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# **Leadership Approaches in Building Construction Industries In South East Nigeria: The Challenges**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study examined challenges inherent in different leadership styles in building construction industries in south-east of Nigeria. It adopted descriptive research design. One research question and hypothesis guided the study. The population for this study consisted of 2890; 945 contractors and 1945 employees from the 290 registered building construction firms handling public buildings within South-East, Nigeria. A sample size of 351; 103 contractors and 248 employees were used for the study. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire. The face and content validity of the instrument was established using the opinions of three experts from the Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The findings of this study revealed that inability to influence others, characteristics of task in organization, inability to initiate actions and move others to share goals and ineffective/poor leadership skills were ranked the highest challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction industries.

It recommended among others that managers of building construction industries in South-East of Nigeria should have good influence on members of their staff; exhibit good and efficient leadership skills; clearly define tasks and responsibilities assigned to their subordinates for effective job performance.

## **KEYWORDS**

building construction industries;  
performance; challenges in leadership  
styles

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership is shaped by local conditions, individual background/experience and circumstances. The evolution of leadership eras led to the realization that organizations world over experience complexity posed by both macro and micro factors. Every organization in its endeavour to produce or render services constantly face challenges of seeking the balance point of adapting to the changing operational terrain and remaining competitive and surviving in the face of macro factors that impose themselves. In response to these challenges, organizations develop strategic plans that focus on positioning the organization at a competitive advantage over its competitors. (Alhowaish, 2015).

Agar (2017) noted that most leaders in organisations do not appreciate the ever-changing operational terrain and surprising changes that cause un-anticipated problems. Leaders find themselves not ready to respond and adapt to the rapid changes, which are interconnected (Jackson, 2013). As a result of agitation by the ever changing and increasingly complicated operational terrain leaders have traditionally responded by seeking more control and reviewing procedures that have sustained the organisation in the past. Typically, such leaders seek to “get things under control, get better information, standardize procedures, create new departments, do more of whatever you were already doing, just do it better” (Agar, 2017). However, experience has proven that those leaders such solutions are inadequate in dealing with emerging complex problems.

The uniqueness of construction is probably the most often mentioned feature in publications on construction project management. The uniqueness comes from the distinct features of construction products (Drewer, 2018). This uniqueness of construction also makes construction project management a distinct discipline as it poses considerable challenges in various contexts, including:

- i. Industry specific challenges and general,
- ii. Environment challenges (socio-cultural, economic, technological, legal and regulatory, environmental, and ethical).

Industry Specific Challenges and General: Industry specific challenges according to Serrador and Turner (2015.) include:

- a. Poor social image of construction;
- b. Fluctuating construction activity;
- c. Greater private-sector participation in infrastructure projects;
- d. Globalization of construction leading to increased foreign participation in domestic industries;
- e. Growing size of projects;
- f. The need to integrate an increasingly large number of construction processes;
- g. Fast track nature of projects and multi-project environments;
- h. Widening application of franchising in the industry;
- i. Increasing vertical integration in the packaging of projects;
- j. Increasing trend of strategic alliances such as joint ventures, consortia, mergers, acquisitions, and partnering relationships.

In supporting the above view Oke and Ayodeji (2013) note challenges such as:

- a. The gap between research and practice;
- b. The need to attain the highest client value as well as its creation;
- c. Capturing, and distribution.

Recently, Songer (2016) noted that the construction industry faces major leadership challenges including:

1. Lack of quality people owing to difficulty in attracting talent;
2. Ageing workforce; and other workforce issues such as change or transition; teamwork and communication; training and education.

Socio-cultural challenges according to Zheng et al. (2015) include:

1. Spreading wave of terrorism;
2. Wars;
3. political upheavals;
4. security problems;
5. increased private participation in infrastructure projects; and
6. cross cultural issues.

Accordingly, Adebayo et al. (2018), economic challenges to include:

1. Funding difficulties;
2. Uncertain economic conditions;
3. Threats of high inflation due to increased energy prices;
4. Fluctuating stock values and exchange rates; and
5. Cash flow problems.

To Adebayo et al. (2018), technological challenges include:

- i. increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) such as in
- ii. e-procurement; technological gap between developed and developing countries, leading to matters of technology transfer; and
- iii. technological innovation and advancement.

Legal and regulatory challenges according to Shehu and Mahmood, (2014) include:

- i. Different legal systems,
- ii. Litigation procedures, and
- iii. Arbitration methods within and across countries.

Omolayo, (2017) opines that sustainability and environmental challenges include:

- i. Increasingly stricter environmental regulations;
- ii. Increased awareness of the need for sustainable construction.

