

Assessment of Labor Relations Practices in Chinese Road Construction Firms Operating in Ethiopia

D.Lalitha Ran Bahran Asrat
Andhra University

Abstract

This study intended to assess the collective bargaining practices, efforts to build participative management systems, dispute handling mechanisms, and commitments for installing quality of work life/conditions in the Chinese construction firms. Considering the socially sensitive aspects of labor relation practices and the large number of Chinese road construction firms operating in Ethiopia, the study chose to adopt the descriptive survey approach. Moreover, this approach was believed to enable the researcher assess the experiences and views of the workers, who are the most relevant focus of a study that deals with labor relation practices. The findings of study have indicated lots of problems regarding the overall labor relation practices in the Chinese road construction firms some among which are the absence of collective bargaining practices, lack of workers' participation in organizational affairs, and limited roles of the concerned external stakeholders in the labor relation practices of the organizations.

Introduction

Most firms in the Ethiopian investment environment, including those of international business, are known for their labor intensive operations (Alemayehu, 2008). The researcher, therefore, believes that the issue of addressing labor relations practices and the related potential problems both employers and workers face is of paramount significance. In this regard, there would be no other relevant target than the Chinese road construction firms to assess this practice. So, the question is: what do labor relation practices look like in the Chinese road construction firms operating in Ethiopia? This has to be addressed in contrast to the good reputation these firms have built especially in managing and delivering projects effectively, commitment to construction schedules, commendable work culture, and adapting to local realities (shortage, in efficiency, instability, etc.) with little or no time for adjustment. Compared to these aspects of their strength, many studies argue that the Chinese construction firms have not changed the usually traditional and short sighted labor relations system for the better. According to Alemayehu (2008), two points are mainly considered the sources of labor relation problems in most Chinese firms: the poor pay scales and arrangements (sometimes lower rates than that of the local construction firms) and their uncommon practices of mobilizing labor from China even for quite menial jobs that could be filled with semi-skilled local workforce. The second practice has also been specified as typical of Chinese contractors in the last decade in a study (entitled 'the Chinese interest and activities in Africa's construction and infrastructure sector, 2006) handled by the Center for Chinese Studies of the University of Stellenbosch. According to the findings of this study, Chinese contractors in such countries as Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia have faced hostilities from their local workers and unions due to their moves to deploy contract workers from the home country-China. Even more graphic reflections of labor relation problems in the Chinese construction firms have been stated in a report compiled by The Federation of Labor Unions of The Ethiopian Construction Sector for stakeholders meeting organized by, FDRE (2012). According to the report, the Chinese employers have aggressively acted against any internal or external efforts of union formation or even non-union initiatives for binding collective agreements. As a result there are no workers in these firms represented by any union. It is also noted that only few of these Chinese firms try to adopt participatory management styles with local workers. The dispute handling procedure and approaches of these organizations are more criticized even by researchers of academic circles and reputed international institutions (Kocer and Hayten, 2011).

The main gap the researcher witnessed in the above stated views is that they blame only the Chinese firms and their management for the labor relations problems. The same cultural and social insensitivities that the Chinese firms and management are criticized for have not been investigated (in terms of their potential existence and consequences) in the local workforce. As a matter of fact, the only study that tried to assess the efforts (for positive labor relations) made by Chinese investors and contractors in Ethiopia and the challenges they face (Fu, 2012) states that the apparent lack of interest of local workers to state and negotiate on their employment terms and conditions, their frequent tardiness and absenteeism, and their spontaneous resignations from their jobs (and the firm) have been more detrimental to the labor-management relations than other internal or external organizational factors.

Therefore, (the researcher) strongly acknowledges that there is a need to address the perspectives of both parties in the organization (employers and employees) in order to look in to the whole picture of the labor relation practices in the Chinese road construction firms so that the critical problems can be identified for further investigation and generation of feasible solutions. The research outcome, hence would contribute some

invaluable inputs for better labor relations and increased quality, efficiency, and productivity of human resources.

Having all these concepts in mind, this study was designed to assess the practices and related challenges of labor relations in the Chinese road construction firms, mainly focusing on the collective bargaining, employee participation, dispute management, quality of work life and work programs of these organizations.

In more specific terms, this was intended to:

- Assess the policies and practices of individual or collective bargaining agreements in the Chinese road construction firms and look in to the collective bargaining issues that are ignored or reluctantly considered against their importance.
- Size up the dispute management approaches applied in the Chinese road construction firms and offer feasible recommendations on how to make the approaches more effective.
- Assess the degree to which employees are involved in the management decisions and practices of the Chinese road construction firms, particularly regarding the issues directly related to their immediate interests.
- Assess the approaches and programs used by the Chinese road construction firms to maintain quality of work life/conditions to their workers and provide recommendations if necessary.
- Assess the degree to which the labor relations practices of the Chinese road construction firms are compatible to the Ethiopian labor regulations and overview the commitment of various concerned government and civic organizations in protecting workers' rights in the stated organizations.

