

Constraints to Quantity Surveying Awareness In Nigeria

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Abstract

“To pay more for a product or service is bad but to pay less is worse” is a popular truism. By implication, this means that there is always an optimum cost for any product or service. This is the *raison-d’être* of the Quantity Surveying profession as far as construction projects are concerned. This paper examined the origin and status of the Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria and observes its rather unimpressive rate of diffusion both from the standpoints of school leavers and prospective clients. The paper reviewed the constraints to the awareness of the profession in Nigeria and advocates due diligence on the part of Quantity Surveyors with regard to advertisement and effective performance so as to enhance the societal awareness of the profession in Nigeria.

Keywords: Constraints, Quantity Surveying profession, Awareness, Nigeria

1. Introduction

There would be no need for Economists if resources were adequate to meet all competing needs. This statement is true for individuals, organizations and even nations of the world. In other words, because resources are scarce relative to the demand for them, individuals, organisation, and even nations of the world must optimize their use by judiciously deploying them amongst competing needs. Similarly, the Quantity Surveying profession exists to ensure the judicious allocation of the construction resources of materials, manpower, machinery, money, methods and management with the overriding aim of ensuring value for money spent on construction projects. Thus, quantity surveying was succinctly defined by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) as the profession concerned with ensuring that the resources of the construction industry are utilized to the best advantage of society by providing, amongst others, the financial management for projects and a cost consultancy service to both clients and contractors during the whole construction process (Ashworth and Hogg, 2007). The profession of Quantity Surveying could be said to be as old as human existence and civilization because, according to Moneke (2001), no wise person has ever embarked on a construction project without first guesstimating the financial implications.

The profession originated in the united Kingdom in the 17th century out of the need to value the works of tradesmen after they were completed (Anyadike, 2004). It however evolved over time to cover the estimation of construction cost before commencement, contract formulation and documentation, contract administration and arbitration settlement. The training and knowledge of the modern Quantity Surveyor has equipped him to provide services in all aspects of procurement, contractual and project cost management (Lee, Trench and Willis, 2005).

2. Status of Quantity Surveying Awareness in Nigeria

The Quantity Surveying profession was introduced to Nigeria as one of its colonial heritages from Britain. Before Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the profession was practiced in Nigeria by British firms of Quantity Surveyors. After independent, however, some Nigerians on-the-job Quantity Surveying training in Britain began to return home so as to contribute their quotas to national development. In fact, some of them were seconded by foreign firms to work in their offices in Nigeria and manage their on-going construction projects. With time, these Nigerians set up their own firms and sensed the need to come together to form a professional body akin to the RICS in the UK. This led to the formation the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS) in 1969. The profession remained somewhat in the doldrums in Nigeria until December 1986 when it was recognized by the then Federal military government of Nigeria through Decree No. 31. The Decree was subsequently replaced with an Act of Parliament (CAP 383 LFN) when Nigeria attained democratic rule. The

profession got a regulatory legal backing in 1990 with the establishment of the Quantity Surveyors' Registration Board of Nigeria (QSRBN) as a Federal Government Parastatal.

Hitherto, opinions are rife that many Nigerians have still not come to terms with what Quantity Surveying as a profession is all about. For instance, Onyeri (1989) claimed that 95% of Nigerians had neither heard about the profession nor understood the role Quantity Surveyors played. Similarly, Babalola (2006) regretted that majority of Nigerians were yet to benefit from the services rendered by Quantity Surveyors. More recently, Kadiri and Ayodele (2013) found that 82.8% of the 430 respondents surveyed in Osun State, Nigeria misunderstood Quantity Surveyors for either Land or Estate Surveyors. The study also concluded that only 8.1% of young school leavers were aware of the role Quantity Surveyors play on construction projects. In related but separate studies, Awodele (2006) and Mogbo (2000) found that lack of public awareness, inter professional rivalries and government policies in that order, were the major factors besetting the involvement of Quantity Surveyors in engineering projects in Nigeria. Moreover, the number of school leavers who apply to study Quantity Surveying in Nigerian universities are usually abysmally low when compared with those for Architecture and Engineering professions.

