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The leadership profile of Nigerian construction project managers

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract. The study aimed at presenting the leadership characteristics of Nigerian construction professionals involved as team leaders on building projects. Sixty construction project managers who were based in the Nigerian cities of Lagos and Abuja were selected for the study. A questionnaire was designed to collect data on 11 variables pertaining to the leaders including professional grouping, age, educational and professional qualifications, industrial experience, overseas training, overall training, personality, leadership style, style range and effectiveness. Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of the data obtained. One-way analysis of variance and Chi-square were used to test the study hypotheses. Notable findings include: Majority of the project leaders exhibited consensus leadership style, overwhelming majority style range support high task/high relationship behaviour; there was no significant relationship between the project leader's professional background and his leadership style, and there was no significant relationship between project leader's professional background and effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

Leadership is a key factor for success in any activity that involves collaboration among a group (or groups) of people. The construction industry has a greater need for leadership than any other field of endeavour. Ofori and Toor [1] advanced reasons that support this contention and these include: first, construction projects are large and technically complex and they involve a combination of specialised skills. Thus, the teams are not only large, but also multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural and from several different organisations. Second, the projects are typically expensive and the stock of buildings represents a large proportion of a nation's savings. Thus, the quality of the built product is of the essence. Third, the projects take a long time to complete and involve a large number of

discrete activities, which increases certain time-related risks and exacerbate problems with communication, co-ordination and the ability to manage a wide range of risks. Finally, the projects and the constructed product have serious implications for the health and safety of the workers involved, as well as the general public. Thus, due care, diligence and expertise are necessary safeguards. The need for effective leadership in construction is even more acute especially in the developing countries because there are evidences which indicate that project performance deficiencies, such as cost and time overruns, poor work quality, technical defects, poor durability, as well as inadequate attention to safety, health and environmental issues are more prevalent in developing countries than elsewhere. Despite this recognition that leadership is important at all levels of the construction industry, emphasis has been on the technical and management aspects, and leadership receives inadequate attention [2].

Project management, as a discipline, is the application of knowledge, skills and techniques to execute

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projects effectively and efficiently. It's a strategic competency for organizations, enabling them to tie project results to business goals, and thus, better compete in their markets. The Project managers' responsibilities span a broad spectrum, covering all the areas of project management like project planning, cost management, time management, quality management, contract administration and safety management. The project manager as the leader of the building team is appointed by the client to plan, control and co-ordinate the project from inception to completion to ensure that the client's requirements are met and that the project is completed on schedule and within approved budget estimate. Some of the consultants in the Nigerian construction industry combine project management practice with their primary technical responsibilities. Mäkilouko [3] observes that construction professionals often have to change roles from being a technical expert to a manager, then a leader and finally, at the end of the project, back to being a technical expert. Goetsch and Davis [4], quoting the statements of Bennis, however, distinguish the leaders from the managers by saying that managers focus on systems whereas the leaders focus on people. Even more distinctive feature is that managers take the short view (specific project success) whereas the leaders take the long view (long term vision) of the company for which the construction professional's success is benchmark against). This is where the majority of the construction professionals have contrasting views and this belief ultimately shapes their leadership style.

Leadership style on the other hand is a leader's style of providing direction to his group members, implementing plan and motivating people to achieve predetermined goals. Leadership styles have to do with how people interact with those they seek to lead. Some of the leadership styles categorized are autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, participative leadership, goal-oriented leadership and situational leadership [4]. Each of these leadership styles has strength and potential pitfalls and the effectiveness of each leadership style depends on the circumstance and the project goal, whether it is a short term or long term goal.

There is serious contention among built environment professionals as to who is most equipped to lead the building team. Traditionally, the architect has been playing the role of project team leader. However, with the advent of project management as a discipline and in the absence of project management regulatory body in Nigeria, many consultants in the built environment now combine their technical role with project management without additional training in project management. In a recent study, Ameh and Odusami [5] found that the quantity surveyors' group and the builders' group are the most equipped

whereas the civil engineers' group is the least equipped in terms of their background education to practice project management. In view of perceived notion that project managers' leadership style and competencies is a contributing factor to project success [6,7]. The rational for this study, therefore, is to examine the profile of the professional groups engaged in project management in terms of their leadership characteristics.