Methodology

Relevant primary data were generated from management of the selected organizations (project managers, administration/human resources managers, and executives) through key informant interviews. A purposefully sample of 389 workers were contacted through a survey questionnaire regarding their labor relations experience in the firms. For the purposes of having a comprehensive and multidimensional view on the matter, representatives of concerned stakeholders (representatives from the Federation of Trade Unions of Ethiopian Construction Workers and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) were interviewed. Secondary sources of data were also used.

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) were adopted to analyze and present primary data inputs collected through questionnaires of dominantly Likert scale questions. The analysis was handled so that it could present outputs with the required dimensions. More specifically, the researcher generated such dimensions as the frequency (in number and percents), mean, standard deviations, as well as the minimum and maximum values of the items from the SPSS analysis. The content analysis was employed for analyzing secondary data and those information inputs collected through interview guides were addressed through the 'data triangulation' method.

Research Findings

Views and Experiences of Respondents about Labor Relation Practices in Chinese Road Construction Firms

As established in the tables below, the level of agreements of the respondents to the assumptions (regarding the overall practices of labor relations and the four components) forwarded by the researcher were distributed in to the five categories (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The statistical composition of the responses (represented in number (N) and percentage rates (%)) reflects the areas where problems significantly lie with regards to labor relation practices in the organizations. The statistical summary of mean and standard deviations are also used as reflections of the respondents. The full discussion follows:

Collective Bargaining Practices

This part includes the views of the respondents on the existence and features of collective bargaining in their respective organizations and their experience regarding its application in the organizations. More particularly, first the views of the respondents on their organizations' commitment to use consensus as decision making mechanism (at least in the case of dealing with mutually important issues) is assessed. Then, the respondents' experience regarding the presence of any sort of bargaining related to pay, benefits, working conditions, and terms of employment is reflected. Finally, the respondents' views and experiences on their organizations' commitment to encourage or at least accept workers' rights for representation are addressed in this section.

Table 1: Collective bargaining practices

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Management tries to build consensus with workers on key organizational issues workloads, restructuring, pay, and benefits.	15	5.0	45	15.0	52	17.3	109	36.3	79	26.3
Workers have the right to bargain on their pay (salary/wage) with the organization	18	6.0	28	9.3	48	16.0	128	42.7	78	26.0
Workers have the right to bargain on their benefits and allowances with the organization	22	7.3	30	10.0	35	11.7	117	39.0	96	32.0
Workers have the right to bargain on working conditions with the organization	29	9.7	42	14.0	50	16.7	98	32.7	81	27.0
Workers have the right to bargain on the terms of their employment with the organization	19	6.3	27	9.0	40	13.3	125	41.7	89	29.7
Management encourages any efforts of workers to form representative groups for bargaining purposes.	10	3.3	12	4.0	31	10.3	145	48.3	102	34.0
Management supports labor unions/ workers' representatives on their various but legitimate efforts to satisfy their members' interests.	9	3.0	11	3.7	36	12.0	123	41.0	121	40.3
There is a collective agreement document that equally governs the organization and its workers	10	3.3	10	3.3	23	7.7	107	35.7	150	50.0
The organization/management strictly respects the terms in the collective agreement	9	3.0	8	2.7	17	5.7	95	31.7	171	57.0
Workers get support from the concerned government agencies to ensure their rights	42	14.0	51	17.0	63	21.0	86	28.7	58	19.3
Total N=300, Valid=300, Missing=0, Minimum=1, Maximum=5, Grand Mean=21.180, Grand SD=4.02512										

As observed in the results above (Table 1.), the picture drawn by the respondents about the collective bargaining practices (or the absence of it) in their organizations is shockingly bleak. As the figures show, the first focus of the analysis—the practices of consensus in making decisions pertaining jobs, changes, and other important issues in the Chinese road construction firms—was recognized only by 20% of the respondents while 17.7% of them maintained neutral position. This resulted in a below average mean result of 2.30, which is an indicator as to how unfavourable outlooks that the workers have to the efforts of their employers in this regard. The views of the respondents become even more negative when they were enquired about the bargaining experience in their organizations. With a rate up to 77%, the respondents denounced the lack of efforts of their employers towards bargaining. In more statistical terms, the lack of bargaining practices in the Chinese construction firms on the issues of pay, benefits, working conditions, and employment contracts were reflected in the respective mean results of 2.26, 2.18, 2.38, and 2.16. Furthermore, the maximum limit of standard deviation of the responses was 1.13 indicating that the workers feel a commonly shared disapproval to the nature of bargaining practices in the organizations. The same (if not more negative) is true about the respondents' perceptions regarding the reactions of the organizations to efforts of workers for representations. Consistent to the findings presented above the rate of disagreement to the assumptions of the researcher (regarding these issues) reaches as high as 88%. The claim by representatives of CETU on this matter seems to be fair. The researcher has not obtained an explicit 'yes' answer from management of the Chinese firms regarding the existence of labor unions and collective agreements even if they have underlined that they try to incorporate the views of workers in making decisions. As a reflection of workers' negative views towards the situations with regards to how their rights to union or any other legitimate forms of representation are treated in the Chinese firms, the mean scores of the items read as 2.16, 1.96, and 1.78 with a variation of only as high as 1.11.

