



# EFFECT OF UNETHICAL CONDUCT OF PROFESSIONALS ON CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

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**ABSTRACT** - Construction activity is a complex and dynamic one which requires the involvement of various professionals and specialists that work together to achieve a common goal of required project delivery. Construction process involves conceptualizing, designing, managing, supervising, organizing and coordinating project requirements which include time, money, human, resources, technology and methods. All these must be integrated in the most effective and efficient manner possible to complete and deliver construction projects in accordance to the required performance expected by the client. Unethical practices can take place at every phase of a construction from planning to project execution and to its service life. Such practices need to be identified and mitigated as it can affect delivery and usage of the project. As such the aim of this paper is to investigate the effect of unethical conduct of professionals on construction project with specific objectives of identifying factors responsible for the unethical conduct of professional, to determine the effects of unethical professional practices on construction projects and to determine remedies for curbing unethical professional practices in Nigeria construction industry. A questionnaire survey was conducted within the construction firms considering the professionals. A purposive sampling technique was adopted. A total of fifty-eight (50) questionnaires were used for the analysis. The findings of the study show that political system, personal behavior, inadequate enforcement of building code and regulation and absence of strict contractual laws and other factors are responsible for the unethical conduct of professionals. The study also revealed that high maintenance cost, aesthetic value and high construction cost are the major effect of unethical conduct of professionals on construction project. The findings, reveal that the enforcement on the usage of code of practice is one of the remedies to curbing unethical practice. The study recommends

**that setting standard for code of ethics to mitigate issues of unethical conduct of professionals on construction project can eradicate or minimize the problems of projects performance in the construction industry.**

**Keywords:** Construction project, constructional professionals, Professional ethics, Unethical Conduct

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important issues that currently arise within the construction industry environments is unethical practices. The construction industry is classified as one of the most fraudulent industry worldwide providing the perfect environment for ethical dilemmas, with its low-price mentality, fierce competition and paper-thin margins [1]. This industry is considered to be one of the most susceptible to unethical practices because it involves substantial capital investments, providing large scale opportunities for rent extraction as well as investments that usually cannot be redeployed after implementation due to its complexities and mode of operation. A high level of ethical performance implies a high level of professional performance, and hence, a high level of client satisfaction. Unethical practices can take place at every phase of a construction project from planning and design stage, stage of tendering, project execution, operation and maintenance stage. Such practices can result in projects delayed, process and quality compromised, large cost outlay. This project when completed are considered unnecessary, unsuitable, overlay complex components, overpriced or delayed [2]. The Nigerian construction industry is extremely vulnerable to ethical issue due to heterogeneous nature of the industry which makes it imperative for construction professionals to exhibit high level of unprofessional ethics. One of the major setbacks affecting the growth of construction industry unethical conduct. This has deterred



meaningful progress in the Nigerian Construction Industry due to the menace of corruption and corruptible practices. The success of construction project depends mainly on the behavior and ethical conduct of the parties involved in the project from starting to finishing stages. Most at construction companies are exposed to unethical behavior of professionals during projects lifetime. [3] submitted that the international community viewed corruption and other unethical issues as common occurrences at all stages of the Nigerian workforce.

The effects of unethical practices have lasting impact detrimental to construction product and the firms as well such as tendering uncertainty, contingency cost, increased project costs, economic damage, project quality compromised, blackmail, criminal prosecutions, fines, blacklisting and reputational risk. The issue of professional ethics has sparked enthusiastic concern and pragmatic recently. There is also a growing demand for good ethical practices and professional behavior in the construction industry. In the face of its size and universality, the construction industry is often cited as plagued with graft and malpractices. Common issues highlighted are tendering practice, substandard quality of construction work, safety culture, payment woes, corruption and most importantly, accountability for money spent on buildings and infrastructure. The consequences of unethical professional practices, which involves professionals not conforming to approved standards of professional behavior is persistent in the Nigerian construction industry, thus affecting the performance of construction projects and the role of the industry in enhancing the economic growth of the country [3].

