

The Influence of Company Culture on Employee Satisfaction at Holder Construction: A Case Study

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Since being founded in 1960, Holder Construction has grown to do work all across The United States and internationally as well. Today, repeat clients are what drive Holder's core markets and provide eighty five percent of the work that Holder performs. The associates at Holder Construction believe their success stems from the company's culture. The "Holder Way" is a slogan that encompasses all cultural attributes that Holder Construction expects their associates to embody. This case study evaluates Holder Construction's effectiveness of their company's cultural training in regards to employee satisfaction and fulfillment. Are these employees truly living out what is expected in the "Holder Way"? An anonymous survey was distributed to Holder associates to determine whether or not they found value in Holder's heavy emphasis on company culture. The respondents included associates of all ages, positions and educational backgrounds. All respondents unanimously agreed that Holder's heavy emphasis on company culture is beneficial. Company culture was the leading reason for employee satisfaction and fulfillment. A good company culture was more sought after than money, location, project types and benefits. Holder Construction places a vast emphasis on company culture, and thus far it has proven to be beneficial.

Key Words: Company Culture, Employee Fulfillment, Employee Retention, Cultural Emphasis, The Holder Way

Introduction

Holder Construction was founded in 1960 in Atlanta, Georgia. Since then, Holder has built relationships with clients and partners all over The United States and internationally as well. As these relationships with owners, engineers and architects continue to strengthen and grow, new relations are continuously flourishing as well. Today, repeat clients are what drive Holder's core markets, and provides 85% of the work that Holder performs. The core markets Holder performs in are: aviation, corporate, commercial, technology, education, hospitality, interiors and special purpose buildings. Holder's success on these various projects has led them to be ranked #1 in Data Center contractors, #9 CM at Risk, #6 Green Contractors and #22 of the Top 400 Contractors ranked by Engineering News Record (ENR). Client relationships are what continue to keep Holder on the cutting edge of the construction industry; while designs and technology increase in complexity, Holder's expertise continues to rise as well. Now working in over 30 states in the US, Holder Construction reached a new milestone at \$3.4 Billion in revenue in 2017. Why is Holder so successful on these projects? The leadership at Holder believes that their company's culture is what provides a work environment that optimizes associate strengths and leads their projects to success.

General Background

Company culture is a top priority of the executives at Holder Construction. As a team, they work to create an environment that encompasses the concept of “The Holder Way”. The phrase “The Holder Way” is a slogan used to help place a heavy emphasis on the company's culture for everyday use. The slogan reminds associates to look at the bigger picture of a project, and to do what it takes to get the job done “The Holder Way”. To a Holder associate, that bigger picture should encompass a career of safety, integrity, teamwork, connection, performance, development and improvement. Whether it means staying a little late, showing up on weekends or picking up a team mates slack, “The Holder Way” is reminder to associates of how the company as a whole comes together to create a positive work environment, which then breeds success on the jobsite and in the office.

The culture of the construction industry as a whole continues to evolve year after year. With new improvements in technology, and automation, the job of a general contractor is constantly changing as well. At Holder Construction, they recognize this and continue to evolve their cultural attributes to reflect that. In past years at Holder Construction, there were ten cultural attributes: Performance, collaboration and communication, ownership, address conflict, teacher/coach, change agent, commitment and selflessness, professionalism, integrity, trust and respect, and lead by example. These ten attributes were constantly referred to throughout summer internships, at conferences and through classes offered through Holder’s online learning management system. Not only were interns introduced to them, but full time associates were constantly being refreshed through discussion and analysis of these attributes. At the start of every company wide business update, an executive VP would give an example of a project team, or individual who portrayed one of these attributes, reminding everyone that “The Holder Way” is something the whole company should strive to abide by.

Just this past year, Holder reassessed their company’s attributes and decided to condense them to be more concise. The new attributes are: Lead with Integrity, Perform Together, Care and Connect, Develop Each Other, Improve relentlessly. While the number of attributes decreased by half, the meaning of them grew tremendously to associates. A committee of associates joined together to research the company’s culture and see what associates and clients saw as the most valuable, and they provided an outlook on culture that came from within the company’s associates at all levels, not just the upper management. By giving associates an opportunity to express what they see every day in their workplace, Holder provides a culture of authenticity, encompassing the most recent 5 cultural attributes and providing clients and associates with project experiences that are completed “The Holder Way”.

Research Objectives

The objective of this case study is to analyze the impact Holder’s culture has on their employee’s career satisfaction and fulfillment. The effectiveness of Holder’s company culture will be evaluated based on both quantitative and qualitative research. After understanding the importance of company culture, one can assess the benefits and disadvantages that stem from those cultural attributes. Is Holder putting forth too much effort towards their culture? Are they not doing enough? The findings of this case study will enable Holder Construction to move forward utilizing this information in a proactive way, leading to maximal efficiency stemming from their emphasis on cultural attributes.

