

Assessment of emotional intelligence impact on construction firms human resource management practices in a developing economy

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Abstract:

The study assessed the attributes of emotional intelligence (EI) that impact construction firms (CFs) human resource management practices (HRMPs) as well as evaluated the impact of each of the attributes on CFs' HRMPs in the Nigerian construction industry (NCI). For this study, a qualitative research design was adopted. Delphi approach was utilised to elicit experts' opinions on some identified attributes of EI. Data collected was analysed using a combination of interquartile deviation, median, standard deviation, mean, and Cronbach's alpha to attain a robust consensus among respondents. The theoretical basis of the study is in the Path-goal theory. The study is limited to construction professionals (CPs) and human resources (HRs) in the Nigerian built environment. The findings revealed that seven (7) attributes of EI impact on CFs HRMPs, with two (2) attributes possessing a very high impact (VHI: 9.00-10.00), while five (5) scored high impact (HI: 7.00-8.99). Also, the study found that the attributes of EI that impact CFs' HRMPs include: encouraging self-control, promoting on-the-job relationships, and having a good listening ability. The study recommends CPs' and HRs should exhibit self-control, build relationships, and possess good listening ability while on construction projects to achieve performance. The study will increase the understanding of CPs and HRs in the NCI on EI's various attributes and impacts on performance. Additionally, it will encourage CPs and HRs to think critically about the need for HRMPs implementation to show different EI characteristics.

Keywords:

Construction industry, developing countries, emotional intelligence, human resource management practices, Nigeria

1 Introduction

Generally, studies on firms' HRM practices in the construction industry contended that firms' human resource management practices are practices that interact with and shape employee attitude and behaviour to achieve quality and higher performance (Babu & Reddy, 2013; Placide et al., 2019). The issue of employee attitude and behavior pertains to employee emotional intelligence activities. However, with the coming of employee winning strategy, employee capabilities, and building relationships and the likes, studies on employee attitude and behaviour in HRMPs (emotions and feelings) are advancing in workplaces to ensure

employee wellbeing. However, little has been said about the need to investigate the attributes of emotional intelligence that impact construction firms' HRMPs in the construction industry (CI). Against this background, it is important that emotional intelligence attributes are assessed within the CI. Thus, this study addresses the gap by identifying the attributes of emotional intelligence that impact on the CI and evaluating the impact of each of the attributes on firms' HRMPs in the NCI. The NCI was the area of focus for this study because of its resemblance with other developing countries' construction industries, although this study seek not to generalise its findings to be the same for all developing countries. Additionally, the study area was selected because the few studies that investigated EI and firms' HRMPs had the construction industry in the developed countries as their study area (Mischung et al., 2015; Konanahalli & Oyedele, 2016; Lawani 2016).

Gope et al. (2018) defined human resource management practices as the activities employed by an organisation to attract, develop, motivate, and retain the most valuable and capable asset (people) for their effective utilisation and smooth running of the firms' operations to achieve organisational goals. Thus, in this study, HRM practices is proxied by recruitment and selection, training and development, and motivation benchmarked against achieving organisational goals and objectives in the NCI. On the other hand, emotional intelligence is seen as a form of social intelligence that involves monitoring of oneself and others' feelings and emotions, discriminating among them and thereby using the information gathered as a guide to one's thinking and actions. Similarly, Deursen et al. (2015:412) defined EI as the individual ability to monitor and discriminate oneself and others' emotions, using the results to guide one's thinking and actions. Thus, from the above definitions of emotional intelligence, it could be deduced that emotional intelligence deals with the interpersonal skills of the HRs. Interpersonal skills include motivating others, managing conflicts, effective communication among HRs, and team building. These skills could be regarded as EI activities that address communication skills between leaders and subordinates, HRs relationship management, and motivational skills. Further, EI activities help understand behaviour, management styles, attitudes, skills, and peoples' potential (Serrat, 2017). In addition, it helps to foster HRs' well-being by eliminating interpersonal conflicts and emotional regulations to the barest minimum (Fabio & Kenny, 2016). In order to foster HR well-being, their concerns ought to be addressed through the EI activities.

Based on this, extant studies emphasised that various EI activities ensure project success and effective leadership behaviour and performance (Maqbool et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2018). However, authors have advanced various views over the years as to which activities (attributes) of emotional intelligence impact HRM practices positively. However, a dearth of studies have assessed the impact of emotional intelligence on firms' HRMPs, especially in the NCI. Therefore, the identified gap in literature is addressed in this study as it seeks to: determine the attributes of emotional intelligence (EI) that impact on firms' human resource management practices; and the relative impact of each attribute on firms' human resource management practices in the Nigerian construction industry.