The roles of external stakeholders in protecting workers rights are also viewed only with modest approval by the workers. Giving a mean score of 2.76 points, only about 52.2% of the respondents agree (or are neutral) that the concerned government agencies at least try to protect the rights of workers.

The researcher further used cross tabulation to see the possible impacts of such factors as experience and current forms of employment of the workers on their views to the overall practices of collective bargaining practices and workers' representations in the Chinese road construction firms.

The significance of the two factors in influencing the workers' orientations and views on this (collective bargaining) and the remaining aspects of labor relations was found statistically tangible when measured through Pearson's Chi-Square Test. Though, the chi-square results of the sum of responses show

relatively some fluctuations, the Asymptote Significance results (which are the most determinant indicators of test significance of measurement units in mixed research studies like this one) stand at 0.000, reflecting the significance of *experience and current types of employment* on the views of the respondents on the labour relation practices in the Chinese road construction firms.

The summary results of the cross tabulation are shown in the table below.

Table 4.2. Distribution of workers' views by experience and current types of employment

Factors		Statistical Values				Test of Significance	
		Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum	Pearson's Chi-Square	Assymp. Sig.
<i>Experience (years)</i>	≤ 1	22.17391	4.475257	14	30	1.411	0.000
	<i>1 to 5</i>	20.41353	3.435836	15	27		
	<i>5 to 10</i>	19.96552	3.190194	16	25		
<i>Current Form of Employment</i>	<i>Daily</i>	22.41304	4.42506	16	29	3.139	0.000
	<i>Temporary</i>	21.70513	3.567927	15	29		
	<i>S. term cont.</i>	20.37405	3.924942	14	30		
	<i>L. term cont.</i>	21.23684	4.52282	15	30		
	<i>Permanent</i>	22	2.645751	16	23		

The results summarized above clearly illustrate that while the view of all workers on the collective bargaining practices of their organizations is critical workers with longer experience reflect more negative views than that of their juniors. If distributed to the number of items, the figures in Table 4.2 show mean of 2.22, standard deviation of 0.34, and a maximum value of 3 regarding the responses from workers with only up to 1 year experience. These reflect a relatively less critical view of such workers compared to that of workers with five to ten years of experiences, which stand at mean of 1.99, standard deviation of 0.31, and a maximum value of 2.5. This indicates that for the workers with longer experiences, the efforts of the Chinese road construction firms in building effective collective bargaining system and encouraging workers' for representation have not improved or declined through time.

The summary results of the statistical analysis on the collective bargaining practices and workers' representations show a grand mean of 21.180, which distributed to the number of items, become 2.12 and a grand standard deviation of 4.02512, which distributed to the number of items stands at around 0.403. The fact that both mean and standard deviation figures are low indicates how disapproving the overall views of the workers are towards the practices in the Chinese road construction firms are on the issues of collective bargaining practices and workers' representations.

Employee Participation and Communication Practices

As underlined by De Silva (1996), any organization cannot claim to have a healthy, stable, and constructive labor relations system, without maintaining an organizational environment where two-way communication and employee participation are realized. In view of this, the respondents have expressed their beliefs and experiences on this issue. This part, therefore, includes two groups of items. The first subgroup (items 1-5) composes the respondents' reactions regarding the features and characteristics of the communication system, culture, and practices in the organizations while their feelings on the inclusiveness of the Chinese road construction firms are represented by items 6-13.

Table 4.3: Employee participation and communication practices

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I understand the long-term strategy, vision, mission and strategic direction of my employer.	22	7.3	39	13.0	61	20.3	116	38.7	62	20.7
Workers clearly know about their job duties & employment rights	71	23.7	80	26.7	58	19.3	52	17.3	39	13.0
Workers are encouraged to offer their opinions and ideas to management.	17	5.7	25	8.3	46	15.3	112	37.3	100	33.3
Management respects the cultural & social values of local workers	53	17.7	74	24.7	51	17.0	64	21.3	58	19.3
Management uses communication language easily understandable for workers	29	9.7	44	14.7	47	15.7	83	27.7	97	32.3
Workers are encouraged to practice team work	82	27.3	104	34.7	37	12.3	51	17.0	26	8.7
Management encourages inter-personal relationship among workers	56	18.7	76	25.3	40	13.3	57	19.0	71	23.7
Management continuously informs workers about changes in matters relevant to them	10	3.3	17	5.7	34	11.3	138	46.0	101	33.7
Management encourages workers to participate in job related decisions	23	7.7	47	15.7	38	12.7	105	35.0	87	29.0
Management trusts workers to make job related decisions on their own	25	8.3	26	8.7	66	22.0	98	32.7	85	28.3
Management uses workers' representatives to know about the interests/problems of workers	23	7.7	47	15.7	70	23.3	93	31.0	67	22.3
Training programmes are adequately provided by management to workers	30	10.0	41	13.7	54	18.0	91	30.3	84	28.0
Total N=300, Valid=300, Missing=0, Minimum=1, Maximum=5, Grand Mean=31.54, Grand SD=6.07713										

