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# Leveraging Conflict Management for Effective Project Delivery in Construction Industry in Esan North East Local Government Area, Uromi, Edo State, Nigeria

**Ehichioya, Innocent, Okodugha, Dauda A. & Adoga, Emmanuel**

Department Of Civil Engineering

Auchi Polytechnic

Auchi, Nigeria

**E-mail:** ehichioyainnocent@auchipoly.edu.ng

**Phone:** +2347043582821

## ABSTRACT

Construction projects demand the contributions of several professionals, we have the constructing team, the supervising team, and the client, each group contributes its knowledge and skill required to successfully bring the project to completion. When people of different background come together as a project team, conflict is certainly inevitable. As the members within the project coalition interrelate interest collides and conflicts result, which can have adverse effects on the project delivery, especially when it is not well managed. The research therefore sought to find the causes of these conflicts as it influence on effective project delivery in construction industry and the manner by which these conflicts are resolved. The research use quantitative design in combination with a cross-sectional. And using questionnaires, a total of 75 questionnaires were distributed but 50 were received and analyzed through the use of statistical tools. The findings revealed that conflict in construction project is inevitable, and therefore prefer the use of collaborating and integrating styles in solving conflict on sites.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Construction, Management, Project, Nigeria, Uromi, Causes, Delivery

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### I.1 Background of the study

In construction industries, no matter how strategic you are attempting to resolve a difference of opinion with another person, as long as it is termed as a conflict and viewed by at least one of you in terms of one person being “right” and the other as “wrong” no real progress is made in the relationship. The presence of right/wrong dynamics in a relationship indicates a power struggle and not the process of co-creation by two equally respected partners. A construction project is complex in nature. The complexity, rationale and lengthy process of designing and building make construction a process in which disputes are virtually ensured. The involvement of multidisciplinary in the construction project also leads to conflicts among the parties. It seems that conflict and disputes are inevitable to the construction industry especially when most of construction projects are facing with so many uncertainties.

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A study by Kumaramyswa and Yogeswaran (2000) provided a good reference of the common sources of construction disputes that are largely related to contractual matters, including variation, extension of time, payment, quality of technical specification, availability of information, administration and management, unrealistic client expectations and determination. In other research by (Kathleen, 2003) highlighted conflicts may develop as a result of limited resources such as not enough time, money, labour, materials and/or equipment. Smith describes conflict and disputes as an endemic problem in the construction industry. Conflict may difficulties communications between individuals, breaks personal and professional relationships and reduces effectiveness.

Conflict produces tension and distracts team members from performing the task. According to Cheung and Suen (2018), if dispute are not properly managed, they may cause project delays, undetermined team spirit, increase project costs and above all, damage continuing business relationships. Thus it is not surprising that many construction stakeholders still overwhelmingly view conflict as negative and something to be avoided or resolved as soon as possible. However, there are many authors have pointed out conflict is a phenomenon that may give rise not only to functional but also dysfunctional effects on individuals, groups and organizations. As today's claims and disputes keep increasing, the construction industry struggles to find ways to equitably and economically to resolve them. According to Shin, managing disputes should become a part of normal project management during project operation because disputes in construction projects are common place and the resolution need to occur immediately on the project site.

Brown et al (2003) highlighted that conflict is doubt or questioning, opposition, incompatible behavior, controversy or antagonistic interaction and disputes is one of the range of events considered as conflict. According to Kumaraswamy and Yogeswaran (2000), a dispute can be said to exist when a claim or assertion made is made by one party is rejected by the other party and that rejection is not accepted. This shows that disputes is more likely occur when the conflicting parties shows an action or arguments to a controversy. Referring to Vorster, a dispute is defined as an argument about an issue concerning project operations, usually resulting from a debate over differences in two or more parties 'understanding of situation. This statement is supported by another statement by Deutsch that defines conflict as incompatible activities; conflict occurs when the behavior of one person is interfering or obstructing the actions of another.

There are perhaps as many definitions of conflict as there are occasions for its occurrence. According to Thomas (2002) there are three themes among the definitions of conflict. The first is that whether conflict exists or not is a perception issue. The perceived difference may not be real but conversely if the difference is real but not perceived there is no conflict. The second common theme is that there is interdependence among parties (i.e. each has the potential to interfere with the other). Third, there are issues of blockage, opposition, and scarcity. Resources, for example, money, power and prestige, are limited. Their scarcity creates blocking behavior. When one party blocks the means to a goal or interest of another, a state of conflict exists. These numerous definitions show that scholars are looking at conflict from different angles but are there a difference between conflict and dispute and if so, should we concern ourselves with the difference?

