

The Influence of Unethical Professional Practices on The Management of Construction Projects in North Eastern States of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In the Nigerian construction industry, many construction projects have failed as a result of unethical professional practices on the part of the construction professionals whom management responsibilities are vested on. This study, which adopted the survey design aimed at examining the influence of unethical professional practices on the management of construction project in north-eastern States of Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 140 participants from Bauchi, Gombe and Yobe States. Structured questionnaire was designed and administered on construction professionals (Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Builders and Civil Engineers). Chi-square statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. Major findings revealed the absence of punishment for corruption; loss of money due to change in government; lack of continuity in government programmes, availability of loop holes in project monitoring; among others are some of the unethical professional practices which have serious influence on construction project management in Nigeria. Government should therefore stop paying lip services to the fight against corruption. Professionals, Contractors and Civil servants also should exhibit the hallmark of professional excellence through adherence to ethics, values, competence and integrity.

Keywords: *Professional ethics, Construction Industry, Construction project management.*

INTRODUCTION

The discussion on business and ethics is very important in Nigeria than many other countries because of instances of unethical practices. It is widely discussed in the media that there is corruption in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. In the bank, cashier has to be bribed by a customer before he/she is paid. For a file clerk to properly treat a person's file, he must be bribed. Doctors in public hospitals take bribe from patients before they are given treatment. In Nigeria, an unborn baby can possess a driver's license provided the parents are ready to bribe the relevant government agency. In government, the demand for 10% kick back of the contract sum has become a culture. Businessmen are not left out in the corrupt practices. Executives are known to have made some decisions in order to benefit

them rather than to optimise government or enterprise interest (Nwachukwu, 1988). These are unethical practices, which affect the general well being of a nation, an indication of the total loss of values, norms and morals that form the foundations of a society. Even the professionals who are trained and therefore expected to exhibit a high level of professionalism are not exempted from this moral decadence (Payne, Chelson and Reavill, 1999). Emily (1986) as cited in Mu'azu (2002) sees professionalism as a set of behaviours, and for the construction professional these include competence, delivery of valuable services, consultancy, honesty and fairness. He further states that to practise as a professional, one has to be registered and abide by the code of ethics of the profession. Many scholars have defined ethics as it applies to their field of endeavour. Hornby (2001) defines ethics as partial principles that control or influence a person's behaviour, and professional ethics, as a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour which defines occupation moral. This is in line with the definition of professional ethics by RICS (2001), that giving of one's best to ensure that clients interest are properly cared for, while wider public interest is also properly recognised and protected. These professional codes of ethics may be seen to serve as checks on the activities of the individual members of a profession. However, they also serve in protecting the members from liability for negligence, and the interest of the clients/public at large. Iro (2006) admitted that the liability for professional negligence is on the increase both in number and magnitude of claims.

The enforcement of codes of ethics by professional bodies will go a long way in reducing these undesirable practices in Nigeria. According to RICS (2001), business practices have changed, as clients' expectations have also changed. As a result, ethical issues have been pushed to the front of political and business thinking. Industry is also finding that public opinion is much better informed and that problems faced by businesses today cannot always be resolved by legislation and experience. Therefore, many professional institutions are providing guidance on ethics for their members. Businesses are also more willing now to set out publicly their ethical standards. In Nigeria, the IPG Report (2003) reveals that all professionals have their codes to guide the practice and integrity of the profession. According to Andawei and Nyenka (2001), the construction industry is the largest employer of labour next to the three tiers of government in the country.