Unlike the results observed in the analysis regarding the previous part (collective bargaining practices) of labor relations, there looks to be some positive outlook from respondents on this aspect of labor relations. At least the levels of disagreements from the respondents on the assumptions provided by the researcher were more contained than in the previous sections. For example, majority of the respondents indicated that they clearly know about their job duties/responsibilities (more than 50% of them) and that the organization encourages team work (with 61.2% agreement). The mean results, at respectively 3.14 and 3.58, also show a positive outlook of the workers on how the Chinese road construction firms practice these two issues. Consistent to these results, the researcher's observations and the management interview confirmed that brief and semi-normal meetings are held at the beginning of each working day (in projects) helping workers clearly understand the short term plans and their role in executing them. The meetings also include orders on team mobilization to project duties, encouraging team work. However, at 1.31 and 1.32 points, the standard deviation figures show a relatively significant variation among the respondents' views regarding the application of these two issues.

The responses to the organizations' reactions to interpersonal relationships and respect to local cultural/social values were scattered on the scales of agreement drawing neither positive nor negative outlooks of noticeable degree. The respective mean scores of 3.04 and 2.96 show the workers still maintain somehow favorable views (no matter how limited) towards their employers on these two issues. However, the standard deviation results of 1.40 and 1.46 reflect the less determined (certain) position of the workers as to how they individually view the degree to which the Chinese road construction firms encourage interpersonal relationships and the degree to which they respect the local cultural/social values.

On the other extreme are negative outlooks of respondents towards a number of issues regarding the practices of communication and employee participation in the Chinese road construction firms. These outlooks are reflected first on the communication practices of the organizations. For instance, the same respondents who said they clearly understand their job duties underlined that they do not have any tangible idea about their organizations' strategic direction, goals, missions and visions at a rate of about 58.7%, which relatively brought down the average score of their views to 2.52 points. On the other hand, only 9% of the respondents stated that management continuously informs the workers on changes taking place on various job related matters. This is the lowest point of the communication aspect of labor relations in the stated organizations. The mean score of 2.06 and standard deviation of 1.05 are both the smallest figures among all items in this category, indicating how excluded workers feel in any process of change that the organizations undertake. Only a quarter (24.4%) respondents feel that management uses communication language understandable to them. It is not difficult to

imagine how such situations can hurt the state of labor relations in any organization. When interviewed by the researcher, the management respondents said that they tried to use interpreters but the action oriented nature of construction projects made it easier to communicate with local workers and that no major problems arise due to language differences.

The lack of participative culture in the organizations is also reflected by majority of respondents. To this effect, 68.6% of respondents stated that workers are not encouraged to participate in job related decisions while 61% of them believe management does not trust workers to make decisions related to jobs. The efforts of the organizations to train and develop workers for future involvement in to the organizations' affairs are also felt by respondents as insufficient where only 25.3% responded favorably. Consistent to the distribution of the responses, the three items scored only mean of 2.38, 2.14, and 2.54 points with standard deviation of 1.28, 1.08, and 1.32 points.

Similar to the approach used in that of collective bargaining part, the researcher tried to see the cross tabulated impacts of experience and current forms of employment of the workers on their views to the communication and workers participation practices in the Chinese road construction firms. The summary results of the analysis are shown in the table below.

Table 4.4. Distribution of workers' views on the communication and workers participation practices by experience and current types of employment

Factors		Statistical Values				Test of Significance	
		Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum	Pearson's Chi-Square	Assymp. Sig.
<i>Experience (years)</i>	<i>≤ 1</i>	31.94203	5.727088	21	42	1.910	0.000
	<i>1 to 5</i>	30.61654	6.433485	20	44		
	<i>5 to 10</i>	33.86207	5.323292	27	41		
<i>Current Form of Employment</i>	<i>Daily</i>	28.34783	4.757298	24	39	4.752	0.000
	<i>Temporary</i>	28.97436	5.781687	20	39		
	<i>S. term cont.</i>	32.70229	5.428833	21	41		
	<i>L. term cont.</i>	35.02632	6.21892	26	44		
	<i>Permanent</i>	40.42857	1.511858	37	41		

The impact of experience is not consistently established according to the results. While those relatively new (≤ 1 year experience) seem to have a more positive view at the stated grand mean of 31.94 points (2.66 if distributed to the 12 items in this category), the same results put them at a more reserved position when compared to that of the workers with experience of 5 to 10 years whose overall views to the communication and employee participation practices in the Chinese road construction firms are more positive with a mean score of 33.86 (2.82 if distributed to the 12 items in this category). Furthermore, the highest of the minimum value and a closer figure of maximum values show more tolerant views of the senior employees to the communication practices of their employers.

