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Conflict Management in Nigerian Construction Industry: Project Managers' View

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Abstract
Conflict is a natural phenomenon in the construction project management as in other areas of human activities as its importance being accepted if positively managed. . Despite different types of conflict resolution, arbitration and mediation conflict in construction projects remained unending and project abandonment flourishes in Nigerian construction industry, however the involvement of Project Managers as a leader who should maintain conflict within the project is worthy of precise role clarification. Therefore, the study seeks to confirm the nature of conflict that is applicable in construction project management; identify the main causes of conflict and ascertain how conflict can be minimized through the use of available tactics in project management. In addition, the researcher reviews current literature on conflict management in construction industry. Also, questionnaires were given to Project managers from a construction background to elicit necessary information for data analysis. Inferential and relational statistical analyses suggest that conflict is natural and inevitable, which may have positive or negative effect. Furthermore, communication breakdown and conflicting commitment of the project managers are the most prevalent causes of conflict in Nigerian construction industry and the tactics most adopted by Project managers in minimizing conflict is by improving communication channels and establishment of sense of trust and collective responsibilities. (In addition to the research findings) the author recommends that Project managers should improve communication channels; build a sense of trust amongst project team members and advance their knowledge in human relation in order to reduce conflicts in projects logically to improve on project success.

Keywords: conflict, project management, construction, project team, project manager

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is as indispensable as peace since the only reason for seeking peace is because there is a conflict, which is inevitable in the construction industry as in other area of human endeavour as (Lee, 2011) concluded. According to (Verma, 1998) Conflict is defined as "a serious disagreement between two people or a number of people, which usually end up in a positive result if properly managed and conversely negative if not properly managed to the satisfaction of stakeholders". However, the fact that individuals involved are from different background, orientation and values are to work on those complex issues on the project to have the expected outcome that satisfy all stakeholders is adequate to resolve conflict within the limits of the project. The causes of conflict among the project team members as posited by (Ohlendorf, 2001) are difference in belief, orientation, demands, prospects, views, imagination and ego, which is not far from what most researchers have mentioned in respect of other areas of life. Chong (2011) looked at conflict as the internal discord that exists between project team, which usually arise from misaligned ambitions, communication breakdown or not having the right players in key positions as the most prevalent causes of conflict in the construction industry. He further explained that the complexity in the construction industry from the design to construction and handing over of the project involve a lot of specialized knowledge that the project managers must use effectively if he is tactical enough to resolve conflicting issues on a project. (Ogunlana and Mahato, 2011) Looked at conflict in the construction industry as a dynamic situation that is intricate and the sector has a rate of change that are not constant but continuous between different parties that must be managed by the project manager to achieve positive results.

(Mohammed, Prabhakar, & and White, 2008) Observed that project management is multinational and consequently has become multicultural and multi-disciplinary as he explained that the team assigned to a project always and all the time resolving issues from the beginning of the project to the handing over are the principal lever to project success. The complexity nature of man coupled with factors like culture, religion, geographical location, age, sex and personality has made success more difficult to achieve than can be envisaged today. The advent of Project management in construction has made conflict management easier to achieve project success since it is a process that involves resolving competing issues like cost, time, quality, clients and stakeholder expectations. However, the Project

manager and his team need to balance these differences which arise during project initiation, planning, execution and close down to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. The construction industry rely on Builder's Merchants, Professionals, the Client, the Contractor, Sub-contractors, the Planning Authorities whose role are extremely influential in achieving success that are equivocally not possible without conflict, which the Project manager must resolve within the project life cycle (Newey, 1992). Critically looking at aforementioned conditions that amount to conflict, it will be highly cumbersome to use the same parameter for all situations on projects conflicts, in this view the study is limited only to the conflicts that arises within the project and among the project team members (consultants) in the construction industry lead by Project manager. Hence the primary data analysed in this study were gotten through a survey questionnaire sent to Project managers that are from eight different backgrounds from the industry. In the pre-project management era in Nigeria, the construction industry has been bedevilled with a lot of project abandonment according to (Ayodele E. O. and Alabi O. M, 2011) and the country has lost valuable time, money and the involvement of other nations in term of foreign investment. In retrospect projects were abandoned because there were conflicts which were inevitable thus this led to unresolved dispute within the reasonable time available. Notwithstanding project abandonment is not encouraged in project management since project managers are expected to contain complex issues and competing issues within the project to achieve a positive result.