The objectives of the study include:

- i. To know the causes of conflicts in construction industries.
- ii. To ascertain the effects of conflict on project delivery in construction industries in Nigeria.
- iii. To ascertain measures to resolve conflicts in construction industries in Nigeria.

## 1.2 Significance of the study

Conflict occurrence is inevitable, but preparing to deal with it in a rational, positive manner can save you from further disruption. Conflict occurs when people have different opinions, lack respect for each other or simply misunderstand intentions. Resolving conflict involves communicating effectively and reaching a compromise. Ignoring dissension eventually takes its toll both mentally and physically. Positive conflict resolution in a team results in better long-term team dynamics.

Conflict would arise due to behavioral problems such as poor communication among project team, multicultural team problem and reluctant to check for construct ability, clarity and completeness of project. Besides that, conflict also arises due to the factors of contractual problem which includes delay interim payment from client; client fails to respond in timely manner, application of extension of time and improper project schedules. Other than that, contractor's quality of work, error of pricing or costing, late instructions from architect or engineer also considered as the factors of conflict which is due to technical problems. This paper was hoped to be a useful reference to the project team in managing conflicts for future construction projects.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The construction industry consists of various participants and experts that do interrelate to the end of a project. And when these members of the project team interact during the course of their work, there are potential for conflict and conflict situations do arise. One of the key factors that portends danger or threatens construction of public projects is conflict between project team members or participants (Emit, 2013). This is mainly as a result of their diverse background, training, skills, norms to work and member's perspective. Conflict remains a challenge in the construction industry (Kassab et. al., 2010) till today.

Conflict has gradually become an unavoidable situation in every construction industry in Nigeria. According to Rahim (2002), conflict generally refers to differences in opinions and perceptions concerning a particular issue at a particular period of time. It usually arise when issues and interests change over time due to social, political and economic dynamisms in the society in which we live in, (Tjosvold, 1993). Because of the unavoidable nature of conflicts in all institutions, there is therefore the need for institutions to learn to deal with them effectively to minimize their negative impact and maximize their positive impact on institutions (Almost, 2006).

According to Mba (2013) the word conflicts brings to the mind image such as antagonism, struggles between parties, opposition processes and threats to cooperation but not all conflicts come in these forms especially in the construction industry, they come in form of need to be met or desires to be satisfied, disagreements to be settled and ideas to be shared that eventually leads to change of attitude feelings and perception. Conflict was also expressed as a struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive that incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference from others are preventing them from achieving their goals (Wilmot and Hocker, 2001). Conflict can also be described as an occasion where an individual or group feels negatively affected by another individual or group.

Karming (2009) conflict" which contends that it is crucially important to prevent conflicts and disputes arising rather than concentrating on dispute resolution, and suggests that improvements could be made by considering the notions of peoplism and Karma.

When conflicts get to a stage where it escalates into dispute, then the progress of a project been undertaken will be hampered or delayed. Dispute, on the other hand, only develops when conflict is not properly managed; therefore, dispute is the unnecessary or dysfunctional element. It is therefore important to try and solve any grievance among parties involve in a conflict before it escalate into dispute. According to Yiu and Cheung (2006) such disagreements can lead to an event or a series of circumstances that result in one or both parties having a grievance against the other. Olu and Abosede (2003) found that conflicts have become part and parcel of human organizations and world over which indeed is a paradox because of the amount of energy and resources expended by organizations to prevent and resolve conflicts. Conflicts may involve two parties or several parties for the same reason or for a diversity of reasons. For example, a construction project may trigger out conflicts between the contractor and the client for lack of quality and excessive cost of the output, between the public administration and both the promoter and the contractor for noise impact and between the contractor and the site neighbors for lack of parking places on the surrounding area.

## **2.2 Concept of Conflict**

When individuals converge in blocs or groups conflicts are unavoidable (Fenn et. al., 2007). In an effort to safeguard teamwork among team participants, there are often variances of view with respect to the ideal manner of accomplishing the group's shared objectives. Individuals within the group pursue their personal concerns and impede outside sways, dreading discordance in view of these contradictory positions. Often conflict is seen as disquieting, and may deteriorate or decline into a mishap or tragedy. Such intensifying situation would involve people, additional time, and higher costs (Harmon, 2003 cited in Peansupap et. al., 2013). Therefore it is more often than not shunned and stifled. On the other hand when the conflicts are properly fared, they engender hale and hearty interactions that permit singular novelty and efficiency (Uline et al., 2003).

