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Investigation into Causes of Project Failure in Akure Metropolis, Ondo State, Nigeria

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A B S T R A C T

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Investigation,
Project Failure,
Corruption,
Nigeria.

This paper examined the causes of project failure in both private and public sectors in Ondo State, Nigeria. This was with a view to making recommendations for improved project handling in the study area. The surviving public and private projects in Akure are not many due to the economic crunch in the Country. This indicator makes the researcher selected about two hundred projects both public and private as the research population. Seventy copies of questionnaire were administered to project stakeholders like clients, government contractors, builders, private contractors, consultants, civil engineers, architects and project managers that have practiced for a minimum of ten years. Fifty-five copies (78.6%) of questionnaire were returned and analysed. The analysis utilized the Relative Importance Index (R.I.I) method and the results were presented in form of frequency table and percentages. The study recommended that failure to retain experienced workers, inadequate supply of resources required for project execution, estimates for cost and schedule that are erroneous, corruption, political influence and indolence of workers/contractors were among of the major causes of project failure in the study area. The study concluded that the above causes of project handling be addressed to improve projects execution in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

According to Algar et al., (2014) projects are tricky to establish especially when the executors are under pressure to deliver a successful outcome. The new tools and techniques to carry out projects have not improved this situation. In reality, the rate of project failure is higher now than in the past. This is due to worse project implementations by the stakeholders in project executions as argued by Ubani and Ononuju (2013); project failure has become a common occurrence since independence. Since then, many developmental projects have suffered failure due to complications and inadequate planning. The sight of projects failure is found across the length and breadth of Nigeria and it is very alarming. It is realised that different projects have different critical factors that bring about their failure. For instance, information communication technology projects have different failures different from construction projects, so also education projects have different failure factors from services projects.

2. Literature Review

Project failure is generally seen as inability of a project to achieve the functional requirements as perceived by the

stakeholder. According to Zuofa and Ochieng (2014), project failure is a situation when projects do not level up to the satisfaction of the stakeholders. It is also when the users have several complaints about the project outcome. They also opined that projects can be considered as failure, when it fails to meet the criteria of time, cost, and effectiveness. These definitions infer that it does not mean if the project has been physically completed but the question is when was the completion? Is the quality specified by relevant standard reached or is the potential of the project really maximized? When these questions are answered in negative form, then, there is a project failure. In Nigeria, studies revealed various factors responsible for project failure as corruption and lack of professionalism. Other critical factors are: inadequate planning and project financing, bankruptcy of contractors, project scope variations, political interference, incompetent personnel, delays in payments, poor technology, lack of senior management involvement, funds mismanagement by contractors, untimely delivery of construction materials/insufficient supply. Furthermore, lack of clear project objectives, lack of integrating and alignment projects into corporate strategies, environmental issues, poor engineering design, poor monitoring and evaluation by government officials among others.

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Ika (2012) considers projects to have failed when they are unable to meet their targeted cost, time or scope. He demonstrated that the failures may be due to inability of the projects to satisfy the aspiration of stakeholders. Similarly, the benefits accruing to society or project organization may not be met which are among criteria for determining project failure. The view of Ika (2012) was in line with Nelson (2005). Nelson (2005) defined project failure by using cost, time, scope and other traditional indicators. In his opinion, value added and value assessment criteria like project usefulness, value to outfits and learning potential must be considered in the cause of evaluating project failure.

Olalusi and Otunola (2012) researched into construction projects in Nigeria and identified corruption, inadequate planning, lack of available skilled personnel, poor risk management, incorrect estimation of costs and resources as factors that led to projects failure. Also, Akinyokun et al., (2009) listed some factors that can lead to information technology project failure as lack of top management support, inadequate skill of information technology managers, poor planning and inadequate expertise of information technology project manager. This was corroborated by Johnson et al., (2001) who identified that lack of executive support, users' involvement, experienced project managers, clear business objectives and minimized scope as factors that could hamper the information technology project success. Similarly, Igbokwe – Ibeto (2012) investigated into challenges affecting local government projects in Nigeria and revealed that corruption, community and labour problems, inappropriate timing of budget releases, contractor's default and inappropriate assessment of project environment are major contributions to projects failure.

