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Training the Professional for Quality Service Delivery in the Building Industry

Buhari Sadah Sodangi
Department of Architecture,
Hassan Usman Katsina Polytechnic,
Katsina, Katsina State of Nigeria

Abstract **- There is a perception that majority of quality-related issues are caused by human factors. The issue of professional training plays an important role in quality-related problems in the building industry. This paper highlights the current level of professional training in the building industry and how training influences the quality of building projects. A comprehensive literature review was carried out to get opinions of professionals in the industry. Results indicate that there is a gap in the training and knowledge amongst professionals on their capacities as professionals and the challenges facing the industry. This is attributed to the inadequacy of the training and development at the institutions of learning and the practice thereafter. This has had significant impact on the building service quality. This study concludes that professional training is a pre-requisite to attaining sustained and acceptable quality in the building industry and suggests several approaches to enhance training and development among building professionals to improve quality service in the industry.**

Keywords: Training; Building Industry; Professionals; Quality service

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Quality in the building industry can be said to be meeting the legal, aesthetic and functional requirements of a project. Getting it right means better public services,delivered more efficiently, effectively andeconomically (Ojambati, Akinbile, &Abiola-Falemu, 2012). Achieving this motive rest solely onthe quality of the professional involved at the predesign,design and construction stages. According to Aniekwu&Ozochi (2010) education is the key tocreating, adapting and spreading knowledge. Basiceducation increases people's capacity to learn and tointerpret information. But higher education increases thetechnical training needed to build a labour force that cankeep up with a constant stream of technologicaladvances, which compress product cycles and speed thedepreciation of human capital, such as the building industry.Aniekwu&Ozochi (2010) went further to state that outside the classroom, peoples' working and living environments are the setting for still morelearning, well beyond the ages associated with formaleducation.Hence, Obi &Zakari (2005) contributed to this opinion that the chief aim of training and development is to removeperformance deficiencies. This is further buttressed by Solomon (1999) when he stated that "Employees today must have access to continual training of all types just to keep up. If you don'tactively stride against the momentum of skillsdeficiency you lose ground.

Thus, Training is a planned and systematic effort aimed at improving current andfuture performance of a job by increasing his skilland knowledge (Adeleke, 2000) .Training therefore isthe process whereby employees learn the skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviors necessary to perform their jobs effectively. This paper is set to examine the impact of training and development on the professionals of the building industry for quality service delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Professionals and the need for Quality in their Services

It is important to understand the term "profession" and what is expected from professionals before discussing the issue of professional training in depth. According to Greenhalgh (1997), the essence of the word "professionalism" can be defined as the possession and autonomous control of a body of specialized knowledge, which when combined with honorific status, confers power upon its holders. Professionals have always been linked with the notion of "service" so that a profession is described as a group of people organized to serve a body of specialized knowledge in the interests of society based on the perceived relationship (Appelbaum and Lawton, 1990). That is to say professionalism ascribes responsibility not to an individual, but to all professionals practicing in a particular profession. Carey and Doherty (1968) stated that it automatically ties up with more practical concepts and expectations from the public, encompassing issues such as competence, responsibility and willingness to serve the public. Consequently, one of the problems facing the building industry is the issue of quality in the services rendered by the professionals. In a project scenario, quality can be defined as meeting the legal, aesthetic (Arditi and Gunaydin, 1997) and functional requirements of a project (Berawi, 2006). Clients and customers, both from the public and private sectors, nowadays place more emphasis on the quality of products rather than the price which was the major concern in the past. Hence, a rapid expansion of international competition in quality had occurred (Tsiotras and Gotzamani, 1996; Abdul-Rahman and Berawi, 2002). In terms of quality in the building industry, Turk (2006), citing Arditi and Gunaydin (1999), mentioned that 'high quality building project' includes factors like the design being easily understandable and applicable, conformity of design with specifications, economics of construction, ease of operation, ease of maintenance and energy efficiency. Zantanidis and Tsiotras (1998) and Abdul-Rahman and Berawi (2002) mentioned that expectations for quality construction projects will continue to

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grow rapidly as the number of affluent, educated and quality-conscious customers are increasing.

Training and the Acquisition of Development Sensitive Knowledge

Training is the process of bringing a person to a deserved state of efficiency by instruction and practice. Training has been defined as the systematic development of the attitude, knowledge and skill behavior pattern required by an individual in order to perform adequately a given task or job. Putting it differently, it is an activity, which is concerned with making employees more articulate and efficient in the performance of their current tasks or in preparation for a new type of job to meet the dynamic needs of the organization. Hence, training with the proper content is very critical for enhancing people's capabilities to harness knowledge. Besides teaching new and better skills, training produce people who can monitor technological trends, assess the irrelevance to the country's prospects and help formulate an appropriate national technological strategy. This invariably has a positive implication on the performance and output of employees of any organization.

