

## **CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING MASTERS DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

### **An exploratory study into construction employees' perceptions on empowerment associated with a Health & Safety initiative**

Over the past decade, despite the continued expansion of additional control measures and bureaucratic procedures, accident statistics within the United Kingdom construction industry have plateaued, or even slightly deteriorated (Health and Safety Executive, 2018). It has been recognised by some that previous methods, where people were regarded as a problem that needed to be controlled, were no longer working (Dekker, 2014a). Research has demonstrated that employee empowerment is seen as a means of improving these statistics (Lawani, Hare and Cameron, 2017; Nahrang, Morgeson and Hofmann, 2011; Lippen et. al., 2000). Whilst there is growing empirical evidence on the benefits of empowerment within the workplace (Wilkinson, 1998), there is a lack of construction specific literature, and especially how it influences health and safety. This qualitative study aims to determine whether the sponsorship of employee empowerment on a live construction site would support an improvement to the organisation's Health and Safety record, and in particular what factors might encourage or undermine the initiative's success.

The data in this enquiry is based on case study findings. A cross sectional sample of 16 operational construction employees were interviewed on two live construction sites, using semi structured interviews. The interview transcripts were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis.

Results identified encouraging factors on the empowerment implementation. Overall there was great enthusiasm for the initiative within this sample of employees, with positive comments on participation and a sense of increased job satisfaction when individuals were actively engaged in the process. These positive aspects have the ability to contribute to the organisations H&S initiative. However, there were certain characteristics identified that, if not addressed, could potentially mitigate or even eliminate the possibility of empowerment positively influencing the organisation's statistics. Whereas management believed they were delegating more responsibility, the workforce did not perceive themselves to be as empowered as the management claimed. Significant contributors to this differing of opinion was leadership behaviours, cultural factors and the resultant complexities of a temporary and mobile workforce.

This study has highlighted that, when implementing an empowerment initiative, there is much more to consider than just the act of redistributing power and decision making. It is highly likely that there will be company specific considerations that need to be acknowledged, and in some cases addressed, if empowerment is to be fully leveraged within the specific context of an individual organisation.

The main limitation of this research is that the case study concentrated on an individual construction business. Future research could be expanded to test current findings, with further investigations concentrating on the communication challenges that were exacerbated by employee language and cultural attributes.

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