2 Literature Review

Existing studies mentioned two complementary variables that account for the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence. These include the diversity of stakeholders such as engineers, quantity surveyors, clients, contractors, architects, sub-contractors, accountants, artisans, suppliers, and project managers that make up the workforce and their emotions which are the motivating forces that influence HRs' activities in the construction industry (Oke et al., 2017). Hence, the current study integrates both the HRs' and emotions in determining EI's attributes that impact construction firms' HRM practices, which is the novelty of the present study. All the same, the underpinning study influencing EI informed that the object of emotional intelligence is the firms' HRs' activities; thus, implying that the activities of the diverse workforces are dependent on their emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). In any organisation, the firm's actions may positively or negatively impact its HRs' whereas HRs' emotions are a response to a firm's actions (Wright, 2008). Therefore, Serrat (2017) acknowledged that EI involves identifying and developing an emotionally intelligent workforce, while Fabio and Kenny (2016) emphasised identifying and incorporating individual needs that foster well-being among workers into organisational activities. However, due to the heterogeneous nature of the CI and varied needs of the workforces (Lawani, 2016; Ali & Mohamed, 2018), generalising EI attributes that impact firms' HRM practices in another national context to be same in Nigeria may be erroneous. Thus, the study determines the EI attributes that have impacted construction firms' HRM practices and the relative impact of each of the attributes on CFs' HRM practices in the NCI.

Evidence has shown that some attributes have been used to measure emotional intelligence in other national contexts. For instance, Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) identified self-control, on-the-job relationship, good listening ability, sense of responsibility, self-confidence, goals despite obstacles /setbacks, and keeping disruptive emotions in check as attributes of emotional intelligence. Songer et al (2006) found trustworthiness as an element of EI. Additionally, Sunindijo and Zou (2013) revealed that EI elements include self-control, self-awareness, good listening ability, sense of responsibility, and self-confidence. Also, another identified attributes of EI are adaptation to new situation, effective communication, extended network, and situation from others' perspective (Konanahalli & Oyedele, 2016; Mahmud, 2017; Oke et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2019). In addition, EI attributes include self-awareness as mentioned by Sunindijo & Zou, 2013 and Maqbool et al., 2017. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of literature investigating EI's impact on HRMPs from the previous studies.

Hence, the relevance of the present study in addressing the identified gaps in the literature as to what attributes of EI impact on HRM practices in the NCI; and also, there exist a gap in relation to the impact of each of the identified attributes of EI on firms' HRM practices in the NCI. Thus, this study addresses these gaps by determining the attributes of emotional intelligence that impact construction firms' HRM practices and the relative impact of each of the identified attributes on firms' HR management practices in the NCI. For this study, the NCI was chosen because it shares some resemblances with the majority of the developing countries' construction industries. Also, the study findings could be a true representation of what relates to developing countries. However, the present study does not try to generalise its outcomes to be the same for all developing countries. Further, few studies on EI and firms'

HRM practices had developed countries' construction industries as an area of focus (Mischung et al., 2015; Lawani 2016).

Moreover, the Path-goal theory was utilised to address the identified gaps of the impact of EI on construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. The Path-goal theory was developed by House (1971) and revised in 1996. The theory posits that leader's behaviour (emotion) is dependent on his employee's satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Evans, 1996). The theory assumes that leaders' emotions are flexible in that they can change their style based on the firm's situation/condition. Thus, suggesting a good leader's qualities that bring about the firm's goals through his emotions. Therefore, developing and maintaining HR needs in the construction industry entails taking into cognizance leadership emotions that fit the employee and firm's environment, thereby enhancing workers' commitment that brings about satisfaction, motivation, performance, and productivity. However, HR needs and how to manage the relationships in the industry based on emotions that influence HRMPs is a question unanswered. Lorinkova et al. (2013) argued that there should exist a mutual understanding of the leader's emotions among project participants about the task and responsibilities at the early stage of team formation. In addition, Oke et al. (2017) maintained that communication skills that influence project's quality and relationships among professionals and other stakeholders in the CI should be improved upon. Therefore, the needs and emotions of the HRs may differ, the ability to recognise the meanings of emotions and their relationships gives them a basis in reasoning and problem-solving (Mayer et al., 2001). Based on the study's theoretical basis, identified attributes were organised and investigated to ascertain their relative empirical impact on NCI construction firms' HRM practices.

