High-Performance Work Practices System for Construction Works in Nigeria

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The construction industry is characterised by poor project performance, hence, the paradigm shift to innovative project performance strategies such as high-performance work practices. Despite some of the strategies that have been implemented to enhance performance, there has been a dearth of scholarly and practical focus on the application of high-performance work practices (HPWP) as an innovative means of dealing with these challenges. This study evaluated the various forms of high-performance work strategies and their effects on project delivery. The population of the study is 665 and the sample size is 250. Simple random sampling technique was used to administer structured questionnaire to the respondents. However, only 225 were properly filled and used for this study. The findings from the study indicate that the respondents are aware of all the eight various forms of high-performance work strategies with mean item scores ranging between 4.25 - 3.62. which include; selective hiring, on-the-job training and development, performance management, incentive compensation, employee empowerment, job security, employee involvement, and work-life balance. The study concludes that HPWPs are critical drivers of project performance, particularly through training, empowerment, and performance management. The study recommends that construction firms should invest more on On-the-job training and development and allow employee involvement in decision making process.

Keywords: Construction projects, project performance, human resources, training and development, career management

Introduction

The Nigerian construction industry continues to be the major stimulant in the country's economic growth and development. This strong interrelationship between the economy and the construction industry further strengthens the need to ensure that project planning and management are cost-effective (Ogunde *et al.*, 2017). However, the construction sector in Nigeria has been characterised by factors such as incessant building collapse, unnecessary delay of projects, projects abandonment, cost overrun unethical practices, fraud and corruption amongst others (Isimoya *et al.*, 2020; Adu & Opawole, 2020).

Temitope and Alonge (2019) posited that poor construction project performance is a cause of worry in the construction sector in Nigeria. Furthermore, project failure has been linked to people management (attitudes, behaviours, and skills) organisational culture and project management practices, according to anecdotal evidence (Tanko *et al.,* 2018; Temitope & Alonge, 2019; Isimoya *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, the traditional system of project management has not yielded the desired result, hence private and public building construction projects are barely completed to time and within the ranges of the initial contract sum, materials and quality specifications and standard code of practices (Tanko *et al.*, 2018; Isimoya *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the paradigm shifts for the construction sector in Nigeria to seek for modern innovative construction project management system to gain a competitive edge (Tanko *et al.,* 2018). Such innovative management strategies as advocated by researchers include the adoption of High-Performance Work Practices System (HPWPS) of human resources management in the construction sector (Isimoya *et al.*, 2020). HPWPs are a set of strategies which are used in organisations, which are geared towards maximising employee output and productivity (Kaushik & Mukherjee, 2022). They include practices like employee involvement, performance management, job design, training and development, compensation and rewards, and teamwork (Chapano *et al.*, 2018).

HPWPs have been established as one of the strategies that can be used to break even in an organisation (Ogunde *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Zavyalova *et al.* (2020) established that HPWPs positively impact project delivery as well as the realisation of project performance. For instance, Wood *et al.* (2016), using the United Kingdom Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) data, found that implementing HPWPs increased productivity growth. Tamkin (2019) found that nearly one-fifth of variations in productivity and profitability were associated with differences in HPWP practices. Guest *et al.* (2020) also identified a link between HPWPs and financial performance. The

consensus from these studies was that HPWP systems had overall benefits for the general performance of firms. Despite the potential benefits of High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) in improving construction project outcomes, there is a lack of comprehensive research on their impact within the context of the Nigerian construction industry. The existing literature primarily focuses on HPWPs in developed economies, leaving a gap in understanding how these practices can be effectively applied and tailored to the unique challenges and dynamics of the Nigerian construction sector. This implies that HPWPs have been fully implemented in the advanced countries such as USA and UK to enhance projects performance but have not been fully adopted in Nigerian construction Industry. Therefore, this study seeks to identify and assess the impact of HPWPs on construction project delivery in the Nigerian construction industry, with the goal enhancing project performance.

Literature Review

Various forms of high performance practices in organizations

High-performance work practices (HPWPs) play a crucial role in the construction industry by enhancing productivity, efficiency, and overall project success (Tanko *et al.,* 2018). These practices encompass a range of strategies and approaches that promote employee engagement, skills development, teamwork, and organisational effectiveness. HPWPs include recruitment and selection, performance management, training and development, rewards and recognition, flexible work arrangements, and team building, which are integrated Human Resource Management (HRM) practices designed to improve employee competencies, motivation, and engagement for effective project delivery (Garg & Lal, 2019). By implementing these practices, construction firms can create a positive work environment, attract and retain talented individuals, and achieve exceptional outcomes (Ingle & Mahesh, 2020).

