

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE: A MATRIX FOR ETHICS AND INTEGRITY FOR IMPROVING CONSTRUCTION PRODUCTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the organisational justice concept of construction project organisations in South Africa as a matrix of ethics and integrity for improving construction productivity. The objective of the study is to investigate the constellation of expected behaviours of organisation justice in order to identify ethical and integrity behaviours that positively influence construction productivity. A descriptive research methodology was used. Data was collected through literature review and exploration and emailed questionnaires to 100 different construction operatives, who included, among others, engineers, architects, and academics in the built environment. Collected data was analysed through the normative and ratio statistical scales; identifying ethics and integrity behaviours that influenced productivity and the extent to which the identified behaviours influenced productivity in South Africa, respectively. Eleven variables that form ethics and integrity behaviours such as honesty, responsibility and accountability were identified in the literature review. All eleven behaviours improved construction productivity and were described as ethical and have integrity. It was concluded that organisation justice is a concept for influencing ethics and integrity behaviours in construction project organisations of South Africa; and that among all the behaviours, effective communication is the most significant. Receiving only a fair reward ranked the least significant. The study

recommends the undertaking of more research to establish other factors that affect construction productivity.

Keywords: organisational justice, construction project organisation, ethics and integrity, construction productivity, South Africa

JEL: M11, M 53, L 74, L 74 & 015

1. INTRODUCTION

The organisational justice concept explores and explains employees' attitudes towards work behaviours, job performance and feelings of trust or mistrust (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Organisational justice perceptions therefore can be used to predict and help control the behaviours of employees in organisations and also to maintain high morale and loyalty in the working environment (Komodromos & Halkias, 2015). The organisational justice concept further considers issues related to organisational members' attitudes on the fairness of organisational regulations and policies (Laundon, Cathcart & McDonald, 2019). Such justice and fairness practices are about rules and social norms that can define the distribution of resources within an organisation where equitable distribution of such resources is expected. These include rewards or punishments as well as treatment among members and interpersonal relationships amongst managers and subordinates (Mason, 2009).

Whilst organisational justice is strongly embedded in the fairness practises regarding the employees' attitude about the fairness of organisational regulations and policies, ethics and integrity are about moral principles, employees' consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes that denote their commitment to execute what is right for the right reason, despite the circumstances in the organisation (Mason, 2009; Eisenbeiss, Van Knippenberg, & Fahrbach, 2015, Orando & Isabirye, 2019). Organisational justice is also about rules, policies, values, expectations and outcomes of how organisational resources are allocated and effectively utilised. It could be suggested that organisational justice provides a cluster of guiding behaviours for employees of an organisation to adopt ethical and integrity behaviours. Within the constellation of these expected behaviours, the ethical and integrity behaviours of employees for improving construction productivity are strongly influenced (Orando & Isabirye, 2019).

Against this background, it can be hypothesised that organisational justice is a constellation of various variables in influencing ethics and integrity behaviours for improving construction productivity in South Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Exploring the concept of organisational justice

Central to the understanding of organisational justice is fairness in the workplace (Rokhman, 2013). The underlying thought in fairness is that if an organisation treats its employees well, they will reciprocate by giving back to the organisation much more in terms of employee commitment. Such a commitment may act as an influential factor, which enables construction workers to willingly accept work responsibility and accountability within the organisational setting. Orando and Isabirye (2019) identified that accepting responsibility and accountability as ethical and integrity leads to improved construction productivity, since issues of monetary rewards, recruitment of employees and promotions require special attention with regard to justice practice within the organisational setting (Colquitt, Greenburg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005). Organisational justice is linked to employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). Ram and Prabhakar (2011) point out that when individuals have a high and positive perception of justice practice in their organisation, they are likely to feel obliged to perform their roles through greater levels of engagement of ethical behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviours in the workplace. Therefore, improving justice perceptions improves productivity and performance (Karriker & Williams, 2003). The feeling of fairness among employees triggers positive attitudes and behaviours in the workplace

