

Causes of Conflict in Construction Projects in Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Construction projects are very important to the infrastructural development of a country. The study assessed the causes of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State, with focus on Akure South Local Government. The multistage sampling procedure of data collection was used. The population of the study was 240 contractors and consultants and the sample was 150. The study used a set of structured questionnaire to obtain primary data. The collected data were statistically analysed using frequency, percentage and mean ranking. Findings from the study indicate that conflict occurs in public construction projects. It identified ten dominant causes of conflict in construction projects in study area. Also, the study revealed the most important cause of conflict as the tendency of contractor claiming high prices with mean value=3.468. It is recommended that conflict be addressed early to prevent its escalation which may affect construction project performance negatively. It is further recommended that construction project team conflict should be trained in conflict management.*

KEYWORDS: causes, conflict, construction, projects, Ondo State

INTRODUCTION

Construction projects are important socially and economically. The construction sector of the economy acts as a catalyst to stimulate the growth of a nation's economy and the industry is often referred to as an engine of growth (Ali & Rahmat, 2010). However, the sector is not contributing as expected to the economic development of the country because construction project abandonment has become an issue of national interest. Moreover, uncompleted projects are scattered across the country. Some stakeholders posit that the phenomenon may be due to the periodic change in government particularly when the opposition party takes over government from the incumbent. This sometimes leads to policy inconsistency in which the new government discontinues with the programmes of the previous administration. Also, it is observed that there is incessant building collapse not necessarily due to old age while many roads are poorly constructed, with attendant infrastructural deficit. For example, in Nigeria there are reports of building collapse even when such buildings are under construction. The national statistics on

building collapse shows that over 460 buildings have collapsed in the past four decades and the rate is increasing yearly (Aderounmu, 2021). The number may be more since such incidents are underreported. Invariably, no part of the nation is excluded from the menace of inadequate and poor road networks and other infrastructural facilities that enhance the quality of life of the citizens.

Researchers and other stakeholders tend to question the professional competencies of professionals in the built industry, contractors and owners without considering possible conflicts among the team players. Poor construction projects have been attributed to diverse factors including but not limited to financial matters, unskilled artisans, failure of foundation and faulty construction (Aderounmu, 2021). While the factors may not be totally faulted, conflict among project teams may be an important underlying issue that can trigger unpleasant consequences. The multi-functionality of construction project teams and experts makes it imperative that conflicts are bound to happen because there are interests to be protected.

Conflicts often arise when an amicable solution or compromise cannot be achieved between the contending parties. Therefore, conflicts can affect project performance despite the fact that stakeholders seem to relegate the importance of conflict in construction projects to the background. Instead it is mostly assumed that other factors cause infrastructural decay and project failure. Since conflict is unavoidable in construction projects, it is better to identify its causes in order to proffer workable strategies for conflict management so that project goals can be achieved. The performance of the construction sector should be of utmost importance to researchers and stakeholders since the sector can make or mar a nation's economy. Al-Sibail and Alashwal (2014) opined that conflict is unavoidable in any construction project and may influence its performance. Therefore, this study investigates causes of conflicts in construction projects in Ondo State with focus on Akure South Local Government.

Objectives of the Study

1. Assess the causes of conflicts in construction projects in Ondo State.
2. Identify the major causes of conflicts in construction projects in Ondo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict occurs when a side perceives that another party's actions or inactions negatively affect their self-interests. It is a situation of competition between parties in which each party is interested in occupying a position that is not compatible with the wishes of the other party (Ojo & Abolade, 2014). Conflict is a situation in which two or more values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature, have not yet aligned or agreed upon yet due to interactions and human subjectivity (Nischal, 2014). Conflict can be constructive or deconstructive. It can also be goal, cognitive or affective conflict (Liu et al. 2011). Conflict is concerned with relationships, strain and workplace stress that have not yet surfaced as a dispute. There are many causes of conflict between individuals, groups and organisations. These factors are available in literature, yet conflicts continue to occur in construction projects.

