

# Measures to Improve Upon Site Operatives Training by Local Building Contractors in Ghana

Olufemi O. Fatonade

Department of Building Technology, Accra Polytechnic, Accra, Ghana. Box 561, Accra, Ghana

## Abstract

This paper presents appropriate measures to improve upon the training of construction site operatives by local building contractors in Ghana. The site operatives are the craftsmen and the labourers. This paper builds upon an earlier study by the author (Fatonade, 2014) on the nature, types and standards of training policy for site operatives by local building contractors. Literature review and methodology of study are all based on the study earlier mentioned with the primary data collection still centered on large-, medium-, and small-scale building contractors in six (6) regions in the southern sector of Ghana.

Some of the findings from this earlier study clearly brought out the fact that training needs for construction site operatives are poorly determined and evaluated even for those contractors having a training policy for employees. On-the-job instruction is also the commonest mode of training site operatives especially by large-scale contractors. Appropriate strengthening measures were therefore recommended for site operatives training by local building contractors.

**Keywords:** Site Operatives, Local Building Contractors, Appropriate Training Strengthening Measures.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background information on the study

Fatonade (2014), the author, in a previous work, “the nature, types and standards of training policy for site operatives by local building contractors in Ghana”, has reiterated site operatives as the personnel who carry out the physical construction work, that is, the craftsmen or tradesmen and the labourers or mates. He has also stressed the importance of building construction operatives, as no building construction work could ever commence without their input. Therefore, the contribution of their efforts being very valuable would need to be appreciated and also consolidated.

The future of any business organization, the construction industry included, depends on the conscious effort of that organization to train and retain the trained personnel as that effort improves productivity levels. As had been mentioned in the previous work, Calvert, Bailey and Coles (1995:160) stressed that a part-training of even semi-skilled workers in the construction industry could be of a valuable advantage where an increased proficiency of only 10 percent could mean a considerable gain in work productivity.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

The findings and conclusions reached by Fatonade (2014), on the nature, types and standards of training policy for site operatives by local building contractors were as follows:

#### Findings

1. Human Resource (HR) policy is being undertaken to some moderate extent by large and medium scale contractors.
2. The large scale contractors are most aware of the Labour Act. However, its implementation is not adhered to.
3. Most of the companies, across board, do not have training officers per se. Where there are semblances of training officers, non-specialists double as these.
4. Training policy for employees generally is highly formulated by large-scale contractors compared to the medium- and small-scale contractors.
5. It is only the large-scale contractors, however, who have any quiet plausible training policy in place specifically for construction site operatives. The training policy for site operatives by medium-scale contractors was not found to be that plausible. The small-scale contractors do not have any training policy for site operatives.
6. Job analysis; employee appraisal; introduction of new methods and equipment; employees have newly arrived; and poor materials control are the most common determinants of training needs for site operatives for both the large and medium contractors. The small-scale contractors have no training determinants. Even for the large-scale contractors, the needs have not been based on highly systematized job analysis.
7. On-the-job instruction is the commonest method of training of construction site operatives by their employers, and especially the large- and medium-scale ones.
8. The preferred means of evaluation of the training effort for site operatives by large-scale contractors are the measurement of knowledge and/or skill at the beginning of training and at the completion of the

training, and the comparison of the values of work performance index before and after the training. For the medium-scale contractors, evaluation mostly centered on interviews and the comparison of work performance index before and after the training. Thus the comparison of work performance indexes is common to both contractors. Small-scale contractors do not evaluate the training of their craftsmen and labourers.

## Conclusions

1. It is only the large scale contractors who have some plausible training policies for site operatives; although these companies have largely non-specialists doubling as training officers.
2. Job analysis, employee appraisal, introduction of new methods and equipment, employees have newly arrived, and poor materials controls are the commonest determinants of training needs for such large-scale contractors.
3. On-the-job instruction is the commonest method of training of site operatives.
4. The preferred means of the evaluation of the training effort are the measurement of knowledge and /or skill at the beginning of training and at the completion of training; and the comparison of the values of work performance index before and after the training.

The foregoing clearly demonstrates that site operatives training is not being undertaken properly and seriously to a large extent by our local building contractors, and there is the need to, therefore, find ways to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local building contracting organisations in order to add more value to building construction works in the country.