The reciprocal workers' response and the outward positive behaviours of the workers become the influential factors behind ethics and integrity, especially when they are satisfied with their job. Mason (2009) defines ethics as the moral principles by which a person is guided. Jin and Drozdenko (2010) conceptualise employees' ethics as their perceptions regarding the organisation's ethical practices. Indeed, Kish-Gephart, Harrison and Treviño (2010) indicate that the way employees think about their organisation's ethics serves as their measure regarding the organisation's ethical standard; and this is bound to affect their performance and productivity. In this way organisational justice is an influential factor behind ethical and integrity behaviours for improving construction

productivity. According to Tsai and Huang (2008), Cullen, Parboteeah and Victor (2003); Schwepker (2001), workers' perception of their organisations' ethical standards can be used to predict work outcomes like employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment; two major constructs that enhance performance and productivity. Justice perceptions have to do with the integrity of the organisations' leaders. According to Eisenbeiss, *et. al.* (2015), integrity refers to one's consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes that denote one's commitment to execute what is right for the right reason, despite the circumstances. Integrity in this case is about being honest and where there is honesty, fairness prevails in ways that are important for improving productivity.

Mason (2009) identifies good ethical behaviours as being honest, being fair in all dealings, receiving only a fair reward, giving reliability for good work, having integrity, being objective and willing and able to accept responsibility. While ethical and integrity behaviour create harmony, transparency in the workplace and help enhance productivity, organisational justice becomes the matrix for its creation. According to Colquitt (2001), organisational justice consists of four dimensions, such as distributive, procedural, informational and interactional justice, discussed below.

2.2 Distributinal justice

Judgments about distributive justice are an essential factor in creating and maintaining peace (Laundon *et al.*, 2019). The equity theory suggests that organisational outcomes should be allocated according to the contributions of individuals (Rokhman, 2010). An essential aspect of the supervisors' role therefore is to allocate resources to their workers equitably to ensure distributive justice. (Gilliland, Steiner & Skarlicki, 2015). The authors further claim that supervisors are often confronted with conflicting allocation demands from their supervisors and subordinates. Kalay (2016) maintains that the distributive and procedural aspects of justice have a significant and positive impact on task performance. Fairness seems important in the way company resources are allocated. According Orando and Isabirye (2019), these behaviours related to distributive justice were identified as: being fair in all dealings, being equitable in all dealings, and receiving only enough reward. This suggests that distributive justice is a dimension for some of the ethical and integrity behaviours for improving construction productivity.

2.3 Procedural justice

Procedural justice is defined as the perceived fairness of the process and procedures used to make allocation decisions (Laundon *et al.*, 2019). Laundon *et al.* (2019) indicate that procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of processes, policies used to distribute responsibilities, and compensation or rewards. They maintain that the organisational justice framework is used to explain and better understand the feelings of trust or mistrust on the part of employees. Procedural justice reflects the degree of fairness in the procedures adopted to determine how individuals are treated and how respective benefits are given (Iqbal, Rehan, Fatima & Nawah, 2017). Procedural justice exists when procedures embody normatively accepted principles (Farooq & Farooq, 2014). Orando and Isabirye (2019) identified three ethical and integrity behaviours: being transparent at work, having integrity and creating trust, and working reliably according to the best practices. When the procedures and processes of work are transparent, a worker may believe in its fairness. It is also possible that if the managers have integrity, create trust, and work reliably according to best practices, employees see the work procedures and processes as fair. Once again, this suggests that organisational justice could be a matrix for ethical and integrity behaviours for improving construction productivity.

2.4 Informational justice

Informational justice refers to the degree to which employees are provided truthful explanations for decisions. Informational justice focuses on interactional justice, which has been linked to job satisfaction, satisfaction with outcomes, withdrawal behaviour, organisational citizenship, commitment to an organisation and performance (Komodromos & Halkias, 2015). Thus, informational justice is about informing employees correctly and adequately in matters of organisational decision-making. According to Orando and Isabirye (2019), job satisfaction, organisational citizenship and worker commitment influence the following ethical and integrity behaviours: effective communication, honesty, acceptance of responsibility and accountability, working reliably according to the best practices, objectivity and avoiding conflict of interest, transparency at work, fairness in all dealings, integrity and trustworthiness, continuous training to improve skills, being equitable in all dealings, and receiving only a fair reward. This again suggests that organisational justice could be a matrix for ethical and integrity behaviours for improving construction productivity.

