

# CHALLENGES OF CORPORATE REAL ESTATE OUTSOURCING IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The paper examined the challenges of corporate real estate (CRE) management outsourcing in Nigeria that can prevent organisations in developing countries from using CRE to reduce overall operational costs. A quantitative research methodology was adopted for the study where a survey was conducted with CRE/property managers of business organisations that were listed with the Nigerian Stock Exchange. Questionnaire were distributed to all the 108 CRE managers of business listed with the Nigerian Stock Exchange face-to-face in order to elicit quantitative data in respect of their organizations' practice of CRE outsourcing. The response rate was 75(69%), which was considered appropriate for the study. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics like percentages, arithmetic means and relative importance index. The study found that a larger number of Nigerian business organisations substantially outsourced technical and professional CRE services that required certification so as to enable them comply with legal requirements. Further findings showed that the organisations considered consultants' compliance with request for expression of interest, as mandated by the 2007 Public Procurement Act in choosing outsourced service providers. In practice, the study found that the greatest challenge of CRE outsourcing was the fear of loss of control and core competencies as well as possible conflict of interest arising between the parties. The study recommended the need for the professional real estate body to make the fee chargeable in respect of real estate service delivery flexible to reflect professional inputs in line with the World Bank standards for job procurement. This will make outsourcing to be cost efficient as well as attractive for patronage.

**Keywords:** corporate, corporate real estate, corporations, Nigeria, outsourcing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global business terrain seems to have changed over the last two decades. The current trend with corporate merging, outsourcing and downsizing, according to Lundstroem (1999) has its route in the globalization of capital market and increased worldwide competition. As

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such, many tasks are beyond the capabilities of managers of corporations. Corporations, which is a term used to refer to any medium to large organisations, most certainly including public companies, private companies, government organisations, public institutions and not – for – profit (Joroff et al., 1993) are often in many cases, established with the aim of achieving desired objectives of profitability and productivity.

Recent occurrences have, however, necessitated the need for organisations to adopt drastic approaches in order to ‘stay on course’. For instance, the collapse of the capital market and the global financial crisis, which led to the collapse of many organisations, with many of them struggling for survival require organisations to re-appraise their strategies and adopt a more proactive approach for efficiency and effectiveness.

A common approach adopted by organisations to survive ‘turbulent’ economic situation is outsourcing. Outsourcing is commonly seen as a relatively easy way to drive cost out of a business and as such has primarily been taken up by many organisations and corporate firms in Australia and many other developed countries for that reason (Kooyans, 2000; Wills, 2008; Matsham and Heywood, 2012). The requirements for consolidation and downsizing are main driving forces behind outsourcing (Jaben, 1992). There could, however, be an argument as to whether or not outsourcing has been able to deliver the required results.

Organisations’ desire to outsource non-core services is to enable them concentrate on the provision of their core service(s) in which they have competencies. Non-core services including real estate services are outsourced. Corporate real estate functions may include planning and execution of real estate acquisition and disposal, space management, interior planning and installation, architectural and engineering services, maintenance and operations, capital and operational budgeting (Mole and Taylor, 1992), organizational cost control, financial value creation, real estate entrepreneurialism, business strategy formulation and implementation (Joroff, et al., 1993). Elmuti et al., (1998), referring to a 1995 study by the Economist Intelligence Units and Andersen, noted that 85% of all executives in North America and Europe outsource all or at least, part of one business functions.

Globally, outsourcing of corporate real estate management (CREM) services has grown strongly in recent years, particularly, in Asia which has widely adopted the practice from US multinationals endeavouring to bring consistency and predictability to their international operations (Mackintosh, 2008; Matshan and Heywood, 2012). The practice is now well established in the developed world and is also spreading to the developing world (Mackintosh, 2008). In spite of the established advantages of CREM outsourcing in the advanced countries, an evidence of its practice in emerging economies like Nigeria is missing. If business organisations in such countries will benefit from the practice of outsourcing, corporate managers must have a good understanding of the issues and perspectives of the CREM outsourcing.

With real estate organizations being substantial, and its costs being regarded as the second largest cost of every organization, inefficient use of it by organisations could result in gross financial loss. In view of the fact that every organization requires space/property for its business use, the question that is likely to agitate the minds of foreign investors who are being wooed into the emerging Nigerian economy is: how involved are the local business executives in CRE? If outsourcing has proved to reduce costs, a similar question is, what real estate services are outsourced and what methods are adopted for CREM outsourcing by organizations in developing countries? And lastly, what are the challenges of outsourcing

which local business executives must be prepared to avoid and/or provide solution to? This paper will provide answers to these questions.