The study analyses, nature of conflict; causes of conflict and tactics for minimizing conflict according to project manager's perspectives, since there have been few researches done to investigate project manager's perspective in conflict management in Nigeria construction industry. The result of the research will achieve greater understanding and knowledge about the nature of conflict; causes of conflict and various tactics of minimizing conflict, which will enable the project managers to achieve their project goals, maintain harmony and good unity among project team members. The result will also enlighten the clients and investors in the construction industry to be familiar with the situation of conflict management in the Nigerian construction industry and invest appropriately. The study will emphasise the necessity for conflict management and education with a view of improving success rating of both private and public projects at large and the learned environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nature of Conflict in Project Management

(Verma, 1998), (Lee, 2011) and (Khanaki & and Hassanzadeh, 2010) claimed that conflict is unavoidable in all human endeavours especially in project management, where all project team members have to work together to start and complete the project to the expected quality standard within cost, the predetermined duration and to the satisfaction of all stake holders. It is understandably impossible for all stakeholders from different background; diverse ideologies and skills to work together without any conflict, so the project manager having all the authority and power must make sure that all conflicts that arose are properly managed to the benefit of the project. They also explained the evolution of three noticeably different views on conflicts in projects and organizations, which are the traditional views, human relation views and interactionism perspectives.

According to (Verma, 1998), (Smith, 2002) and (Lee, 2011) there is a belief in the traditional view that conflict is destructive, and its impact is always negative as it usually leads to gradual loss of performance , and as such, it is good to avoid conflict. Consequently, conflict avoided always end up in violence, destruction and irrationality. In the traditional view the manager in the process of reducing, suppressing or eliminating conflict unconsciously start to become authoritarian, which hide the causes of the conflict and the positive features of conflict. (Verma, 1998)Looked at the human relation perspective, which emerged in the late 1940's and move gently back and forth through 1970's as it was accepted that conflict is unavoidable as it is a natural phenomenon in any project or organization. The response to conflict determines whether the result will be positive or negative. (Khanaki & and Hassanzadeh, 2010) Claimed that conflict is now understood to being a creative force and the only thing needed is to take that advantage of the need to innovate more.

latest view is the interactionism perspective, which concludes that if conflicts are managed properly, it increase performance as such conflict was accepted as a necessity. Interactionism perception enables the Project manager to appropriate conflict to keep the project self-critical, viable, creative and innovative.

Causes of Conflict in Project Management

(Verma, 1998) Attributed the most prevalent causes of conflict in projects as breakdown in communication; and lack of respect; defective listening skills and perception difference, and these can lead to serious communication problem. The following are the leading causes of conflict caused by communication breakdown in projects: - Misinterpretation of design drawing; A misunderstood change order delay in the delivery of critical components; Failure to execute instructions. However, (Chong, 2011) claimed that the main cause of conflict between organizations is mistrust, and it is common because of divergent cultures and unrealistic

expectation as the second potential cause of conflict. While (Al-sedairy, 1994) looked at conflict as being prevalent in substantial aspect of project, nevertheless its main causes are "difference in perceptions, priorities and goals rather than differences in level of technical understanding or the management approach adopted"

(Mohammed, Prabhakar, & and White, 2008) on their estimation posited that the range of variation and intricate nature of the existing culture coupled with integration of the existing culture can be terribly intimidating, in this premise Nigeria being a multi ethnic grouping is prone to have causes of conflict that is been directly linked to the culture. Conflict Resolution and Project Management claimed that conflict originate mostly from poorly designed project plan process or organization, and resolving this conflict identified at various phases of the project life cycle is an extremely pivotal part of conflict resolution. Jackson, observe the disagreement on task durations and sequencing project priorities base on the need to learn new skills and underestimating the need for continual project communication. Conflict also arises from technical issues that cause budget restraints, cost estimates, inadequate payment schedules and personality conflict which are always intertwined with other issues in the project. (Gyulay, 2012) and Yates both agreed that type of procurement method adopted usually lead to conflict in the construction industry, which include cost, delivery time and quality, sharing the activities and responsibilities and risks among stakeholder.