The summary results of the statistical analysis on the communication and employee participation practices in the Chinese road construction firms show a grand mean of 31.54, which distributed to the number of items, become 2.63 and a grand standard deviation of 6.07713, which distributed to the number of items stands at around 0.5064. Compared to the findings on collective bargaining and workers' representation aspects, better situations are reflected on the communication and employee participation practices in the Chinese road construction firms.

Conflict/Dispute Handling Procedures and Approaches

In a sector such as construction, the importance of designing and implementing proper dispute handling mechanisms is not only to the labor relation part but also to the management of the entire organizations. In relation to labor relations, dispute handling mechanisms are used to address employee grievances, inter-personal conflicts, and disputes between labor and management. This part assesses the practice of dispute management in view of the experiences of the respondents and triangulating them to the information obtained from management and other sources. Accordingly, the first two categories of items represent the respondents' views regarding features and process of grievance handling and disciplinary measures. The styles and approaches of the organizations in dealing with labor management disputes are covered in the third set of items. Finally the rights of workers to use various (internal as well as external) options of dispute handling are assessed through the last set of items.

Table 4.5: Conflict/dispute handling procedures and approaches

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Workers are well oriented of the dispute management procedures of the organization	30	10.0	44	14.7	64	21.3	96	32.0	66	22.0
Workers are encouraged to freely present their complaints/grievances to management	45	15.0	69	23.0	43	14.3	80	26.7	63	21.0
Management quickly responds to the grievances of workers	22	7.3	41	13.7	35	11.7	117	39.0	85	28.3
Management treats conflicts in work area without favouritism.	36	12.0	58	19.3	48	16.0	77	25.7	81	27.0
Management handles detailed and proper investigation before taking disciplinary measures	32	10.7	48	16.0	36	12.0	99	33.0	85	28.3
Workers can challenge the organization on issues such as pay, benefits, working conditions without fear of losing their job or position	11	3.7	22	7.3	41	13.7	128	42.7	98	32.7
Management solves disputes on such issues as promotion, transfer, and pay increases according to collective agreements.	10	3.3	10	3.3	23	7.7	107	35.7	150	50.0
Workers can strike or stop work to express their legitimate grievances	18	6.0	26	8.7	43	14.3	117	39.0	96	32.0
If needed, concerned government agencies are involved in resolving worker-management disputes	67	22.3	95	31.7	50	16.7	49	16.3	39	13.0
Workers can challenge their employer in court without fear of retaliation from management	10	3.3	12	4.0	36	12.0	141	47.0	101	33.7
Management tries to solve worker-worker and worker-management disagreements/disputes through constructive approaches.	17	5.7	29	9.7	40	13.3	126	42.0	88	29.3
Management tries to resolve disputes/conflict through internal organizational mechanisms	43	14.3	50	16.7	63	21.0	86	28.7	58	19.3
Proper and adequate mechanisms of dispute/conflict management are available in the organization	11	3.7	18	6.0	38	12.7	130	43.3	103	34.3
Total N=300, Valid=300, Missing=0, Minimum=1, Maximum=5, Grand Mean=31.66, Grand SD=5.47396										

We can summarize the results of the survey regarding the conflict/dispute handling practices in the stated organizations in to three. The grievance handling practices, to which the respondents showed divided views, can be reviewed first. While there is no strong resistance to the researcher's assumption that workers can freely present their grievances (only 48% disagreed), majority (68%) of respondents do not believe management quickly responds to grievances. The relative difference in the mean figures (2.82 to 2.30) show the significant difference of the respondents views' regarding the two interdependent activities of the same procedure-grievance handling.

Regarding disciplinary measures and procedures, again the negative outlooks outweigh the positive views. In this regard, only 26.7% of respondents believe that management handles detailed and proper investigation before making disciplinary decisions while at least 50% of respondents assume that management lacks objectivity and shows favoritism when making such decisions. The statistical averages of their responses back this distribution at respective mean scores of 2.16 and 2.66 respectively though with standard deviation of up to 1.35, the workers show considerable variation in their view towards the objectivity of management in its conflict handling procedures.

