African person can go abroad and work there in whichever field he/she desires.

The people in the world view people in different ways, our cultural background, and the circumstances on which we grew up influence us all. If a German born man was brought up with the perception that Jewish people are to be discriminated against then if he comes to work in South Africa and one of his colleagues is Jewish, it will be very difficult for them to have a good working environment and this will influence their productivity. In South Africa many people grew up in rural communities where it was believed that some people are 'witches' and can even use witchcraft to kill another. A lot of power was given to these witches and it was considered that they could even control your promotion levels at work and these powers could be used to bring bad luck to a colleague and for example have them fired. If two truck drivers on site do not get along well, suddenly one of them gets a promotion, and the other is fired, if the fired one believes is witchcraft then he will accuse the other of orchestrating it and it might even were a fatal disagreement. Cultural backgrounds of people have a lot of power on their attitude and perception towards life.

In order to understand the different behaviors of people from different cultural backgrounds, we look at the work by Trafimow et al. (1998). People look at the role of self in social cognition and others view self from a cross-cultural perspective, for the distinction between Triandis (1989) and Pratkanis (1984) look at private, collective and public aspects of self. The private self involves traits and behavior of self. The collective self consists of cognitions about how some generalized other views of the person (Trafimow et al., 1998). Since there are collectivist (African and Asian) and Individualistic (European and North American) cultures, Hofstede (1980) argued that the private self is more emphasized in individualistic cultures while the collective self is more emphasized in collectivist cultures.

The effectiveness of global managers depends on their ability to exercise influence in culturally mixed interpersonal networks (Smith and Peterson, 1988). Ping Ping Fu et al. (2004), categorizes cultural concepts into 2 categories; Micro-level (societal) concepts and social beliefs as Micro-level (individual) concepts. This process is said to be similar to interactional psychology perspective in which both individual factors and contextual factors combine to influence behavior (O'Reilly et al., 1991). There are two phenomenons in this concept, belief and cultural value. Belief represents an individual's perception of reality while values are more stable, long-lasting beliefs about what is important (Sargie and Alizur, 1996). Cultural values are defined as cultural evaluation standards for judgment (Hayden, 1988; 416) cultural values are transcendental; beliefs can be specific to an activity or institution and more directly related to behaviors. Belief could be more useful than values in explaining cross-cultural differences in specific individual behaviors (Leung et al., 1995).

INTERACTION WITHIN TEAM MEMBERS

Since the teams on a construction project consist of people from different societies and cultural backgrounds, it is of importance that the stakeholders in the construction industry conduct surveys and research to find out how teamwork and invariably interaction within team members be improved.

Cultural differences include also differences based upon income, dress codes, regional origins, political affiliation and time keeping standards. Although there are differences between people from

different societies and cultural backgrounds, there are some constants and similarities that all cultures have in common. They are:

- Every person appreciates being treated with respect.
- Even those who come from cultures noted for self-sacrifice and community thinking has a sense of self-value and appreciates being treated as individuals.
- Every person appreciates feeling as if his or her opinion matters to you.
- Everyone appreciates an opportunity to explain him or herself. (www.twc.states.tx.us)

People working on in a team want to experience progress towards the following goals: ✓

- The respect of their fellows
- Creature sufficiency: the desire to be able to afford and provide food, shelter, clothes and health for oneself
- Increasing control over their own affairs. The desire to make personal life decisions and reduces the influence of others in dictating his decisions.
- Understanding: the desire to have a clear picture of the facts and forces that are present in the organization.
- Capacity performance: the desire of a person to be given a chance to prove his/her capability
- Integrity: the desire for someone to make a difference and matter in a team (Bakke, 1948).

After getting to understand the bonds of organization the manager must now use them to help the team members to acquire their desires. The downfall of team leaders and managers can come as a result of none effective control of the team and human and personal relations thereof. The managers/leaders may fail because they leave too little freedom for the initiative and inventiveness of the person assigned to the job. The job specifications might not be matched with the actual potential capacities of the jobholders, which may be detrimental to the success of the team. The last contributor to a manager/leader failure is when people and positions are changed too frequently; this can get to be time consuming and confusing to the individuals and the team.