Ethical challenges according to Barrido and Abadiano (2018), ethical challenges include:

- i. Corruption in both developing and industrialized countries; and fraudulent,
- ii. unethical and unprofessional practices in professions.

According to Gleick (2010), this era of disillusionment of leaders about the causes of the emergent problems birthed complexity theory, which pointed out that the world and corporations operate in a complex environment. Complexity theory emerged as a field of study as a result of the realization that striving for predictability, certainty, stability and equilibrium fails in the face of complex situations.

Hence, Raziq et al. (2018) catalogue current and emerging leadership challenges, including

- i. challenges that are industry specific,
- ii. general to businesses and in the operating environment

For example, certain surveys show that respondents in the construction industry had low satisfaction with their leaders' ethics and authenticity (Serrador & Turner, 2015). As shown in the above studies, much of the blame for the industry's poor performance in most countries is often allocated to factors outside of the control of construction organizations and professionals. Certain authors blame economic cycles and the political environment. Even where the features and failings of the industry, as well as its practices and procedures, are highlighted, practitioners and certain researchers do not appreciate the importance of leadership in the construction industry.

In addition, the Nigerian construction industry is stuck in traditional construction processes and fragmentation of work processes which leads to multiple exchanges of information between people, disciplines and project phases. Interestingly, studies such as Popoola, Aluko and Omoyajowo (2024) and Abubakar, Ibrahim, Kado and Bala (2014) have shown that Building Information Modelling (BIM) is capable of addressing these problems by promoting better integration of construction processes and enabling project teams to collaborate and exchange project information electronically.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The professional operation in the building construction project is complex; require longer times to complete and with interrelated-task therefore necessitate and require a human resource manager with the skills to motivate and influence actions/inactions of others to achieve the overall organization/project' objectives (Yusuf, 2014). Every organization/firm has set of policies and standard practices upon which their core functions are built, understanding of organization policies and practices by a leader determines how effective such leadership system will be. Whenever a leader fails to fully understand the organization policies and practices, there could be lots of mistakes, errors and lapses in the organization operations and poor leadership system due to leader's knowledge. This situation undoubtedly is obtainable in South East Nigeria where large numbers of construction firms operate (Yusuff et al. 2014). Hence, this present research seeks to examine challenges inherent in different leadership styles in building construction industries in South East.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine choices and challenges of leadership styles in building construction projects in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. to identify the challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction projects in the study areas
2. to establish the factors influencing the choice of leadership style on construction industries in South-East Nigeria.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction industries in the study area?

## Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Challenges faced by leadership approaches have no significant impact on the performance of building construction industries in South-East Nigeria

## METHODS

The study adopted descriptive research design. The population for this study consisted of 2890; 945 contractors and 1945 employees from the 290 registered building construction firms handling public buildings within South-East Nigeria according to data from Ministry of Industry, Trade and Commerce: Anambra State, Abia State, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo State chapter. A sample size of 351; 103 contractors and 248 employees were used for the study. The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's sample reduction formula. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire titled **Challenges in Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance Questionnaire (CLSOPQ)**. It has sections A and B. Section A contains items on demographic data of respondents while Section B contains 14 items with five response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The face and content validity of the instrument was established using the opinions of three experts from the Department of Building, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was established using a pilot test involving 20 construction contractors and employees of construction companies in South-South Nigeria which is not part of the sample for the study. which was outside the study area but have similar features to the studied area. Data collected was analysis using Cronbach alpha which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87.

The researcher with the help of three research assistants administered the questionnaire and engaged the respondents in follow-up phone calls to ensure good response rate. Arithmetic mean was used to analyze data related to the research question. Standard deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' ratings. The mean ratings were interpreted using the real limit of 3.50. Thus, any item that had a mean rating of 3.50 and above was regarded as agreed while any item with a mean rating less than 3.50 was regarded as not agreed. The t-test statistical tool was used in the analysis of hypothesis. The null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated p-value was less than the 0.05 level of significance, it meant that there was a significant difference between mean scores. Conversely, where the calculated p-value was greater than or equal to the level of significance (0.05), it meant that there was no significant difference and the hypothesis was accepted.

**Research Question 1:** What are the challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction industries in the study area?

