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## Conflict Management in Building Construction Industries: Case Study of Adamawa State

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### **ABSTRACT**

Theoretical and empirical studies have considered the importance of conflict management as a factor of change realization, motivation and improvement of work performance effectively and efficiently. This study investigated approaches to conflict management in building construction industries in Adamawa state. The population for this study was 500 people. 20% of the population was taken which gave a sample size of 100 respondents. They included contractors, site and project managers, engineers, consultants and labourers. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection and the data was analysed using means and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that, conflicts possess a high negative effect in building construction industries and solutions to these conflicts as to its effects and frequent occurrence in building construction industries, seem insufficient to critically handle these effects efficiently. The findings reveals that amongst others, effective management of available resources and proper inventory of residual, used and needed items on the site as well as adherence to design specification and instructions of site engineers and tolerance amongst workers should be basis of conformity to job engagement, and be employed as fundamentals for conflict management.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Construction, Adamawa

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The construction industry is a project-based industry, with each project having unique features and the involvement of various parties within a life cycle of each project. It can be viewed as an organ or a whole system with integral components such as materials (concrete, steel, wood and pipes, among others.) and the complex set of roles and relationships by various teams of workers (how the contract is planned, administered and managed) without which nothing could be achieved. The fundamental objectives are to deliver construction projects to the required quality more quickly and improve project performance. Unfortunately, practice is not that simple as construction work has become more complex technically and

administratively, and there are several challenging engineering and management problems that occur on the site.

Dispute in the construction industry has been characterised mainly by its nature and its diversity because the business it covers has a wide range of end products and people working from a broad range of crafts and professions. As a result of the diverse nature of the involvement of various parties, conflicts and disputes are inevitable. Varied social relationships normally involve actual or apparent differences between two or more parties in which the welfares of each party are mutually exclusive. This set a fertile ground for conflict. Disputes arise when the limited resources available to an organization becomes drained by an unpredicted problem or when risks are distributed unevenly, as they commonly are in construction contracts. The responsibility for supplying extra resources fall unevenly on projects contestants leading to the appearances of distinct winners and losers and a redeployment of resources between them. Thus, such an event is likely to be met by a range of positive and negative behaviours of potential beneficiaries encouraging the change and potential losers resisting it. It is within the resultant strains that conflict is born, an occurrence which escalates from side to side (Ogunbayo, 2013; Klinger, 2009). Verma (1998) observed that the most prevailing causes of conflict in projects are breakdown in communication and lack of respect, defective listening skills and perception difference, and these can lead to serious communication problems such as misinterpretation of design drawing, delay in the delivery of critical components and failure to execute instructions, amongst others.

However, a conflicting relationship between two or more individuals or groups in an organisation can be regarded as a sequence of conflict episodes, which begins with conditions characterised by certain conflict potentials. Mistrust as claimed by Chong (2011) also poses great concern amongst various employees in the organizations and it is commonly because of divergent cultures and unrealistic expectation. These roles and relationships include how the participants interact with each other so that the project is a success in line with how important site management practices are maintained efficiently, cost effectiveness and control on project. Based on this, good customer relations, good reputation and high integrity are maintained. Carmichael (2002) proposes that approach to dispute resolution should start with an attempt to resolve the problem at the level which it occurs, in a timely fashion. If this attempt fails, the next step is to get an involvement of people at a higher level with decision-making authority. If the outcome is unfavourable, the next action will be to proceed

with an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) with an independent party. If all attempts fail, the next step is to proceed with the arbitration or litigation. The same author suggests that time and cost effectiveness of formal and informal resolution methods in addressing dispute may be attributed to the potential dispute and therefore should be tackled at its origin.

