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LEADERSHIP AT PROJECT CONSTRUCTION SITES: A CASE TO PONDER

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Abstract

There has been this contentious argument on, who among the professionals within the project construction industry, should serve as project manager or site supervisor. This research discussed the attributes that qualifies someone to leads a team with different skills working at project construction sites. It distinguished between leadership and management, while outlining the various styles of leadership in places of work. The research designs adopted were explorative and argumentative. These methods required gathering relevant information and data from existing literature, visits to, and interactions with workers at project sites. The concept guiding this study revolved around capacity building as Nigerian government has formulated several policies with the view to enhancing capacity building for self-reliance in the construction industry. The research outlined different stages involved in project construction from conception period to completion of the construction, and the role of each professional. The professionals are estate surveyors and valuers, town planners, architects, land and quantity surveyors, and engineers with different areas of specialization. The research showed that estate surveyors and valuers, architects and civil engineers are capable to lead other workers (skilled and unskilled) at project construction sites based on their academic training and professional attainment. It concluded that civil engineers, particularly structural engineers, are better qualified to serve as sites supervisors of large engineering concerned such as high rise buildings and highway with bridges. It recommended a collaborative approach for effective project conceptualization, construction and maintenance for durability.

Keywords: Leadership, Project, Construction Site, Professional, Site Managers/Supervisor.

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Introduction

Construction of buildings and other projects are carried out on a daily basis particularly in major urban centres. The execution of these projects requires huge sum of money in the form of equity capital or borrowed funds. The projects are carried out in different phases, ranging from conceptualization of the project to site acquisition, preparation of development plans, construction, provision of basic infrastructure to the structure, occupation and management/maintenance for durability (Udoudoh, 2024). To attain a successful project execution and timely delivery, professionals who are experts in various aspects of the projects are consulted by the project initiator or financier. The professionals include town planners, estate surveyors and valuers, land surveyors, architects, engineers, quantity surveyors, amongst others. The issue that often comes up at project sites is '*who should lead other professionals as project manager or supervisor to execute the project?* The duties and responsibilities of these professionals are outlined in the various statutes and bye-laws that established and regulate their practices. This paper is poised to critically examine the concept of leadership and different styles of leadership in practice. It shall also look at the laws and statutes, the responsibilities and operations of various professionals at various stages of project construction in order to determine who is adequately qualified to lead other staff at project sites.

Conceptual Clarification: What is Leadership?

Leadership is the act of influencing the activities of others in order to achieve organizational goals. It is a relationship between the leader and the led. There must be people to be led (Akpakpan and Okpota, 2021 & Segun, 2022)**.** This implies that leaders are those at the helm of affairs with the ability and authority to influence others within the system to attain set out goals. Essentially, people tend to follow those whom they perceive that can provide a means of achieving their own desires, wants and needs. This suggests that leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Thus, the primary essence of leadership is followership. The concept guiding this study revolves around capacity building of workers which requires regular training in order to meet with the current expectations at project sites. Basically, the concept of leadership is an interesting one, particularly in the building construction industrial that uses both human and material resources for the attainment of set goals. It requires the project leader to exhibit a certain level of ability that would enable him to change the directions of his other workers at site to work with confidence and zeal. It is a process where one person exerts certain levels of influence over other workers to execute and accomplished an envisaged task for the benefits of the industry. In this manner, it entails getting workers to understand and believe in the investor's vision to attain certain goals. The essence is to lift workers' visions to an expected performance standard. This is pertinent as execution of tasks at sites is guided by the rules and requirements set by the project development authority. Where the leaders are not able to exercise the set rules and requirements, subordinates may work at less than expected capacity, which is just enough to satisfy the requirements to hold onto the jobs (Udoudoh, 2026). Going by this view, leadership can be seen as the sum total of the leader having direct working relationship with his subordinate staff. The processes cut across effective communication, ability to motivate every worker, and manage conflicts toward achieving organizational goals. The question that often come to fore is: *Is leadership synonymous to management?* The difference between leadership and management is that while a leader focuses on people, a manager focuses on the system and structure of the organization. According to Egbenta (2012), management is one form of activity that no living creature can avoid. It involves commanding, directing,

planning and co-ordinating of staff of the organization, among other responsibilities; whereas, leadership applies diplomacy in the realization of organizational goals. It is in this perspective that leadership is seen as a visible aspect of management with the potential of transforming the workforce into a willing team with appropriate synergy to collectively actualize determined corporate objectives (Udoudoh, 2026). It is through effective leadership that organizations' management achieves success.

