

# Analysis of architects' demotivating factors in design firms

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## Abstract

The overall aim of this study is to identify factors that influence architects' demotivation in design firms. After a review of extant literatures in design management, project management, and organisational behaviour, a list of 43 demotivating criteria was produced and used in a questionnaire survey. Analyses included reliability analysis, Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis tests, demotivation severity index (DSI) computation and exploratory factor analysis. Results show an underlying factor structure of seven demotivating factors that include 'organisational injustice', 'project induced stress', 'dysfunctional design team', 'poor interpersonal relationships', 'perceived career decline', 'negative leadership behaviours' and 'poor organisational culture'. Comparing these demotivational factors with motivational factors identified from previous related research, this study confirms that demotivation and motivation are on the same pole. In addition, what causes motivation or demotivation is a function of individual frame of reference. This implies that the presence or absence of a factor might cause motivation or demotivation depending on an individual frame of reference. Positive attention to the identified factors in relation to individual personality differences therefore helps to remove impediments that could affect employees' well-being such as being downcast, dispirited, depressed and despondent. The study would help directors and managers of design firms to develop a healthy workforce through recognition and eradication of the identified demotivating factors using some of the suggested solutions.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, there has been a continuous effort on the need to explain what motivates and demotivates employees in general within organisational workplace. The need to possess sustainable competitive advantage and success has made many managers and top management teams of organisations to realise that human resource is among the greatest assets in today's competitive market. Managers and employers in various organisations have become increasingly aware of the financial advantages that motivated workers could bring to their organisation (Pfeffer, 1994). De-motivated workers in contrast are more likely to spend diminutive effort in their jobs, keep away and egress the workplace at any given opportunity, and deliver low quality work (Amabile,

1993). In addition, they can dispirit team effort and lead to high employee turnover (Falout et al., 2009).

Despite the adverse effect of demotivation in organisation, majority of the existing theories in organisational behaviour literature have majorly concentrated on motivation, with little attention to demotivation. These include among others, Maslow's needs hierarchy theory, Alderfer's ERG theory, McClelland's achievement theory, Adams' equity theory, Vroom expectancy theory and Locke and Latham goal theory (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004). In a related research written for practising management audience, Ritchie and Martin (1999, p.12), argued that 'the task of a manger is to find out what motivates people'; leaving aside what demotivates in workplace. There is an implicit assumption that lack of motivation is the same as demotivation as conceptualised by Gorham and Christophel (1992), while others researchers (Ng et al., 2004) argued that the two are different. Lack of motivation means lack of inner or social stimulus or impetus for an action on the part an individual (also refers to as

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‘no motivation’ or ‘zero motivation’). Demotivation on the other hand entails dampening of morale or spirit in carrying out a particular action. It generally causes dissatisfaction, and in actual fact, it is even worse than lack of motivation as it leads to feeling of being downcast, dispirited, depressed and despondent on the part of the employee.

The study of workers’ motivation and de-motivation is an important aspect in heavy industries such as construction due to the project-based nature of the sector. Firms located within this type of industries are called project-based organisations (PBO) or project-oriented organisation (POO) simply because project is the primary business mechanism for co-ordinating and integrating all main business functions of the firm (Hobday, 2000; Turner et al., 2008). Examples of firms of this nature are located in construction, shipbuilding, aerospace and telecommunications industries (Gann and Salter, 2000; Hobday, 2000). They rely heavily on human resources who work in teams over a period of time, to deliver clients needs and requirements to the desired quality and within budget. Since project is a temporary organisational form (Hobday, 2000), project team participants from different project-based organisations are brought together on a temporary basis (Di Vincenzo and Mascia, 2012) to deliver the production function that enables realisation of project objectives and goals. A peculiar problem associated with this type of organisations particularly in construction is the fragmented nature of the project teams, which often has individually defined objectives that are always in conflict with one another (Baiden et al., 2006). During the projects, individual project team members are confronted with many problems, such as poor team interaction, low-quality workmanship, material unavailability, co-workers’ incompetence and the project itself among others, which could lead to demotivation and low morale (Ng et al., 2004).

The project process in construction include, design, construction, commissioning and post-occupancy maintenance phases. Despite the importance of all the phases to project success, an important area of interest for this study is the investigation of employees’ demotivation particularly architects, who are involved in the design phase of construction projects. Currently, most of the studies on employees demotivation within construction have focused on workers on construction sites (Ng et al., 2004; Smithers and Walker, 2000, etc.), with little attention to architects, who are regarded as the knowledge base for conceptual ideas of most construction projects (Oyedele and Tham, 2005, 2007). In a recent study, Oyedele (2010) identified factors that can be used by design firms to sustain the architects and engineers’ motivation without diagnosing what demotivates them. It is on this basis that this study aims to identify and analyse factors that influence architects demotivation in design firms. The study objectives therefore include:

- (i) Identification of architects demotivating criteria including their level of severity.
- (ii) Exploration of underlying factors that demotivates architects in UK architectural practices and design firms.
- (iii) Confirmation of whether lack of motivation means presence of demotivation or vice versa, through comparison of

demotivating factors identified in this study with motivational factors existing in similar literature.

The scope of this study is hereby on factors causing demotivation to architects within architectural/design organisations as against personal factors (e.g. personality, age, sex, experience). These include factors originating from organisational behaviour, project processes and design team/co-worker related activities. The rationale for this is that individual motivation and demotivation are subjective and unstable phenomena and are easily affected by organisational changes, project processes and team related activities, which can be actively influenced by managers and top management teams (Oyedele, 2010). Personal factors on the other hand despite its influence on motivation/demotivation as shown by cognitive psychologists (Amabile, 1993; Deci and Ryan, 1985), are either relatively stable (traits, sex) or emerge over time (age, experience). They are not easily controlled by organisations to same degree as organisation, project and team related factors (Seiler et al., 2012). Similar to previous related studies, (Oyedele 2010; Seiler et al., 2012), the findings of this study should therefore be applied based on the recognition of individual personality differences.

## 2. Literature review

After a thorough review of extant literature particularly in the knowledge areas of project management, organisational behaviour and design management and practice which are deemed important to the subject area, three broad categories associated with demotivating factors were identified. These include, (1) project related criteria, (2) design team/co-worker related criteria, and (3) organisational related criteria. The three categories along with their associated criteria are discussed below.

### 2.1. Project related criteria

During the design phase of a project, there are some criteria that could demotivate an employee architect which arises as a result of the project itself. Recently, there has been call for an expansive understanding or critical rethinking of project management beyond the existing dimensions of cost, time and quality as project outcomes (Sauer and Reich, 2009). This rethinking is fuelled by complexities associated with projects and project management — structure, processes and its environment (Cicmil et al., 2006; Crawford et al., 2006). These include the temporary nature of project, deadlines, uncertainty of future assignments, changing priorities and nature of future work colleagues among others (Seiler et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2008). These complexities have been highlighted as sources of stress in project-based organisations (Atkinson et al., 2006; Hodgson, 2002; Low and Chuan, 2006; Sage et al., 2010) including design firms. In design firms, Donovan (2001) highlighted that design projects induce stress on designers and include greater degree of thought and working process, bureaucracy, personal identification with project goals, focus on ultimate value, excessive workload and tight deadlines set either by the firm or stakeholders

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