3 Research Methodology

This study utilised both the literature review and Delphi method research approach. In the first approach, literature was reviewed, which aided in identifying the specific attributes for measuring emotional intelligence (EI) and indicators of firms' HRM practices. The latter involved seeking experts' opinions on the level of impact of EI attributes on construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. Fifteen experts were involved in the two rounds of the Delphi process against nineteen (19) that started the Delphi survey. These experts include professionals such as engineers (4), builders (2), project managers (2), architects (2), quantity surveyors (2), and the HR/personnel managers (3) in the NCI. The selection of the experts cut across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria; North-central (2), North-west (1), North-east (1), South-south (2), South-east (2), South-west (4), as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (3). The selection of experts helps to enrich the study by seeking varied opinions and knowledge across these zones. Additionally, in terms of experts' size, Ameyaw et al. (2016) assert that studies from management and engineering utilised between 8 to 20 experts as panel members. In this study, the size of the experts (15) was sufficient based on recommendations of scholars who have previously employed the Delphi techniques in previous studies (Aigbavboa, 2013) and are considered adequate for this study. Moreover, the experts were drawn from industry based on common requirements such as must be knowledgeable in the field of construction/ project management, HRM and its practices; possess at least a diploma, a bachelor or master's degree or doctorate; selected experts' willingness to participate in the entire Delphi study and must belong to a professional body among others.

In first-round of the Delphi, both open and closed-ended questions were utilised. The study round one response were analysed, and the results formed the basis of round two. In round two, the Delphi questions allowed the expert panelists to review and comment on EI attributes impacting firms' HRM practices in the NCI, which the expert panelists proposed in Delphi study round one. Also, the questions were used to investigate the expert panelists' comments expressing agreement, disagreement, or clarification concerning proposed attributes of EI impacting HRMPs in the NCI. Frequencies, interquartile deviation (IQD), and Cronbach's alpha were utilised in measuring the degree of consensus reached in the experts' responses. For each response, the group median was calculated. The group median was the appropriate measure of central tendency utilised because it was more suitable for the type of information collected. Further, the group median for each element in the second round was computed and sent back to expert panelists. They were asked to maintain the first-round response/ change it as informed by the group median of the first round. Using Microsoft Excel, the experts' opinions were analysed and calculated using a combination of median, mean, standard deviation, interquartile deviation, and Cronbach's alpha with the adopted scale (Aigbavboa, 2013) to measure consensus. This scale was based on a 10-point impact scale ranging from no impact (1) to very high impact (10) (Aigbavboa, 2013). Throughout the study, experts' information was kept confidential. Moreover, the Delphi process's reliability and validity due to its qualitative nature was overcome based on the sound theoretical reasoning of the qualitative research (Mitchell, 1983). Thus, this study's theoretical basis is in the Path-goal theory (House, 1971). Therefore, it is worth stressing that the findings of this study are limited to the views of the Delphi experts selected for this study, though maybe a true representation of the impact of EI on CFs HRMPs in other developing countries construction industry which share similar characteristics with the NCI.

4 Results and Discussion

The summary of the Delphi result reveals how consensus was reached in round two, as indicated in Table 1. Objective 1 determines the attributes of emotional intelligence that impact construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. The experts found seven (7) EI attributes to have impacted CFs' HRM practices in the NCI concerning objective one. The acknowledged attributes of EI were as stated in Table 1. When assessed, findings showed that each of the identified attributes of EI that impact CF's HRM practices had a median value falling within the very high impact (VHI: 9-10) and a high impact (HI: 7-8.99). Also, it was revealed that all seven (7) variables achieved consensus with IQD cut-off ($IQD \leq 1$) score (Aigbavboa, 2013). This suggests strong consensus in the view of the expert panelists towards EI attributes that impact CFs' HRM practices in the NCI. Also, the identified attributes are similar to previous studies found to have been attributes of EI in some national contexts, as mentioned in the literature review. However, the extent of the impact of each identified attribute relative to one another varied in the study area.

Table 1: Emotional intelligence attributes

Sub-attributes	(M)	($\bar{x}$)	(σx)	(IQD)	(R)
Encourage self-control	9	8.33	1.35	0.50	1
Promote on-the-job relationship (building relationship)	9	8.20	1.47	0.50	2
Good listening ability	8	8.07	1.67	1.00	3
Promote work for effective communication among employees	8	8.00	1.73	1.00	4
Promoting a sense of responsibility	8	8.00	1.20	0.50	4
Encourage self confidence	8	7.93	1.79	1.00	6
Pursing goals despite obstacles and setbacks	8	7.80	1.97	1.00	7
Cronbach alpha		0.936			