Tactics for Minimizing Conflicts

(Zikmann, 1992) Looked at the construction industry has been extremely fragmented and the problems posed by those working in it has compelled the leadership in the project manager to institutionalize a proactive tactic for minimizing negative conflicts in projects. Project manager's response to conflict is usually dependent on his personality, training, experience and willingness to succeed on the projects. Project manager's effectiveness in managing conflict can identify previously undetected problems, and consequently this could create a pool of further unresolved issues if not properly managed. (Yates,

Conflict and Dispute in Development Process

A Transaction Cost Economics Perspective, 2007-2010) Posited that conflicts are being resolved in an informal manner, and this has made it extremely hard to ascertain the level of conflict at any particular period of time. However, the occurrence of conflict is gradually increasing, and it is unfavourably affecting performance in the construction process of many countries including Nigeria. (Yates, Conflict And Dispute In Development Process: A Transaction Cost Economics Perspective, 2007-2010) Suggests trust and team work as the complete remedy to the problems of conflict and dispute as posited by Sir Michael Latham's (1993,1994) review of UK construction industry. (Chong, 2011)Proposed that the Project manager should gradually establish a sense of trust in the project team members mind and encourage collective responsibilities and these can be achieved through alignment of interest and goals, improved communication channels and as well as using equitable employment and contractual practices.

METHODOLOGY

The study was to assess the project conflict management in the Nigerian construction industry as perceived by Project managers in the construction industry, and this was achieved through the following objectives: to confirm the nature of conflict management in the construction industry; to discover the primary causes of conflict in project management; to affirm the tactics for minimizing conflict in Nigerian construction industry. Previous researches on the topic were adequately looked upon for better understanding on the topic and questionnaire were given to project managers to give their opinions on the objectives. All the Project managers that were given the questionnaires are the professionals from the construction industry in Nigeria, which are Architects, Builders, Quantity Surveyors, Structural Engineers, Mechanical Engineers, Electrical Engineers and Estate Surveyors. Each of the professionals was sent fifty questionnaires through posts and emails, and a total number of one hundred and five questionnaires were returned. The professional background of the respondents was of importance as this was used to determine their role in projects handled. In order to achieve a meaningful result, the researcher waited for eighteen months before the analysis of the questionnaire started. Likert scale was used in which respondents respond in term of scale 1 to 5 in order to calculate the index average with a minimum value of 1and maximum value of 5, and the test representations are n1=never, n2 = seldom. N3= sometimes, n4 = often and n5= remarkably often. The hypothesis was tested by using Kruskal-Wallis since the test is a non-parametric and sample size is eight.

$K=12/N(N+1)\sum R2j/N-3(N-1)$ 1

Where N=Total number of samples (total)

n =Numbers of observation

R= sum of ranks in samples

df= n-1 =8-1 = 7 and α=0.05

$1-\sum T/N^3-N$ 2

$T= t^3 – t$ 3

T= number of tied observation in the data

N= number of sample (grand total)

Hypothesis1. H_0: there is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of project managers on the nature of conflict in Nigerian construction industry

Hypothesis 2. H_0: there is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of project managers on the causes of conflict in Nigerian construction industry

Hypothesis 3. H_0: there is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of project managers on the tactics for minimizing conflict in Nigerian construction industry.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1, shows that one hundred and five questionnaire were returned out of four hundred sent out, which is 26.25 per cent of the respondents. Quantity Surveyors response is the highest with 21, followed by Estate Surveyors 18, Architects 15, Civil Engineers 13, Builders 12, Mechanical Engineers 11, Structural Engineers 8 and Electrical Engineers 7.