Impacts of high performance work practices on organizations

Tregaskis *et al*. (2017) pointed that while implementing HPWPs, the impact on performance was not momentary or unstable. Therefore, the performance did not fall back to previous levels after implementing HPWPs, and employees did not withdraw their discretionary efforts and were capable of meeting new targets. On the contrary, a reciprocal management-employee exchange environment was generated through the implementation of HPWPs. Wu (2018) studied the effects of HPWPs application on different organisation sizes, namely small, medium, and large organisations, and found that although the implementation of effective HR practices such as HPWPs in small-sized firms is limited, one possible interpretation is that the lack of HPWPs in such firms only prevents them from the positive outcomes that usually accompany such implementation. However, only some studies reported a positive relationship between HPWPs and performance in small-sized firms, such as the relationship between training and productivity. Isimoya *et al*. (2020) combined in their research several HPWPs, like training, compensation, career management and performance management and found that those practices are individually related to labour productivity in small-sized firms. Additionally, Tawk (2021) found that HPWPs in small firms play a significant role in employee motivation, commitment, retention, and performance, even if these businesses depend less on official HPWPs. Alternatively, Delerys (2015) mentioned that the right choice of HPWPs is critical for improving firms' performance and results in medium-sized firms. Such choices may be crucial because medium-sized firms are in a development stage where the main concern is to target problems in order to help these firms grow (Rauch & Hatak, 2016).

In the case of large-sized firms, there are similar findings with the small-sized firms where in both, the implementation of HPWPs resulted in improvement of their employee's performance and consequently, these HPWPs need a platform or a system to be more effective. Hence, significantly higher performance levels were found in large firms with a solid human resource management (HRM) system (Wu, 2018). All these clearly demonstrate that a robust HRM system that contains bundles of well-selected HPWPs is more likely to impact performance significantly (Garg, 2019). Therefore, it is helpful to emphasise again that the best set of HPWPs in a given organisation can depend on many criteria and steps preceding their implementation.

Drivers and barriers of high performance work practices in organizations

Several studies have identified a range of drivers and barriers that impact effective project delivery in the construction industry. One key driver is effective project planning. A study by Combs *et al*. (2016) found that poor project planning was one of the main reasons for project failure, while effective planning was found to have a significant impact on project success. Similarly, Ingle and Mahesh (2020) argued that effective project planning is crucial to ensuring that projects are delivered on time, within budget, and to the required quality standards. Another driver is effective communication. A study by Kissi *et al*. (2019) found that effective communication among project team members was a critical factor in successful project delivery. Similarly, Borges *et al.* (2024) found that communication was one of the key enablers of successful project delivery. Effective communication has also been found to be crucial in facilitating stakeholder management, which is

another important driver of effective project delivery. Stakeholder management involves identifying and engaging with all stakeholders in a project and addressing their needs and concerns. According to a study by Borges *et al.* (2024), stakeholder management is an important driver of project success, as it helps to ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and working towards a common goal. Similarly, Lavagnon and Pinto (2022) found that effective stakeholder management was a critical success factor in construction projects. Project governance is another important driver of effective project delivery. According to a study by Borges *et al.* (2024), project governance involves the establishment of clear roles and responsibilities, effective decision-making processes, and the implementation of appropriate controls and monitoring mechanisms. Effective project governance has been found to be crucial in ensuring that projects are delivered on time, within budget, and to the required quality standards (Beshah, 2024).

Research Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative survey research design to systematically collect data from a targeted population. This approach was adopted as it allows for the gathering of representative information from a sample population, providing accurate results within a defined margin of error ((Nworgu, 2016). The population of this study composed of key professionals within FCT Abuja registered construction firms. In line with this, a preliminary investigation undertaken revealed a total population size of 665 (Architects, Builders, Quantity Surveyors, Estate Surveyors, and Civil Engineers) in the registered firms. Based on this population, Yamma's formula was applied to obtain sample size of 250 for the study. A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data for the study using the sample size. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistic. Hence, mean item score (MIS) and standard deviation were used to analyse the data. In the tests, variables with MIS of 3.0 and above were considered very significant on the various forms of HPWPs applicable to the Nigerian construction industry and their significant effects on project delivery. It is imperative to note that before the commencement of data analysis, the Cronbach's alpha reliability test was used to determine the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of values above 0.700 was obtained for all the variables suggesting a very good internal consistency reliability for all the variables tested (Pallant, 2013).