M = Median, $\bar{x}$ = Mean, σx = Standard deviation, IQD = interquartile deviation, R = $\bar{x}$ ranking

Objective 2 determines the relative impact of each EI attribute on construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. As shown in Table 1, analysis revealed that out of seven (7) characteristics of EI that impact CF's HRM practices in the NCI, two (2) had very high impact (VHI: 9.00–10.00) on CF's HRM practices while the remaining five (5) had a high impact (HI: 7.00–8.99). This is based on the 10-point impact scale this study employed (Aigbavboa, 2013). However, none of the attributes was found not to impact CFs' HRM practices in the NCI. Also, based on the IQD values, the study revealed that strong consensus was achieved for all the seven (7) attributes of EI as they obtained scores ranging from 0.00 to 1.00 based on their respective IQD scores. As depicted in Table 1, the Cronbach alpha value of 0.936 was revealed. This indicates that the instrument used was reliable as the alpha value tends towards one (1) (Moser & Kalton, 1999).

Evidently, the respective standard deviation (σx) values show consistency in the experts' responses. Ranking by their mean scores, *encouraging self-control*, was ranked first with a mean value of 8.33, supporting studies that recognised self-control as an attribute of EI (Sunindijo & Zou, 2013; Konanahalli & Oyedele, 2016). Similarly, *promoting on-the-job relationships for better firm common goals* with a mean value of 8.20 emerged second EI attribute that impacts construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. This is consistent with Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) claims that employers with high emotional intelligence use their skills to make changes that inspire others. Further, *employee good listening ability* with a mean value of 8.07 came third most impactful ranked attribute of EI on CFs' HRMPs in the NCI. This corroborates with Sunindijo and Zou (2013); Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) claim that possessing good listening ability between employer and employee and vice versa are attributes of EI. Additionally, the fourth-ranked attributes of EI with mean scores of 8.00 respectively that impact CFs' HRMPs in the NCI were having *effective communication skills and a sense of responsibility among employees*. This corroborates with Molina et al. (2019) claim that managers with high communication skills will effectively connect with employees, which will motivate them to address challenging tasks in an organisation. Also, this finding is in line with the assertion by Sunindijo and Zou (2013) and Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) that acknowledged a good sense of responsibility as an EI attribute.

The sixth-ranked attribute of EI that impacts CFs' HRMPs in the NCI was *exhibiting self-confidence by the HRs*. The mean score of this attribute was 7.93. It affirmed the declaration by Sunindijo and Zou (2013) and Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) that HRs that display

confidence in their task enhance the implementation of HRMPs. Finally, *setting goals despite obstacles and setbacks* was ranked seventh with a mean value of 7.80, supporting previous studies by Sunindijo and Zou (2013) and Konanahalli and Oyedele (2016) that firms with HRs who are supportive despite challenges faced influence effective HRMPs implementation. From the foregoing, the NCI can be enhanced by improving the firm's emotional intelligence features in the area of HRs self-control and building relationships among HRs, since they were the attribute of EI that had a very high impact on construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI.

5 Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Research

This study assessed the attributes of EI that impact construction firms' HRM practices and evaluated the impact of each of the attributes on construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. The study utilised a Delphi approach by gathering information from construction professionals and HRs in the NCI. The study concludes that seven (7) attributes of emotional intelligence impact firms' HRM practices in the NCI. This is in line with the attributes identified by previous studies on firms' emotional intelligence. However, the relative impact of the identified attributes varied in the NCI. Also, based on objective two, the study concludes that relatively *encouraging self-control* emerged as the first attribute of EI. It had a very high impact on construction firms' human resource management practices in the NCI. *Pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks* was ranked last among the EI attributes, impacting construction firms' human resource management practices in the NCI.

Therefore, this study recommends seven (7) main attributes of EI as stated in Table 1. The findings of this study will provide CPs' and HRs' of the important insights into attributes of EI that impact construction firms' HRM practices in the NCI. The study will provide a starting point for future research to delve into EI that impacts on CFs' HRM practices by adding to existing literature. Finally, it will inform policymakers formulating policies that will significantly impact CFs' emotional intelligence in the NCI. However, while the study's contribution to body of knowledge on emotional intelligence attributes is evident, the findings of this study are constrained in terms of the Delphi study. The study was completed by only fifteen (15) experts out of the nineteen (19) experts invited. There is possibility that findings could have been presented otherwise if all invited experts had participated in the Delphi study. Furthermore, only seven (7) EI attributes were deemed noteworthy in the context of this study. Based on this, future studies are recommended across all the states of the six geo-political zones with a view to generate more EI factors that could impact HRMPs implementation in the NCI.

6 References

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