Specifically, conflict among construction project team members include but not limited to difference in belief, orientation, demands, prospects, views, imagination and ego (Ohlendorf, 2001). Chong (2011) opined that conflict in the construction industry is the internal discord existing between project team, mostly caused by misplaced ambitions, communication breakdown or not having the right players in key positions. Thamhain and Wilemon (1975) identified seven major sources that create conflicts, namely: project priorities, administrative procedures, technical opinions and performance, trade-off manpower resources, cost, schedules, and personality. There are also other sources of conflicts which are classified in different ways for the different working environments such as: cultural differences, religious differences, military conflicts, economic conflict, and traffic conflict (Jia et al., 2011). Conflict, if managed properly, may have a positive impact on organisation because it encourages searching for the best alternatives. However, conflict has been regarded as a destructive factor that has influence on team, organisation, and inter-organisation (Panteli & Sockalingam, 2005).

Furthermore, Kerzner (2001) examined causes of conflicts to include diversity in expertise of project participants, project manager's low level of authority, undefined project goals, undefined roles among project teams and undefined project priorities. Other causes are fear to losing relevance among project team due to implementation of project management, and undefined channel of communication. The authors show that causes of conflict are diverse, interwoven and human factor related. Williamson (1979) categorised causes of conflicts into behavioural, contractual, and technical problems which arise due to uncertainty. The researcher opines that conflict can arise as a result of human behaviour, the contract itself and technical issues that may occur at any stage of construction.

Ejohwomu et al. (2016) reported that there is a need to identify causes of conflict in order to manage conflicts properly and that there have been an increased number of causes of conflicts and this is due to changes in project size, environment, complexity and requirement. They identified the five critical causes of conflicts in the Nigerian construction industry. The causes are poor financial projections on the client's side, lack of funds, poor public relationship between the project people and the public, change of scope of works due to client requirement instability, and cheap design hired instead of quality. Average causes of conflicts in the construction projects as identified by the researchers include wrong interpretation of site investigation, tendency of contractor claiming high prices, inexperience of the designer, and unsuitable contract. They further identified local trade and industry as cause of conflict in the construction projects in Nigeria.

In Korea, Acharya et al. (2006) studied conflicting factors in construction projects and found that differing site condition, public disruption, differences in change order evaluation, design errors, excessive contract quantities variation and double meaning of specifications were the significant causes of conflict in construction projects. Their study also showed that there are differences in perceptions of clients, consultant and contractors. Other causes of conflicts in construction projects include adversarial relationships, multi-disciplinary nature and differences in interest of project participants (Jaffar et al. 2011).

Williamson (1979) categorised causes of conflicts into three classes namely behavioural; contractual; and technical problems which arise due to uncertainty. In the project environment, conflicts are caused by schedules, prior unresolved conflicts, project priorities, resource competition, cultural differences, technical issues, team or clique, team environment, personality conflicts, organisation structure, communication barriers and poor planning. The last two world wars broke out when major conflicts were not properly managed or resolved and this was considered as the worst outcome of a conflict involving human lives (Guan, 2007). The import of the assertion is that conflicts can escalate out of control, causing a great deal of unexpected damage. Molwus et al. (2016) conducted a study on managing conflict in the Nigerian construction industry using Jos as the case study. The study investigated the causes of conflict and the strategies for managing it in terms of resolution and prevention. Copies of a set of questionnaire was distributed to the construction professionals including Architects, Engineers, Builders, and Quantity Surveyors for primary data collection. The results of the study showed that the main causes of conflicts in construction projects are differences among team professionals, while the conflict management strategy mostly adopted in the study area is negotiation and renegotiation. The most important technique employed for conflict prevention is definition of roles and responsibilities. One important outcome of the research is that conflict occurs mostly at the post contract stage also known as the construction stage of a project. Also in Nigeria, Dada (2012) showed that administrative issue, resources for project execution and personality issues are the most common sources of conflict. Most clients/ public organizations engage consultants as their agents/representatives.

Theoretical Framework

The two factor theory propounded by Herzberg (1959) is an important theory that explains what satisfies or dissatisfies employees and serves as an important framework for employee loyalty and retention. He proposed a two-factor theory or the motivator-hygiene theory. According to this theory, there are some job factors that result in satisfaction while there are other job factors that present dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors are those job factors which are essential for existence of motivation at workplace but they do not lead to positive satisfaction for long-term. But if these factors are absent or if these factors are non-existent at workplace, then they lead to dissatisfaction. Motivational factors include recognition; that is, the employees should be praised and recognised for their accomplishments by the managers. In teamwork such as the construction projects, recognition is very important, especially in decision-making and communication. When it is not properly done, conflict becomes the order of the day. Herzberg's two factor theory is about knowing what factors make employees dissatisfied with the job and what factors motivate them and make them want to remain in the organisation (Nguyen, 2013). Having knowledge of the theory mentioned above is essential for decision makers in understanding the needs and wants of different levels of construction project team and help the organisation to come up with the necessary strategies that increase team loyalty for the accomplishment of goals.