Styles of Leadership

In the context of this research, we observed that different leaders often adopt various leadership styles based on their personalities, experiences, and the demands placed upon the university. Leadership styles refer to the pattern of thinking, feeling and behaviour that a leader uses to deal with his staff and situations. It is conceived by Segun (2022) as the behaviours or processes that leaders portray or participate to enable extraordinary things to be done in or by an organization. The leadership styles are unique as each leader's operations depend on his academic and professional background, situation and inclined paradigm; thus, the reason why some leaders thrive while others flounder. For instance, professional qualifications have become the paramount indices of leadership, as success depends on how leadership styles mesh with their teams and organizational cultures. Scholars including Segun (2022), Okeleke and Agwoje (2023), Uyanga (2025) and Udoudoh (2026) have identified several styles of leadership in working organizations to include autocratic, transactional, transformational, distributed, contingency, managerial, ethical and laissez-faire. Autocratic leadership style is also called authoritative leadership as the authority and decision making are embodied in the leader. The leader imposes his authority on the organization without deriving his legitimacy from the governed. It is whatever the leader says that must be done. An autocratic leader reinforces his leadership by preventing staff members from taking part in decision making. This clearly shows that the subordinates have little or no input in decision making. To achieve his goal, he uses threats, the authority of his position and the vigour of his own personality. Invariably, an autocratic leader places more emphasis on task performance than on sharpening subordinate staff orientation towards achievement of set goals.

Transactional leadership which is otherwise called democratic or participating leadership is rooted in contingent rewards and management-by-exception, which delves into the nitty-gritty of daily university operations. Okeleke and Agwoje (2023) observed that the primary purpose of doing these is to ensure that tasks assigned to staff are executed efficiently, and processes adhered to strictly. Here, the leader consults with his subordinates to get their opinions before taking decisions on any matter. He uses good human relations in dealing with staff of all ranks and cadres. The democrat is flexible, accessible and sympathetic in order to give them opportunity to express their views when necessary. In doing this, they can also develop creative skills, potentials and contribute in formulating goals for the organization. Despite this concessionary approach, such a leader has the right to take any decision and issue instructions based on the collective decision earlier taken. Transformational leadership style is characterized by inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence which emerges as a powerful force for inspiring and motivating stakeholders within the construction environment. It is very ideal in situations that require strategic change since consideration is given to the behaviour of the leader and not his personality. Why? Such leaders are morally driven, credible and have self-confidence, that is, trusting in their ability to adapt to the needs of followers and requirements of the situation. The leaders with these abilities are

more successful because they encourage, inspire and motivate followers to innovate, create change that will help grow and shape the success of the organization (Dan-Baridom, 2021). It is necessary to mention that in transformational leadership, authority and influence are not necessarily assigned to people occupying formal positions, but to whoever is perceived would be able to accomplish specific tasks.

Managerial leadership focuses on the functions, tasks or behaviour of the leader, with the assumption that if these functions are effectively carried out, it will facilitate the work of others in the project site. The leaders who perform duties as managers are responsible for policy implementation, maintenance of site stability, and dealing with the day-to-day routines of the job such as allocating, providing and distributing construction material and financial resources, maintaining effective communication with stakeholders, and mediating conflicts, amongst other responsibilities. These leaders also see to steady progress of work in line with the stipulated requirements and timely delivery of completed project. Contingency leadership relates to how leaders respond to the unique development of work at site and attendant problems encountered while executing the work. In practice, leaders are faced with a variety of circumstances and situations which require different management styles to effectively tackle them. Uyanga (2025) pointed out that the ability to match the appropriate leadership style with the situation at hand is the hallmark of the contingent leadership style. This becomes necessary on realization that leadership within public project site is not a one-size-fits-all paradigm when compared to smaller private project site; rather, it is a diverse spectrum of styles and approaches that leaders need to adopt based on their personalities, experiences, and demands placed upon them by the investor.