This paper is structured as follows. Section two, which discusses the methodology follows the introduction. Section three contains a discussion of the concept of outsourcing and a review of past studies. The fourth section deals with data presentation, analysis and discussion while section five concludes the paper.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study on outsourcing of corporate real estate management was carried out in Lagos State, Nigeria. The choice of Lagos was justified on the basis of the fact that Lagos State is the commercial nerve centre of the country hosting the headquarters of almost all business organisations in the country. This enhanced timely and possible collection of data about the practice of outsourcing.

A quantitative research methodology was adopted for this study where a survey was conducted with CRE/property managers of business organisations that were listed with the Nigerian Stock Exchange. One hundred and eight business organisations were listed with the Nigerian Stock Exchange (Goldstar Directories, 2011) and using Lagos as a case study, structured questionnaires were distributed to the respondents face-to-face. Out of the total 108 organisations, 75 (69%) of them filled and returned the questionnaire, which was found to be useful and considered appropriate for the study. The questionnaire was in three sections. Section one asked questions pertaining to the respondents and their organizations. Questions included the status of the respondents in the organizations as well as educational and professional qualifications of the respondents. In section two, questions about the type of organisations registered, the organizations' involvement in outsourcing of real estate and the strategies being adopted were asked. The last section asked questions pertaining to the current challenges of CRE outsourcing in the industries in Nigeria. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics like percentages, arithmetic means and relative importance index.

## **3. PAST WORKS ON CRE OUTSOURCING**

Organizational resources are many, most of which managers often struggle to provide internally. But in some cases, available resources for non-core services might be insufficient to get the desired result. In such situations, what organisations do is to outsource such services. Outsourcing could be defined as employing an outside agency to manage a function of a company formerly carried out in-house (Rothery and Robertson, 1995). Other definitions of the concept exists. In practice, outsourcing arises when any operation or process that could be or would usually be – performed in-house by an organization's employees is subcontracted to another organization for a substantial period (Garrett, 2011). Outsourcing is used as a general term for the partial or total contracting out of a business task, functions or process to an external service provider. It involves replacing the internal provision of services with the external provision of those services, which include out-tasking, strategic alliances and partnership arrangement (Kenley et al., 2000; Kooymans, 2000; McDonagh and Hayward, 2000; Rothery and Robertson, 1995; Wills, 2002). Documenting the drivers of outsourcing,

authors such as D'Aveni (1994), Rothery and Robertson (1995) and Joroff et al., (1993) refer to outsourcing as reengineering of business process including value reengineering, time compression and value chain analysis, organizational restructuring venting, competition and the ever faster erosion of competitive advantage, changing technology and cost control.

The decision to outsource is a strategic one for every organization. It would require a major thought as to what to outsource and what should be carried out in-house. In either case, organisations would only outsource those services that are its non-core services. The arrangement chooses who, among external providers, could deliver the best of the non-core services for which the contracting organization lacks sufficient knowledge while concentrating on the provision of the core services. However, the magnitude of what to outsource might be a function of the size of the organization itself.

Outsourcing of relatively minor functions is often referred to as out-tasking. While all out-tasking can be outsourcing, not all outsourcing could be referred to as out-tasking. At the same time, another variant of outsourcing is the concept of Alliancing or Partnership. Partnership is a strategy to achieve higher performance and/or lower costs through joint and mutually dependent action of independent organization or individuals (Rothery and Robertson, 1995). The authors referred to it as the natural evolution of outsourcing. As a contractual arrangement between parties for the provision of divine service, both outsourcing and partnership create a symbiotic relationship that affords the organizations the opportunity to get the best of service available.

Several studies about CREM have been documented in the literature. Such studies include Manning et al., (1997), Sirmans (1996), Gibler and Black (2004) and Ambrose, Diop and Yoshida (2016). Even though the studies fulfilled the objective for which the researches were conducted, their focus was not directly related to CREM outsourcing and, thus, creating a gap to be filled. For instance, in line with the global trend in outsourcing of corporate real estate management functions, Manning et al., (1997) analysed the reasons for outsourcing and identified both positive benefits and possible negative results of outsourcing. With a focus on which real estate function should be outsourced, the study concluded that real estate management functions that are consistent with individual company's needs should be outsourced in order to enhance shareholders wealth.

Using evidence from the capital markets, the work of Rodriguez and Sirmans (1996) demonstrated the impact of real estate management decisions on business organisations. In 2000, McDonagh and Hayward examined the current practice and emergent trends in respect of the outsourcing of non-core business activities in New Zealand. The study which noted the practice by which real estate asset management functions of non-property investment organisations are being taken over by 'external service providers' as a strategy by which organisations seek to reduce cost and strategic business advantage in an increasingly competitive marketplace, used data from a survey of 457 organisations to identify outsourcing issues and problems in the country.