State of Education and Training of Building Industry Professionals and its implication on the Quality of their Services

Technical education is substantially neglected by policy makers and oriented to the teaching of traditional hand skills that are often divorced from labor market requirements. Higher education enrolls a very modest 4% of the relevant age cohort. This level compares poorly with economic competitors such as South Africa (17%), India (7%), Indonesia (11%) and Brazil (12%) (World Bank, 2006). Since the education of technical and professional staff to operate in the building industry can only take off beyond this point, it is apparent that the education of professionals to man the industry is seriously hampered. As asserted by Aniekwu&Ozochi (2010), there are three basic reasons that can be adduced for this trend of things:

1. By international assessment as of 1997, Nigeria was considered really poor as over 70% of her population lived on less than $1 per day and over 90% lived on less than $2.0 per day consequently, a substantial percentage of the educable population drop out just to focus on subsistence.

2. There is a chronic lack of facilities to offer adequate education to all deserving and qualified Nigerians and consequently another substantial percentage of the qualified population drop off due to lack of appropriate institutions to accommodate their educational needs.

3. Funding of the educational system in Nigeria has been identified as one of the most pervasive and the greatest challenge to education and the training of all categories of professionals in the country. Experts agree that the most serious problem facing the Nigeria educational system is the manner in which the sector is funded, organized, planned and administered. The United Nation's Education and Scientific Committee (UNESCO) approved standard budgetary allocation to education is 26% of the national budget in order to engender proper development in that sector and in appreciation of the keyrole of that sector in economic development. And for the past 15 years, no government in Nigeria has been able to meet this minimum standard and indeed, since 1999 and the advent of democratic rule in Nigeria, the budgetary allocation to education has not risen beyond 10%. While many countries have met or are striving to attain the UNESCO approved minimum budget allocation, Nigeria has continued to accord low priority to education and indeed the allocation of only 1.8% in the current year (Hartnett, 2000).

The government also seems totally oblivious of the importance of education in her scale of priorities, institutional mechanisms for supplying training to the industry have come under strain as the educational infrastructure is neglected, over stretched and not conformed to societal needs. Declining enrolment and falling contributions have left the existing training institutions facing increasing deficits while the majority of the industry's workforce is still unable to access such training. Thus, it was noted that, while the theoretical education of engineers in Nigeria used to compare favorably with that of any University in the world, the opportunity for practical training is extremely inadequate (Oseni, 1987). The same is true for polytechnics and other technical schools in the country. This situation has deteriorated so badly that a typical Nigerian graduate cannot be accepted for postgraduate work in most developed countries. Even the theoretical aspect of his training is now so deficient that he has never seen nor conducted experiments in key engineering principles. This as a consequences of the low level of priority accorded education by the government and the import dependent nature of Nigeria on foreign technologies, there is a tendency to acquire these technologies faster than the skills and knowledge required to operate them. The education curriculum operated in Nigeria for example, requires students of science-based courses to undergo industrial training program for a substantial percentage of his total training period, as is standard in most schools in the world over. However, there are no places to send these students for their industrial training experience. Thus, that part of the program is loosely implemented. Furthermore, the management of building services must be geared towards the environment inquestion. The educational curriculum for the training of construction professionals in Nigeria is very inadequate in this respect. Not only do the students not get enough training in management courses, but the little management training he gets, is standard and not directed at his business environment. Thus a young graduate is as handicapped, from this point of view as any foreigner in operation within the Nigerian business environment. The long term implication of this situation is extremely disturbing because a time will come when the populations who have been so denied their opportunity of meaningful training will be directly responsible for the continued functioning of not only the building industry but the country in general. This will obviously amount to a regression.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study indicates that inadequate training and development of professionals of the building industry have a direct and negative impact on the quality of construction and thus undermining the clients and users of those projects. Thus there is a need for restructuring of training of professionals towards creating a synergy with the changing realities of the industry; and aligning professional training needs to be more closely harmonized with development priorities and the delivery approaches. Furthermore, there is a need for the coordinated interaction of government, the statutory professional bodies and the organized private and public sector to ensure the appropriate development of all built environment professionals, as well as greater synergy in their training to meet public-sector objectives, industry needs and the all-round promotion of existing and new professions. It is also the author's views that more active participation in the activities of the building industry will offer indigenous professionals the opportunity to learn through experience given the deficiencies in our educational system.

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