3. Constraints to Quantity Surveying Awareness in Nigeria

A number of reasons could be adduced to beset the awareness of the Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria. First is the young age of the profession in Nigeria. The profession is very young in Nigeria when compared with other kindred professions in the built environment. The respective years of recognition by government of these professions in Nigeria were (Architecture - 1969; Engineering - 1970; Land Surveying - 1990; Quantity Surveying - 1986; Estate Management - 1975; Building - 1989; Urban and Regional Planning - 1988). Thus, it could be seen that Quantity Surveying as a profession in Nigeria is relatively younger when compared with Architecture and the Engineering professions, for example. It is expected therefore that it will take some time for the society to get acclimatized with the novelty of the profession. Architecture, Surveying and Engineering for example have been there in the main stream of governance since the colonial era. This point on the young age of the profession was also alluded to by Ashworth (1982) who observed that the full potential of Quantity Surveying had not yet been realized because of its young age when compared with Architecture, Civil Engineering or Accountancy. This younger age of the profession could also be explained to account for the numerical disparity between its membership and those of Architecture and Engineering, for instance. As at today, the number of registered Quantity Surveyors is less than 3,000 as against over 50,000 registered Engineers and about 6000 registered Architects in Nigeria.

The conservative attitude of Quantity Surveyors has also been identified as another major factor hindering the awareness level of Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria. Various traces of conservatism by Quantity Surveyors have also been identified. These include lack of good marketing strategy, sub-consultant status, inability to embrace change and inability to invest in necessary technology. Writing on the survival strategies for Quantity Surveyors, Onyeri (1989) accused Quantity Surveyors in Nigeria of hiding behind the legal cloak of Decree No. 31 of 1986 and past glories while their services were being eclipsed by the intrusion of allied professionals. The paper advocated a paradigm shift by Quantity Surveyors from such mundane behaviours as over reliance on government and local markets as sole sources of patronage; and continued specialization on building works to the disregard of involvement in other areas like engineering facilities, petrochemicals and gas industries. For instance, in a study on the involvement of Quantity Surveyors in the execution of Civil Engineering projects in Southwestern Nigeria, Awodele (2006) found that 85% and 15% of the respondents respectively claimed that their cost management was exercised by Engineers and Quantity Surveyors. Similarly, writing under the caption "a case for direct appointment of Quantity Surveyors", Isiadinso (1987) lamented the practice whereby Nigerian Quantity Surveyors accepted sub-consultancy status to Architects and Engineers instead of insisting on direct appointment by construction clients. This practice has succeeded in shielding the identities of Quantity Surveying consulting firms from private clients in Nigeria.

Asupoto (2008) bemoaned the inability of Quantity Surveyors to invest in necessary Technology as one of the conservative practices bedeviling the growth of the profession in Nigeria and by extension precluding it from

public recognition. It should however be observed here that several practicing firms of Quantity Surveyors in Nigeria have shown remarkable improvement in this area but much could still be done in the area of dedicated websites. Instead of maintaining their conservative posture, Ashworth (1982) advised that Quantity Surveyors must correct the false opinion of society about their profession. According to him, some of these misconceptions include the notion that Quantity Surveying is nothing more than the preparation of bills of quantities and squinting through a tripod telescope. Both Onyeri (1989) and Ashworth (1982) maintained that the profession must be promoted and marketed through advertising to dispel society's misconception about it. In the long-run, the inability of Quantity Surveyors to let people know what Quantity Surveying is all about, the range of professional skills and services they can offer and possibly where to find them stands as the greatest handicap to public awareness of the profession.

Corruption, according to Moneke (2001) is another hindrance to the awareness of the Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria. Since a Quantity Surveyor is concerned with ensuring financial probity and value for value on development projects, he is not the friend of some public or private officials. This explains why despite overwhelming evidence of what he can do to save public or private funds on construction projects, some public and private officials are often reluctant to use him. As such, the Quantity Surveyor is often placed in a difficult position of trying to save money for the client whose representatives or employees are least enthusiastic about that. Generally therefore, the practice of the profession in any corrupt establishment or society is very problematic and unpopular. A true Quantity Surveyor cannot be more popular in a corrupt society than an honest man can be.