Today, professionals gain integrity and respectability to some extent through professional bodies whose mission includes that of ideals for education, standards and ethics.” These are embodied in codes of practice, which define the roles and responsibilities of professionals and are the cornerstone of any ethical program. Of course, codes alone are insufficient to ensure ethical conduct and they need to be complemented with the assignment of functional responsibility.

Professional’s misconduct in Nigeria has been in increase and there are great conflicting issues between actual behavior of professionals and the ethical duties which are expected. However, this study is carried to investigate the effect of unethical conduct of professionals in the Nigeria construction industry.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Ethical Behaviors

Ethical behavior is characterized by honesty, integrity, fairness and equity in interpersonal,

professional. Ethical behavior respects the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people. According to [4], Ethics generally comprise system of moral principles by which human actions and proposals may be judged either good or bad, or being right or wrong, the rules of conduct recognized in respect of a particular class of human actions, and moral principles as of an individual. Behavior that is right in one culture may be considered wrong in another. Even within the same culture and background the interpretations may be ambiguous and even contradictory. Contributing to this vagueness is the fact that individuals often make their own interpretations of proper moral and ethical behavior. [5] declared that ethics is not just about recognizing whether an objective is good but encompasses a careful thought in making viable choice or identifying if the choice is right or wrong. It’s hard to manage ethical values, it is a personal thing. It is about personal behavior and it is about standards

### 2.2 Ethics in Business

Generally, business ethics involves two tasks. The normative task of defining standards of behavior and the practical task of applying these standards to business conduct. This is interpreted to be the normative versus the positive approach. [6] define business ethics as legal behavior and a collection of moral principles or set of values being shared not only with the business community, but also within society as a whole. The general concepts of ethics are applicable in business on the grounds that business exists not solely to suit certain individuals, but because it serves society and meets collective and individual needs [4]. Core business values are principles or beliefs which provide guidance to employees and which a company might determine to be critical to business success. Ethical decisions in the business arena are important due to its significant implications for business as well as society. Companies are making efforts to find ways and means to assess the ethical performance through the work, but these efforts still less than what required. Business exists not solely to suit certain individuals, but to meets collective and social needs. Ethical standard in business cannot be changed unless those engage in business are ready to change their attitude, and also stringent rules in place to reduce its menace.

### 2.3 Professional

Professional is a person who has received a high standard of professional training and practice, knowledge and skill required, qualified with a valid registration and licensed to practice the profession by a professional body. The professional body is established for the purpose of supervising and managing the activities of the profession. A professional is a person



who has received a high degree of professional competence in a particular task. The word professional denotes a person who is highly educated, enjoys work autonomy and engages in creative and intellectually challenging work. Profession is an occupation or process in which an individual uses an intellectual skill based on an established body of knowledge and practice to provide a specialized service in a defined area, exercising independent judgment in accordance with a code of ethics and in the public interest. Profession has been described as a group of people organized to serve a body of specialized knowledge in the interests of society [4]. "Professionalism" is the possession and autonomous control of a body of specialized knowledge, which when combined with honorific status, confers power upon its holders [2]. Profession is an occupation which requires both advanced study and mastery of a specialized body of knowledge and undertaken to promote, ensure or safeguard some matter that noticeably affects others' wellbeing [4]. [5] submitted further that a token of a major profession is in its ability to accept the responsibility to act in the public interest which requires an overt commitment by its attachment to subdue personal advancement to this responsibility. professional must be knowledgeable and proficient in all area of the field of work.