The technological development in building materials coupled with a tight monetary supply is faced with a big challenge of managing materials, cutting construction cost for construction works and meeting up with the time frame for project completion. This mostly ends up in conflicts which are viewed in three categories;

1. Management – Management Conflict
2. Management – Employees/Participants Conflict
3. Employees/Participants – Employees/Participants Conflict

Conflict of the above stated categories could exist as a result of an idealistic expectation by the owner, differences in construction interpretation between the construction manager and contractor, design changes, cost concern, inability to perform, differing site conditions, financial difficulties and lack of transportation, subcontractor performances and collapse of some structures. Adamawa State which is in the North-East region of Nigeria has a high demand for construction of all types of buildings. This provided the motivation for carrying out this research on “conflict management in building construction industry, Adamawa State”.

The Nigerian construction industry, operating at similar levels of complexity, experiences similar conflicts with some peculiarities because of environmental and cultural settings. In Adamawa State, several on-going public and private construction projects are also exposed to familiar and non-common conflicts that need particular attention. The study was therefore carried out to find out how conflicts are managed at sites in Adamawa State.

The main purpose of this study was to find out how conflict management is carried out in construction industries in Adamawa State. The specific purposes are to;

1. Determine the causes of conflicts existing in building construction industries, in Adamawa State.
2. Determine the effect of conflicts in building construction industries, in Adamawa State.
3. Identify common possible management approaches/procedures and/or measures against the frequently occurrence of conflict in building construction industries in Adamawa state.

The research questions that guided this study are;

1. What are the causes of conflict existing in building construction industries, in Adamawa State?
2. What are the effects of conflicts in building construction industries, in Adamawa State?
3. What are the possible conflict management approaches/procedures employed, to effectively manage conflict in building construction industries, in Adamawa state?

## METHODOLOGY

The study covered all major construction sites within the study area. To ensure quality of data collection, the researchers concentrated on building construction sites within Adamawa Central zone, because there exists within this area, small to mega building construction sites. The study was primarily an opinion based study and therefore it was considered appropriate to use a survey design for the conduct. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data. The population for this study was made up of 500 people in the five medium-to-large scale construction industries, from an information sourced from the Corporate Affairs Commission which includes; Dada Construction Company Limited, Medugu Construction Company Limited, J & J Construction Company Limited, Salima Construction Company Limited and Dari Investment Limited. Respondents include all management staff; Contractors, Project and Site Managers, Architects, Structural Engineers, Civil Engineers, Building Engineers, Surveyors, and Consultants, Supervising Officers, Foremen and Labourers working in these various construction industries with each having not less than a 100 workers.

The stratified random sampling technique was used. The population was stratified into company types depending on their major activities (e.g. Road, Building/structure and Bridge constructions) and further stratified into small, medium and large scale industries. Within each company, the staffs were classified into management and non-management staff. Under each group, 20% per cent of the staffs were randomly selected through simple balloting technique.

The instrument used for collecting data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three (3) sections, section 1, 2, and 3. The questionnaire was designed with a likert-type five (5) point rating scale as shown below.

Strongly Agreed

SA

5

Agreed	A	4
Undecided	UD	3
Disagree	D	2
Strongly Disagree	SD	1

Literature was reviewed to gather information that helped in framing and structuring the questionnaire items. It was subjected to face and content validation by three (3) lecturers, one from each of the Departments of Technology Education, Civil Engineering, and Building, of the Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola. The instrument was checked for reliability by the use of “Test-retest reliability or stability. The method employed for data analysis was the use of mean and standard deviation, with a decision (cut-off) point of 3.50, where the mean is 3.00, the upper and lower limit of 3.49 and 2.50 respectively.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Research Question One:** What are the possible causes of conflicts existing in building construction industries in Adamawa State?