1.1. Research objectives

The purpose of the study is to present the leadership profile of Nigerian construction professionals who are engaged as project managers. The objectives of the study are to present the demographic characteristics of the project leaders and to investigate if there is any association between the project leader's profession and his/her leadership style, and effectiveness.

1.2. Research hypotheses

Two hypotheses were postulated for the study as follows:

- H_1 There is no significant relationship between the leadership style and the professional background of the project leader.
- H_2 There is no variation in the effectiveness of the different professional groups involved in project team leadership.

2. Literature review

2.1. Leadership in construction project

Leadership has been consistently acknowledged as a prominent contributor to project success. Prab-hakar [8] examined the leadership of 153 projects across 28 nations (including Nigeria) and confirmed that project manager leadership was a critical factor in project success. A leader according to Winston and Patterson [9] is one who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills. A leader focuses the follower(s) on the organisational mission and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organisational mission and objectives. The project-based nature of construction industry with its temporary, multi-organisations and a short time related task will almost certainly have an important influence on the managerial leadership styles of professionals working in the industry. Giritli and Oraz [10] opined that the most effective style of leadership depends on project circumstance, especially project duration and intensity of work done. The extensive use of sub-contracting is another factor that can have an impact on the leadership style of projects. Previous studies on leadership in the construction industry focus on traits, behaviours, qualities, skills, styles, and

competencies of effective and successful project leaders. Many studies on leadership focused on personality traits. Trait theory, also known as great man approach, is based on the belief that leaders are born and not made. The argument is that those who are born to be leaders possess certain characteristics or traits that make them effective and different from their followers. These qualities include virtues, race, gender, height, energy, appearance, knowledge and intelligence, imagination, self-confidence, integrity, fluency of speech, emotional and mental balance and control, sociability and friendliness, drive, enthusiasm, courage and so on. For example, Fraser [11] established from a survey on construction site managers that their effectiveness is correlated more with their personal characteristics than their formal education, professional qualifications or their working experience. Keegan and Den Hartog [12] found that transformational leadership has particular relevance in a project-based context. Ke and Wei [13] identified transformational leadership as a necessary factor for organizational change. In addition, Jung et al. [14] established that a transformational leadership style (e.g. charismatic) was more effective than other leadership styles in stimulating innovative projects. Transformational leadership style which is the major style for construction projects in Thailand was found to generate better leadership outcomes in terms of higher work quality, volume, as well as creative problem solving by subordinate than either the transactional or laissez-faire style [15]. It has been found that senior managers who use a transformational leadership style can better rally the support of followers to make changes than can leaders with a transactional leadership style (e.g. autocratic) [16].

Through extensive literature review, Ammons-Stephens et al. [17] identified four central leadership competencies with 17 broad competencies. These are cognitive ability (problem-solving, decision making, and reflective thinking), vision (global thinking, creative and innovative thinking, and forward thinking), interpersonal effectiveness (cultural competence, accountability, team building, development, inspirational/motivational, and communication skills), and managerial effectiveness (change management, resources management, strategic planning, collaboration, and flexibility/adaptability).

Jayasingarm and Cheng [18] examine the dominant leadership styles of Malaysian managers and their effectiveness from three main dimension: autocratic/directive, participative and nurturant-task behaviour. The result indicates that participative style was the most evident in the Malaysian context while autocratic style was found to have negative influence on leadership effectiveness. Amiral and Daud [19] measured leadership effectiveness based on three major outcomes from leadership styles - extra effort,

effectiveness and satisfaction. Effectiveness criteria used include subordinates or follower perceptions with regards to issues such as how effective a leader is in meeting others' job-related needs, how effective he is in representing their group to higher authority, how effective in meeting organizational requirements and lead a group that is effective. The study found that transformational leadership style has a strong relationship to leadership effectiveness.