Table 1. Respondents survey analysis

Description profession		Number Distributed	Number of responses	% of number distributed	% on overall of responses
1.	Architecture	50	15	30	3.75
2.	Builders	50	12	24	3.00
3.	Quantity Surveyors	50	21	42	5.30
4.	Structural Engineers	50	08	16	2.00
5.	Mechanical Engineers	50	11	22	2.75
6.	Electrical Engineers	50	07	14	1.75
7.	Civil Engineers	50	13	26	3.25
8.	Estate Surveyors	50	18	16	4.50
		400	105		26.25

Analysis on Nature of Conflict

The analysis in table 2 below suggests that all project managers in Construction industry have the opinion that conflict is natural and inevitable being the highest in the ranking order with a weighted average of 0.904 and this means that their professional stake in the industry concerning project management is of valuable importance to all stakeholders. However, second in the order of ranking is that conflict increases performance of the project team, and this are subject to those tactics the project manager employ in managing conflicts. The third is that conflicts is bad and always have a negative impact on projects with a weighted average of 0.326 which suggest that some project managers are still living in the era of traditional procurement methods.

Table 2. Nature of conflict

Nature of conflict Parameters	Arcs	R	Bldrs	R	QS	R	SE	R	ME	R	ELEC En.	R	CE	R	EST	R	W.A	R
1. Conflict is bad and always has negative impact on projects	0.280	3	0.400	3	0.373	3	0.450	3	0.256	3	0.286	3	0.292	3	0.267	3	0.326	
2. Conflict is natural and inevitable in all projects (may have positive or negative effect)	0.907	1	0.830	1	0.907	1	0.975	1	0.945	1	0.943	1	0.938	1	0.789	1	0.904	
3. conflict increases performance	0.813	2	0.783	2	0.813	2	0.925	2	0.927	2	0.914	2	0.954	2	0.778	2	0.864	

Notes. Arcs –Architecture, Bldrs- Builders, QS- Quantity Surveyors, SE- Structural Engineer, ME- Mechanical Engineer, ELEC En.- Electrical Engineer, CE- Civil Engineer , EST- Estate Surveyor, W.A – Weighted Average. R- Rank

Hypothesis 1. H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of project managers on the nature of conflict in the Nigerian construction industry.

Table 3. Test of Agreement of Opinion of Project Managers on Nature of Conflict in Project Management

Parameters	N(group)	df	t-cal	t-tab	accept H_0	Sig
Opinion of Project Managers	8	7	4.44	14.07	Yes	0

from the tables of Chi-square distribution with seven degree of freedom and 0.05 of the area in the right hand tail, x^2=14.07. As the calculated value K is 4.44 and less than the value of K tabulated or critical value of x^2 , hence the sample lies within the acceptable region so, H_0 should be accepted; there is no difference in the opinion of project managers on nature of conflict in the Nigerian construction industry.

Analysis on Causes of Conflict in Project Management

Table 4 below shows that communication breakdown is the number one cause of conflict in the Nigerian construction industry as agreed by all the respondents from the different profession. The second on the ranking table is conflicting commitment which is born out of the situation in which the project manager of a particular project is also the project team member of another project or whereby the project manager is also a project manager of other projects at the same time. The third is scheduling, and sequencing of work and the forth are technical options and performance trade-offs, which is the main cause by lack of local technology to cope with local needs unlike in the developed world where their advance technology is suitable for the growing needs of any country.