#### **2.4 Professional Ethics in Construction Industry**

Professional ethics is a system, process or modality in doing something. The construction professionals include architect, quantity surveyor, builders and engineer comprising of civil engineer, structural engineer, mechanical and electrical engineer which are involve in the process of construction. [2] stated that professional ethics is a system of behavioral norms. Such norms related to the employment of the particular knowledge, and also largely concern with the relationship between experts and other persons so that both the morality and behavior of professionals could be dealt with in their day-to-day practice. Professional ethics means giving all fairness, trust and morals in its entirety to the best interest of the project. [4] said that professional ethics is treating others with the same degree of honesty that they would like to be treated. There are many reasons why professionals are involved in unethical practices. This may be due to insufficient legislative enforcement, greed, fierce competition, the economic downturn, lack of ethical education from schools and professional institutions, cultural changes and high complexity of construction works. The definition of professional ethics recognized by the working party is giving of one's best to ensure that clients' interests are properly cared for, but in doing so the wider public interest is also recognized and

respected [7]. [5] discovered that the construction industry is more susceptible to ethical problems because of several features and corruption, and concluded that these affect all stages of construction from planning to completion stage. [3] studied Nigerian building professionals' ethical ideology and perceived ethical judgement. Their finding reveals that the dominant ethical ideology of building industry professionals is due to situations. Hence, the attitude of building industry professionals in practice, given the current socio-political and economic situation of Nigeria would possibly be unethical due to the extreme influence situational factors have on their behavior. In the Nigeria construction industry, contractors fraudulently obtain vital information on a contract by paying money to officials of the awarding organization. Having invested interest on the jobs they are bidding on and, winning the contract is now how fair they will be in term of not compromising the standard of the work.

#### **2.5 Ethical Principles and Codes of Conducts**

[5] submitted that the international community viewed corruption and other unethical issues as common occurrences at all stages of the Nigerian workforce considering the recent incessant rankings by the Transparency International. Efforts have been taken to increase the ethical standards among the professionals in construction sectors. In order to achieve ethical standard practice among fairness, accountability and transparency is needed for smooth running of any business process particularly the construction industry. Construction industry organizations must strive to find effective ways to engage reliable and talented professionals and elevate their performance, productivity and service levels to new heights, to find an effective solution to the ethical problems. Increasing ambiguity in the nature of the relationships that govern the relation between individuals and groups of people, and increasing ambiguity in their attitudes to ethical issues improves moral orientation [6]. However, well established companies or industries and professional association (governing bodies) have written documents labeled as codes of conduct [8]. Codes or regulation is a set of minimum standard of practice expected from professionals and are designed to delegate responsibility. According to Mason [9] ethical conduct is the compliance with the following ethical principles:

**Honesty:** Acting with honesty and avoid conduct likely to result directly or indirectly in the deception of others.

**Fairness:** Do not seek to obtain a benefit which arises directly or indirectly from the unfair treatment of other people.

**Fair reward:** Avoid acts which are likely to result in another party being deprived of a fair reward for their work.



**Reliability:** Keeping Knowledge and skills updated and provide services only within your area of competence.

**Integrity:** Having regards for the interests of the public, particularly people who will make use of or obtain an interest in the project in the future.

**Objectivity:** Identify any potential conflicts of interest and reveal the conflict to any person who would be adversely affected by it.

**Accountability:** Avoid information within your knowledge which are of potential detriment to others who may be adversely affected by them. However, be accountable for your actions. [10] suggested there is need for pursuit towards the formulation of an ethical code of conduct governing the rules of ethical practices for employees in the construction industry. To overcome the ethical issues, an organization should not only have a professional code of conducts but to also enforce it and in addition, willing to commit the whole organization to the code of ethics [11].

