

MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AT INDIAN CONSTRUCTION SITES

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Abstract - The construction industry in India is facing a shortage of recruits and an aging workforce. It is common for migrant workers, who are already part of the society to join the construction industry. Several root causes, such as language and cultural barriers and educational level, lead to the higher rate of fatalities among Ethnic Minority workers as suggested by various studies. Understanding the nature of cultural barriers is important for the effective management of the EM workforce at construction sites. It is crucial for project managers to have knowledge of differences in culture to effectively lead a multicultural workforce. The study concentrates on construction expatriate professionals from West Bengal working in Kerala. In this study, construction expatriate professionals' perspectives regarding active cultural differences were collected, analysed, and compared to supervisors' perspectives and responses. Therefore, this study provides a meaningful understanding of the nature and influence of cultural differences, which in turn helps construction supervisors to manage their diverse workforce as well as aids future research studies that are focused on cultural diversity.

Key Words: Active culture difference, Construction industry, Expatriate professionals, Multicultural workforce

1. INTRODUCTION

The construction industry continues to be one of the most hazardous industries. Construction workers continually face higher rates of work-related fatal injuries. Several root causes lead to the higher rate of fatalities among Ethnic Minority workers, such as language and cultural barriers and educational level, Al-Bayati et al. (2017) as suggested by various studies. Understanding the nature of cultural barriers is important for the effective management of the EM workforce at construction sites. determined that it is crucial for project managers to have knowledge of differences in culture to effectively lead a multicultural workforce.

Domestic Migrant Labourers (DML) has become one of Kerala's wealth creators. Over 75 per cent of the DML come from five states, namely West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. 15 % of the total migrants came from West Bengal. Whereas 60 per cent of them work in the construction sector, they also work in the hospitality, manufacturing, trade and agriculture sectors. Ananda (2016).

The culture, is a built-in program that may indicate what responses are probable and reasonable given one's social environment. Focusing on Active Cultural Difference instead of cultural differences generally will improve a construction company's efforts to manage its human assets. This study is based on Hofstede's theory, which defines a simple and useable framework for cross-cultural communication that offers practical knowledge for incorporating culture into psychology, sociology, marketing, and management studies.

1.1 Scope of the project

1. Concentrating on unskilled construction professionals.
2. Kerala employs large number of construction expatriate professionals from West Bengal.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Identification of sites.

This project is carried out in different construction sites therefore the sites are selected based on availability of West Bengal construction workers and sites with provision of conducting survey with workers. 15 Construction sites within Kerala are selected. The sites are selected such that the West Bengal workers will be available with the contractors till the project work is completed.

2.2 Semi Structured Face-To-Face Interview is Done with Operatives

Semi-structured interviews were done after keen observations and thorough study of literature. A pilot study was conducted for identification factors for Questionnaire survey. Both workers and supervisors were considered for the interview. The data obtained were quantified in the scale of five, from 1 to 5. The responses were considered and value in recorded for WB workers. In case of supervisor Directly the value is recorded. 117 workers and 15 supervisors were interviewed face to face.

2.3 Data Analysis is Done to Identify Active Cultural Differences

Data obtained from different sites were tabulated and graph were plotted and potential active cultural difference dimensions were identified.

2.4 Identification of Problems of Potential ACDs

Problems causing the potential dimensions were identified from the survey.

2.5 Recommendation of Solution

Solution for the problems identified is found out with opinion from the 15 supervisors and experts from the construction field.

3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The Active cultural difference was evaluated through semi structured interview with workers and supervisors in the field and literature review. The questions asked were related to each dimension and the opinions related to cultural differences were noted. The factors from the survey were categorised under each Active cultural dimension.

Table -1: Factors for semi-structured interview

ACD	FACTORS
MASCULINITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caring and nurturing behaviors equality environmental awareness
RESTRAINT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaption to changing worksite conditions. strict social norms controls gratification of needs
POWER DISTANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized authority obedience to authority asking for an explanation reporting unsafe conditions
COLLECTIVISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> loyalty to group Decision-making based on what is best for the group "We" mentality
UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tolerance for ambiguity acceptance of differing thoughts or ideas
LONG-TERM ORIENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges traditions are honored and kept

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the case studies, the expatriate professionals from West Bengal in Kerala have Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance and collectivism as potential Active Cultural Difference. It can be observed from both the workers and supervisor’s perspectives.

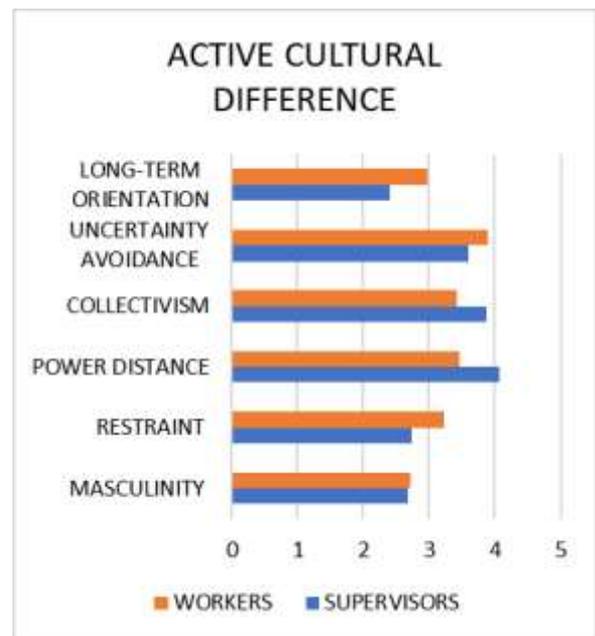


Fig -1: Active Cultural Difference

The impact of these three dimensions which are potential is discussed. The problems were identified from worker survey and solution from supervisors and experts in the construction field.

Table -2: Power distance

No	Problem	Solutions
1	Resistant of asking questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of communication between workers and supervisor. Rewards for workers who ask questions daily
2	Fear of Job loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong labour policies.
3	Follows the instruction without cross checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should not take the silence of WB workers as a sign of comprehension.

Table-3 Uncertainty Avoidance

No	Problem	Solutions
1	Ideas and suggestions not accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions from workers should be given importance. • Appreciation for fresh ideas.
2	Unsure of the direction of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing more details of ongoing tasks. • increase face-to-face communication with Hispanic workers who do not demonstrate a full knowledge of required safe actions and behaviors

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Table -4 Collectivism dimension

No	Problem	Solutions
1	West Bengal members are more likely to cover up negative practices and don't report to supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed leadership within the group.
2	Clashes with other cultural groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural integration programs at regular intervals.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Development of the construction industry’s human resource capabilities such as construction workers performance has become necessity because productivity, quality and innovation are becoming increasingly important for construction industry. Power Distance, Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance were the potential ACD in Kerala for West Bengal workers from the study.

This study calls for managing the active differences in culture, instead of managing all cultural characteristics. From the pilot study conducted and from the literature the factors for semi structured questionnaire is obtained. The clear understanding of cultural difference will improve the workforce management of WB workers for supervisors. The potential ACDs obtained were same from both supervisors and workers perspective. Construction supervisors and Workers agree that cultural differences negatively influence overall site safety. Thus, steps must be taken to improve the working condition of expatriate workers.