Over the last 70 years, there have been six main schools of leadership theory [20,21] and Partington, cited in [22]. These include: the traits school, behavioural or style school, contingency school, visionary or charismatic school, emotional intelligence school and competency school. The leadership style instrument adopted for this study was the Bonoma/Slevin leadership model which is based on behavioural or style school [23]. The model is based on two dimensions of project management situations found to be critical in choosing the appropriate leadership style - information input and decision authority. Four leadership styles are identified depending on the information input and decision authority by the project team leader and members.

1. Shareholder leadership style. Here, there is little subordinate (project team members) information input into decision making.
2. Autocratic leadership style. In this situation the project team leader has complete authority in decision making with little or no input from the project team members.
3. Consensus (democratic) leadership style. There is large amounts of the project team members' information input into decision making. In this case the team leader allows the members to make the decision.
4. Consultative autocrat leadership style. The project team leader absorbs the information input from the team members but makes the ultimate decision.

3. Research method

A questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect primary data for the study. The target population includes built environment professionals comprising architects, builders, civil/structural engineers, estate surveyors and quantity surveyors (who have once acted as managers/project team leaders or are presently engaged as one). Other professionals like mechanical and electrical engineers, town planners and land surveyors were excluded from the study because there was little or no evidence of their involvement in team leadership on building projects. The study areas are the Nigerian cities of Lagos (the commercial nerve centre) and Abuja

(the seat of power). The rationale for choosing these cities is because many of the reputable contracting and consulting companies have their head offices in these cities and also because of the considerable volume of construction workload going on in these cities.

A non-probabilistic sampling technique ‘snow ball’ was adopted in the selection of the project managers. The target respondents were contacted through few known project team leaders and team members. The rationale for adopting this sampling technique was because there is no professional body regulating the practice of project management. This accounts for unavailability of sample frame of practicing project managers from which accurate sample size could be drawn. Sixty mini case studies of project managers who have once acted as managers/project team leaders or currently offering project management services participated in the study.

The project team leader questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A contains nine questions, which sought to know personal variables or characteristics of the project leaders sampled. The variables studied include their age, profession, academic and professional qualifications, industrial experience, place and level of their training, whether introvert or extrovert.

The leadership style instrument adopted for this study was the Bonoma/Slevin leadership model [23]. The project team leaders’ leadership styles were assessed by their inclination towards different leadership behavior. This instrument was adopted because it was suitable for project leadership. Other leadership instruments are only suitable in situations where the leader and the subordinates are based in the same organisations. In project management setting (especially construction project management) the project leader and the members are in most cases (except in case of in-house consultants) based in different organisations. They only come together for a specific task (project) which creates Temporary Multi-disciplinary Organisation (TMO) and are disbanded on completion of the project. The instrument is therefore found useful in this type of situation. More so, the instrument was claimed to have been used effectively with thousands of managers in both explaining the theory and providing them with a diagnostic on their particular styles [23].

Section B contains 12 variables to test the effectiveness of the project leader and the style range. Twelve different situations were presented with four suggested alternative course of action. The respondents were requested to choose one out of the four possible actions they would most likely take for each situation.

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the data obtained. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-square were used to test the hypotheses set up for the study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Demographic characteristics of project managers

Table 1 shows the summary of the demographic characteristics of the project managers. All the five professionals are equally represented in the survey. Five categories were selected to measure the range of the age of the project leaders in years as at their last birthday. Few (seven percent) of the project leaders were between 21 and 30 years old. This category of leaders was in the minority and probably new entrant in the industry from school. Majority of the leaders (56%) were in the 31-40 years age bracket. Another 27% of the leaders were in the age bracket of 41-50 years. This category was older and probably has been in the industry for some years. Few of the leaders (six percent) were between ages 51 and 60 years. None was above 60 years. From this analysis it can be inferred that project leadership is practised between ages 31 and 60 years. At the age of 60 years and above, professionals probably go into other ventures that are less stressful or retire from practice.

Educational qualification of the respondents indicates that seven percent of the leaders have Higher National Diploma, eight percent have Professional Diploma, 28% have Bachelor’s degree, 53% have Postgraduate Diploma/Master’s degree while only two percent (minority) have Doctorate degree. It can be observed that the project leaders were well educated academically as majority of the respondents (about 85%) have bachelor’s degree and above. This implies that the respondents should not have any challenge comprehending the research questionnaire and thus are in a position to provide the needed response.