The adoption of alternative procurement arrangements has also been identified as a factor militating against Quantity Surveying awareness in Nigeria. Onyeri, (1989) alluded to the use of "Clientele Deal" procurement arrangement – a euphemism for direct contractor – client arrangement of awarding contracts whereby the client negotiates directly with contractors without the involvement or knowledge of consultants but nevertheless using their documents as bases of such negotiations. Talking about alternative procurement systems readily brings direct labour to mind. Most construction clients feel that with direct labour, they only need to negotiate with a contractor or artisan without the need to use a quantity surveyor. This practice is highly in vogue in Nigeria and if unchecked is capable of consigning the relevance of the Quantity Surveyor to obscurity. The fact is that even with the use of direct labour, the preparation of materials quantities (materials schedules), the actual purchasing of the materials and of course labour cost negotiation with the artisans or contractors are veritable areas of cost control and ensuring value for money for which the Quantity Surveyor can safeguard the clients' interest. Eke (2007) recommended the use of the Standard Method of Resource Scheduling (SMRS1) which is more applicable with the informal sector.

In some ways, Quantity Surveyors themselves may have, over the years whether knowingly or otherwise, undermined the awareness of their profession in Nigeria through lack-luster performance. According to Taylor (1981), the real area of interest with regard to performance should not necessarily be on the ability to carry out their functions but rather on sufficient interest and motives of role incumbents. Thus, if Quantity Surveyors' performance is deemed ineffective, abilities may be beyond question in some cases, it may be because motive forces have become impoverished. A sincere answer to this question will help to drive home the point on this position: Have some Quantity Surveyors one way or another not compromised on their financial probity role on construction projects? On the other hand, we cannot look-away from the issue of professional competence with regard to effective performance. This is because according to Ashworth (1982) Quantity Surveyors must be prepared to take a positive step to address the issue of professional competencies in their work since it is possibly one of their best advertising media. In this regard, there is the need to heed the opinion of Oyediran (2007) who posited that for Quantity Surveying education to meet the challenges of the 21st century, graduate Quantity Surveyors must be provided with necessary theoretical and practical skills commensurate with a multidisciplinary industry. In particular, Quantity Surveying syllabi, according to Mogbo (2001), require overhauling to respond to the engineering orientation of modern project trends. However, Adebola (2000) was of the opinion that the level of training for Quantity Surveyors in Nigeria was presently adequate.

The devastating effects of professional rivalry from kindred professions have also taken their tolls on the awareness of Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria. These have been in the areas of professional encroachment and blackmail. As was said earlier, some kindred professions like Architecture and Engineering had the comparative advantage of being earlier comers to the decision making machinery of governments in

Nigeria. As such, in most government agencies in Nigeria, Quantity Surveyors are being sidelined and marginalized. These professions having been in the mainstream of government body politics for such a long time feel threatened by the growth and development of Quantity Surveying profession (Ashworth, 1982). Nevertheless, relevant professional bodies in charge of the Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria should make concerted efforts to insist on the professionalization of the civil service which legal framework has been put in place in Nigeria since the early 1990s.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby proffered with a view to improving the awareness level of Quantity Surveying profession in Nigeria and by extension enhancing its benefits to the citizenry. On performance, the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors and individual Quantity Surveyors for that matter should aggressively pursue ongoing continuing professional development programmes through seminars, workshops and refresher courses so as to bridge perceived knowledge gaps especially in engineering projects. To address the low level of public awareness about the profession, Quantity Surveyors should pursue private sector relevance through personal marketing rather than relying on government patronage alone. This way, the low level of awareness of the sector about the profession will be stepped up. The Quantity Surveyors' Registration Board of Nigeria (QSRBN) which is the body saddled with the responsibility of regulating the practice of the profession in Nigeria, should work in close liaison with various government agencies and regulatory bodies of kindred professions with a view to ensuring adherence to delineated professional boundaries.

5. Conclusion

This paper identified the origin of the Quantity Surveying profession and its introduction to Nigeria. The paper argued that the immense benefits of the profession are yet to be fully appreciated in Nigeria. The constraints to societal awareness of the profession in Nigeria were reviewed. These include the young age of the profession, the climate of corruption and the attitude of Quantity Surveyors themselves, amongst others. The paper recommended that attitudinal change by relevant stakeholders like government, professional bodies and Quantity Surveyors will be required to realize the full potentials of the profession in Nigeria.

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