Table 4. Causes of Conflict

	Parameters.	Arc	R	Bldr	R	QS	R	SE	R	ME	R	EL E	R	CE	R	ES	R	Weighted Av.	R
1.	Project priority	0.893	**4**	0.867	**7**	0.867	**7**	0.875	**4**	0.818	**7**	0.857	**4**	0.877	**7**	0.833	**7**	0.861	**5**
2.	Administrative procedures	0.520	**11**	0.517	**11**	0.487	**11**	0.486	**11**	0.470	**10**	0.514	**9**	0.554	**10**	0.556	**10**	0.512	**11**
3.	Scheduling and Sequencing of work.	0.910	**3**	0.933	**4**	0.848	**8**	0.900	**3**	0.945	**3**	0.914	**3**	0.954	**3**	0.822	**8**	0.903	**3**
4.	Manpower resource	0.853	**7**	0.900	**6**	0.876	**6**	0.750	**7**	0.873	**5**	0.800	**6**	0.892	**6**	0.900	**4**	0.856	**6**
5.	Technical opinions and performance trade-offs	0.867	**6**	0.917	**5**	0.924	**5**	0.850	**5**	0.891	4	0.829	**5**	0.908	**5**	0.944	**3**	0.891	**4**
6.	Cost estimates	0.880	**5**	0.960	**2**	0.950	**3**	0.825	**6**	0.836	**6**	0.486	**10**	0.938	**4**	0.888	**5**	0.845	**7**
7.	Personality conflicts (ego between team members)	0.567	**10**	0.450	**12**	0.410	**12**	0.375	**12**	0.436	**11**	0.400	**12**	0.492	**11**	0.522	**12**	0.457	**12**
8.	Misaligned ambition	0.840	**8**	0.850	**8**	0.581	**10**	0.525	**10**	0.582	**9**	0.714	**7**	0.477	**12**	0.533	**11**	0.638	**10**
9.	Communication breakdown	0.960	**1**	0.983	**1**	0.971	**1**	0.975	**1**	0.981	**1**	0.971	**1**	0.985	**1**	0.967	**1**	0.974	**1**
10.	Mistrust	0.787	**9**	0.817	**9**	0.667	**9**	0.675	**9**	0.636	**8**	0.600	**8**	0.862	**8**	0.844	**6**	0.736	8
11.	Unrealistic expectation	0.920	**2**	0.550	**10**	0.943	**4**	0.700	**8**	0.400	**12**	0.457	**11**	0.815	**9**	0.667	**9**	0.682	**9**
12.	Conflicting commitment (two projects or more at a time)	0.920	**2**	0.950	**3**	0.962	**2**	0.925	**2**	0.964	**2**	0.943	**2**	0.970	**2**	0.955	**2**	0.949	**2**

Notes. Arcs –Architecture, Bidrs- Builders, QS- Quantity Surveyors, SE- Structural Engineer, ME- Mechanical Engineer, ELEC En.- Electrical Engineer, CE- Civil Engineer , EST- Estate Surveyor, W.A – Weighted Average. R- Rank

Hypothesis 2. H_0: There is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of Project managers on the causes of conflict in the Nigerian construction industry

Table5. Test of Agreement of Opinion of Project Managers On Causes of Conflict in Project Management

Parameters	N(group)	df	t-cal	t-tab	accept H_0	Sg
Opinion of Project Managers	8	7	0.39	14.07	Yes	0

From the table of Chi-square distribution with seven (7) degree of freedom and 0.05 of the area in the right hand tail x^2 = 14.07. As the calculated value K is 0.39 and less than the value of tabulated or critical value of x^2 , hence the sample lies within the acceptable region. So H_0 should be accepted, there is no difference between the opinions of Project managers on causes of conflict in the Nigerian construction industry.

Table 6 below shows the result from the analysis in which the project managers suggest that the best tactics in reducing conflict is to improve communication channels (0.960) followed by the establishment of sense of trust and collective responsibilities.(0.948) and the third is when the project manager discovers the professional and personal goal of team members.(0.896). Others are the project manager gives timely praise and recognition to project team members, which is the fourth (0.874) on the weighted average followed by when the project manager align the interest of each party and giving feedback as at when due are the fifth and sixth respectively. The seventh is that the project manager should define control parameter; the eight is the development of tolerance for failure to encourage creativity and the last is when the project manager should clarify his expectations from the team member.