**Table 1: Mean responses on the Possible Causes of Conflicts in Building Construction Industries in Adamawa State**

S/N	ITEM	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	S.D	Remark
1	Discrepancy on task duration and sequencing project priorities.	3.62	1.33	Agreed
2	Type of procurement method adopted.	3.81	1.35	Agreed
3	When limited resources are exhausted.	4.04	1.62	Agreed
4	When risks are unevenly distributed amongst workers.	3.58	1.57	Agreed
5	Ineffective communication.	4.03	1.47	Agreed
6	Lack of respect amongst workers and to their superiors.	3.78	1.43	Agreed
7	Mistrust as to divergent culture and unrealistic expectations.	3.68	1.59	Agreed
8	Limited time for proper budgeting.	3.75	1.46	Agreed
9	Differences in perception, goals and priorities.	4.10	1.48	Agreed
10	Failure of the designers to incorporate and interpret the client’s requirements in their designs.	4.32	1.66	Agreed

11	Failure of the contractors to conform to specifications during construction stage.	4.01	1.53	Agreed
12	Delays caused by parties to complete their assignments at the expected times.	4.43	1.58	Agreed
13	Delays in honouring contractor's claims for additional payments.	3.89	1.37	Agreed
14	Increase in cost of project inputs beyond the anticipated levels.	3.83	1.40	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.92		Agreed

**Key:** S.D = standard deviation

From Table 1, the response of the respondents reveals that all the questionnaire items 1 to 14 were agreed upon as possible causes of conflict in construction industries in Adamawa State. The mean responses tend to illustrate the level of agreement, with respect to each item. Items 3,5,9,10,11 and 12 have higher mean responses than others.

**Research Question Two:** What are the effects of conflicts in building construction industries in Adamawa State?

**Table 2: Mean responses of Respondents on the Effects of Conflicts in Building Construction Industries in Adamawa State**

S/N	ITEM	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	S.D	Remark
15	Emergence of distinct winners and losers and a redistribution of resources between them	3.68	1.59	Agreed
16	Delay in completion of tasks	4.43	1.58	Agreed
17	Misinterpretation of design drawing	4.30	1.50	Agreed
18	Inconsistency in executing instructions	4.14	1.36	Agreed
19	Delay in the delivery of critical component	4.28	1.56	Agreed
20	Slowdown of rate of work needed for completion of tasks	4.16	1.56	Agreed
21	Escalation of time of project completion	4.45	1.66	Agreed
22	Lack of cooperation amongst workers	4.04	1.50	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.73		Agreed

**Key:** S.D = standard deviation

From Table 2, the response of the respondents reveals that questionnaire items 15 to 22 were agreed upon as effects of conflict in building construction industries in Adamawa State. The high mean responses illustrate the level of agreement with the statements. All items have mean responses above the cut-off point of 3.50

**Research Question Three:** What are the possible conflict management approaches/procedures employed, to effectively manage conflict in building construction industries in Adamawa state?

**Table 3: Mean responses of Respondents on the Approaches to Conflict Management in Adamawa State**

S/N	ITEM	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	S.D	Remark
23	Confrontation / Collaboration amongst parties involved in conflict	4.72	1.78	Agreed
24	Ignoring and refraining from conflict altogether rather than trying to directly resolve it	4.30	1.50	Agreed
25	competing strategy to force the other party to accept a particular position	4.14	1.36	Agreed
26	Ensuring avoidance of conflict amongst parties involved	4.11	1.53	Agreed
27	Seeking compromises amongst parties involved in conflict	4.11	1.39	Agreed
28	Arbitration	3.96	1.36	Agreed
29	Resort to Litigation by aggrieved parties	3.88	1.54	Agreed
30	Involvement of Alternative Dispute Resolution concepts such as mediators, third parties etc. to parties involved in conflict	3.90	1.31	Agreed
Grand Mean		4.63		Agreed

**Key:** S.D = standard deviation

From Table 3, the responses of the respondents reveal that all the questionnaire items 23 to 30 were agreed upon as approaches for conflict management in construction industries in Adamawa State. The Mean responses illustrate the level of agreement with the items for which all the items have higher levels of mean responses with reference to cut-off point.