Kooymans (2000) examined the nature of the working relationships between the corporate real estate unit and the outsourced service provider in Australia. The study evaluated how successful outsourcing would be if dictated by the top management or carried out at CRE unit level and evaluated whether the relationship should be based on formal or informal arrangement.

In a bid to establish the desirability or otherwise of 'sale-and-leaseback' of corporate real estate as a measure of achieving flexibility and cost effectiveness that companies need in the

operation of their facilities vis-à-vis wider business planning issues, Asson (2002) presented outsourcing as an efficient way of achieving business objectives. Gibler and Black (2004) looked at agency costs associated in a bid to determine the optimal staffing/outsourcing balance by business organisations. The result of the data from corporate real estate managers and real estate service providers indicated that achieving optimum balance of staffing/outsourcing requires good understanding of overall corporate strategy as well as attention to effective monitoring of outsourced tasks.

Naidu et al., (2005) examined CREM representatives in India and the UK to identify factors influencing Western companies' outsourcing of organisational activities to India as well as the effects of business outsourcing on corporate real estate locational requirements in India. The works of Gibler and Black (2004) and Heywood and Matsham (2012) were limited to an examination of the challenges faced by corporate organisations when outsourcing from the external service provider point of view in UK and Australia respectively. Farncombe and Waller (2005) assessed the factors influencing the rising practice of outsourcing of real estate services and the requirements for the efficient outsourcing market. While noting some successful case studies of outsourcing in Real Estate, the study identified the need for overcoming challenges such as poor processes, inadequate measurement and inappropriate reward structures. Ambrose et al., (2016) analyzed the interactions among corporate real estate investment, product market competition and a firm's risk. The study found a positive correlation between strategic real estate ownership and industry concentration and established that a firm's risk is higher for firms with more strategic real estate operating in a more concentrated market. Ikedishi and Okwuashi (2015) examined the factors influencing outsourcing decision for facilities management services in Nigerian public hospitals.

As typical of every system, CREM outsourcing is not without problems. The most common areas reported in a number of studies include: outsourced workers may likely be less in tune with organizational needs or culture (McDonagh and Hayward, 2000); lack of performance measurement (Hertmann et al., 2010; Kenley et al., 2000; Kooymans 2000; Wills, 2002; Matsham and Heywood; 2012); suspicions of the motives of external service providers which could give rise to feelings that they could do as little as they could get away with, in order to enhance their own profitability (Gilber and Black, 2004); and difficulty of reversing the process of outsourcing once it has been done (Garrett, 2011). Matsham and Heywood (2012) identified some common problems. According to the authors, CREM could make an organization to be vicariously liable for the action of others which the company may not be aware of or in which the company may not be fully involved.

Other problems identified by Matsham and Heywood, (2012), Gilber and Black (2004), Kenley et al. (2000), Kooymans (2000), McDonagh and Hayward (2000), Wills (2002) and Wong (1995) include: tendency for losing the capacity to profit from the benefits of future productivity enhancement in changing industry or market by trading rights of first access to the outsourced service provider; the possibility of creating a self-imposed monopoly with the service providers by emphasizing the short term transaction costs saving without considering the potential long term strategic benefits of a healthy and competitive market supply; the tendency for outsourced service providers to be less in tune with the organizations' need or culture thereby seeing themselves as another 'taker' rather than having a strategic role; time consuming bid or management processes; slower response time; possibility of losing control of what the outsourced consultants do; and the tendency for poor communication and lack of

satisfaction with relationship as well as the tendency to rely on contractual obligations and formal decision-making and reporting arrangement between the organizations and the external service provider.

In addition to these possible challenges of CREM outsourcing, Garrett (2011) observed amongst others that an organization could run into the problems of incurring unexpected costs and additional charges that are likely unpredictable as at the time of entering into the agreement. Other problems, according to the author are: the possible difficulty of reversing outsourcing contract especially when the terms do not favour the corporation any longer; the possible damage to the reputation of the organization due to the inefficiency of the contractor; the possibility of non-congruent objectives and loss of management control by the company; and dependence on outsiders for performance can be dangerous while lack of confidentiality/security can result in loss of trade secret and some sensitive information.

In view of the aforementioned, organisations in African countries who wish to take the advantage of outsourcing of their CREM services, would need to understand the likely challenges that will help them to incorporate possible checks and solutions into the outsourcing process in order to enhance effective and successful performance.