2.5 Interactional justice

Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment an employee receives during the implementation of organisational procedures (Komodromos & Halkias, 2015). Interpersonal justice highlights the importance of kindness, respect and esteem in interpersonal relations, particularly in the relationships between employees and managers (Kala & Turkey 2016; Komodromos & Halkias, 2015). This form of justice does not pertain to the outcomes or procedures associated with decision-making, but instead focuses on whether or not people feel they are treated fairly when decisions are made (Laundon *et al.*, 2019). It is important for managers to have integrity and create trust with their employees. Having integrity and creating trust is one of the 11 ethical and integrity behaviours that enhance construction productivity (Orando & Isabirye, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design of a descriptive survey technique to gather data from 100 construction industry operatives. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), descriptive studies involve the exploration of possible correlations among two or more phenomena. Such studies do not involve making changes of situations being studied and neither do they govern the cause and effect relationship. The data collected from the 100 operatives were assessed using a five-point Likert scale as developed by Kazaz, Manisali, and Ulubeyli, (2008), with one representing strongly disagree and five strongly agree. The scale enabled the researchers to establish the mode, percentage value and chi-square. Eleven ethical and integrity behaviours, as identified in the literature and captured in the questionnaire, were assessed using two statistical methods. The first method was acquisition of percentage values by the frequencies of the answers received. This was followed by the calculation of the relative importance index (RII) of the behavioural factors. The researchers used the percentage frequencies of answers to rank the behaviour factors, where two or more factors had the same RII. To establish which ethic and integrity behaviours led to increased productivity, the Likert scale was used to eliminate those behaviours that measured less than 2.60 as indicated in Table 1. The correspondence frequencies and a chi-square test were then used to measure the factors and behaviours. A combination of this

methodology, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, was applied in this research.

Table 1 The evaluation scale for the data

Level of significance	Level of importance	Scale value
Not significant (NS)	Not important (NI)	≥ 1.80
Somewhat significant (SS)	Somewhat important (SI)	$1.80 \leq 2.60$
Significant (S)	Important (I)	$2.60 \leq 3.40$
Very significant (VS)	Very important (VI)	$3.40 \leq 4.20$
Extremely significant (ES)	Extremely important (EI)	$4.20 \leq 5.00$

Adapted from Kazaz et al. (2008)

3.1 Population and sample size

The research covered both private and public sector work, civil engineering and building projects in South Africa. The sample comprised contractors, consulting professionals, academics, local government officials, government built-environment professionals and construction workers, totalling 100 in number.

3.2 Measuring instrument and data analysis

The researchers made use of a questionnaire, which was circulated by email, preceded by a letter to the stakeholders explaining the objectives of the study. It had three sections related to the objectives of the study, namely:

- A Profile of the respondent.
- B Ethical and integrity human behaviours.
- C General comments, if any, regarding the study.

The data collected from sections A to C were analysed using SPSS and the relative importance index (RII), in order to determine the ranking of the ethical and integrity behaviour factors identified in the study.

4. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In order to establish the validity of the study, the chi square test was carried out. The test was found to be .05, indicating 95 percent confidence level in the results. All 11 behaviour factors identified in the categories of ethical and integrity behaviours were found to be very to extremely significant factors that influence improving construction operatives' productivity. Regarding the reliability, results from the collected and analysed primary data were tested against the secondary data. The latter supported the former. Furthermore, the study focused on the entire South African construction industry as well as the built environment, ensuring that the findings reflected the general trend across the country.

5. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data from the results of the ethics and integrity human factors which influence improved construction productivity in South Africa are presented and described below.

5.1 Ethical and full of integrity behaviour factors which improve productivity in South Africa

The result of the ethical and full of integrity behaviour factors which improve on construction productivity in South Africa, are presented in Table 2. Construction operatives' attitude factors were identified and evaluated as significant; only three of them were found to be extremely significant, while eight were found very significant in improving productivity, implying that they are all important, as discussed below.