## **2.6 Unethical Behavior in the Construction Industry**

There is a growing consensus within and outside the construction industry that corruption and other unethical practices are endemic in the construction industry. Ethical issues in the profession of building and construction industry should be seen as something of interest which needs attention. Ethical consideration in the construction industry is required and its inclusion is necessary for disasters and damage to be avoided. The responsibility in the construction industry is complex and ethical issues in such case must be considered [10]. One of the most frequently reported unethical practices in business is bribery, described as: “the offering of some good, service or money to someone for the purpose of securing a privileged and favorable consideration of one’s product or corporate project [4]. Other regularly reported unethical practices are related to fraud, breach of confidence and negligence. Deceit, trickery, sharp practice, or breach of confidence, by which it is sought to gain some unfair or dishonest advantage [4]. [5] stated that Unethical and corrupt practices have a lot of adverse effect to the construction industry, and the development of the economy and human resources.

Unethical or corrupt practices tend to distort construction process and thereby hinder economic fortune. Unethical performance delays the free play of market forces. Unethical conduct, as it is said, is not a consequence of a person’s upbringing, but rather it is part of the process of learning practical business or being inducted into the practice [4].

## **2.7 Unethical Behaviour in Nigeria Construction Industry**

The Nigerian construction industry is enormously vulnerable to ethical problems due to heterogeneous nature of the industry which makes it imperative for construction professionals to exhibit high level of professional ethics. One major factor amongst others that impede meaningful development to the Nigerian construction industry is the threat of corruption and corrupt practices. [3] assessed the perception of construction professionals in ethical issues and the result indicate that the most common unethical behavior is financial bribery and also there is great pressure on construction managers to act unethically. According to [4] unethical and corrupt practices in the construction industry can take many forms but the most common ones are:

**Bribery:** Cash or non-cash favor to get something in return

**Fraud:** Deception to get financial or other advantages

**Extortion:** A form of blackmail where one party makes threats against another party of adverse consequences unless demands are met by the other party.

**Embezzlement:** The pinching of corporate or public funds.

**Kickbacks:** Sweeteners or rewards for favorable decisions.

**Overbilling:** Expanding the prices for activities that are scheduled to happen earlier in the project to increase the cash flow.

## **2.8 Effect of Unethical Behavior on Construction Projects**

Unethical practices are found in every phase of a construction project from the planning and design, in the award of contracts, procurement, during the construction process, and post construction stage to the maintenance of completed projects [3]. These practices bring drawbacks and adverse effects on project performance in the construction industry, and thereby hindered the development of the economy and human resources [5]. One of the aftermaths of corruption is the raising of the cost of construction to an embarrassing level. The prevalence of poor pre-contract planning, inept/ incompetent contractors, incompetent consultants/professional advisers, fraud, poor project funding/delayed payments, late appointment of relevant professionals among others. Unethical professional practices on construction project performance lead to, abandonment, building/users dissatisfaction, conflicts/disputes/litigation, cost overrun, delays, deterioration of the environment, deterioration in professionalism, high maintenance cost, poor aesthetic value, poor basis for project monitoring and control, loss of clients’ confidence on professional competence, poor





value for money, poor workmanship, portrays bad image of the construction industry, rework, time overrun, underutilization of resources and vulnerability to frequent maintenance work [5]. In essence, unethical practices have a lot of undesirable effects in the construction industry, hinder the development of the economy and human resources, impede construction process and thereby obstruct economic growth, lead to project abandonment. Poor ethical performance hinders the free play of market forces, discourages economic aid from the foreign donors and makes it difficult for the industry to attract international investors.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology was based on a survey of related works and data collected through administration of a well-structured questionnaire to a sample of population for the study. The questionnaire survey was used to elicit response on the effect of unethical conduct of professionals in the Nigeria construction industry. The respondents were professionals in the construction field. The study was carried out in Bauchi, Bauchi state, Nigeria. The study however was limited to the stated city. Out of the fifty (60) administered questionnaire, forty (50) were returned and use for the analysis, this puts the response rate at 83% which is satisfactory as against the researches carried out by [27] with 52%. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts; mean and standard deviations were employed in analyzing and interpreting the data collected.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

**Table 1: Profession of the Respondent**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Architect	12	24
Builder	16	32
Quantity Surveyor	10	20
Engineers	12	24
Total	50	100.0

From Table 1 above the highest concentration of the respondents are builders (32%), architect and engineer each with (24%) respectively, while the quantity surveyors with (20%).