Fu and Yuki (2000) conducted a study to identify relationship-based strategies and Ping Ping Fu et al. (2004), discussed their perceived effectiveness. The 3 strategies are as follows:

1. Persuasive strategy – rational persuasion: using logical arguments and factual evidence to persuade the target by:
 - a. Inspirational appeal: making an emotional appeal to the target
 - b. Consultation: seeking the target's input.
2. Assertive strategy – Persistence: repeated pleading with the target to carry out the request using:
 - a. Pressure; using threats and persistent reminders
 - b. Upward appeal; seeking help from someone with higher authority.
3. Relationship based strategy: giving gifts and offerings to the target
 - a. Informal engagement
 - b. Personal appeal
 - c. Socializing with the target. (Ping Ping et al. 2005) ✓

Social beliefs facilitate the attainment of important goals and help people understand the world (Ping Ping et al. 2004). Leung et al. 2002 conducted a study and identified 5 dimensions as pan-cultural dimensions of belief that characterize individuals and relate to differences in individual behaviors. The cultural dimensions are:

- i. Cynicism
- ii. Reward for application
- iii. Religiosity
- iv. Fate control
- v. Social complexity

People however subscribe differently to these social beliefs based on the social logic developed over history by that particular cultural group. Individual belief structures will lead people to perceive certain influence strategies as more likely to result in successful outcomes (Ping Ping et al., 2004).

Hofstede (1980) developed classic measures of national culture, which consisted of 4 dimensions namely:

- i. Individualism vs. Collectivism
- ii. Power distance
- iii. Uncertainty avoidance
- iv. Masculinity vs. Feminists

Social beliefs help us provide a more fine-grained analysis of influence strategies (Ping Ping et al., 2004). This allows us to develop emphatically grounded models of individual social behavior across cultures (Smith and Bond, 2003).

MAIN LITERATURE FINDINGS

Attitude towards someone else is important and it dictates the relationship thereon. It also has an effect on the productivity of the people on a project team. Management conduct and philosophies usually evolve in harmony with the cultures within which they function. South Africa is a complex mixture of different cultures and subcultures, the dominant management practices are for historical reasons but the dawn of democracy has given a slight problem since it has introduced the once inferior to now be given the same chances and sometimes even a greater chance on the organization. Cultural differences if not dealt with appropriately will deter the running of the construction project but when managed well they can give an advantage to the team as they will be able to communicate ideas that might make the job easier. Communication in a team is very essential and the construction managers need to make the team members feel free to communicate their feelings, thoughts, grievances and most importantly their ideas.

CONCLUSION

People are an important tool in any construction project and good human resources are a scarce commodity. The construction industry needs to take good care of this commodity and the first step is to understand people and use their differences to reap the benefits from them in order to bring value to

the team. The way teams communicate is very influential to the performance of the team, team coordination and the productivity of the team. Teams are made of People, individuals who bring their own perspectives, value and attributes to an organizations life and when managed effectively, these human qualities can bring considerable benefits to organizations (Mullins, 1999). People from different backgrounds come onto a new project with their different views and ideas but if they are taken lightly by the elite group or overshadowed by the dominant culture in their teams then some good workers and great ideas may be lost.

Although there might be a debate on how different people from different backgrounds are culturally different and diverse but there are some constants that almost all people share; people appreciate being treated with respect and seeing that their worth counts in a team. The management of a construction project needs to come up with a way to choose their teams, lead and control them in a way that will enhance great team communication and relationship. This might have a great influence on the productivity of the team; a team that communicates well will obviously work better together than a team that has concurrent disputes.

The management needs to come up with ways to monitor the influence of culture on a team and promote the spirit of a rainbow nation that works well together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Construction managers should not be afraid of composing teams of different cultural backgrounds.
- Managers should take a new project team through training on personal relations and how to work effectively with team members to reach a predetermined goal.
- Communication between team members should be encouraged.
- Social gatherings should be encouraged within team members where they will meet another in an out of the work place environment.
- Management must give platform for the team members to be able to speak out their views on the team and the work being done by the team, more especially if the team member wants to introduce or suggest new or other ways of reaching a specified goal easier; with less effort, time and money.

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