Project failure occurs when its completion time exceeds its due date, expenses overrun the budget, or outcomes do not satisfy a company's predetermined performance criteria (Walid and Oya 1996). In the present days, it has become difficult to determine whether a project is a failure or a success. This happens because the project manager and the project team at the same time the client perceived a completed project differently, while the project manager considers a project to be successful, the client might perceives it as a failure. These two different views on the same project came up because it is still not clear how to measure project success or failure. So also, the two groups evaluate project success or failure differently and thus they value the outcome differently (Pinto et al 1989). Some of the critical factors of project failure enumerated in Walid and Oya (1996) research are lack of management support, poor communication and qualified personnel. Other factors enumerated are poor project managers' performance, inadequate resources, erroneous estimate of costs and itemisation of materials, inadequate funding among others.

Ubani and Ononuju (2013) found that frequent changes in government and political power, misappropriation of fund, mode of financing and payment for completed work, lack of due process in awarding project works, ineffective project planning are major causes of project failure. Other factors are: faulty design of projects, neglect of warning signals, poor technical feasibility study and poor monitoring and control of project progress as factors contributing to project failure especially in many public sector civil engineering projects.

Chandara (2006) as cited by Ubani (2013) said that it is a common thing that project fails especially when it could not meet its mission of creating a facility within the specified cost and time. He further explained that hardly few projects get completed in time and within the original costs. It was reported that out of 351 projects executed in India in 1989-1990, 56% of them had cost overrun (totally 20% cost), 49% faced a time overrun from 1 to 157 months. This cost overrun was due to inadequate project formulation, poor planning for implementation, lack of proper contract planning and management and lack of project management during execution.

Nguyen and Chileshe (2013) opined that cost target or quality, poor management and inefficient risks management are causes of project failure in Vietnam. So also they claimed that lack of high – quality project managers and lack of systematic and efficient risks management system is one of the major factors leading Vietnamese construction projects to failure. They also mentioned the death of the client/investor as a cause of project failure. Furthermore, Ling et al (2009) claimed that lack of financial capacity, knowledge in advanced design and corruption are factors causing failure of project in Vietnam. Similarly, Ihuan and Benedo (2014) investigated the causes and effects of abandonment and failure of project in Nigeria and listed the following critical factors as responsible; leadership inability, death of the investor/client/owner, lack of stakeholders' involvement, improper project estimates, inadequate project budgeting among others

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire design

A set of questionnaire was designed on the basis of an extensive literature review of various causes of project failure. The questionnaire was used because of its convenience, cost and time effectiveness when compared to face-to-face interview. The questionnaire was carefully designed to avoid several shortcomings associated with questionnaire survey. These include poor response rates and problems relating to question of project failure. The questionnaire consists of two sections:

Section A gathered information about the respondents' profile while section B consists of questions relating to causes of

project failure in Akure Metropolis, Nigeria. The validity of the questionnaire was carried out by using five other respondents precisely, a client, a builder, one civil engineer, a project manager and an architect from Ado-Ekiti. The choice of Ado Ekiti was taken because of its nearness to Ondo State. Their responses were used to correct errors found in the setting of the questionnaire. Purposive sampling was utilised for the selection of the sample. Seventy copies of questionnaire were administered to project stakeholders like clients, government officials, builders, project managers, contractors and engineers who are the respondents for the research. Fifty-five copies (78.6%) of the questionnaire were recovered and found useful. Base on the assertion by Moser and Kalton (1999) that the result of a survey could be considered as biased and of little value if the return rate was lower than 30 – 40%. Therefore, the return rate of 78.6% is considered adequate. The responses to the questionnaire were collected and analysed with Relative Importance Index (RII) statistical tools. The respondents rated each cause of project failure on a scale 1-5. The five points scale was then transformed to percentage and relative importance indices

The data collected was analysed through the use of frequency (fi) and percentages of the response category index for the causes of project failure. So also the relative importance index (RII) for each factor was calculated using the frequency data for each response categories generated. The RII is the calculation of the mean frequency of each response category index for the probability. It is calculated thus:

$$RII = \frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + n_1}{5N}$$

Where	n5	= strongly agree
	n4	= agree
	n3	= fairly agree
	n2	= not agree
	n1	= no idea
	N	= number of respondents
	RII	= rate of 0.75 is considered

R.I.I. rate of 0.80 and above is considered critical root cause of project failure.

4. Findings and Discussions

Table 1 presents educational qualifications of the respondents. 35 (63.6%) of the respondents have M.Sc/M.Tech which is the highest qualification while 20 (36.4%) of the respondents have HND/BSc. The educational levels of the respondents show that required capacities in project execution are possessed by the respondents.