### Major Findings

The major findings of the study are as follows;

1. Limited resources, ineffective communication, differences in perception, goals and priorities, failure of the designers to incorporate and interpret the client's requirements in their designs, failure of the contractors to conform to specifications during construction stage among others are major causes of conflict in building construction industries.
2. Conflicts in building construction industries usually results to delay in completion of tasks, misinterpretation of design drawings, inconsistency in executing instructions, delay in the delivery of critical components, slowdown of rate of work needed for completion, escalation of time of project completion, and lack of cooperation amongst workers, among others.
3. Involvement of alternative dispute resolution concepts such as mediation, third parties, seeking compromises amongst parties involved in conflict, ensuring avoidance of conflict amongst parties, confrontation / collaboration amongst parties and resort to arbitration were found to be measures and approaches to conflict management in building construction industries, among others.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The Table 1, in agreement with (Ogunbayo, 2013; Klinger, 2009 and Verma, 1998), revealed that among the suggested items such as; cultural intimidation as an intricate nature to the existence of conflict in Nigeria, poorly designed project plan process or organization, discrepancy on task durations and sequencing project priorities based on the need to learn new expertise, technical issues resulting to budget restraints, inadequate and inappropriate cost estimates, inadequate payment schedules and personality conflict, type of procurement method adopted, and lack of respect amongst others, were accepted by the respondents as the possible causes of conflicts existing in building construction industries.

Omoluabi (2001) asserts that the negative consequences of conflict are that it undermines an organizations effort at delivering quality projects at the right time. Thus, if conflict management is handled correctly, it can benefit individuals and organizations by producing stronger, more resilient working relationships, improving creative outputs and generating innovative solutions. It must be pointed out that the idea of eliminating conflicts completely as against creative conflict management strategies may not be feasible. According to Lee (2008), views towards conflict changed



with the emergence of social systems and open system theory which suggests that conflict should be regarded as a positive indicator of effective organization management.

Respondents in Adamawa State also agreed with the conflict resolution strategies as presented in table 3. Salami (2009) citing Mayer and Ogunbamila, gave the five conflict resolution strategies used in the formation of items in table 3 as; confrontation / collaboration, withdrawing/avoiding, forcing/competing, smoothing, and compromising. Others such as Leong, Aminah and Syuhaida (2011) however, suggests that conflict management in construction industries is generally associated with alternative dispute resolution techniques such as arbitration and litigation. These interventions may take many forms and utilize a variety of approaches and tools, so that whatever approach is taken, conflict intervention must foster a certain set of essential conditions for bringing the conflict parties to the place where they are willing to work together to break the destructive behaviours in their relationship, (Norman, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Conflict is a common phenomenon in all building construction firms in Adamawa State. It exists whenever incompatible activities occur. An action which is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective (Deutsch, 1973), and can be caused by several vices as mentioned in the major finding above that if not properly managed would result to delay in completion of tasks, misinterpretation of design drawing, inconsistency to execute instructions, delay in the delivery of critical component, slowdown of rate of work needed for completion, escalation of time of project completion etc., and in the construction industry, time is a huge resources not to be played with. In some rare cases, it has been observed to bring about change, but as it's been said, "prevention is better than cure".

However, it's clear and prevalent from this study, that conflict management demonstrates the professionalism and skills of both the site and project management team that should be considered as a noteworthy backer to the accomplishment of any building construction project.

## RECOMMENDATION

The recommendations are:

1. Effective management of available resources and proper inventory of remaining, used and needed items on the site.

2. Proper adherence to design specification and instructions of site engineers as well as tolerance amongst workers should be bases of conformity to job engagement.
3. Adequate enforcement of discipline amongst workers should be ensured.
4. Provision of adequate and effective means of dispensation of wages at its due time, to the workers.
5. Adequate and proper scheduling of work activities, time of commencement and closure, for each day of the project contract.
6. Training of site managers on cultural differences, diversity in perception and experience.
7. Clarity and early notification of personnel expected to make purchases, what item needed for purchase, quantity to be purchased, cost of purchase, and most especially, time of expectation of these items for use.
8. Seeking compromise amongst parties, using arbitration or involvement of other alternative dispute resolution concepts such as confrontation / collaboration. Also, ignoring and refraining from conflict altogether, should be considered as conflict management strategies.

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