## **4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Profile of Respondent Organizations**

The profile of the respondent organisations showed that a majority 46(61.2%) of the organisations were limited liability companies. The profile also showed that 15(20.4%) were owned as joint ventures while the remaining 14(18.4%) of the organisations were partnership companies. Responses in respect of geographical spread of the organisations revealed that 52(77.7%) of the organizations had up to 10 branches. While 10(13.2%) of the respondents had between 11 and 20 branches, the remaining 8(10.2%) operated from between 21 and 30 locations.

Findings in respect of the size of the organisations revealed that a larger proportion 43(57.1%) of the organisations were small organisations. While 18(24.5%) of the organisations regarded themselves as being medium organisations, the remaining 14(18.4%) were large organisations. On average, the organizations had about 50 employees.

### **4.2. Involvement in CREM Outsourcing**

Results in respect of the enquiry as to whether or not the organisations outsourced real estate services revealed that 54(71.7%) of the organisations substantially outsourced real estate services. These are related to organisations who as a result of the need to cut cost and get the best professional real estate services, allow consulting firms of estate surveyors to satisfy their real estate needs and manage them for effective operations. The involvement of the remaining 21(28.3%) of the organisations in real estate outsourcing was considered as little representing organisations who largely procure real estate in-house.

**Table 1. Involvement in CREM outsourcing**

Involvement in CRE Outsourcing	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
Substantial	54	71.7
Little	21	28.3
Total	75	100.0

Source: Author's Survey (2016).

### 4.3. Types of Real Estate Services Outsourced

Responses in respect of questions soliciting information on the type of real estate service (s) that are outsourced revealed divergent views as contained in Table 2.

The findings are that the highest outsourced real estate service, with a mean figure of 4.33 was town planning related real estate services. Services like obtaining planning approval, among others, are often technical in nature requiring some complexities in complying with statutory requirements. As such, organisations often engage the services of professional planners when such services were required. The second highest outsourced service, with a mean figure of 4.12 was the requirements to handle surplus properties and/or disposal of leases by the organisations. The justification for this can be linked to the fact that getting the best price/value in respect of the sale of surplus assets of an organization requires sufficient knowledge and experience in the property market which are not always possessed by in-house professionals.

The third highest outsourced real estate service by the organisations, with a mean figure of 3.39 was building designing. Apart from the depth of technical and professional skill-requirements for effective building design, most major complex design (electrical and mechanical) requires certification by experienced and licensed engineers/builders, thus compelling organisations to comply by outsourcing them from qualified professionals.

**Table 2. Real estate services outsourced**

S/N	Type of Service	Mean	Ranking
1	Town planning issues	4.33	1
2	Surplus property / lease disposal	4.12	2
3	Building design	3.39	3
4	Construction / fit out management	3.29	4
5	Property / lease administration	3.22	5
6	Facility management /maintenance	3.19	6
7	Real estate valuation	3.09	7
8	Site selection	3.06	8
9	Procurement of premises	2.89	9
10	Space layout planning	2.88	10
11	Strategic planning	2.85	11
12	Feasibility studies	2.81	12

Source: Author's Survey (2016).

The fourth highest outsourced service with a mean figure of 3.29 was building construction. Since business organisations lack the know-how for effective construction, they are often compelled to comply with the provisions of Building Code which mandates that a certified builder handles major construction works. This is becoming more necessary in view of the incessant collapsing of buildings being recorded in many parts of the country as a result of which compliance with the Code is now a major requirement in the country.

The four aforementioned highest outsourced services relate to the need for compliance by the organisations with legal and/or policy requirements which had substantially influenced procurement from outsourced consultants.

The mid-ranked services were lease administration (3.22), facility management/maintenance (3.19), real estate valuation (3.09) and site selection (3.06). The mid ranked services, not often outsourced, are real estate services that impact on the day-to-day running of the business of the organisations. They were not often outsourced but rather provided in-house as a means to limiting business exposure to “outsiders” and preserve their trade secret in house.

The least outsourced services with their corresponding mean values were procurement of business premises (2.89), space layout planning (2.88), strategic planning (2.85), and feasibility planning (2.81). Rating the services low indicated that they were not being outsourced. The preference for procuring them in-house could be the strategic importance of business planning, space layout and feasibility studies to achieving the organisations shareholders value/objective. The least outsourced services are strategic issues that no organization would choose to place in the hands of outsourced consultants.

#### 4.4. Methods of CREM Outsourcing

A majority 23(30.7%) of the respondents’ organisations was guided by compliance with the terms of Request for expression of interest in choosing consultants to outsource to. This is in tandem with the World Bank standard requirements for job outsourcing established by the Public Procurement Act, 2007. A larger 17(22.7%) hinged their final outsourcing decisions on the existing business relationship which could have been mutually beneficial in the past. This decision often reflect the degree of trust in the expected quality of job that the consultants would provide.