### **2.2.1 Conflict Types:**

Mba (2013) observed that there are two sides to conflicts, one is destructive and unhealthy, and the other has a problem solving base where those involved are willing to sublimate personality differences, to listen to other's views and to be open as well as candid to each other, and to be supportive and helpful whereas the former defeats cooperation. Gorse (2003) equally postulates that conflict can be natural, functional and constructive or unnatural, dysfunctional, destructive, and unproductive. Functional conflict (Gorse, 2003) results from challenges, disagreements and arguments relating to task, roles, processes and functions, this type of conflict often involve detailed discussions of relevant issues. The categorization of conflict by a plethora of literature has been offered semantically diverse by individual writers though; their meaning and description are compatible and convergent. Conflict (Atreyi et al., 2007) can be issue base or interpersonal; affective and cognitive conflict (Uline et al., 2003); functional or dysfunctional (Rahim, 1992).

According to Atreyi et al. (2007) issue based conflict can be attributed to task and explicate that it happens as variances in views allied to the group's duty. They describe subject centered conflict as usually conspicuous with intense arguments and individual excitement, bereft of upset and adverse sentiments similar to relational conflict. An interpersonal conflict conversely, is defined as relational centered and are categorized by agitation, aggravation and infuriation amongst group participants (Atreyi et al., 2007). A sizeable volume of Literature contends that subject-based conflict is useful and advantageous to group achievement; it permits for a crucial evaluation of other options and expand the answerability of team participants.

Per Atreyi et al., (2005) the nonexistence of subject-based conflict may precede to an adverse outcome for instance groupthink. Task based or Issue-based conflict has repeatedly been referred to as productive conflict, for the reason that it aids escape dominance and lack of progress, pursues answers for queries, and stimulates inventive thinking (Carte and Chidambarum, 2004). Emmitt and Gorse(2003) in agreement with above position affirms that functional conflict more often than not is beneficial, helping to expose problems, reduce risks, integrate ideas, produce a range of solutions, develop understanding, evaluate alternative and improve solution. And Darling and Walker (2001) insist that conflict which supports the objectives of the team and encourages team achievement is categorized as useful conflict or disagreement. Constructive conflict desires unbiased dialogue of divergent views or positions.

Nonetheless, some researchers have dissimilar opinion to the grouping of conflict clarified in relative to building construction. Again they contest that conflict in the building sector ought not merely be termed as dysfunctional or functional (Leung et al., 2005). Somewhat they are with the view that rational stages of conflict may advance contentment in a work environs up until a stage where conflict worsen and reduces satisfaction (Gardener and Simmons, 1995). Tjosvold (2006) argues in his opinion, that conflict may offer incentive for employing intra-group disagreements; an expert regulatory of these in-house conflicts, notwithstanding the transient distraction, strengthens relations between group participants.

### **2.3 Causes of Conflict in the Nigerian Construction Industry**

Construction of major public infrastructure in the Nigeria is a notorious cauldron for conflict. Conflict may arise in many ways you see contractors making claims against owners, designers fight blame for errors which he may or not responsible for, and the public often feels left out of decision-making forums. Builders may face environmental challenges that the designers didn't consider, or nearby residents may object only after the project begins. These and a hundred other scenarios play out in the construction industry every day. They lead to cost overruns, delays, safety issues, and inconvenience to the public and time-consuming litigation.

In the work of Henry (2009, cited in Agwu, 2013) found out that in any organization, there are many causes of conflicts, however, conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about what task is expected to do, if not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge. In such circumstances, if the task is carried out wrongly when what transpire to the task is not clearly stated then conflict sets in, the supervisor becomes over-aggressive toward the individual while the individual becomes penurious towards subsequent task given to him, the results is simply a non accomplishment of task while conflict begins. Kululanga et al (2001, cited in Borvorn, 2011) identifies four sources of conflict in construction which are errors, defects and omissions in contract documents, underestimating the real cost of the project in the beginning, and changing condition and stakeholders involved in the project.