Mu'azu (2002) reports that construction is one of the most important activities of any economy and a large proportion of the country's resources are usually used in the construction and maintenance of building. The construction sector in Nigeria accounts for 3-8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), about 5% of the labour force, 40-70% of the gross fixed capital formation and about 12% of industrial sector production (Omole, 2000). This enormous amount of wealth is managed or generated by the construction industry through the various contributions of its professional members. This responsibility can only be achieved by the construction industry if the professionals who contribute to the running of the industry are committed to their professional ethics. According to Okpala (2002), a critical industry like the constructions industry absorbs disinvestments resulting from excessive bribery and corruption which characterized the Nigerian leadership since the end of the civil war. According to Ogbonna, Ameh and Agbo (2003) ethical conviction

gives professional practice meaning and direction. The construction industry which is adjudged to be an industry that co-ordinate various endeavours of Professionals in the construction sector depends on teamwork, trust, commitment, and competence for the successful accomplishments of its responsibilities. However, this has been seriously affected by corruption, which eventually undermines the advantages of teamwork, trust, commitment and competence. Corruption has become the most traded and lucrative commodity in Nigeria and has given the nation a negative impact both at home and abroad (Adetola, 2001). In the area of procurements, Tite (2002) observes that the greatest culprit of procurement perversion in Nigeria is the construction industry sub-sector. The Nigerian elite have found in the construction industry a convenient conduit for capital flight.

According to Jambol and Yusufu (2004), the indigenous construction companies have been saddle with the problem of contract malpractices, abandonment of projects and collapse of structures. In addition, Mshelbwala (2005) submits that the Nigerian construction industry is characterized by a range of problems which includes high cost of procurement, sub-standard products, and project collapse/abandonment. The problems are largely attributed to lack of adherence to processes and procedures involve in procurement system. This is horribly against professional ethics. It is an unethical practice. Corruption in the construction industry procurement system encourages the non-adherence to due processes and procedures. According to Adeyemo (1990), corruption is a major problem of national development in Nigeria. At every level, the practice is prevalent; polity, administration as well as the lower and upper levels of bureaucracy. Corrupt practices occur in nearly all ministries, departments and agencies. The practices are more widespread with each passing day. The situation in Nigeria, according to Nwachukwu (1988), is worse than many other countries. IPG (2003) reports that professional ethics have been caught in the rat-race to get rich quick. The ugly face of corruption in the construction industry had resulted to the violation of procurement procedures and professional codes of ethics of the various professions. The revisiting of the due process by the Obasanjo led administration is an evidence of the severity of the resentful practice.

Professional Ethics in the Construction Industry

Fabarebo (2004) opines that ethics are the science of moral values and duties. As a moral principle, ethics defines the standard of behaviour and norms with which the conducts of man should conform. In the opinion of Omoregbe (1979), ethics are guides of human conducts in directing what should be done and what should be avoided. According to Olayinka (1997) as cited in Iro (2006), there is no universal code of ethics acceptable to all societies. To Oyalade (1982) every society determines its own codes of conduct based on its own unique experience and peculiarity. This is also true with codes of ethics guiding the practices of various professions. Payne, Chelson and Reavill (1999) have opined that ethical behaviour in business defines legal behaviour and collection of moral principles or set of values dealing with what is right or wrong, good or bad. The importance of ethics in business cannot be under estimated, for the consequences of corporate activity have a great impact on live. According to Bailey (2002), every profession has its own code of ethics which seeks to protect its members and moderate the relationship between the

members themselves; this extends to the clients as well. According to Omole (2000), apart from skills, experience and standards, service quality and ethics are the true hallmark of any profession. All professional members have moral duty dealing with clients and their affairs and to exercise the utmost honesty and integrity in all their dealings (Kawu, 1998). A professional should not have conflict of interest; perform his duties with honesty and integrity; work competently and diligently; adopt personal and professional standard which enhance his professional standard (Nwachukwu, 1999; RICS, 2001 and PMI, 2006). Construction Project management is the overall planning, coordinating and monitoring of construction projects from inception to completion (Stoner and Wanket, 1986; Eigege, 2005). The total projects developmental cycle normally consists of several interesting phases requiring a diverse range of specialised inputs (Andawei and Nyenka, 2001). Project management involve the co-ordination of other professional actions within a project (Iro, 2006). It can be inferred that project management is a teamwork involving a range of professionals that have their own individual professional codes of conduct or ethics. The direction and implementation of each stage of the construction process is overseen and managed by professionals. Each of these disciplines operates under an existing ethical code and they operate based on their own professional ethical codes (Uff, 2003). This study seeks to examine the influence of unethical professional practices on the management of construction projects in north-eastern part of Nigeria. To achieve this objective, a comprehensive research proposition was formulated in the null form to guide the study. Thus, unethical professional practices have no influence on construction project management in Nigeria.