The view of respondents on the use of the standard dispute handling mechanisms such as challenging management through internal organizational hierarchies, strike, courts, and government mediation systems reflect their deep sense of fear and intimidation. As such only 10% of the respondents believe that they can challenge management and its decisions using various legitimate mechanisms. In more particular terms, only 6.6%, 14.7%, and 7.7% regard collective agreements, strike, and courts as conflict/dispute handling means. As such, the mean scores of their views regarding the potential of application of these three dispute handling mechanisms are 1.84, 2.14, and 1.96 respectively. This extreme disapproval in the views of respondents undermined the performance of the Chinese road construction firms in this regard. The only positive aspect indicated in this survey is the respondents' belief in government institutions (labor-management boards) as

options for dispute resolution.

The dispute handling practices in the Chinese road construction firms are summed by the negative views reflected by majority of the respondents regarding two issues. One is the use of constructive approaches to dispute handling to which respondents thought otherwise at the rate of 80.6% and the other is the summary assumption that the organizations adopt proper and adequate dispute handling mechanisms to which respondents disagreed at the overwhelming rate of 86.6%.

Furthermore, more important implications have been drawn from the cross tabulated analysis between the Part II questions (related to dispute handling practices) and some items in this part. When enquired about their views regarding the efforts of the management of the Chinese road construction firms to properly orient them about the dispute management policies and procedures, about 55.6% of the 107 employees who have been subject to disciplinary actions showed disagreements. In a similar line only 30.1% of those who have not been subject to disciplinary measures showed disagreements. This implies that even those who have yet to go through disciplinary measures are not either informed or satisfied with the organizations' dispute handling systems, increasing the potential for future challenges in this regard. Moreover,

Again, the researcher tried to see the significance of the workers' experience and current forms of employment on their views regarding the dispute handling system and practices in the Chinese road construction firms through the cross tabulation analysis. Some interesting figures have been derived from this analysis as observed in the table below.

Table 4.6. Distribution of workers' views on the dispute/conflict handling practices by experience and current types of employment

Factors		Statistical Values				Test of Significance	
		Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum	Pearson's Chi-Square	Assymp. Sig.
Experience (years)	≤ 1	31.47826	5.798587	24	45	2.985	0.000
	1 to 5	31.58647	4.714786	21	42		
	5 to 10	32.86207	6.998592	21	40		
Current Form of Employment	Daily	33.02174	4.846484	28	43	5.093	0.000
	Temporary	31.0641	4.358421	23	38		
	S. term cont.	30.8626	4.824239	24	40		
	L. term cont.	33.10526	8.961749	21	45		
	Permanent	36.42857	1.133893	36	39		

Though modestly, the results still show experience and type of employment having some effect on how workers view the dispute handling practices in the Chinese road construction firms. According to the results, workers have become more familiar to these aspects of labor relations in the Chinese road construction firms. For example, at the stated grand mean of 32.86 points (2.52 if distributed to the 13 items in this category), workers with 5 to 10 years experience seem to be relatively more tolerant of the procedures than their junior co-workers.

The summary results of the statistical analysis on the dispute handling practices in the Chinese road construction firms show a grand mean of 31.66, which distributed to the number of items, become 2.44 and a grand standard deviation of 5.47396, which distributed to the number of items stands at around 0.421. Compared to the findings on communication and employee participation practices, the circumstances related the dispute handling practices in the Chinese road construction firms show more symptoms of problems.

Programs for Quality of Work Life/Conditions

This part of the analysis deals with the most economically appealing part of labor relations. By addressing the basic economic needs as well as enhancing the economic security and job satisfaction of the employees, organizations through programs for quality of work life/conditions aim at increasing worker motivation and instilling a sense of responsibility. If effectively integrated to the other aspects of labor relations, literature shows that they can benefit organizations through reducing absenteeism; increasing awareness and commitment of workers on efficiency, safety, and quality; and limiting labor turn over. With this orientation, the researcher forwarded some items in order to assess the views of respondents regarding the efforts of the Chinese road construction firms to introduce and maintain programs for quality of work life/conditions. As such issues related to pay, benefits, safety tools, access to resources, and work hours are raised here.

Table 4.7: Programs for quality of work life/conditions

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My salary is fairly adequate for my responsibilities.	44	14.7	62	20.7	47	15.7	77	25.7	70	23.3
My employer offers me a fair and adequate benefit package.	17	5.7	12	4.0	25	8.3	140	46.7	106	35.3
My pay & benefit package grows with my experience, position and consideration of changes in the costs of living.	32	10.7	37	12.3	72	24.0	87	29.0	72	24.0
I am offered with all resources necessary for my job in headquarters or projects	80	26.7	97	32.3	53	17.7	41	13.7	29	9.7
I am fully oriented and trained with the necessary safety procedures for my job.	55	18.3	78	26.0	40	13.3	57	19.0	70	23.3
I am furnished with the required safety kits suitable for my job/s.	67	22.3	94	31.3	51	17.0	49	16.3	39	13.0
The organization limits its working hours to mutually acceptable limits.	54	18.0	79	26.3	55	18.3	60	20.0	52	17.3
The organization offers me adequate vacation time at various intervals during the operational period.	51	17.0	77	25.7	56	18.7	57	19.0	59	19.7
I am entitled to full provision of medical services at the event of any job related accidents.	44	14.7	57	19.0	58	19.3	60	20.0	81	27.0
Total N=300, Valid=300, Missing=0, Minimum=1, Maximum=5, Grand Mean=25.72, Grand SD=4.54648										