This research paper is, therefore, being proposed with the following research question: What are the appropriate measures to institute to raise the general standards of training for site operatives in the local building construction industry?

### 1.3 Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to recommend appropriate measures to improve upon the training of building construction site operatives by local building contractors in Ghana.

## 2. Literature review

Site operatives training is the learning experiences given to a tradesman/craftsman and/or labourer in order to improve his/her knowledge and skills for a more effective performance in his/her present or future job on a construction project site (Fatonade, 2014).

Fatonade (2014) also stressed the benefits of training; principles of learning and training; and the phases in the development of training programmes (determination of training needs, programme design, programme implementation and programme evaluation).

### 2.1 Benefits of training

The following were alluded to in the aforementioned paper as some of the benefits of training flowing from Beach (1970) and Ovuorie (1985):

1. Reduced learning time to reach acceptable performance through having qualified and experienced instructors to create carefully controlled learning situations.
2. Improved performance on present job.
3. Attitude formation through having training programmes with the objectives of moulding employees attitudes to achieve support for company's activities, and to obtaining better co-operation and greater loyalty.
4. Training can help to fill manpower needs. For instance a manufacturing company finding it quite difficult to recruit sufficient skilled machinists, say, may establish its own apprentice training programme to help solve this manpower problem, in the long run.
5. Training benefits employees thereby increasing their market value and earning power. In addition trained workers are likely to be in possession of useful skills which enhance their value to their employers and thereby increases their job security. Training may also qualify those workers for promotion to more responsible jobs; this also increases their pay and status.
6. Training makes employees to require less constant and detailed supervision so that there is a better basis on which employees may exercise judgments.

#### 1.1 Principles of learning and training

In Fatonade (2014), the author alluded that Hallstein (1969) mentioned the need to ground training in sound learning principles in that learning must satisfy a need, be active, be arranged in a logical order, be broken down into small steps, be repetitive, and be able to provide a feedback. In addition Pigors and Myers (1981) stated that the trainers should be well-qualified to impart the learning that is the core of the training process, the human process by which skills, knowledges, habits and attitudes are acquired and utilized in such a way that behaviour is definitely modified through actual performance.

## **1.2 Phases in the development of the training programme**

### **1.2.1 Determination of training needs**

At the base of this determination is the need to have an aid in solving specific operational problems of an organization through a rational analysis of the entire organisation viz people, jobs, technology, etc., in order to identify areas of short comings where training can be of good help. Training needs have been advanced, as follows:

#### **1.2.1.1 Personnel Need Analysis**

This is the analysis of jobs and employees. A job analysis should state how much training, if any, is needed. Also regular personnel appraisal may provide the basis for pinpointing the training needs of individuals. In addition, collection of employees and management opinions through interviews and questionnaires in order to obtain views regarding necessary and desirable training programmes can also be a determinant of training needs.

#### **1.2.1.2 Task Need Analysis**

The author highlighted in Fatonade (2014) the need for employees, especially new employees, to know:

- a) What the organization is like and what their roles will be in it.

This is met by some form of job instruction, some method of identifying the tasks to be performed in the job and requirements of the tasks in question.

- b) What work is expected of them to be done and how to perform that work.

#### **1.2.1.3 Organisational Need Analysis**

There could be some specific problems in an organization, for instance: low productivity, high production costs; excessive scrap and waste; expansion of business, new plants, organizational changes, etc. These areas of shortcoming can help determine training needs.

## **2.3.2 Programme Design**

### **2.3.2.1 Satisfactory Answering of Training Questions:**

Programme design as the second phase in the development of the training programme has to answer some training questions viz Who to train? Why train? What to train in? How? Where? and When?

#### **2.3.2.1.1 Who?**

The author in Fatonade (2014) mentioned that training of employees and managers represents one of the most extensive personnel activities in modern organizations. He particularly mentioned that training and development programmes are usually differentiated to develop five groups of employees as indicated by Klatt, Murdicle and Schuster (1985):

- a. Managers
- b. Professional personnel
- c. Semi-professional employees (technicians)
- d. Office and clerical help; and
- e. Factory and other production personnel.

#### **2.3.2.1.2 Why?**

This was related to the organization's general objectives of getting an optimization of the use of its human resources in line with some identified needs.

