AN ASSESSMENT OF CLIENTS SATISFACTION WITH THE CONTRACTORS PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This paper identified the variables for assessing the clients satisfaction, based on the specification given to the contractor. These variables include the quality, standard, and competency of their product. Thirty well structured questions were administered randomly on the clients who completed a project by engaging a contractor within the last five years. Twenty returned questionnaires (66%) were analysed by relative importance index and ranking, to evaluate the importance of the various variables. The result shows that clients expectations are the highest in the area of standard and quality product delivery. The study concluded that, though, the priority of each client in terms of his expectations may differ from one client to the other and from project to project, it is obvious that the expectation of clients in quality and standard of building project is high at all times. The study recommended among others, that contractors must strive to move with the trend of development and the knowledge of the latest technology, methods and materials.
Keyword; *contractor, performance criteria, clients satisfaction*

Introduction

The use of performance criterion such as client's satisfaction in construction is at an early stage of evolution; hence evaluation of performance through client's satisfaction focuses on a few performance elements, such as time, cost, quality of service and final product's quality. To accurately measure the degree of client's satisfaction, an unambiguous operational definition that allows for a consistent, replicable, and valid measure of satisfaction is needed. However, it is important to note that client's needs vary considerably from one to another, and on one project to other. Generally, other factors that need to be considered in this respect include varying time, budget, needs, environment, and so on. Though, it is not possible to establish the list of the client's needs that is appropriate for every project

An experienced contractor with handful knowledge needs to identify the most important criteria for his clients on each project and then formulate the clients' expectations that are important in any consideration of satisfaction. A performance measurement can be achieved when there is a set target or expectation of the client. Satisfaction is said to involve "expectancy disconfirmation, that is, the confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations. In most cases neither the client nor the contractor take time off to set the target of expectation at the inception of a project. Hence confirmation or disconfirmations become very difficult. This paper examines the priorities of the clients with regards to satisfaction on their project in relation to the performance of the contractor in Ilorin, Kwara state. The following are the objectives of the study:

- To Identify the client's area of satisfaction with contractors performance; and
- To identify the client's expectations from the contractors.

Contractors Performance

The process of constructing a project produces neither a pure product nor a pure service but may be considered as a hybrid process consisting of both product and service components (Williams and Maloney, 2002). In the global economy, contractors in Nigeria have to compete with their foreign counterparts in their domestic markets. For them to achieve the best practice in the competitive market, it is necessary for them to measure their performance through feedback from the clients, on their products and services, based on the level of satisfaction the clients derived. Most contractors pay little attention to the client's satisfaction and this contributes to the poor performance. Al- Monam's (2000) Contractors Performance is a fastidious and onerous process. Xiao and Proverbs (2002) itemise the factors which the clients use in measuring the contractor's performance as the construction time, the quality, the constructors' behaviour and the sustainable development. The key performance indicator, according to Gerry (2007), encompasses those aspects of service that have the critical success factor as the clients may want the projects delivered on time, on budget, safely and free from defects. Since success involves real commitment in terms of time and effort, there must be a benefit to the contractors, such as improved efficiency and more patronage. To learn about how satisfied its customers are, the contractor must periodically measure the client's satisfaction, (Torbila & Stroh, 2001).

Measures towards improving the contractor performance have received a considerable attention in the recent years. Client satisfaction has become one of the key issues for companies' market. The client's expectations of construction are a function of several factors which includes the past experiences with the contractor, verbal information about the contractor and the client's personal need. The client's expectation plays an important role in the evolution of the contractor's work performance. The contractor is therefore expected to periodically measure the client's satisfaction in order to learn how satisfied their clients are. The worse situation comes when a contractor is unable to identify his personal weakness and the key factors in improving the most important construction process. Furthermor, there could be a paradigm shift from focusing solely on objective criteria (i.e. time, cost, and quality constraints) to an empathetic posture or seeing things, not from the objective and reality point of view, but from the client's perception of the objective reality.

Adoption of this approach by the contractor is envisaged in order to close the gaps in perception between the client's prioritization of their requirements and how far they are constantly changing. To keep up with this, the contractor must put in place a system to identify measure and continuously improve their products or services.

Client's Expectation and Satisfaction
Client's satisfaction in the building industry can be defined as how well a contractor meets the client's expectations. It is a function not only of output but the perfection and expectations of the client, (Tang, Ming & Chan 2003). The primary concerns of most clients' have to do with when the facility will be available for use and what it will cost. Hence the economic viability of the project is hinged on these two factors time and costs.

Sidwell (2005) claims that the stakeholders in a building project are usually numerous. They include the client (e.g. individual executives within a client organization), contractors, which may include various levels of government, special interest groups, employers and unions. Furthermore, the correct identification of the stakeholders and the prioritisations of their needs is essential to enable an effective decision-making process throughout the project's lifecycle, and to realize the benefit that the constructed facility provides over its entire lifetime.