**Table 2: Profession of the Respondent**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
General Manger	3	6
Project Manager	11	22
Site Manager/		

Engineer	36	72
Total	50	100.0

From Table 2 above, the highest concentration of the respondents in terms of position in the firm are site managers/engineer are builders with (72%), project manager with (22%), while the general manager is (6%).

**Table 3: Professional Years of Experience**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Above 20years	1	2
16 - 20 years	4	8
11 - 15 years	6	12
6 - 10 years	15	30
0 - 5 years	24	48
Total	50	100.0

From Table 3 above, the highest concentration of the respondents with years of experience of 20 years and above is (2%), those with years of experience with 16-20years is (8%), those with years of experience with 11-15years is (12%), those with years of experience with 6-10years is (30%), while those with years of experience within 0-5years is (48%).

**Table 4: Do unethical conduct have effect on quality of construction project**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	44	88
No	6	12
Total	50	100.0

Table 4 shows that 88% of the respondents agree that unethical conduct has effect on quality construction project. While 12% disagree that unethical conduct has effect on quality construction project. However, from the result of the study it shows that unethical conduct has effect on quality of construction project.

**Table 5: Do unethical conduct have effect on productivity of construction project**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	46	92
No	4	8
Total	50	100.0

Table 5 shows that 92% of the respondents agree that unethical conduct has effect on construction project. While 8% disagree unethical conduct has effect on productivity of construction project. However, from the result of the study it shows that unethical conduct has effect on productivity of construction project.



**Table 6: Stage of construction affected by unethical behavior**

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Design Stage	4	8
Bidding and awarding Stage	15	30
Procurement stage	17	34
Construction stage	11	22
Operation and maintenance stage	3	6

Total                      50                      100.0

Table 6 present result on the stage of project life affected by unethical behavior. It can be deduced from the result that the most affect stage with unethical behavior is the implementation and construction stage. From the table the most affected stage is the procurement stage with 34%, then bidding and awarding stage with 30%, construction stage with 22%, design stage with 8% while operation and maintenance stage is 6%. The result is in conformity with the findings of [11] who posited that the most seriously phase affected by unethical behavior is procurement phase.

**4.2 Factors Responsible for unethical conduct**

**Table 7: Factors Responsible for unethical conduct**

Factors	N	Sum	Mean	Ranking
personal behaviour	50	183.00	3.66	2
fierce competition	50	177.00	3.54	5
political systems	50	185.00	3.70	1
professional indiscipline	50	166.00	3.32	7
profit maximization	50	170.00	3.40	6
the absence of strict contractual laws	50	182.00	3.64	3
inadequate enforcement of the building code and regulations	50	182.00	3.64	3
lack of job security	50	147.00	2.94	11
economic fluctuation	50	140.00	2.80	12
insufficient legislative enforcement	50	152.00	3.04	9
size and complexity of project	50	149.00	2.98	10
competition between contractors	50	160.00	3.20	8
Valid N (list wise)	50			

Table 7 present factors responsible for unethical conduct in Bauchi, a list of factors was identified and provided for the respondents to identify base on the factors leading to unethical conduct. Result shows the ranking of these factors and their associated significant differences in the mean of the various identified factors across the different categories of respondents. From Table 10, the result reveals that the respondents agreed by ranking first political system with a mean of 3.70, personal behavior ranked second with a mean of 3.66, inadequate enforcement of building code and regulation and absence of strict contractual laws both ranked third with a mean of 3.64. The implication is that professionals recognizes political system, personal behavior and inadequate enforcement of building code and regulation as major factors responsible for unethical

conduct. Fierce competition, profit maximization, professional maximization, competition between contractors, insufficient legislative enforcement, with a mean of 3.54, 3.40, 3.20, 3.04 respectively, are other factors responsible for unethical conduct. Size and complexity if project, lack of job security and economic fluctuation, with a mean of 2.98, 2.94 and 2.80 respectively have low effect on the factors responsible for unethical conduct of professionals. Overall, it can be seen that the identified factors responsible for unethical conduct which have mean value of 3.0 and above. While those value below 3.0 are low in ranking on factors responsible unethical conduct on construction project. However, the result also implies that all the identified factors are responsible for unethical conduct of professionals in the study area.