#### **2.3.2.1.3 What?**

This was related to the contents and materials to be taught during the training programme from the identified training needs.

#### **2.3.2.1.4 How?**

This was related to the methods and techniques of training whether through on-the-job, lecture, role playing, audio-visual aids, simulation, demonstrations, etc.

#### **2.3.2.1.5 Where?**

This was related to the types or broad categories of training programmes best suited for employees. This can be through orientation, on-the-job, off-the-job or outside training.

#### **2.3.2.1.6 When?**

This was related to the scheduling of the training, either "massed" or distributed. For any given training situation, there is some "optimum" schedule that contributes most effectively to training. A training programme spaced out properly in time duration is likely to yield more fruits than that concentrated.

## **2.3.3 Programme Implementation**

The author, in the previous paper mentioned, highlighted that a properly designed training programme can only be appraised when it is implemented. This can be done by employees being taken through the right types of training inculcating the right methods.

## **2.3.4 Programme evaluation**

This last phase in the development of a training programme was reiterated by the author in Fatonade (2014) as the evaluation of the training effort in order to ascertain whether trained employees have acquired the desired skills, knowledges and attitudes after training. In effect, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the training

programme through reaction, learning, behavior and results, as enunciated by McCormick and Tiffin (1975) using the following techniques of Beach (1970):

- a. Administration of questionnaires to the trainees at the completion of the programme to obtain their opinions as to its worth.
- b. Interviews to elicit opinions.
- c. Measuring the knowledge and/or skill that employees possess at the beginning of training and again at the completion of same through the administration of the same examination before and after.
- d. Using various indices of work performance and compare them after the training with values before the training.
- e. Measuring performance before and after training for both a control group and an experimental group. This procedure can be accomplished by selecting two groups of employees that are approximately equivalent in education, experience, skill, job conditions and performance. Subject one (experimental) group to the training programme and give no training to the other (control) group.

This last technique has been established as the most refined method of evaluating training (and one that also avoids the errors of others techniques) and is one of the most fruitful methods available.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology was based on that of the previously mentioned paper of the author and is as follows:

### **2.1 Study Area**

The southern sector of Ghana was taken as the study area. The author mentioned this sector to be the major hub of commercial and construction activities in the country. A study undertaken in this sector, therefore, was taken as being representative of the situation in the country as a whole.

### **2.2 The Population of the Study**

The population of the study were local building and civil engineering contractors spanning small, medium and large categories and as classified in the financial category by the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH).

### **2.3 The Sampling Procedure and Sampling Size**

The contractors were stratified into small, medium and large companies and random samples taken from each of the stratum.

### **2.4 Study Design**

The study design was based on the descriptive quantitative research with survey research as the type or method. The study was carried out using structured questionnaires, observation and unstructured interview.

### **2.5 Data and Instrument for Data Collection**

Both primary and secondary data were gathered. The primary data collected from the field with questionnaires, observations and interviews. The secondary data were from documented literature.

### **2.6 Test of Validity and Reliability of Measurement Instrument**

Face validity was employed for the test of validity. The test-retest method was employed for the reliability of the data measuring instruments.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The author indicated in the previous paper mentioned that a survey research was undertaken in six (6) regions in the southern sector of Ghana. One hundred (100) sets of questionnaire were administered out of which thirty-four (34) were responded to across these 6 regions.

From the analysis of data collected based on the methodology above-mentioned, the following findings were arrived at:

1. Human resource policy is being undertaken to some moderate extent by large-, and medium-scale building contractors.
2. The large scale contractors are most aware of the Labour Act of Ghana which emphasizes amongst others, the training and retraining of employees by business concerns. However, its actual implementation is nothing to write home about.
3. Most local contractors, across the category divide, do not employ training officers per se. Non-specialists have doubled as these.
4. Training policy for employees generally is highly formulated by larger-scale contractors compared to the medium-, and small-scale contractors.
5. It is only the large-scale contractors, however, who have any quiet plausible training policy in place specifically for construction site operatives. The training policy for construction site operatives by medium-scale contractors was found not to be that plausible. The small-scale contractors do not have any training policy for construction site operatives.
6. The small-scale contractors studied had no training determinants. In fact none could have as none

studied had any training policy in place for site operatives.