The first noticeable difference observed here is the distribution of the views of respondents across the scale of agreements to the researchers' assumptions. Actually, the practices of the Chinese road construction firms to ensure quality of work life/conditions have drawn more positive outlooks than in the previous sections. In particular cases of access to resources, safety and health protection mechanisms/tools, and limited work hours the respondents indicated that they are well treated by their organizations with agreement rates of respectively 59%, 51%, and 53.6%. even if the mean results (at 3.64 and 3.36 points) of the responses for the first two items reflect the above reported levels of agreement of the workers, the high standard deviation (1.40) brought down the mean (to 2.92 points) of results of the workers' view on the number of working hours. With average of the responses at 2.80 and 2.90 respectively, the workers were found non-committal regarding adequacy of pay and vacation time. The lack of collective agreements and worker representation in organizational decisions seems to have affected the situation regarding this matter. According to the results of the cross tabulation between these factors, at least 57.2% of those respondents whose pay rates were determined without any collective agreements indicated that they do not believe they are paid adequately while at least 87.5% of those who individually bargained about their pays agree on the adequacy and fairness of their pays.

Even if the conventional assumption is that international business firms pay higher and offer more lucrative benefit packages, this does not look to be the case in the Chinese road construction firms, at least according to the respondents surveyed here. Consistent to the findings presented under 4.4.1.1 (that workers are not provided with any type of insurance, allowance, and incentives), only 11.7% of respondents believe they are provided with adequate benefit packages while agreement is obtained from only 33.7% of them regarding the adequacy of the medical services they get at times of work related accidents indicating their overall views on the state of pay and benefits in their organizations. It is not thus surprising to find out that the mean score of this item is the smallest at just 1.90 representing a fairly commonly unfavourable view of the respondents at a standard deviation of 1.07 (the smallest of all). In a more illustrative manner, the composition of the benefit packages that the workers are provided with was seen to directly affect their views on the adequacy of the packages. In this regard, about 90.6% of the 53 respondents that get only health/medical services expressed their dissatisfactions to the benefit packages in their organizations followed by 86.1% of the 158 who get only transportation services. Even of the 77 employees who have access to a relatively better composition of benefits (transportation and health services), the survey shows that as many as 79.2% of them think they are inadequately provided from their organizations.

The important features/results of the analysis are depicted here under followed by the brief discussion of their implications.

Table 4.8. Distribution of workers' views on the quality of work life/condition by experience and current types of employment

Factors		Statistical Values				Test of Significance	
		Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum	Pearson's Chi-Square	Assymp. Sig.
Experience (years)	≤ 1	26.02899	4.162646	16	32	3.121	0.000
	1 to 5	24.98496	3.66388	17	31		
	5 to 10	27.62069	8.117062	17	37		
Current Form of Employment	Daily	23.08696	5.028037	16	36	4.710	0.000
	Temporary	25.70513	3.535016	21	31		
	S. term cont.	26.22137	4.413772	18	37		
	L. term cont.	27.15789	5.390313	17	36		
	Permanent	26	2.645751	20	27		

According to the results, the relationship between the two source factors-workers' experience and type of employment-and the workers' views on the programmes of quality of work life in the Chinese road construction firms show interesting patterns. First, consistent to the patterns in the communication and employee participation parts, the workers with 1 to 5 years experience show critical views more intensively than their juniors or seniors (the smallest grand mean, minimum, and maximum values at 24.99, 17, and 31 respectively). This could be due to their feelings of being senior and entitled enough to the provisions from their employers not being realized due to the reluctance of the organizations.

The summary results of the statistical analysis on the quality of work life/conditions in the Chinese road construction firms show a grand mean of 25.72, which distributed to the number of items, become 2.85 and a grand standard deviation of 4.54648, which distributed to the number of items stands at around 0.5056. Compared to the findings on dispute handling practices, the situations in this aspect of labor relation practices in the Chinese road construction firms show improvements. However, the findings also clearly established that the realities with regards to some individual components of quality of work life in the organizations are even starker than that of the other aspects of labor relations. This is especially more evident in the cases related to adequacy of pay and scope and accessibility of benefits.