Not only will Holder benefit from this study, but other companies can as well. By better understanding what builds (or breaks) a cultural foundation within a company, others can compare their cultural material with that of Holder’s and see if there is anything they can do differently. Like Holder, do they need to do more? Do they do too much? The answers to these questions will become more clear when there is a specific cause and effect to compare it to.

Students will also be able to utilize these findings as they continue making decisions regarding their internships, full time offers and career changes in the future. By raising more awareness of the impacts of company cultures, students will feel more driven to ask the questions to companies that often times are overlooked during career fairs and interviews. Students will be able to make more educated decisions on their future by having a better understanding what they are signing up for when accepting a job offer.

Methodology

The methodology for this case study includes both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research will lead to a better understanding of what culture is and why it is so important in the corporate world. It will specifically reference Holder's cultural attributes and what the intention for each individual attribute is.

The quantitative research includes a survey from Holder Associates. In that survey the Holder associates were asked six questions to gain a better understanding of how the culture at Holder influences their decision to stay. Those questions were:

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
2. What is your job title?
3. Where does your career fulfillment mostly stem from?
4. Do you think the heavy emphasis on company culture at Holder is beneficial?
5. How would you describe Holder's company culture?
6. Does Holder's culture influence your everyday decision to keep working there?

Case Study

As mentioned previously, the current cultural attributes at Holder are as follows: Lead with Integrity, Perform Together, Care and Connect, Develop Each Other, Improve relentlessly. Each associate is expected to embrace and exemplify these attributes on and off the jobsite. The following are the guidelines provided during Holder's cultural training on how to utilize these attributes every day.

Attribute 1 Lead With Integrity

The following are guidelines relevant to Attribute 1:

- Do the right thing
- Hold high ethical standards
- Earn trust
- Be honest
- Be respectful

Attribute 2 Perform Together

The following are guidelines relevant to Attribute 2:

- We are ONE COMPANY
- Excellence in everything we do

- Be professional
- Commit Selflessly
- Communicate and Collaborate

Attribute 3 Care and Connect

The following are guidelines relevant to Attribute 3:

- Be inclusive
- Family
- Wellness and Safety
- Do whatever it takes
- Take ownership

Attribute 4 Develop Each Other

The following are guidelines relevant to Attribute 4:

- Be candid and considerate
- Lead by example
- Empower others
- Be self aware
- Vulnerability is strength

Attribute 5 Improve Relentlessly

The following are guidelines relevant to Attribute 5:

- Challenge Everything
- Good enough, never is
- “Humbition”- balance of humility and ambition
- Be the fuel
- Encourage Others

Discussion

In his 2014 book *Above the line: how to create a company culture that engages employees, delights customers and delivers results*, Michael Henderson discusses the key components to an effective company culture. Henderson defines culture as “*an active, self-questioning and organising process of shared personal beliefs and rituals that creates meaning that is transmitted from one generation to another through learned formal and informal interactions that occur daily*”. (Henderson, 2014) A simpler version of this definition may be a continuously evolving process that brings a group of people together for a common interest, improving the process by learning from one another.

Within corporate companies, culture is often thought to be the backbone of a company's success. In the construction industry, many people believe that all business stems from relationships. Company culture is what cultivates those relationships and sustains them. In “*The effect of relationship management on project performance in construction*” Xianhai Meng elaborates on the importance of relationships in order to maintain quality performance on job sites. The indicators he mentions are as follows:

- Mutual objectives

- Gain and pain sharing
- Trust
- No-blame culture
- Joint working
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Risk allocation
- Performance measurement
- Continuous improvement

In this particular study, it was found that companies that utilized the above indicators were more successful on projects; while those who did not utilize the above indicators had higher rates of poor performance. The groups that embraced the relationship indicators had projects that were considered more successful; the projects were in reality close to the preconceived budget and schedule. The project teams that did not effectively utilize the relationship indicators had less success in maintaining the project's schedule and budget.

The relationship indicators are comparable to a company's cultural attributes. Since the team was aware of the relationship indicators, the culture of the project site was then molded into an atmosphere that embodied the indicators. The team then focused on things like trusting one another, solving problems together and improving as they met each milestone. In the construction industry, this is the team that will be asked to perform on another project, providing themselves and their company opportunity for growth. Culture is what builds up or tears down a company's reputation, which is a tremendous influencer in what propels or hinders a company's position in the marketplace.

Conclusion/Results

Holder Construction utilizes an organic growth business model. This means that Holder trains associates to fit the positions they need to fill. Very rarely will Holder hire a new associate to an advanced leadership position. Instead, they will train and promote their own associates to take on the task at hand. With that being said, employees that continue advancing their career with Holder will likely embody the culture that Holder represents. Most associates join holder within a year of graduating college; however not all associates have obtained a degree at the college level. A survey was distributed to Holder associates. Among the 85 respondents, there were administrative support associates, office engineers, project managers, and executives from the pre-construction, operations, and business development departments. The majority of those that responded had graduated from college; some had completed graduate school and a small amount had not completed college.