The professional qualification of the respondents indicates that 90% of the leaders were corporate members while the remaining ten percent were fellows of their respective professional bodies in Nigeria or foreign equivalent. It can be inferred that they were equipped professionally to be engaged in project team leadership.

The industry experience of the respondents was also examined. This variable represents the total number of years which the project leader has spent in the construction industry. Ten percent of the respondents have spent less than ten years while majority (about 58%) have spent between ten and 19 years in the industry. About 20% of the project leaders have industrial experience ranging between 20 and 29 years while few (about five percent) have spent between 30 and 39 years in the industry. No respondent has spent more than 40 years. The modal class for the industrial experience is between ten and 19 years. The implication of this result is that the respondents have enough experience to make significant contribution to the research.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the project leaders.

	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	%	Cumulative %
Professional group				
Architects	12	12	20	20
Builders	12	24	20	40
Civil engineers	12	36	20	60
Estate surveyors	12	48	20	80
Quantity surveyors	12	60	20	100
Age (in years)				
21 - 30 years	4	4	7	7
31 - 40 years	34	38	56	63
41 - 50 years	16	54	27	90
51 - 60 years	6	60	10	100
Above 60 years	0	60	0	100
Level of education				
HND	4	4	7	7
Professional diploma	5	9	8	15
Bachelor's degree	17	26	28	43
PGD/master's degree	32	58	53	96
Doctorate degree	2	60	3	100
Professional qualification				
Corporate member	54	54	90	90
Fellow member	6	60	10	100
Industrial experience				
Less than 10 years	10	10	17	17
10 - 19 years	35	45	58	75
20 - 29 years	12	57	20	95
30 - 39 years	3	60	5	100
Above 40 years	0	60	0	100
Overseas training				
No	48	48	80	80
Yes	12	60	20	100
Training level				
Low	1	1	2	2
Moderate	32	33	53	55
High	27	60	45	100
Personality				
Introvert	46	46	78	78
Extrovert	13	59	22	100
Leadership style				
Shareholder manager	15	15	25	25
Autocrat	10	25	17	42
Consensus manager	30	55	51	93
Consultative autocrat	4	59	7	100
Style range				
Low relationship low task	0	0	0	0
Low relationship high task	11	11	18	18
High relationship low task	6	17	10	28
High relationship high task	43	60	72	100
Effectiveness				
Low effectiveness	13	13	22	22
Moderate effectiveness	4	17	6	28
High effectiveness	43	60	72	100

In the early 70s and up till late 80s the demand for construction professionals increased tremendously because of the oil boom which resulted in high demand for construction products. As a result, many Nigerian travelled abroad to study construction related disciplines. The research sought to find the number of project leaders who benefited from overseas training. Only 20% of the project leaders had overseas training while 80% were trained locally.

On the extent of project management training undergone by the respondents, majority admitted they have moderate training in project management courses, 45% have high training while few (two percent) have low training. This implies that the respondents have adequate background knowledge in project management, thus have necessary skills to practise project management in addition to their technical skills.

On interpersonal relationship, large percentages (78%) of the leaders are introverts while 22% are extroverts. Previous research suggests that a significant relationship exist between leadership style and personality traits (psychological type).

On style range, majority of the respondents (72%) exhibit high relationship/high task style, 18% exhibit low relationship/high task style, another ten percent exhibit high relationship/low style while none exhibits low relationship/low task style.

4.2. Professionals' leadership style

Table 2 shows that majority of the architects (i.e. eight out of 12) are consensus managers; nine out of 11 builders are consensus managers, half (50%) of the civil engineers are consensus managers, one-third of the estate surveyors are shareholder managers, another one-third are autocrats while another one-third are consensus managers. Majority (five out of 11) of the quantity surveyors are shareholder managers. It can be observed that no single professional dominates a particular leadership style. Almost half of the quantity surveyors are shareholder managers while most of the other professionals are consensus managers. This suggests that the style of leadership adopted at any given time depends on the situation, whether the project is complex or simple, fast track or non-fast track project. This agrees with Giritli and Oraz [10] and Goetsch and Davis [4] which found that the most effective style of leadership depends on project circumstance. However, consensus leadership style can lead to communication failure and project time overrun in a situation where roles are unclear or time is the essence as it requires everyone to agree to the plan. Therefore the notion or belief that architects are autocrats is not true.