Table 2: Ethical and behaviour with integrity, for improved construction productivity (N=11)

Item: Ethical and integrity behaviours	Rank in total	Effect level	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Communicating effectively	1	ES	1	5	4.52	0.98
Being honest	2	ES	1	5	4.41	0.89
Able and willing to accept responsibility and accountability	3	ES	1	5	4.22	1.01
Working reliably, according to the best practices	4	VS	1	5	4.19	1.08
Being objective and avoiding conflicts of interest	5	VS	2	5	4.15	0.86
Being transparent at work	6	VS	1	5	4.15	1.03
Being fair in all dealings	7	VS	2	5	4.11	0.97
Having integrity and creating trust	8	VS	2	5	4.07	0.92
Continuously training to improve skill	9	VS	1	5	4.07	1.07
Being equitable in all dealings	10	VS	2	5	3.85	1.10
Receiving only a fair reward	11	VS	1	5	3.67	1.04
Average			1.36	5.0	4.13	0.99

5.1.1 Communicating effectively (ES – 4.52)

For effective working of any company, communication is essential. Indeed, employers who create open communication within the organisation also create trust within workers, resulting in increased productivity, performance and overall morale (Orando & Isabirye, 2019).

Communicating effectively was found to be the most important ethical behavioural factor, with a mean index of 4.52 (extremely significant). It does not only enhance good work relations but also solves many work-related problems. According to the results, communicating effectively improves productivity. Table 3 presents communicating effectively as the first and most important ethical behaviour for improving construction productivity.

5.1.2 Being honest (ES – 4.41)

As a key characteristic in business, honesty is the bedrock for a work culture that nurtures consistency in workplace behaviour. It also builds both trust and loyalty among workers and customers (Laundon *et al.*, 2019). Being honest as a behavioural factor with a mean index of 4.41 is evaluated in this study as extremely significant and ranked the second most important ethical behaviour. Being honest is about truthfulness. An honest person will always tell the truth, will not cheat, falsify documents, or steal. In this way, cooperation is encouraged, and productivity improves. Table 3 shows being honest as the second most important ethical and full of integrity behaviour for improving productivity.

5.1.3 Able and willing to accept responsibility and accountability (VS – 4.22)

Accountability means standing by one's actions and decisions is also a management process, which makes sure that workers answer to their leaders and the leaders behave in a responsible way (Mason, 2009). Ability and willingness to accept responsibility and accountability had a mean index of 4.22. It was evaluated as very significant and ranked the third most important ethical behaviour for improving productivity. Responsibility and accountability are about willingness to account for one's actions. It could mean the willingness to bear the consequences of one's actions, good or bad. What this implies is that if workers perceive their leaders as people capable of standing up for their actions, bad or good, they will work hard and increase productivity.

5.1.4 Working reliably, according to the best practices (VS-4.19)

Best practices entail daily relationships that workers experience. It is a set of guidelines or ethics that are followed to ensure the best action in a given context (Orando & Isabirye 2019). Working reliably, according to the best practices as a behaviour, was found to have a mean index of 4.19, was evaluated as being very significant (VS – 4.19) and ranked the fourth most important ethical behaviour for improving construction productivity. Working reliably means benchmarking one's work standards against the best in the world. Table 3 shows working reliably, according to the best practices, as the fourth most ethical behaviour for encouraging productivity at work.

5.1.5 Being objective and avoiding conflicts of interest (VS – 4.15)

Being objective and avoiding conflicts of interest was found to have a mean index of 4.15; thus, it is evaluated as very significant (VS – 4.15) and ranked the fifth most important ethical behaviour for improving construction productivity and work relationships, as shown in Table 3. The results confirm that conflicting interests within an individual lead to making unethical decisions and judgements. For example, an interest in the immediate gains may be preferable to the interest of ensuring that the work is professionally done. Whilst conflict is a common feature in organisations, it is vital that management to create values that avoid nurturing conflicting interests (Kala & Turkey, 2016). This result therefore confirms the need for organisations to craft conflict resolution policies and build such policies into the organisational cultures. A conflict free environment will no doubt promote increased productivity.

5.1.6 Being transparent at work (VS – 4.15)

Transparency implies openness and ensures that all involved parties are aware of what happens within the organisation. Transparency at work had a mean index of 4.15 (very significant VS); and ranked the sixth most important ethical behaviour for improved work relations and productivity. Transparency thus allows exchange and the sharing of important work information to improve work quality and productivity. It is against this backdrop that Rokhman (2013) asserts that transparency does not only build trust but makes workers feel that their organisation espouses higher ethical standards. It can therefore be argued that when an organisation adds transparency to its culture, workers become more engaged, committing themselves to increased productivity.