Laissez-faire leadership which is also called ideographic leadership comes to play when a clear-cut agreement is established with employees as to what should be done, when, and with what resources. Here, the leader is very tolerant while the subordinates are free to do what they want. In fact, the leader exercises no authority but simply displays a symbolic role. As pointed out by Segun (2022), the impact of laissez-faire leaders on followers are conflicting roles or responsibilities, lack of decision making or accountability, and lack of direction for the future. It is considered as a destructive leadership behaviour as it is a correlated with role conflicts, role ambiguity, and conflicts with co-workers. Basically, the responsibilities for decision making and discipline remain with the project owner and/or financier, but the leader needs to carry out periodic monitoring of progress of each staff performance without losing sight on staff needs to attain expected goal. Strategic leadership is an extremely complex but critical form of leadership. It involves skilful deployment of managerial creativity, problem-solving proficiency, and forward-thinking strategic vision to propel both team members focus towards the achievement of long lasting objectives. This signifies the place of heads of units as they should be able to anticipate, envision, maintain flexible attitude to think logically in order to empower others to initiate changes that will create a viable future necessary for the project attainment. Essentially, strategic leadership provides the vision, direction, purpose, and context for the growth and success of any organization.

Capacity Building at Construction Site vis-a-vis Leadership

As earlier stated, the concept guiding this study revolves around capacity building. This is what leadership entails especially at construction site because of the demand of professionals. It is the process that includes all forms of training and education to create an ensemble of capabilities, abilities and potentials for growth and development. It involves the

development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of workforce in areas of policy making, design, development and enforcement to enhance effective project execution. It is aimed at establishing sufficient manpower that can boost effective execution of desired project from the available land and human resources. It focuses at understanding the interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of construction systems and the need to produce a capable workforce that can deliver the project at within the available budget and at expected time (Udoudoh, 2018, Omuaru, 2018).

Over the years, government has been formulating several policies with the view to enhancing the capacity building for self-reliance. The first major attempt by the Nigerian government at capacity building was the establishment of Nigerian Railway Corporation Training School in the early 1900's. The School trained apprentices in trades under electrical, fitting, fabrication, woodworks and machines. This School was also engaged in conducting training for its own technicians as well as those sent to it from corporate organizations like Savannah Sugar Company, Bacita; Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, and recently National Directorate of Employment (Usanga, 2018). This was followed by the establishment of Technical Schools and Colleges nationwide, including Yaba College which is now Yaba College of Technology; College of Arts, Science and Technology in the erstwhile three regions of Nigeria. The one at Enugu later became the Enugu Campus of University of Nigeria in 1962, amongst others. These colleges were established with the primary goal of training middle level manpower to grow Nigerian scientifically and technologically for the overall national economy. Of recent, are the Polytechnics and Universities of Technology which are empowered to trained high level manpower for the construction and engineering industries. These Colleges, Polytechnics and Universities have Schools or Faculties of Environmental Sciences/Technology that train students for the building/construction industry.

Professionals in the Construction Industry

The construction industry requires the consortium of trained and experienced professionals to carry out diverse aspects of activities in order to execute any project. The professionals include, though not limited to, Estate Surveyors and Valuers, Urban and Regional Planners, Architects, Land Surveyors, Quantity Surveyors, Engineers (civil, structural, electrical), and many others who perform their services in accordance to legal framework. Other workers who carried out the actual project construction at sites are masons, carpenters, iron benders, painters, amongst others. A clear delineation of the different stages of development and understanding of how each stage affects the other is fundamental to a successful project execution (Udoudoh, 2024). An error in any stage of the development process may lead to risk that may affect the entire project.

Table 1: Stages of Project Development and required Professionals

S/N	Stages of Development	Activities	Professionals/Other Workers Required
1.	Site Acquisition	Scouting for suitable site	i) Estate Surveyors and Valuers ii) Estate Agents
2.	Preparation of Development Plans	i) Land Surveying ii) Preparation of building plans iii) Approval of building plans iv) Issuance of C-of-O	i) Land Surveyors ii) Architects iii) Builders iv) Town Planners v) State Governor
3.	Sourcing of Finance	Consulting mortgage/financial institutions for funding	i) Estate Surveyors & Valuers ii) Financial Experts

4.	Building Construction	i) Excavation and pouring of foundation ii) Blockwork and Roofing iii) Finishing	i) Contractors ii) Engineers/Builders iii) Bricklayers (Masons) iv) Carpenters v) Iron benders vi) Painters
5.	Provision of Estate Infrastructure	Provision of access roads, electricity, water and security at Site	i) Town Planners ii) Electrical Engineers iii) Plumbers
6.	Estate Management	i) Letting and Leasing ii) Estate maintenance iii) Rent collection	i) Estate Surveyors & Valuers ii) Architects iii) Estate Agents

Source: Udoudoh (2016 & 2024)

Table 1 outlined the professionals saddled with responsibilities of carrying out various tasks at each stage of the construction. Their respected statutory functions include;

Estate Surveyors and Valuers: These are the principal experts and custodians of land policies. Their other responsibilities include:

i. Preparation of feasibility and viability appraisals for projects;
ii. Sourcing/arranging of mortgage finances for real estate developers;
iii. Management of land, Sales and letting of properties
iv. Coordinating the activities of other professionals in the course of land acquisition and development.