It was hypothesized that "There is no significant relationship between the leadership styles and the professional background of project managers". Chi-square was used to test if there is any association

Table 2. Relationship between leadership styles and professional background of the project leaders.

Professional group	Leadership style of professionals				Total
	SM ^a	A ^b	CM ^c	CA ^d	
Architects	2	1	8	1	12
Builders	0	1	9	1	11
Civil engineers	4	2	6	0	12
Estate surveyors	4	4	4	0	12
Quantity surveyors	5	1	3	2	22
Total	15	9	30	4	58

^aSM: Shareholder Manager;

^bA: Autocrat;

^cCM: Consensus Manager;

^dCA: Consultative Autocrat

(Chi-square=15.580, DF=12, significance = 0.211).

Table 3. Relationship between leader's effectiveness and professional group.

Professional group	N*	Leader effectiveness		
		Mean	S.D.	Rank
Architects	12	5.00	3.77	1
Estate surveyors	12	4.58	4.32	2
Civil engineers	12	4.17	5.46	3
Quantity surveyors	12	2.67	5.21	4
Builders	12	2.00	4.34	5
Average		3.78	4.62	

*N: No of observation.

between leadership styles and professional background of the project leaders. As shown in Table 2, it can be observed that the calculated χ^2 of 15.580 is less than the tabulated χ^2 of 21.026 with 12 degree of freedom at 5% significance level. It is concluded, therefore, that there is no significant relationship between the project leaders' professions and their leadership styles.

4.3. Professionals' effectiveness as a team leader

Leader effectiveness was measured using Hersey and Blanchard's [24] Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description (LEAD) self-questionnaire. The result presented in Table 3 revealed that the architects appeared to be most effective with means score of 5.0. The Estate Surveyors with mean score of 4.58 followed this. The civil engineers scored 4.17 and came third while the quantity surveyors and the builders came forth and fifth with mean scores of 2.67 and 2.00, respectively. Interestingly, the builders and quantity surveyors who were found to be the most equipped by their background education to lead the construction team [5] are ranked low in effectiveness. Further

Table 4. One-way analysis of variance on leader effectiveness and their professional discipline.

Source	DF	SS	MS	F-ratio	F-tab	F- prob.	Sig.
Between groups	4	64.3401	16.0850	0.7387	2.61	0.5697	NS*
Within groups	54	1175.7955	21.7740				
Total	58	1240.1356					

*NS: Not Significant.

research will be required to ascertain the effectiveness of built environment professionals in team leadership under different socio-cultural and organizational climates. However, leadership style effectiveness depends on the expected outcome [19].

It was hypothesized that “there is no variation in the effectiveness of different professional groups involved in project team leadership.” These variations were tested statistically using one-way analysis of variance as indicated in Table 4. The result shows that there was no variation in leader effectiveness of the professional groups involved in project leadership. This implies that all the five professional groups are equally effective which suggests that any of them can act as project leader from leader effectiveness point of view.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the leadership characteristics of professional groups engaged in project management in the Nigerian construction industry within a certain geographical location which in this case was Abuja and Lagos. The implication of the findings in this study is that no particular professional group is identified with any particular leadership style. Hence, any of the built environment professionals can be appointed as project team leader. However, additional decision criteria may be considered in choosing a suitable project team leader.

Another aspect of the leadership behaviour investigated was the style range. Overwhelming majority of professionals involved in project management support high task/high relationship behaviour. This implies that the Nigerian project managers see completing tasks as the most important achievement while welcoming ideas and suggestions from the team members. This can prove to be effective in the right situation. The characteristics of the followers using Hersey and Blanchard’s extension of the leadership grid match moderate readiness level. However, the readiness level of the follower is outside the scope of the current study.

Future research may explore leadership styles exhibited by project managers at the various procurement stages (design & documentation, prequalification & award and construction) of building projects. The leadership style most effective in a fast track or non-

fast track project, or in a complex or simple projects may also be investigated.

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