However, for the majority of both the large-scale and medium-scale contractors, job analysis; employee appraisal; introduction of new methods and equipment; employees have newly arrived; and poor materials control are the most common determinations of training needs for site operatives.

7. On-the-job instruction is the commonest method of training construction site operatives by the large-scale and medium-scale contractors.
8. For the large-scale contractors, the measurement of knowledge and/or skill at the beginning of training and at the completion of the training, and the comparison of the values of work performance index before and after the training are the preferred means of evaluation of the training effort for site operatives. The medium-scale contractors evaluate the training effort based on interviews, and the comparisons of work performance index before and after the training. Small-scale contractors do not evaluate training efforts since there is no training policy in place for any of those surveyed in that category.

## Conclusion

The objective of this study was to recommend appropriate strengthening measures for building construction site operatives training by local building contractors. From the findings, it has become clear that it is only the large-scale local building contractors who have any reasonable and factual training policy in place that is being implemented and evaluated but in a way which clearly falls short of industry norms. Things, therefore, should be done properly by all registered local building contractors as regards construction site operatives training in order to add more value to the construction sector of the nation for obvious and real benefits both to the national economy and the general citizenry.

The following are, therefore, being recommended as appropriate strengthening measures for site operatives training by all registered local building contractors:

1. All registered local building contractors should be made, by government legislation and strict enforcement thereof, to employ specialist and qualified training officers even if such officers have to perform other functions in addition to their areas of specialization.

As enunciated already, there are phases in the development of training programmes, and it is only the well-qualified training officers who are most likely to help implement these properly and thus ensure that the benefits of the training efforts are properly harnessed by the organizations concerned.

2. Local building contracting organizations, in the evaluation of their training efforts, must make it an utmost priority to measure performance before and after training for both a CONTROL group (those not sent on training) and an EXPERIMENTAL group (those sent on training). This technique of evaluation of training has been established (Beach, 1970) as the best evaluation technique, the most refined and fruitful method, one that clearly avoids the errors of any of the other techniques.

3. All registered local building contractors must be enforced by appropriate government authorities to train and retrain their site employees as implored by the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) – Section 9(d) which states *inter alia*:

“Without prejudice to the provisions of this ACT and any other enactment for the time being in force, in any contract of employment or collective agreement, the duties of an employer include the duty to: .....d) develop the human resources by way of training and retraining of the workers”.

This approach, if strictly implemented, will tend to have a positive impact, in the long run, on construction project delivery within cost, quality and time as most of the large-scale local contractors surveyed and who embark on some semblance of training of site operatives have reported high productivity achievement and timely completion of projects despite experiencing some delays also during the course of construction of projects.

4. In addition to (3) above, there should be the establishment of a central development and regulatory agency as advanced by Fugar, Ashiboe-Mensah, and Adinyira (2013) who did a study on the development of the human resource in the Ghanaian construction industry. In that study, they concluded that there is no compulsion on firms and contractors to undertake continual development of their employees, and this has led to poor performance on projects in areas such as cost, quality, and productivity, a view point reinforced further by Erkelens et al (2008) that a high percentage of construction projects undertaken in Ghana overshoot the cost and time limits set by the parties. The call for a Construction Development Board or Authority for Ghana as advanced by Fugar, Ashiboe-Mensah and Adinyira (2008) is therefore found relevant and urgent. Success stories as testified to by the three authors in Tanzania (The National Construction Council), Singapore (The Building Construction Authority), Malaysia and South Africa (The Construction Industry Development Board) go to show that notwithstanding financial problems and having regard to the immense benefits that can accrue from human capital development for the construction industry, creative approaches to training and

development could be adopted by the Government of Ghana and stakeholders to minimise cost and time. The establishment of a central agency with the appropriate legal backing can set good and valuable standards for training in the construction industry and this can go a long way to minimise the poor perception of the local construction industry thereby enhancing its capacity as a mainstay of the socio-economic development of the country. Osei (2013) alluded to the fact of the construction sector being one of the mainstays of the Ghanaian economy with the sector's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product rising from 7.6% in 1996 to 9.9% in 2011. Similarly, he highlighted the sector's share of industrial output in Ghana rising from 29.8% in 1993 to 37.4% in 2011.

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