Roles of Trade Unions and Government Agencies

The nature and characteristics of labor relations practices are not determined only by the organization and its workers. Labor relations practices in international business organizations and operations, invite the attention and at certain occasions, the involvement of external stakeholders. In this regard, the roles of trade union federations, labor affairs agencies, and courts become significant in facilitating such labor relations practices as collective bargaining and dispute resolution. The final part of the analysis, therefore, tries to address the roles of the above stated external stakeholders in supporting the labor relation process in the Chinese road construction firms.

Table 4.9: Roles of trade unions and government agencies

	SA		A		N		D		SD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Serious efforts have been made by labor union federations to organize workers	22	7.3	41	13.7	41	13.7	102	34.0	94	31.3
Workers in my organization are adequately represented by unions	0	0.0	0	0.0	33	11.0	141	47.0	126	42.0
The concerned government agencies actively monitor the labor relations practices in my organization	24	8.0	39	13.0	45	15.0	113	37.7	79	26.3
The concerned government agencies are committed to protecting workers' rights	26	8.7	41	13.7	49	16.3	98	32.7	86	28.7
Courts promptly & effectively address worker-employer disputes	33	11.0	55	18.3	52	17.3	90	30.0	70	23.3
The concerned government agencies have helped in creating healthy & constructive labor relations practices in my organization	52	17.3	58	19.3	57	19.0	68	22.7	65	21.7
Labor unions have facilitated trust & cooperation between workers and management in my organization	5	1.7	7	2.3	31	10.3	137	45.7	120	40.0
Total N=300, Valid=300, Missing=0, Minimum=1, Maximum=5, Grand Mean=16.02, Grand SD=3.17066										

It is already indicated (in the previous sections of this chapter), that the existence of such instruments

as unions is virtually non-existent in the Chinese road construction firms. This is reflected above where 0% of respondents believe that any worker in these organizations is represented in unions. Interviews with officials indicated that the absence of unions or collective agreement tools is caused by the strong resistance by the management of the firms against any efforts of such kind. In order to find the heart of the matter, the results depicted above can be summarized here.

Contrary to the claims of representatives of federations of trade/labor unions majority of the respondents (65.3%) believe that serious efforts are not yet made to achieve worker representation in the Chinese road construction firms, resulting in a mild mean score of 2.28. This is further indicated in the results generated by cross tabulating the answers to the question about the why almost no worker is represented in unions. Of the 58 workers who cited the lack of contact/support from federations of labor unions as reason for their failure to unionize themselves, about 82.7% of them believe that the federations have not done enough to win the resistance of the employers to organize workers. Majority of the respondents seem to have developed similar views towards the roles of government agencies and courts. As such, 61.4% and 63.5% of respondents criticize the concerned government agencies for their lack of commitment to ensure workers' rights and limited follow up/monitoring of labor relation practices in the Chinese road construction firms. This trend has also been reflected in the statistical figures, which respectively stand at 2.42 and 2.44 points. However, the respondents show relatively higher degrees of variation in their views on these two issues as shown in the standard deviations of 1.24 and 1.32 respectively. Furthermore, about 52.3% of the respondents (with mean results of 2.48) believe that courts do not facilitate labor cases at the required speed and efficiency.

by considering their experience and form of employment the researcher tried to reflect on the respondents' view on the roles of these external parties in the labor relation practices. The following part briefly summarizes the results and their interpretations.

Table 4.10. Distribution of workers' views on the roles of external stakeholders by experience and current types of employment

Factors		Statistical Values				Test of Significance	
		Mean	Standard Deviations	Minimum	Maximum	Pearson's Chi-Square	Assymp. Sig.
Experience (years)	≤ 1	15.81884	3.605016	10	23	1.541	0.000
	1 to 5	16.23308	2.83615	11	25		
	5 to 10	16	2.329929	12	18		
Current Form of Employment	Daily	16.36957	1.970434	11	19	2.992	0.000
	Temporary	15.55128	3.030783	11	23		
	S. term cont.	15.40458	3.110228	10	21		
	L. term cont.	18.39474	3.873259	10	25		
	Permanent	17.57143	1.133893	15	18		

According to the results, the views of the workers with more than 1 year experience are more positive to the roles of the external stakeholders (trade unions, government agencies, and courts) in facilitating labor relations practices in the Chinese road construction firms. This is most likely related to workers' realization and contact with these stakeholders as their only if not final means of protecting their employment rights, a pattern which grows along with growing experience in working for the Chinese road construction firms.

The summary results of the statistical analysis on the roles of the external stakeholders (trade unions, government agencies, and courts) in facilitating labor relations practices in the Chinese road construction firms show a grand mean of 16.02, which distributed to the number of items, become 2.28 and a grand standard deviation of 3.17066, which distributed to the number of items stands at around 0.4529. The final results illustrate that the workers feel the responsible external stakeholders have yet to justify their roles in facilitating labor relations practices in the Chinese road construction firms.

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