**Table 8: The effect of unethical conduct on construction project**

	N	Mean	Ranking
depreciation of economy	50	3.54	4
high construction cost	50	3.56	3
project abandonment	50	3.50	5
high maintenance cost	50	3.66	1
deterioration of the environment	50	3.16	6
poor aesthetic value	50	3.60	2
Valid N (listwise)	50		

**4.3 The effect of unethical conduct on construction project**

Result in Table 8 shows the effect of unethical conduct of professionals on construction project. The result reveals that the respondents agreed by ranking first high maintenance cost with a mean of 3.66, aesthetic value ranked second with a mean of 3.60, high construction cost ranked third with a mean of 3.56. depreciation of the economy, project abandonment, deterioration of the environment ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively, as effect of unethical conduct on construction project. Overall, it can be seen that all the identified factors of unethical conduct affecting construction project have mean value of 3.0 and above, this shows they all have significant effect on construction project.

**4.4 Possible remedy to curb unethical practices**

**Table 9: possible remedy to curb unethical practices**

Factors	Mean	Std Deviation
Enforcement of the construction industry on using ethical practice	3.76	1.33
Avoiding conflict of interest	3.82	1.14
Professionals show of integrity	3.86	1.21
Reliability of professionals	3.28	1.21
Ethical awareness	4.32	0.98
Compulsory training and education on ethical practice	3.76	1.25
Setting standard for ethical conduct	3.36	1.40

Table 9 present result on remedy to curb unethical practices. The result shows that enforcement of the construction industry on using ethical practice has a mean of 3.76, avoiding conflict of interest has a mean of 3.82, professionals show of integrity has a mean of 3.86, reliability of professionals has a mean of 3.28, ethical awareness has mean of 4.32, compulsory training and education on ethical practice with a mean of 376 and setting standard for ethical conduct has a mean of 3.36. However, from the result of the study it can be deduced that ethical awareness, professionals show of integrity, enforcement of the construction industry on using ethical practice, compulsory training and education on ethical practice are measure required to remedy

unethical professional practice, this will however be of greater help in bringing unethical practice to an arrest.

**V. CONCLUSION**

This study focused on the factors, effects and remedies of unethical conduct of professionals on construction project in Bauchi, Nigeria. The study revealed that the professionals agreed that out of the 12 identified factors responsible for unethical conduct of professionals the top four factors responsible for unethical behavior are causing delay are political system, personal behavior, inadequate enforcement of building code and regulation and absence of strict contractual laws. Also, the three critical effects of unethical conduct of professionals on



construction project were high maintenance cost, aesthetic value and high construction cost. It is believed that the effects of unethical conduct of professional's affect construction project and project performance is compromised. Hence, the factors responsible for unethical conduct of professionals in the construction industry should be addressed and the remedies highlighted should be exploited. The results of this study is the perception of construction professional's in Bauchi, Nigeria this paper can be used for benchmarking in the process of decision making but may not be generalized.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Professional's bodies should associate with the government in enforcing ethical codes in the construction industry so that unethical issues can be mitigated.
2. Law enforcing department should set a structure to receive complaint and issues from the construction industry violation of ethical standards.
3. Improve workplace culture as it's very unlikely for employees to engage in unethical behavior in an environment where employees are valued and respected and where all are expected to be selfless in their associations with each other and with clients.
4. Setting examples on those who violate the rules and regulation by implementing sanctions and penalties.

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