Also, Abraham Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs was used in the study. The theory is one of the widely mentioned theories of motivation and satisfaction. Maslow (1943) came up with a theory on hierarchy of needs that harps on human motivation. The theory highlights the factors that drive human behaviours and motivate them and that organizations should ensure that employees' basic needs are met and then move to bigger aspirations that will motivate them to remain with the company. There are five (5) levels in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and these are physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and the need for self-actualisation. Maslow recognised that needs are in strata and also there are different levels of management in an organization. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Herzberg Two-factor theory of motivation are applicable to conflict management and construction project performance. This is because human beings are driven by certain factors or needs to act in a particular way they perceive to be desirable in achieving their goals. When such needs such as recognition and self-esteem are not met there will be conflict among the team members.

In a study, Adedeji and Ugwumadu (2018) compared the perception of different levels of management on employee loyalty and retention factors in deposit money banks. The study showed that the factors vary in their importance at different levels of management in the study area. The outcome tends to suggest that due to the different factors motivating human beings to be loyal to a cause, stakeholders in the construction projects may not be motivated by the same factors, thus leading to conflict among the team members. In agreement, Tabassi, et al. (2019) stated that team members' perception of the way in which their desired goals may be affected by actions significantly influences both the nature of interactions and the final results of conflict management. This means that whether team members are on the same pedestal or not, what is good for one set of people may not motivate the other set based on individual differences and interests (Sinha & Sinha, 2012). The differences in aspirations may be the beginning of conflict in the construction project. This study is based on the combination of both theories that were reviewed. It becomes necessary for a better understanding of the relatedness of the study variables.

METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey research design owing to its capability to explain existing situations and address the objectives of the study. The study was carried out in Ondo State, with focus on Akure South Local Government. The local government is the largest in the state. Akure City which is the state capital is located in the local government. The population of the Local Government based on the 2006 population census was 353,211. The multistage sampling technique was adopted public construction projects that are roads and buildings belonging to the three tiers of government in the local government. The population of the respondents was 240 contractors and consultants. The population of the study comprised all the Project Managers, Architects, Civil Engineers, Structural Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Surveyors and Services Engineers numbering 240. The sample size was determined to be 150 through the use of Yamane's (1973) statistical distribution formula. The questionnaire which was designed in a five-point Likert scale was used to collect primary data from the selected 150 respondents. 128 out of the 150

distributed copies of the questionnaire were correctly completed and were useable. The collected data were presented and analysed using mean, percentage and tables.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	104	81
Female	24	19
Total	128	100

Table 1 shows that majority of the 128 respondents representing 81% were male and 24 respondents representing 19% were female.

Table 2: Educational Qualifications of Respondents

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage %
HND/ its equivalent	34	26
BSc/B. Tech/its equivalent	59	46
MSc/M. Tech/ its equivalent	24	19
PhD	4	3
Others	7	5
Total	128	100

Table 2 shows that majority of respondents 93 (34, 59) representing 73% (27%, 46%) of respondents were HND/its equivalent and BSc/B.Tech/ its equivalents. This means that the respondents were basically first degree holders.

Table 3: Age of Respondents in Years

Age in Years	Frequency	Percentage %
Less than 30	33	26
31-40	39	31
41-50	41	32
Above 50	15	11
Total	128	100

Table 3 shows that most of respondents-80 (39, 41) representing 63% (31%, 32%) of respondents were aged between 31 and 50 years.

Table 4: Role of Respondents

Role of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage %
Contractors	75	59
Consultants	53	41
Total	128	100

Table 4 shows that 75 respondents representing 59% of respondents were contractors, while 53 respondents representing 41% of respondents were consultants. The respondents comprised Project Managers, Architects, Civil Engineers, Structural Engineers, Quantity Surveyors, Surveyors, Service Engineers and Site Engineers who worked on projects as contractors, subcontractors hereby termed contractors and client's representatives and government staff who were called consultants. Both groups interact during construction projects.