According to verma (1998) lack of respect, breakdown in communication, defective listening skills and perception difference are also some of the causes of conflict in projects. He further explained that these can lead to serious communication problem. Conflict can also results from wrong priorities, delays, variation and political and cultural differences on a construction project which makes it compulsory for any project manager to possess the basic management skills because the success and failure of any projects depends on its own leadership attributes and style. Sambasivan and soon(2007) however categorized the causes of conflict in the construction industry as client/owner related factor which are improper arrangement of funds,

late payments, owner interference, slow process of decision making and approval, unrealistic time durations, frequent design change; consultant related factors- delay in approval of variation statements, discrepancies between contract documents, delay preparation and approval of drawings, quality assurance and waiting time for approval of test and inspection; contractor related factors: poor site management, improper construction methods, improper planning, error during construction, inadequate experience of the contractor, level of labour and staff hired, lack of procurement schedules and organizational structure.

#### **2.4 Effects of Conflict on the Nigerian Construction Industry.**

The works of Walton and Dutton (1969) founds that conflict results in low trust and low respect which in turn has an adverse effects on effective project delivery. When conflicts are not well managed it can also results in the reluctance of individual to continue to participate in a task. Although conflict may have a negative impact on a project but this is dependent on the nature and level of the conflict. According to verma (1998) conflict is unavoidable as it is a natural phenomenon in any organization and its response determines whether the results will be positive or negative. According to martins dada (2013) in Nigeria the direct loses due to litigation on construction project is not known, yet what is known is that conflict occur on project and sometimes degenerates into lawsuit.

Kassab etal (2010) maintains that conflict remain a challenge in the construction industry with the potential to leading to project failures, litigation and outright project abandonment. Sometimes, when there are conflicts among the workers or project team on site it could result in frustration that can manifest a tripartite effects of communication break, unnecessary annoyance and aggressive behavior. Conflict also affect the accomplishment of organizational goals due to their attending stress, hostility and other undesirable factors when poorly managed.

Total compendium of research reveals that conflicts generally and negatively influence the initial cost of construction projects by incurring more cost on any damaged items or materials in the course of disputes and conflicts occurrence. More so it extends the estimated project time when not properly managed within the stipulated time of occurrence. Quality of work may also be affected whenever there is conflicts and disputes due to poor communication of specifications and design methodology among the conflicting parties.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The research method employed in this work depends on the research strategy, design and philosophy. This research was designed to explore conflict management, a panacea for effective project delivery in construction industry.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Based on the aim of this research, quantitative research design was appropriate, and information was gathered via administration of questionnaire. The survey applied standardized instruments, so that the changing viewpoints and experiences of people suited a limited number of scheduled response categories, to which numbers were allocated and measured statistically.

#### **3.3 Study Population**

A population size of seventy-five (75) respondents was used in the study. The Populations focus on the stakeholders in the construction industry in Nigeria who carry out project specifically in Uromi, Esan North East Local government and its immediate environs. The stakeholders are mainly client/promoter, project managers, contractors, sub-contractors, suppliers, and Quantity surveyors, Builders, Engineers and Architects.

The Yaro Yameni population sample size formula was used to obtain the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

where  
 n= sample size  
 population size  
 margin error taken as 5%

$$n = 86 / 1 + 86 (0.05)^2 \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

$$n = 71 \dots\dots\dots(3)$$

Based on the above result, 75 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents 50 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned

**3.4 Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique adopted in this research was random.

**3.5 Data Gathering**

To address the question of the research, appropriate information needed to be collected in a manner permitted under such research. And both primary and secondary data are used in this study. The present literature like conference papers, journal articles, and web sites of professional bodies, databases and books were all consulted for indebt information on sources/causes of conflict, its effects and their management.

**3.6 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from the questionnaire were organized and analyzed by means of percentage, tables, and statistical tool in the SPSS software for data analysis. The procedure for analyzing collected data deal with the technical procedures needed to carry out the statistical or quantitative analysis.

**4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

#### 4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data obtained for the research is presented and analysed in statistical form, showing the mean, relative importance index and their rank.

#### Section A: Demographic Information Of Respondent.

**Table 4.1 Gender Distribution of the Respondents**

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Female	20	40
Male	30	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

Table 4.1 shows the gender of the respondent where 60% respondent is male and 40% are females. Therefore the percentage of respondent within 60% is the highest. This showed that both male and female are well represented in this study.