Table 2 reveals the professional qualifications of the

respondents. Twenty-four 24(43.6%) of the respondents were Engineers (Civil, Electrical, Quantity Surveyor and Architect) due to fact that they are many in the ministries. Six 6(10.9%) were builders, 8(14.6%) were project managers; 6(10.9%) were Project consultants while others were 11 (20%).

Table 3 shows the work experience of respondents. Twenty-five (45.1%) of the respondents have spent between 10 and 15 years in carrying out project implementation. Similarly, 19(34.5%) of the respondents have spent between 16 and 20 years. Further, 11(20%) respondents have executed projects for between 21 – 25 years. Their work experience shows that project failure will not be strange to them to mitigate or avoid while executing projects.

Table 4 presents experience of respondents in project failure. All the respondents (100%) claimed that they have experienced failure in some of the projects executed in one time or the other.

Findings from Tables 5 and 6 show that 45 (82%) of the respondents agreed that poorly defined project plan and scope are responsible for project failure in Akure Metropolis of Ondo State, Nigeria. However, only 5(9%) of the respondents fairly agreed that poorly defined project plan and scope led to project failure while another 5(9%) respondents strongly agreed that poorly defined project plan and scope contributed to project failure. The cause factor has a relative importance index of 0.80. This is in agreement with Zuofa and Ochieng (2014) and Olalusi and Otunola (2012) who claimed that inadequate planning and scope contribute immensely to project failure in Nigeria.

On lack of management commitment, 50 (91%) of the respondents were of the opinion that this factor causes project failure while 5 (9%) strongly agreed that the factor surely brought about project failure in Akure. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.82. This factor was in agreement with Zuofa and Ochieng (2014) who established in their research that lack of senior management involvement in project execution led to project failure. So also, Akinyokun et al., (2009) listed lack of top management support to information technology project will bring about the failure of information technology project. Furthermore, Walid and Oya (1996) mentioned lack of management support to project execution as a serious cause of project failure.

* On inadequate risk management, 25 (45%) of the respondents agreed that it causes project failure while another 25 (45%) of the respondents fairly agreed that the factor causes project failure in Akure metropolis. Furthermore, 5(10%) strongly agreed that project failure occurs mostly as a result of inadequate risk management. This cause factor has a relative importance index of 0.73. The factor agrees with finding of Olalusi and Otuola (2012) that poor risk management is a major

factor of project failure in construction works in Nigeria. So also Nguyen (2013) asserted that inefficient risk management is a cause of project failure in Vietnam.

- * Failure to identify key assumptions in project may lead to project failure. This cause of project failure was agreed to by 35(64%) of the respondents involved in this research study while 20(36%) fairly agreed that it causes project failure. This project cause factor has a relative importance index of 0.73 and it corroborates the finding of Zuofa and Ochieng (2014) that projects fail if there is lack of clear cut project objectives. This factor may not be taken as critical factor because the relative importance index is less than 0.75 that this study chose as standard measure of critical factor of project failure for this study.
- * The recruitment of project managers that lack experience and training of project execution is another critical factor meticulously agreed to by 30 (55%) of the respondents. So also 25 (45%) of the respondents strongly agreed that this factor is responsible for project failure in Akure metropolis. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.89. The factor is in agreement with the result of research carried out by Zuofa and Ochieng (2014), Akinyokun et al (2009); Walid et al (1996), Nguyen et al (2013); Johnson (2001) concerning the recruitment/involvement of inexperienced project managers which no doubt led to project failure.
- * The death of the investor/client is another critical factor that majority 50(91%) of the respondents agreed that leads to project failure in Akure metropolis. So also, 5(9%) of the respondents strongly agreed with this factor that it causes project failure. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.82. This is in agreement with Ihua and Benedo (2014) and Nguyen and Clileshe (2013) who concluded in their research that dearth of the investors resulted to project failure in Nigeria.
- * On insufficient funding, majority 50 (91%) of the respondents agreed that inadequate fund causes project failure while 5(9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that insufficient funding is a critical factor of project failure. Thus a relative importance index of 0.82 is recorded. This is in agreement with Zuofa and Ochieng(2014), Igbokwe (2012), Walid and Oya (1996) and Ling et al (2009) who all claimed inadequate financing as a critical factor to project failure in the literature.