The graphs shown below show the survey data:

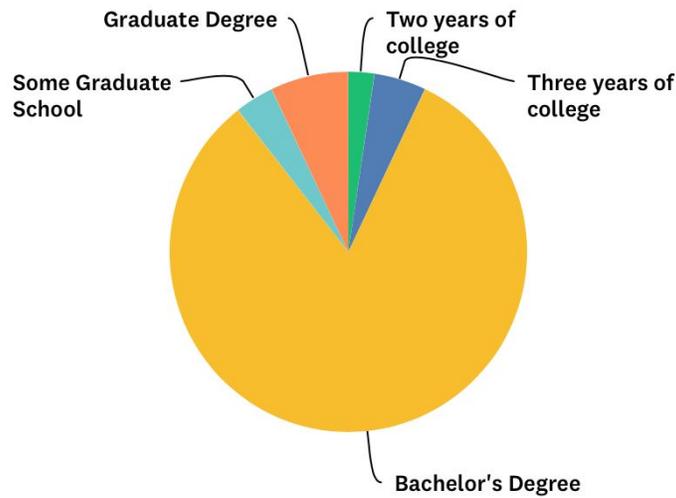


Figure 1: Survey Data- Level of education

The associates at Holder construction were asked to elaborate on what mainly influenced their career fulfillment. Culture was the leading contributor to career fulfillment; following culture was money, location, project types and benefits. While these other factors do influence an associates decision to remain working at Holder Construction, they focus on the day to day culture of the company to ensure they are enjoying what they do. One associate commented: “We spend more time with our co-workers than we do with our families. We have to love what we do!” The culture at Holder Construction is not just by chance, it is because of the informational sessions and classes provided that the associates live out the culture that is desired. Since the attributes are developed by associates and not just the top executives, the culture is genuine and resonates with those who live by it every day. The emphasis on the cultural attributes provide clear expectations that Holder Construction associates set for themselves.

The graph below provides a visual for the top 5 career fulfillment contributors:

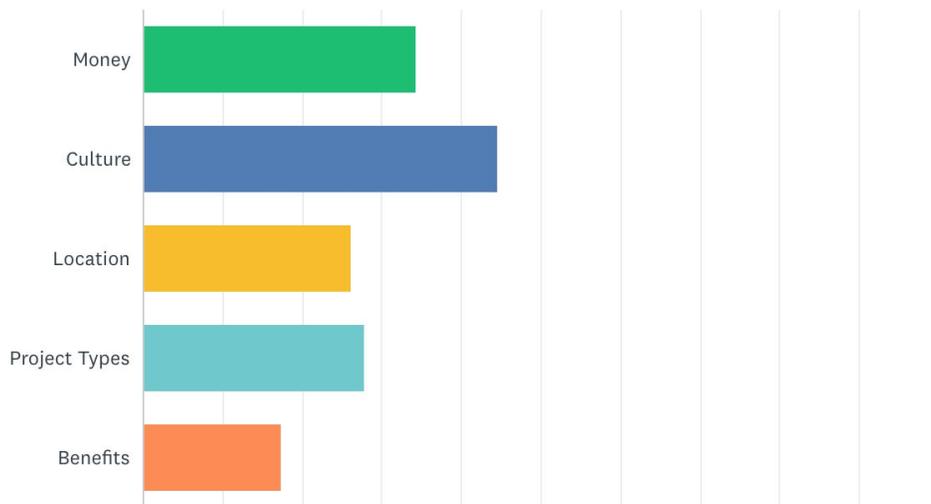


Figure 2: Survey Data- Career fulfillment contributors

When asked to describe Holder's culture themselves, the majority of respondents used the phrase "family" in their answer. Other notable phrases were integrity, improvement, and teamwork. Since the culture content is developed by associates themselves, it is clear that it is being utilized. All 85 respondents unanimously agreed that the heavy emphasis Holder places on their company culture is beneficial. When asked, they also unanimously agreed that the culture influences their every day decision to continue working for Holder Construction.

In the construction industry, success is often times based on profit margins, meeting milestones, and beating budgets. However, there are numerous aspects of getting to that project success. At Holder Construction, there is emphasis on how a project team can successfully reach those goals and milestones together. The "Holder Way" encompasses a company-wide culture that is accepted and appreciated by every associate. The generous effort put forth to create a culture that encompasses integrity, teamwork, connections, development and improvement has been successful.

References:

Henderson, M. (2014). *Above the line: How to create a company culture that engages employees, delights customers and delivers results.*

Meng, Xianhai. (2012). The effect of relationship management on project performance in construction. *International Journal of Project Management*, 30(2), 188-198.