5.1.7 Being fair in all dealings (VS – 4.11)

Fairness means being selfless and caring for others' interests. Being fair in all dealings had a mean index of 4.11. It is evaluated as being very significant (VS) and ranked the seventh most important ethical behaviour for improved productivity. Fairness means ensuring a win-win scenario in most business relationships; and if encouraged, could improve performance at work. According to Komodroskos and Halkias (2015), when workers are fairly treated, exposed to

the same rules and guidelines, given specific awards for performing similar tasks, they develop an attachment to the organisation. This enhances productivity.

5.1.8 Having integrity and creating trust (VS – 4.07)

Having the integrity to create trust had a mean index of 4.07. It is evaluated as very significant and ranked the eighth most important ethical behaviour for improved productivity. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) note that trust is believing in each other's ability, keeping promises, having faith in others, acknowledging others, sharing information and knowledge, giving authority to others, being willing to forgive others, seeking solutions with others and standing by the decisions and actions of others. It is indeed no wonder that the results in this study confirmed that where there is integrity and trust, there is also organisational justice.

5.1.9 Continuously training to improve skills (VS – 4.07)

Continuously training to improve one's skills had a mean index of 4.07 and it is evaluated as being very significant (VS). The finding confirms that knowledge and skills in any industry should be continuously growing and in order to remain relevant by adding value to customers' satisfaction, one has to train continuously in order to improve one's skills. This confirms Orando and Isabirye's (2019) views regarding the need for continuous professional development in organisations. This finding also confirms that acquisition of skills and knowledge in an organisation by all employees creates that feeling among them that the organisation is just. It is this feeling that eventually enhances productivity.

5.1.10 Being equitable in all dealings (VS – 3.85)

With a mean index of 3.85 (very significant/VS) and ranked tenth among the most important ethical behaviours for improving work relations and productivity, equity is about treating everyone equally, and giving everyone equal opportunity and a chance to compete and share in a business market. Indeed, Gilliland, Steiner and Skarlicki (2015) indicate that workers who are equally treated and exposed to the same opportunities are not only happy but also motivated to work, thus enhancing productivity.

5.1.11 Receiving only a fair reward (VS – 3.67)

Receiving only a fair reward has a mean index of 3.67, is very significant (VS) and was ranked eleventh most important ethical behavioural trait for improving working relations and productivity. According to the respondents, all the above ethical behaviours should significantly improve construction productivity and work relations in South Africa. If construction project organisations are encouraged to incorporate ethical workplace values, construction productivity would improve. This result is therefore in line with Kalay's (2016) views that fair reward is not only a driving force on workers' action but it also impacts positively on production.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study builds on the existing knowledge on the principles of organisational justice, ethics and integrity as a moral behaviour necessary in a fair business society. The research has shown that organisational justice can act as a mediating variable for influencing ethical and integrity behaviour factors, which can be used to improve construction industry productivity and that these should be encouraged. The nature and ranking of the ethical behaviour factors have been revealed. This could enable the industry to develop a strategy to incorporate them in the workplace.

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research was limited to human work organisational justice, ethics and integrity principles in the construction industry. There are other factors which influence construction worker productivity. For example, work environment could influence workers' mood, drive and overall productivity. Furthermore, processes or their absence, could also influence construction productivity. Therefore, further research is required to examine how these limiting factors can be overcome.

8. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Construction project organisations may incorporate the identified ethical and integrity behaviour work factors in their organisations in order to build their work ethics strategy capacity to improve construction productivity. At inter-

governmental levels, governments may use the factors identified in the study for their national work ethics and integrity strategies and policies for citizens' work and economic empowerment for productivity improvement. Such important national work ethics and integrity could promote more transparency, minimise business risks, reduce business fraud and encourage best governance practices in ways that would promote the rapid development of any society.

9. CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence organisational justice as a matrix for influencing ethics and integrity behaviours for improving construction productivity in South Africa. It was noted that while organisational justice can act as a matrix for influencing ethical and integrity behaviours, ethical and integrity behaviours do indeed enhance construction productivity in South Africa.

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