- * On erroneous estimates for cost and schedule of projects, majority, 30(55%) of the respondents strongly agreed that it causes project failure while 25 (45%) of the respondent agree that the factor is responsible for project failure. This has a relative important index of 0.91. This agrees with Olalusi et al., (2012) Igbokwe (2012), Walid and Benedo (1996) and Ihua and Benedo (2014). Similarly, the cause factor of bad decision by clients 30(55%) of the respondents agreed that this cause factor is responsible for project failure. So also, 25(45%) of the respondents fairly agree that the factor causes project failure. This has a relative importance index of 0.71 which does not qualify the cause factor as critical.

Another is ignoring project warning signs in project execution. Majority 30 (55%) of the respondents agreed to the view that this cause factor results to project failure. Similarly, 20 (36%) of the respondents strongly agreed that it causes project failure while 5(9%) also fairly agreed that the cause factor causes project failure. This cause factor has a relative importance index of 0.85. This cause factor is in agreement with Ubani and Ononuju (2013) who found in their research to project failure that project executors sometime neglect project warning signals. This action of the project executors always leads to failure of projects.

Furthermore, ineffective leadership is another project failure. Majority 35(64%) of the respondents agreed that this factor causes project failure. In the same vein, 20(36%) of the respondents fairly agreed that it causes project failure. This cause factor has a relative Importance Index of 0.73. This cause factor is in agreement with Ihua and Benedo (2014), but not a critical factor according to the standard of this study. On failure to retain experienced workers, all 55 (100%) the respondents strongly agreed that failure to retain experienced workers bring about project failure. It has a relative Importance Index of 1.0. This is the highest and most critical factor of all the causes of project failure in Akure Metropolis.

On the cause factor of political reason, majority 30 (55%) of the respondents agreed that political reasons can bring about project failure while 25 (45%) of the respondents also strongly agreed that it causes project failure. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.89. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Zuofa and Ochieng (2014) and Ubani and Ononuju (2013) who stated that political reasons had led to the failure of many projects in Nigeria.

The inadequate supply of resources required for project execution, majority 45 (81%) of the respondents fairly agreed with the opinion that it results to project failure.

This factor has a relative importance index of 0.91 and it is in agreement with finding of Walid and Oya (1996) who found the

factor as one of the cause of project failure. Corruption is another critical factor that is responsible for project failure. Majority 30 (55%) of the respondents agreed that this factor causes project failure. So also 20 (45%) of the respondents strongly agreed that it causes project failure. The relative importance index of this factor is 0.89 while the factor corroborates the findings of Zuofa and Ochieng (2014), Olalusi and Otunola (2012), Igbokwe – Ibetor (2012), Ling et al., (2009) that corruption is main causer of project failure.

On projects supervised by relatives/ community, majority 45 (81%) of the respondents fairly agreed that it causes project failure. Similarly, 10(19%) of the respondents agreed that projects supervised by relatives, many times result into failure. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.64. This factor is not a serious factor for project failure.

The factor is also in consonant with research carried out by Morris and Hough (1987) who worked on critical success/failure factors in projects.

Indolence of workers/labourers/contractors hired by project clients is another critical factor that can be responsible for project failure. Majority 30(55%) of the respondents agreed that it causes project failure while 25(45%) strongly agreed that the factor is responsible for project failure. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.89. The critical factor corroborates with finding of Nguyen and Clileche (2014) and Ewa (2013) who stated that lack of high quality project manager is present in Vietnam projects works. Furthermore, cost/budget over run is another factor that causes project failure. 30 (55%) of the respondents agreed that the factor is responsible for project failure while 25(45%) of the respondents also strongly agreed that cost/budget over run causes project failure in Akure metropolis. This factor has a relative importance index of 0.89. The factor corroborates the study carried out by Walid and Oya (1996) that cost /budget over run causes project failure.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This research paper investigated causes of project failure in Akure Metropolis in Ondo State, Nigeria. The research established that despite all studies carried out by many researchers on project failure in Nigeria, no solution has been established to mitigate or avoid, which is a position corroborated by this paper. The major causes of project failure researched into in this study were as follows:

- (1) failure to retain experienced workers
- (2) erroneous estimates for cost and schedule;
- (3) Inadequate supply of resources required for project execution;

- (4) corruption;
- (5) Political influence;
- (6) indolence of workers/labourers/contractors;
- (7) cost/budget overrun;
- (8) recruitment of project managers that lack experience and training.

Furthermore, insufficient funding, none use of formal methods and strategies; ignoring of project warning signs are of mid rank in the survey. This study concludes that any reason for project failure can be connected to compromise on the above mentioned failure causes.