A client is a person using the services of a professional person. In the construction industry, various types of professionals abound and the client makes use of a combination of these professionals to achieve his objectives. The client with his team of professionals engages the contractor and monitors his activities to get the desired pre-conceived requirement from the contractor.

The client may be an individual or a group of people. That is, it may be a public or private individuals or group of individuals. A private client is usually a person or a group of persons such as

private establishments like banks, Churches, Mosques, etc; while a public client is the representative of a public enterprise or organizations such as government ministries, parastatal, local, state or federal government. Though, the requirements of the client differ; these requirements could be based on several factors like the project's size and complexity. The unpredictable nature of the project, the client and the environment are other factors that may affect the productivity of the construction industry and they may be responsible for the reasons the clients may be dissatisfied with the contractor's overall performance.

Whereas authors such as William and Maloney (2002), are of the opinion that, even though a project is completed in accordance with the plans and specifications within budget and on time, it may satisfy the clients need and the contractor may make profit, but the contractor may not want to work for the client in the future. This implies that there are some other silent and important factors that need to be considered in respect of the client's satisfaction. Thus for proper identification, William and Maloney (2002) classified the contractor's services into three. These are service product, service environment and service delivery. The service product is the services as designed to be delivered. Services environment includes internal and external, which includes availability of materials, equipment, and a well organized site facility. The service delivery is a form of role expectations on events which reflects types of encounter with the personnel, quotations, negotiations, etc.

Tang, Ming and Chan (2003) opine that client satisfaction, both internal and external is a function of quality service, quality of product and quality of manner to customer. It is a function not only of output but the perceptions and expectations of the clients. Generally, satisfaction can be measured based on the client's expectations of all the elements mentioned above and the contractor's ability to meet the expectations. Hence, satisfaction can be viewed in terms of a process of expectancy disconfirmation while an expectation is a belief or anticipation of what will happen as a result of an action.

Methodology

The area chosen for this study is Ilorin the Kwara State capital. The primary data for the study were collected through questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of relevant variables on demography of the respondents and the variables. The questions asked seek to identify the information associated with the client's satisfaction on each variable using a four point scale. Specifically, the respondents were asked to rank the expectation and the variables as they perceive the importance between two extremes.

The population of study consisted of clients or their representatives from the public and private establishments in Ilorin town who in the recent past, completed a project. Fifteen (15) samples were drawn from each of the two sectors, making a sample size of (30). Major project executed by the respondents includes, churches, residential and banking halls. Twenty of the questionnaires were returned completed.

The data collected from the respondents were analysed using sample frequency and percentage. The research questions were answered by ranking the mean of the variables as in Table 1.

Variables	Frequency	%
Type of Organisation		
Public	5	25
Private	11	55
Religion	3	15
Community	1	5
Job/Contract Awarded Recently		
Residential	6	33.3
Office	7	38.9
Warehouse	2	11.1
Worship place	3	16.7
Size of Project		
Small (N1 – N10 million)	5	25
Medium (N11 – N20 million)	5	25
Big (Above N20 million)	10	50
Contract Duration		
6 months	5	26.3
12 months	5	26.3
Above 12 months	9	47.4
Procurement Method		
Separated/traditional	12	60
Integrated procurement	2	10
Management oriented	6	30
Project Supervision		
Consultant	6	35.5
In-house professional	6	55.2
Self-management	5	29.4

Table 1: *Demographic Data of Respondent*

Table 1 shows that 25% of the clients that responded to the questionnaire are from the public sector while 55% are from the private sector and only 5% represents the community. Among the 20 respondents, jobs awarded of recent (i.e. within the last 5 years) includes, residential buildings 33.3%, and places of worship 16.7%. The sizes of the product/contract awarded ranges from small (below 10million Naira) 25%, medium (between 11 and 20million Naira) 25% and (above 20million Naira) 50%. The duration of the various jobs executed by the respondent are 6 month (26.3%), 12months (26.3%) and above 12 months (47.4%). The procurement method used for the various project by the respondent include the separated/traditional method accounting for (60%), the integrated method (10%), while 30% represent those that used the management oriented method for their project. Majority of the clients used in-house professionals for the management of their project; and this represents 55.2%, while 35% employed consultants and 29.4% managed their project by themselves. In Table 2, the expectations of the client from a contractor are itemized and their importances are ranked.