Table 5: Causes of Conflict in Construction Projects in Ondo State**Table 5:** Causes of Conflict in Construction Projects in Ondo State

	Very low	Low	Fairly high	High	Very High	Mean	Rank
Poor financial projections on the client's side	3.9	20.3	33.6	27.3	14.8	3.2891	3 rd
Differences among team professionals	10.2	16.4	32.8	31.3	9.4	3.1328	6 th
Change of scope due to design error	3.9	21.9	36.7	30.5	7.0	3.1484	5 th
Change of scope of works due to client requirement instability	5.5	14.8	33.6	35.9	10.2	3.3047	2 nd
Inadequate communication	10.9	18.8	37.5	26.6	6.3	2.9844	8 th
Inadequate team work	10.2	34.4	32.0	19.5	3.9	2.7266	10 th
Error in bill of quantity	3.9	29.7	37.5	20.3	8.6	3.0000	7 th
Error in specification	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	7.0	2.8672	9 th
Interpersonal Relationship	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	3.2578	4 th
Tendency of contractor claiming high prices	5.5	19.5	18.8	35.2	21.1	3.4688	1 st

Grand mean =3.1180 =Fairly high

Data obtained and presented in table 5 shows respondents perception on the main causes of conflict in construction projects. The result shows that the most important cause of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State, Nigeria is the tendency of contractor claiming high prices, with the mean value of 3.468. Change of scope of works due to client's requirement instability (3.307), came second, poor financial projections on the client's side (3.2891) was third, interpersonal relationship

came fourth (3.2578), change of scope of works due to design error (3.1484) was fifth, differences among team members (3.1328) was sixth, error in bill of quantity (3.0000) was seventh, inadequate communication (2.9844) came eighth, error in specification (2.8672) came ninth and inadequate team (2.7266) was tenth.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the data gathered, analysed and presented, construction project contractors and consultants were mostly male and first degree holders. This means that construction project professionals were mostly male and literate/knowledgeable.

Assessing the causes of conflicts in construction projects in Ondo State, table 5 shows that there are ten major causes of conflict in construction projects in the study area. The result shows that the most important cause of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State, Nigeria is the tendency of contractor claiming high prices, with the mean value of 3.468. Change of scope of works due to client's requirement instability (3.307), came second, poor financial projections on the client's side (3.2891) was third, interpersonal relationship came fourth (3.2578), change of scope of works due to design error (3.1484) was fifth, differences among team members (3.1328) was sixth, error in bill of quantity (3.0000) was seventh, inadequate communication (2.9844) came eighth, error in specification (2.8672) came ninth and inadequate team (2.7266) was tenth. The result of the study agreed with the causes identified by Ejohwonu et al. (2016) as poor financial projections on the client's side, lack of funds, poor public relationship between the project people and the public, change of scope of works due to client requirement instability, and cheap design hired instead of quality respectively. However, tendency of contractor claiming high prices was the first cause identified in this study but was averagely rated in their study. The outcome of this study differs from the result of a research conducted in Jos, Nigeria by Molvus et al. (2016) which showed that the main cause of conflict in construction projects is differences among team professionals. Similarly, the outcome of this study does not agree with the work of Acharya et al. (2006) that differing site condition, public disruption, differences in change order evaluation, design errors, excessive contract quantities variation and double meaning of specifications were the significant causes of conflict in construction projects.

Concerning the most important cause of conflict in construction projects in the state, table 5 shows that majority of respondents identified tendency of contractor claiming high prices with a mean score of 3.4688 as the major cause of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State. Analysed data in table 5 reveals change of scope of works due to client's requirement instability (3.307) as the second most important cause and poor financial projections on the client's side (3.2891) as the third major cause of conflict in construction projects in the study area. Therefore, there can only be conflict where there is interdependence of tasks, anger between stakeholders, and one party accusing the other of wrongdoing and where one party is responsible for a business problem. This study has revealed that conflict can arise either from the contractors or from the consultants.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The main aim of this study was to assess the causes of conflict in construction projects and identify the most important cause in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study found that there were ten main causes of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State and identified the most important cause of conflict as tendency of contractor claiming high prices with a mean score of 3.4688 as the major cause of conflict in construction projects in Ondo State.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Causes of conflict should be identified early in order to find solutions to them because construction projects are prone to many conflicts.
2. Conflict should be addressed promptly to prevent its escalation that may affect construction project delivery.
3. Construction team members should have basic training in conflict management including alternative dispute resolution strategies.

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