**TABLE 1:** Respondents opinion on the challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction Industries.

S/N	Items	SA	D	SD	U	T	$\bar{x}$	Ranking	Decision	
		5	4	3	2					1
1	fluctuating construction activity	118 (590)	108 (432)	76 (228)	8 (16)	3 (3)	313 (1269)	4.05	4	Agreed
2	Lack of a formal structure	102 (510)	144 (576)	39 (117)	18 (36)	10 (10)	313 (1249)	3.99	5	Agreed
3	Lack of skills	142 (710)	86 (344)	58 (174)	18 (36)	9 (9)	313 (1273)	4.07	3	Agreed
4	Diversity in society	140 (700)	84 (336)	54 (108)	28 (56)	7 (7)	313 (1207)	3.85	8	Agreed

S/N	Items	SA	D	SD	U	T	$\bar{x}$	Ranking	Decision	
		5	4	3	2					1
5	Inexperience	116 (580)	78 312	64 192	42 84	13 13	313 1180	3.77	10	
6	Educational background	159 (795)	127 (508)	11 (33)	10 (20)	6 (6)	313 (1362)	4.35	1	Agreed
7	other security problems	136 (680)	76 304	56 168	30 60	13 15	313	3.70	11	Agreed
8	Unstable political environment	114 (570)	110 (440)	68 (204)	15 (30)	6 (6)	313 (1250)	3.99	5	Agreed
9	lack of support from senior leadership	122 (610)	70 (280)	70 (210)	40 (80)	11 (11)	313 (1191)	3.80	9	Agreed
10	Ineffective organizational culture	126 630	86 344	46 138	40 80	15 15	313 1207	3.85	8	Agreed
11	Racial divide in the workplace	149 (745)	137 (548)	11 (33)	10 (20)	6 (6)	313 (1320)	4.21	2	Agreed
12	Lack of self-confidence by managers	116 580	98 392	66 198	22 44	11 11	313 1225	3.91	7	Agreed
13	Autocratic management	128 640	104 416	30 90	42 85	9 9	313 1239	3.95	6	Agreed
14	Lack of training	124 (620)	116 (464)	24 (72)	33 (66)	16 (16)	313 (1238)	3.95	6	Agreed

From tables 1, Respondents were asked to identify the challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction industries in South-East Nigeria. The table revealed that item 1 to 14 has a mean score of 4.05, 3.99, 4.07, 3.85, 3.77, 4.35, 3.70, 3.99, 3.80, 3.85, 4.21, 3.91, 3.95 and 3.95 respectively. This showed that all the mean scores of items were above the decision point of 3.00; hence, they agreed that all the items in the table are challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction projects in South-East Nigeria. Educational background (4.35), racial divide in the workplace (4.21), Lack of skills (4.07) and fluctuating construction activity (4.05) were ranked the highest challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction projects.

### Hypothesis 1

Challenges faced by leadership approaches have no significant impact on the performance of building construction industries in South East Nigeria. Data obtained in respect of hypothesis 1 were analyzed and presented in Table 3.

**TABLE 3:** Summary of t-test comparison of the mean ratings of respondents on the extent challenges faced by leadership approaches affect organizational performance of building construction projects.

Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P-value	Decision
Between Groups	79.529	2	38.264		
Within Groups	294.958	194	9.334	0.000	Significant
Total	374.487	196	3.799		

Results in Table 3 show that there was a significant difference among the building worker and professionals in terms of their mean ratings on the extent challenges faced by leadership approaches effect organizational performance of building construction industries in South East Nigeria. It was observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 2 is nominator and 194 of denominator, the calculated F-ratio is 9.334 and *P-value* .000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that the challenges faced by leadership approaches in construction firms affect organizational performance of construction projects in South-East Nigeria and these include fluctuating construction activity, Lack of a formal structure, Lack of skills, Diversity in society, Inexperience, Educational background, security problems, Unstable political environment, lack of support from senior leadership, Racial divide in the workplace, Lack of self-confidence by managers, Autocratic management and Lack of training This is in agreement with Asim (2016) who asserted that construction organisations should be looking for experienced professionals with effective leadership and management skills rather than technical experience; which is also important. This is also in agreement with Hamid et al. (2016) who asserted that managers who overcome leadership challenges can easily focus on the development of value system of employees, their motivational level and moralities with the development of their skills. Good leadership according to Hamid et al acts as a bridge between leaders and followers to develop clear understanding of followers' interest, values and motivational level. It basically helps followers achieve their goals while working in the organizational setting, encouraging followers to be expressive and adaptive to new and improved practices and changes in the environment.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that inability to influence others, characteristics of task in organisation, inability to initiate actions and move others to share goals and ineffective/poor leadership skills were ranked the highest challenges faced by leadership approaches on construction industries.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of the study and the conclusion reached, it was recommended that:

1. managers of building construction industries in South-East of Nigeria should have good influence on members of their staff.
2. managers of building construction industries in South-East of Nigeria should exhibit good and efficient leadership skills.
3. managers of building construction industries in South-East of Nigeria should clearly define tasks and responsibilities assigned to their subordinates for effective job performance.

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