Expectations	N	Min	Max	Mean	Ranking
Quality/competence	20	1	4	3.65	1
High standard materials	19	1	4	3.53	2
Ability to complete on time	19	1	4	3.37	3
Honest/trust worthy	20	1	4	3.35	4
Safety	20	1	4	2.30	5
Work within budget	20	1	4	3.30	6
General satisfaction	19	1	4	2.21	7
Skilled work force	20	1	4	3.20	8
Saving in cost	20	1	4	2.10	9
Schedule control	19	1	4	3.0	10
Team work	20	1	4	2.95	11
Responsiveness	18	1	4	2.89	12
To be right the first time	18	1	4	2.78	13
Friendliness	19	1	4	2.42	14

Table 2: *Client's Expectation from Contractor*

Table 2 shows that most clients expect a quality and competent jobs from their contractors. The clients ranked this variable very high with a mean of 3.65. Next in the ranking is the use of high standard material, which the clients rated 3.53. The respondent clients expect their contractors to complete their work on time and be honest with them. These two expectations were ranked 3 and 4, with average mean of 3.37 and 3.35 respectively. The average mean shows a high expectation on working within the estimated budget along with safety on the project which is of high concern to the client, with a mean of 3.30 each. General satisfaction was ranked 7 with a mean of 3.21. This indicates a high expectation. Skilled work force is next with a mean of 3.20 and savings in cost follows closely with a mean of 3.10. These two variables indicate a high expectation from the client. Schedule control is ranked 10th among the variables with high expectation and mean 3.09. Least ranked among the variables of client's expectation is friendliness with the lowest mean of 2.42, meaning a low expectation.

The Specific Areas of Satisfaction

Table 3, as presented below shows the ranking of the specific areas where the client desires satisfaction

Expectations	N	Min	Max	Mean	Ranking
Standard of workmanship	18	1	4	3.28	1
Communication with client	18	1	4	3.22	2
Over all services	18	1	4	3.06	3
Staff performance as team	18	1	4	3.06	3
Resolution of defects	17	1	4	3.0	6
Timeliness	18	1	4	3.0	6
Speed and reliability of service	18	1	4	3.0	6
Site management	17	1	4	3.06	6
Caliber of site workforce	18	1	4	2.94	9
Site safety	18	1	4	2.89	10
Accuracy of interim payment	18	1	4	2.89	10
Friendliness of staff	18	1	4	2.83	12
Supply management	18	1	4	2.78	13
Ability of innovation solution	18	1	4	2.72	14
Environmental management	18	1	4	2.69	15
Handling of variations	18	1	4	2.61	16
Confrontational attitude	17	1	4	2.35	17

Table 3: Area of Satisfaction of Client

The variables indicating the satisfaction a client derived from the service rendered by the contractors are shown in Table three (3). The standard of workmanship was ranked highest with a mean of 3.28, showing a high level of satisfaction. This closely followed by a satisfactory communication with the client with a mean of 3.22. The overall services rendered by the contractor, staff performance as team, and site management were ranked 3 with a mean of 3.06, indicating a high level of satisfaction. Timeliness, resolution of defects and speed of construction are next in ranking by the client with a satisfactory mode of mean 3.06. The calibre of site workforce used by the contractor meets the requirement and satisfaction derived by client with a mean of 2.94. The safety arrangement on the project site and the accuracy of interim certificate were considered by the client as satisfactory with a mean of 2.89. Members of staff of the contractors were considered to be friendly. This attitude satisfies the clients with mean 2.83 and ranked 12 among the satisfaction variables.

Supply management and the contractor's ability of innovative solution were ranked 13 and 14 respectively with means of 2.78 and 2.72. The management and handling of the immediate environment are next in rank with means of 2.69 and 2.61 respectively. The least among the rank is the confrontational attitude with a mean falling within the satisfactory scale. Hence the clients are satisfied with the contractors' performance in this area. The least among the rank is the confrontational attitude with mean 2.35. It could therefore be established generally that most of the contractors were able to satisfy their clients on issues raised by this studies.

Conclusion

Going by the objectives of this study, it could be concluded that at every award of contract to a contractor, the expectations in terms of performance of the contractor is always very high. However, the priority of each client in terms of his expectations differs from one client to the other and from project to project, The study has clearly rated the various variables of client's

expectations and found that, the client rated the quality, standard, and competency of their product (finished project) to be very high and the contractor are expected to deliver their services as such.

It is also concluded that the level of satisfaction derived by the client from the services delivered by the contractors is derived from the standard of workmanship delivered by the various contactors. This is expected, because naturally, no client is ready to accept a sub-standard product. More so, this corroborate the outcome of the first objectives, in that, a competent contractor will always give his client a standard product through the use of standard materials and standard workmanship.

Recommendations
Owing to the uniqueness of building products and uncertainties around the construction process, it is difficult to find a matching case of client views on the contractor's performance. However, each case study can only reflect the situation at hand, but generally the following are recommended for an effective performance of the contractors.

i Contractors must periodically measure the customer's satisfaction, through feedback from client.

ii Contractors must strive to move with the trend of development on the knowledge of the latest technology, methods and materials.

iii Contractors must constantly study their areas of weakness and strength bench marking on project by project bases, which will help to determine the areas of weakness and inefficiency.

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