METHOD

The study uses descriptive survey method. Structured questionnaire was the instrument for data collation. The questionnaire was administered to construction professionals (Architects, Quantity Surveyors, Builders and Civil Engineers). 140 copies of the questionnaire were distributed randomly in three stratified sample locations in the north-eastern States of Nigeria (Bauchi, 60, Gombe, 40 and Yobe, 40). Bauchi State has the highest number of the sample size because of the high concentration of construction activities and Professionals in the State. Out of the 140 copies of questionnaire administered, 76 were correctly filled and returned for analysis. According to Moser and Kalton (1971), the result of a survey could be considered as biased and of little value if the response was lower than 30-40%, the response rate for the research is 54.30% which indicate an unbiased and higher value of survey. The results were analysed using Kendall's coefficient of concordance to establish the level of importance of sample factors and rank them according to their importance index. The factor with the highest value of importance index rating becomes the most severe. The chi-square statistics was used at 5% level of significance to test the research proposition formulated for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study observed that absence of punishment for corruption is the major cause of unethical practices with a percentage rank of 89%, followed by loss of contract money due to

change in government with a percentage rank of 64%. The third being lack of continuity in government programmes with a percentage rank of 58.25%, then availability of loopholes in project monitoring , 55.50% and collusion by contractors was ranked as one of the major problems facing the country. The sixth ranked is occupied by job insecurity 33.75%, the fear of losing a job and not getting another makes many to try driving the maximum benefit out of their present jobs, whether legally as illegally. The eight on the rank table is "lack of loyalty to government" with a percentage rank of 12.50%, and "fear of status relegation after retirement ranked the least, which means it is an insignificant cause of unethical practice in construction project management. The computed chi-square is 23.92, the chi-square critical value, is 19.675. Hence, the null hypothesis that unethical professional practices have no influence on construction project management is rejected. Therefore, unethical professional practices have influence on construction project management in Nigeria.

Table1: Professionals' combined rank agreement on causes of unethical practices in the Nigerian construction industry

	Architects' ranking	Q/Surveyors' ranking	Builders' ranking	Civil engineers' ranking	Rank sum	$RAF = \frac{\sum \text{professionals ranking}}{\text{No. of factors}}$	$PRAF = \frac{RAF_{MAX} - RAF_{CONSIDERED}}{RAF_{MAX}}$	Rank order
Job Insecurity.	7	5	7.5	3	22.5	2.50	33.75	6
Fear of status relegation after retirement.	8	8	7.5	8	31.5	3.50	0.00	9
Relatively low income compared to needs.	6	7	6	6	25	2.78	21.00	7
Lack of loyalty to government.	9	9	9	9	36	4	12.50	8
Absence of punishment of corruption.	1	1	1	1	4	0.44	89.00	1
Loss of contract money due to change in government.	2	2	2	7	13	1.44	64.00	2
Lack of continuity in government programmes.	4	4	3	4	15	1.67	58.25	3
Availability of loop holes in project monitoring.	4	3	4	5	16	1.78	55.50	4
Collusion between officials and contractors	4	6	5	2	17	1.89	52.75	5

Note: *RAF* = Rank agreement factor. *PRAF* = Percentage Rank agreement factor.

Source: Survey, 2008

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nine factors were identified to have caused unethical behaviours and twelve common unethical practices inherent in construction project management. These factors includes: Absence of punishments for corruption; abuse of procedure etc. Therefore, the professionals should hold to their professional ethics to minimize the adverse influence on unethical practices in the management of project in the construction industry. Government should stop paying lip service on the fight against corruption. It should be patriotic and committed to upholding the requirement of the country's constitution. Professionals, Contractors and Civil servants should exhibit the hallmark of professional excellence through adherence to ethics, values, competence and integrity.

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