

MANAGING COMMITMENT IN SMALL CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FIRMS

Nur Affah Mohyin

ABSTRACT

Small construction professional services (CPS) firms are recognised as being vitally important to the UK construction industry as much of the professional capacity of the sector resides within these small practices. They rely on the capabilities of small groups of professional employees in delivering their services and so need to ensure their commitment to achieving organisational objectives. Clearly, human resource management (HRM) strategies have a major role to play in managing employee commitment, and yet such strategies have received little attention within the construction management literature. This study investigates the nature of construction professionals' commitment within small CPS firms and to develop HRM interventions that foster organisational commitment in small CPS firms. The study adopts qualitative approach to enable gathering of rich data that come directly from the participants involved in the phenomenon. Exploratory interviews with managers of small CPS firms conducted in the early phase of the research helped to identify some of the key strategies and operational challenges related to the management of commitment. Following this, the main data was collected through conducting two in-depth case studies, which included one small quantity surveying practice in the East Midlands, UK, and one small multi-disciplinary practice in the West Midlands, UK. The case studies involve in-depth interviews involving the employer and employees, participation observation and document analysis at the main office of both organisations. Together, these data helped to unravel the nature of the employment relationship within such firms and also to gain a better understanding of how professional employees express their commitment. The findings reveal that professional employees' commitment is influenced by a complex range of factors, but that five main HRM levers have a particular influence within such firms. These relate to job design, performance and career management, training and development, reward management and employee involvement. It is clear that a range of factors impinge on the abilities of employers to enact effective HRM strategies. In particular the recent economic crisis and personal problems have both been cited as the main challenges by the employer and employees of both organisations. It highlights the significant importance of managing organisational commitment much more effectively, regardless of the economic climate. Based on the research results a framework for managing professional commitment was developed and validated within a range of small CPS firms. The framework presents a holistic way of accounting for all the issues that influence the development and maintenance of organisational commitment

within small CPS firms. Such knowledge is essential to the management of small CPS firms for achieving meaningful improvement in their approach to foster organisational commitment. The key recommendations for the management of small CPS firms is to make sure that every aspect of the job meets the professional employees' expectations as well as project requirements and organisational objectives. This includes improving communication by utilising both formal and informal medium of communication, rewarding employees with both monetary and non-monetary rewards and developing employees by providing both on-the-job training and off-the job training. All these HRM practices need to be effectively linked and managed appropriately to collectively foster commitment. In conclusion, the complex nature of organisational commitment raised the importance for the management of small CPS firms to have a structured approach in managing their employees' commitment.

Keywords: *Construction Industry; Construction Professional Services (CPS) firms; Employment Relationship; Human Resource Management (HRM); Organisational Commitment; Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)*

Loughborough University