**Table 4.2: Age of Respondents**

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
Between 18-22 years	20	38
Between 23-32 years	17	43
Between 29-33 years	13	19
Between 34 -38 years	–	–
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

From table 4.2: the numbers of respondents from 18-22 years are 20(38%), 23-32 are 17(43%), and 29-33 years are 13 (19%). This implies that the researcher obtain data from all categories of adult population of the area under study. This frequency is helpful to the study.

**Table 4.3: Educational Background**

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
SSCE	3	6
NCE/ND	12	24
HND/BSC	20	40
MSc/PhD	15	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

From table 4.3: The qualification according to the table 4.3 showed that 6% possess primary school certificate/SSCE 24% that possess NCE/ND, 40% possess HND/B.Sc. and 30% possess MSC/PhD . Therefore, most of the respondents possess at least HND or above. This shows that majority of the respondents' attained post-secondary educational qualification. Similarly, this implies that efforts were

made by the researcher to seek the opinions of people that possess the knowledge and educational qualification because such people were considered enlightened enough to understand the phenomenon under investigation and hence provide reliable findings as regards to the research.

**Table 4.4 Status/Position occupied by the respondent.**

positions	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Builder</b>	3	6
<b>Engineer</b>	12	24
<b>quantity surveyors</b>	9	18
<b>Architects</b>	12	24
<b>Others</b>	14	28

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

**Table 4.5 Causes of conflict**

Causes of conflict	RSI	RANK
<b>Different perception of work quality</b>	0.584	4
<b>Inaccurate design information</b>	0.580	5
<b>Inadequate site investigations</b>	0.632	2
<b>Delayed client response (decisions)</b>	0.532	7
<b>Inadequate communication among project teams</b>	0.620	3
<b>Unrealistic time targets and durations</b>	0.532	7
<b>Excessive change orders</b>	0.500	8
<b>The use of substandard materials for construction</b>	0.660	1
<b>Poorly developed project plan and scheduling.</b>	0.552	6
<b>Delays in payments</b>	0.552	6

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

Data collected was analyzed based on the responses of the participants. And for each item listed under causes of conflict the mean values as well as the relative importance index (RII) for each item were rank to identify the highest cause of conflict in the construction industry in the study area.

According to the results in Table 4.5, the use of substandard material for construction was ranked highest with relative importance index (RII) of 0.660, follow by Inadequate site investigations with relative importance index (RII) of 0.632.

**Table 4.6 Effect of conflict on projects**

Effect on project	RSI	RANK
Rework on the project	0.668	2
Reduces productivity at site	0.712	1
Diversion of resource in respect of management time allocated to resolving conflict	0.508	8
Damaged reputation of project team	0.472	3
Delays and inefficiencies in construction	0.532	7
Loss or reduction of quality	0.660	4
Delays in project completion	0.636	3
Termination of contract	0.580	6
Wasted funds on incomplete project	0.584	5

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

From the ranking as contained in the Table 4.6, the most popular effect according to the participants of this study is reduces productivity at site” with a relative importance index (RII=0.712), a position that affirms the thoughts of Kumaraswamy (2000) and Colin et. al., (1996). The second most occurring and visible effect of conflict in the minds of the participants in construction is rework on the project ” with a mean a relative importance index (0.668).

**Table 4.7 Effort and Strategies measure to forestall conflict**

Effort and strategies	TW	RSI	RANK
Integrating	41.4	0.828	2
Dominating	39.1	0.782	5
Obliging	39.5	0.790	4
Collaborating	41.9	0.838	1
Avoiding	40.5	0.810	3

Source: Authors Survey, January, 2022

The content of table above (Table 4.7) confirms the use of all the conflict management modes as well espoused in existing literature in settling conflicts in the construction of projects. However, the level of usage or the regularity of use differs from one mode to another. According the Table 4.7, Collaborating mode of handling construction conflict was rank highest than the remaining modes of settling construction conflict, especially in the study area as per the responses of the participants.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

As inevitable as change is the issue of conflict in construction. At any construction project site where project team members work together in the course of completing their work and obligations, there exist always an obvious possibility of conflict. This work has established better choice mechanism of conflict resolution strategies adopted in construction industries in the study area.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Indeed, it is absolutely and completely impossible to have people of different experience, training and upbringing work together, decide on issues and work towards project objectives and goals without impasse. Therefore the need for appropriate conflict resolution mechanism to strength effective communication in construction industry.

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