Table 6: Tactics For Minimizing Conflicts With Your Project Team Members

Parameters		Arc	R	Bldr	R	QS	R	SE	R	ME	R	EL.E	R	CE	R	ES	R	Weighted Av.	R
1.	Discover professional and personal goals of team members	0.880	**2**	0,833	**6**	0.962	**3**	0.825	**5**	0.891	4	0.914	**3**	0.908	**4**	0.956	**3**	0.896	**3**
2.	Clarify your expectations	0.710	**9**	0.917	**3**	0.876	**6**	0.750	**7**	0.800	**9**	0.829	6	0.800	**9**	0.878	**8**	0.820	**9**
3.	Define control parameters	0.730	**8**	0.817	**7**	0.933	**4**	0.725	**8**	0.855	**6**	0.886	**4**	0.846	**7**	0.922	**6**	0.839	**7**
4.	Develop tolerance for failure to encourage creativity	0.773	**7**	0.783	**8**	0.905	**5**	0.850	**4**	0.873	**5**	0.714	**9**	0.831	**8**	0.867	**9**	0.825	**8**
5.	Give positive feedback	0.813	**5**	0.764	**9**	0.848	**8**	0.800	**6**	0.854	**7**	0.886	**4**	0.892	**5**	0.889	**7**	0.843	**6**
6.	Give timely praise and Recognition	0.830	**4**	0.867	**5**	0.867	**7**	0.900	**3**	0.820	**8**	0.829	**6**	0.923	**3**	0.956	**3**	0.874	**4**
7.	Align interest of each party	0.790	**6**	0.900	**4**	0.838	**9**	0.725	**8**	0.945	**3**	0.800	**8**	0.846	**6**	0.933	**5**	0847	**5**
8.	Establishment of sense of trust and collective responsibilities	0.920	**3**	0.933	**2**	0.971	**2**	0.925	**2**	0.964	**2**	0.971	**1**	0.985	**1**	0.988	**1**	0.948	**2**
9.	Improve communication Channels	0.920	**1**	0.967	**1**	0.981	**1**	0.975	**1**	0.982	**1**	0.943	**1**	0.954	**2**	0.967	**2**	0.961	**1**

Notes. Arcs –Architecture, Bidrs- Builders, QS- Quantity Surveyors, SE- Structural Engineer, ME- Mechanical Engineer, ELEC En.- Electrical Engineer, CE- Civil Engineer , EST- Estate Surveyor, W.A – Weighted Average. R- Rank

Hypothesis 3. H_0: there is no statistically significant difference in the opinion of Project managers on the tactics for minimizing conflict in Nigerian construction industry.

Table 7 Test of Agreement of Opinion of Tactics for Minimizing Conflict in Project Management

Parameters	N(group)	df	t-cal	t-tab	Accept H_0	Sg
Opinion of Project Managers	8	7	15.92	14.07	No	0

From the table of Chi-square distribution with seven (7) degree of freedom and 0.05 of the area I the right hand tail $x^2 = 14.07$. As calculated value of K is 15.92 and more than the K tabulated or critical value of x^2, hence the sample lies outside the acceptable region, so H_0 should be rejected, and H_1 is accepted ; there is difference between the opinion of project managers on the tactics for minimizing conflict in Nigerian construction industry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researcher set out to identify the nature of conflict; causes of conflict and tactics for minimizing conflict in Nigeria construction industry. The respondent's responses were adequately analysed and the results suggest that conflict is natural and inevitable in all projects which may have positive or negative outcome. The project manager should develop his leadership role so that he can impact positive conflict resolution on his team members as his position should not be undermined by any unduly individual influence. The respondents opinion on nature of conflict suggest that conflict is natural and inevitable in Project Management as it may be favourable or negative depending on how the Project manager handles the project. The respondent's response to causes of conflict is very important as the result shows that communication breakdown is the main cause of conflict in Nigerian construction industry followed by conflicting commitment (managing two or more projects at a time). According to (Ogunbayo, 2013) it was discovered that most Nigerian Project managers at most times is a consultant in the same project that they are the project manager and the other scenario when the project manager has other projects that needs much attention. The third on the ranking order is that of scheduling and sequencing of work and such a situation is very important as most project managers show signs of inadequacy in this area, and this is where training and retraining of project managers is of prime importance. The fourth on the ranking order of the causes of conflict is the technical opinion and performance trade-offs; followed by project priority manpower resources cost estimates; mistrust and unrealistic expectation; misaligned ambition, administrative procedures and personality conflict between team members. The respondents prefers the Project managers to improve communication channels; establishment of trust and collective responsibilities and discovery of professional goals of team members as the most relevant tactics in minimizing conflict in construction Project management.

However, it is recommended that Project managers should ensure that conflict of any kind is not allowed to navigate to claims and consequently to dispute and lawsuits as posited by (Ng, Pena-Mora, & and Tamaki, 2007). Furthermore conflict management should be introduced as part of Project managers training within and outside the projects. Project Management regulatory Body should be established to monitor and regulate activities of Project Management in Nigerian Construction Industry as posited by (Odusami, 2002) as this will enhance project management practice training and retraining of Project Managers

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