**Table 3. Methods of CREM outsourcing**

Criteria	Frequency of Response	Percentage
Request for expression of interest	23	30.7
Existing business relationship	17	22.7
Tender bid price	16	21.6
Location	13	17.0
Job flexibility	6	8.0
Total	75	100

Source: Author’s Survey (2016).

Further findings are that while sixteen (21.6%) of the organisations considered the tender/bid price while choosing to whom to outsource, other responses showed that thirteen (17.0%) of the organisations considered the location of their would-be consultants as a sure means of getting easy and prompt access to the expected services. The remaining six (8.0%) organisations considered the flexibility involved in the contract terms to enhance the outsourcing decision.

#### 4.5. Challenges of CREM Outsourcing

As peculiar to every operation, outsourcing of CREM has the tendency of being bedevilled with some challenges. Table 4 contains the responses of the respondents in respect of what they considered as challenges.

The responses indicated that the organisations were confronted with series of challenges in CREM outsourcing. The greatest challenge was conflict of interest between the client organisations and outsourced consultants, suggesting the possibility of disloyalty on the part of the outsourced consultants. The second greatest challenge of CREM outsourcing was the possibility of loss of control/competence by the client organizations in respect of outsourced services. Such organisations, possibly were not enjoying the support of the client organisations for effective service delivery. The third rated challenge in the order of importance was what the organisations perceived as unrealized expected savings of cost which is always a major underlying reason for CREM outsourcing. The result suggested that, by the experience of the organisations, it was more expensive to outsource real estate services than to provide them internally. This could be as a result of the inflexible nature of the professional scale of charges which requires the payment of about 10% flat rate of the total value of real estate projects as fees for the provision of real estate agency and management services to consultants/practitioners. The three highest ranked challenges relate to unethical practices by outsourced consultants hindering them to provide excellent services.

**Table 4. Challenges of CREM outsourcing**

S/N	Challenge	Mean	Ranking
1	Conflict of interest	4.23	1
2	Loss of control / core competence	4.00	2
3	Unrealised cost savings	3.72	3
4	Lack of knowledge / skill	3.69	4
5	Breach of contractual obligations by service providers	3.31	5
6	Inadequate communication	3.00	6
7	Lack of commitment on the part of service providers	2.55	7
8	Difficulty in performance measurement	2.26	8
9	Poor business relationship	2.03	9
10	Slow response rate	1.86	10

Source: Author's Survey (2016).

The mid-ranked challenges were: lack of knowledge/skill by outsourced consultants; breach of contractual obligations by service providers; and lack of commitment to clients by service providers with corresponding mean values of 3.69, 3.31 and 3.0 respectively. The mid ranked challenges, by the experience of the organisations, indicated that the services obtained from outsourced consultants occasionally did not demonstrate the possession of competence and could hence be adjudged below acceptable standards. The seeming display of incompetence could also explain constant breach of contractual obligations as well as insufficient communications and seeming improper reporting to the client organisations.

The least ranked challenges were considered of little significance to the organisations. These included absence of performance measures by client organisations with a mean figure of 2.55. The indication is that many Nigerian organisations did not have performance matrixes but relied on experience to adjudge satisfactory service delivery or the quality of service delivery. Other not-so-important challenges were poor business relationship and slow response rate of outsourced consultants to the client organisations' request with corresponding mean values of 2.03 and 1.86 respectively.

## CONCLUSION

Global practice in the corporate world requires organizations to focus on their primary or core business in order to enhance their efficiency and increase profitability. Where organisations do not have the competence, especially non-core services, outsourcing has been a means for 'world class' professional services. The study evaluated CRE outsourcing practices in Nigeria and found a larger number of organisations substantially engaged in CRE outsourcing, mostly outsourcing technical and professional CRE services that required certification so as to enable compliance with laws and source those services related to their core business requirements in-house.

Further findings showed that while outsourcing CRE services, the organisations considered consultants compliance with request for expression of interest in choosing who their expected providers would be as required by the Public Procurement Act, 2007. In practice, the study found that in CRE outsourcing, business organisations were majorly challenged by the fear of loss of control and core competencies when they outsource to external consultants and the possible conflict of interest arising between the parties. The major implication of the study is the need for the professional real estate body to make the fee chargeable in respect of real estate service delivery flexible to reflect professional inputs in line with the World Bank standard for job procurement. This will make outsourcing to be cost efficient as well as attractive for patronage.

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