Urban and Regional Planners: Their professional services include:

i. Preparation of structural plan for areas, new towns or settlements.
ii. Preparation of block plans and site plans
iii. Carrying out of site investigation, processing of planning approvals.

Architects

The scope of services architects provide includes:

i. Preparation of preliminary and full concept designs with particular regard to clients' requirement, site information, planning and statutory regulations and budget;
ii. Directing, monitoring and coordinating the construction works to ensure adherence to specifications;
iii. Managing the defects liability period;
iv. Drawing of building and master plans.

Land Surveyors

The primary responsibility of a land surveyor is carry out the review of land using technical equipment to ensure its suitability for project construction or any other development. This can be broken down into:

i. Carrying out of surveys to determine perimeter, layout, topography, details control and aerial.
ii. Locate the direction and length of lines, boundary lines, then set out the lines and grades needed for the construction of buildings, roads, dams, and other structures.

Quantity Surveyors

The quantity surveyors carried out the following functions:

i. Preparation of contract documentations, bills of quantities and schedule of materials and plans.

ii. Preparation of contract administration and project management
iii. Handling of project evaluation, analysis, reporting and measurement of variations.
iv. Advising on tendering procedure, contractual arrangements and materials procurement.
v. Facilities Management which involves rehabilitating, restoring and refurnishing works on damage done to existing building and structures.

Engineers

Civil, structural and electrical engineers handle the various engineering activities pertaining to building, structural and electrical drawings and installations of buildings and other structures on and below the earth's surface.

Who leads at Project Construction Sites?

There have been serious arguments on who, among the professionals in the building industry, should heads the workforce at project construction sites. This question occurs frequently and required being answered. After a thorough examination of the major responsibilities of professionals within the industry, we found out that Estate Surveyors are trained on choice of suitable sites for envisaged project after a comprehensive conduct of feasibility and/or viability appraisal. They are also better equipped in advising on how to raise funds for project and effective maintenance and overall management of the completed project for durability. The architects drew the building or project plans in collaboration with structural engineer who designed the structures (columns and beams) and electrical installations for the project. The engineers, particularly civil and structural engineers, are better qualified to serve as sites supervisors of large engineering concerned such as high rise buildings and highway with bridges. The quantity surveyors prepare bills of quantities, schedule of materials and plans for project execution. They handle project evaluation, analysis, reporting and measurement of variations, in addition to tendering procedure and materials procurement (See Table 1 above). To achieve the goal of project, the architect has to design the project with proper consideration to developer's budget, available resources and prospect of maintenance for sustainability. This requires working in closed contact with the quantity surveyor, facility manager, maintenance/service engineers to realize an economically viable project. Project evaluation is supposed to be a continuous process throughout the development period to ensure that the developer's dream is achieved. This is an aspect of performance measurement which requires periodic evaluation of investment in order to determine that at each stage, the target objectives are being achieved. It is an exercise performed by estate surveyors and valuers.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This research has shown that every professional within the construction industry has great responsibilities in the execution of project; but estate surveyors and valuers, architects and civil engineers are capable to lead other workers (skilled and unskilled) at project construction sites by their academic training and professional attainment. However, there is serious need for collaborative approach for effective project conceptualization, construction and maintenance for durability. Collaborative engagement is increasingly recognized as a critical component of effective decision-making and operations in project construction sites. The involvement of relevant professionals, who are stakeholders in projects development, ensures a high level success in project execution. The integration of stakeholders' inputs can enhance the relevance and applicability of diverse skills within complex systems where multiple interests intersect. Experience has revealed a concerning trend where different professionals tactically failed to engage the services of other stakeholders at construction

sites under their supervision. The consequences of this selfish action are the many uncompleted or collapsed projects that littered the length and breadth of Nigeria. Collaborative engagement of relevant professionals in decision-making process and actual project execution can significantly influence job performance, timely delivery and overall project satisfaction to the project owner and overall economic attainment within the construction industry. This would certainly reduce those technical risks associated with construction sites that often lead to project collapse during and after delivery.

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