5.2 Recommendations

Some of the recommendations are as follows:

- i. It is advisable for the project stakeholders to retain their experienced workers for higher productivity and also helping to retain their experienced workers.
- ii. Project organizations should recruit experienced professionals like accountants and engineers that will enable them achieve high rate of raw material estimates, efficient costs estimate and sourcing, accurate job scheduling for their projects.
- iii. There should be no shortage of raw materials at site of on-going project purposely to avoid unnecessary delay to project delivery.
- iv. In Nigeria, siting of any project should be devoid of politics if such project is to be sustainable.
- v. Based on the conclusions, it is concluded that in order to mitigate project failures, projects stakeholders should always apply general principles of adequate planning, monitoring and control in executing their projects.

Table 1: Educational Qualification of Respondents

	No of respondent	Percentage
HND/BSc	20	36.4
MSc/M.Tech	35	63.6
Total	55	100

Source: Field Survey ,2015

Table 2: Professional Qualifications of the Respondents

	No of respondent	Percentage
Engineers	24	43.6
Builders	6	10.9
Project Managers	8	14.5
Consultants	6	10.9
Others	11	20.0
Total	55	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 3 Work Experience in Project Implementations (yrs)

	No of respondent	Percentage
10 – 15	25	45.5
16 – 20	19	34.5
21 – 25	11	20.0
	55	100

Table 4 Experience on Project Failure

	Yes	%	No
Engineers	24	43.6	–
Builders	6	10.9	–
Project Managers	8	14.5	–
Consultants	6	10.9	–
Others	11	20.0	–
Total	55	100	–

Source: Field Survey

Table 5 Factors responsible for project failure in both private and public projects works in Akure Metropolis expressed in percentages and Likert scale of 1 – 5.

S/N	Causes	NI	%	NA	%	FA	%	A	%	SA	%	Total
		1		2		3		4		5		
1	Poorly defined project plans and scope	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	0.09	45	0.82	5	0.09	55
2	Lack of Management commitment	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	50	0.91	5	0.09	55
3	Inadequate risk management	0	0.00	0	0.00	25	0.45	25	0.45	5	0.01	55
4	Failure to identify key assumptions	0	0.00	0	0.00	20	0.36	35	0.64	0	0.00	55
5	Recruitment of project managers that lack experience and training	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	30	0.55	25	0.45	55
6	Death of the investor/client	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	50	0.91	5	0.09	55
7	Insufficient funding	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	50	0.91	5	0.09	55
8	Estimates for cost and schedule are erroneous	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	25	0.45	30	0.55	55
9	Bad decision/ project mismatch	0	0.00	0	0.00	25	0.45	30	0.55	0	0.00	55
10	Ignoring project warning signs	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	0.09	30	0.55	20	0.36	55
11	Ineffective leadership	0	0.00	0	0.00	20	0.36	35	0.64	0	0.00	55
12	Failure to retain experienced workers	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	55	1.00	55
13	Political reasons/influence	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	30	0.55	25	0.45	55
14	Inadequate supply of resources required for	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	25	0.45	30	0.55	55

NI=No Idea

NA=Not agree

FA=Fairly agree

A=Agreed

Table 6 Factors responsible for project failure in both private and public projects works in Akure Metropolis expressed using Relative Important Index

S/N	Causes	1	2	3	4	5	RII
1	Poorly defined project plans and scope	0	0	5	45	5	0.80
2	Lack of management commitment	0	0	0	50	5	0.82
3	Inadequate risk Management	0	0	25	25	5	0.73
4	Failure to indentify key assumptions	0	0	20	35	0	0.73
5	Recruitment of project managers that lack experience and training	0	0	0	30	25	0.89
6	Death of the investor/client	0	0	0	50	5	0.82
7	Insufficient funding	0	0	0	50	5	0.82
8	Estimates for cost and schedule are erroneous	0	0	0	25	30	0.91
9	Bad decisions/Project Mismatch	0	0	25	30	0	0.71
10	Ignoring project warning signs	0	0	5	30	20	0.85
11	Ineffective leadership	0	0	20	35	0	0.73
12	Failure to retain experienced workers	0	0	0	0	55	1.00
13	Political reasons/influence	0	0	0	30	25	0.89
14	Inadequate supply of resources required for project execution	0	0	0	25	30	0.91
15	Corruption and bribery	0	0	0	30	25	0.89
16	Individual projects supervised by relatives	0	0	45	10	0	0.64
17	Indolence of workers/labourers/contractors hired by project client	0	0	0	30	25	0.89
18	Cost/budget overruns.	0	0	0	30	25	0.89

Source: Field Survey.

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