Results and Discussion

Demographic information of the respondents

The sample has a large proportion of mid-to-senior level practitioners: 42.67% of the sample has a BSc/BTech degree, 78.67% are corporate members of their professional organisations, and 64.44% have more than 21 years of industry experience. The majority of the respondents are professionals who include builders (40.44%) and quantity surveyors (32.00), and the rest are architects, estate surveyors and civil engineers. Professional membership and long tenure means high levels of professionalism that implies responses are based on in-depth practical understanding of construction processes and human-resource practices and enhance face validity of survey judgment regarding HPWPs and its influence on project delivery. Simultaneously, the composition of the sample presents significant interpretation and generalisation concerns. The large proportion of builders and highly skilled practitioners could affect the outcome biasedly through contractor/managerial attitudes and insufficiently represent the opinions of early-career staff, the consultancy professionals or jurisdictions with a different professional composition. The reason of low proportion of doctoral/postgraduate respondents (PGD, MSc/MTech, PhD combined ≈ 17.33%) also indicates that the data is more practice-oriented than research-oriented. Such may result in cautious evaluations of more recent or less institutionalised HR practices and restrict extrapolation to contexts in which the mix of professions are similar.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Information of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educational Qualification		
1. OND	42	18.67
2. HND	48	21.33
3. BSc/BTech	96	42.67
4. PGD	15	6.67
5. MSc/MTech	21	9.33
6. PhD	3	1.33
Total	**225**	**100.00**
Profession		
1. Architecture	18	8.00
2. Building	91	40.44
3. Quantity Surveying	72	32.00
4. Estate Surveying	32	14.22
5. Civil Engineering	12	5.33
Total	**225**	**100.00**
Membership Grade		
1. Graduate	22	9.78
2. Corporate	177	78.67
3. Fellow	26	11.55
Total	**225**	**100.00**
Years of experience		
1. Less than 5 years	9	4.00
2. 6 – 10 years	21	9.33
3. 10 – 21 years	50	22.22
4. Above 21 years	145	64.44
Total		**100.00**

The various forms of HPWPs applicable

The standard Deviation (SD) obtained in the analysis is also within the acceptable range, seeing that they indicate low variations in the responses among the respondents (Landau & Everitt, 2013). Out of the eight variables measured, on-the-job training and development (MIS = 4.25), employee involvement in decision-making (MIS = 4.22), and employee empowerment (MIS = 4.15), became the most crucial practices and all of them are above the mean of 4.0. This gives an implication that, human capacity building and participatory management have been widely known to be key performance drivers in the industry. The eminence of training and development confirms the core position of constant maintenance of skills in meeting the dynamic demands of construction projects. Likewise, the empowerment and involvement are signs of transitioning to the hierarchical management systems to collaborative systems that are necessary in complex project settings. These results can be compared with Chapano *et al*. (2018) who highlighted the beneficial impact of HR practices on the performance of construction organizations. On the other hand, such practices as selective hiring (MIS = 3.62) and incentive compensation (MIS = 3.77) were lower rated, which indicates that, although they are relevant, they are not as frequently used and applied yet in the context of the study area.

Table 2: The Various HPWPs Applicable

S/N	High-performance Work Practices	$\bar{M}$**IS**	**SD**
1	Selective hiring	3.62	1.11
2	On-the-job training and development	4.25	0.89
3	Performance management	4.06	0.99
4	Incentive compensation	3.77	1.09
5	Employee empowerment	4.15	0.93
6	Job security	3.96	1.08
7	Employee involvement in decision making process	4.22	0.88
8	Work-life balance	3.89	1.07

The most rated effects in Table 3 were increased communication among the team members (MIS = 4.21), reduced scope changes (MIS = 4.06) and better project planning (MIS = 4.00). These results support the fact that workforce practices have a direct impact on collaboration, stability, and efficiency during project implementation. Communication and planning are some of the traditional success factors of construction project management (Lavagnon & Pinto, 2022), and this paper offers empirical evidence in the Nigerian sector. The moderately rated results were the improvement of coordination (MIS = 3.85), funding access (MIS = 3.92), and the availability of skilled labour (MIS = 3.90). This implies that, an indirect effect of HPWPs can be a better mobilization and capacity, but not as effective as communication or planning benefits. External threats, resource abundance, and governance, on the other hand, were the least (MIS = 2.81) to indicate the low penetration of HPWPs in dealing with systemic and institutional issues that are beyond the control of organizations. Combined, the findings suggest that although HPWPs prove to be potent instruments of internal project process improvement, they do not allow replacing the larger governance and institutional changes that the Nigerian construction sector requires. The managers of the construction can thus use HPWPs to reinforce the processes within an organisation, but the policy makers should also focus on the external and structural bottlenecks to generate overall success in the project.

Table 3: Effects of HPWPs on Project Delivery

S/N	Effects of HPWPs on Project Delivery	MIS	SD
1	Enhance communication among the construction team	4.21	0.63
2	Improve coordination in construction projects	3.85	0.79
3	Effective planning at every phase of construction projects	4.00	0.63
4	Reduce regulatory challenges in the construction industry	3.76	0.88
5	Encourage proper project management	3.54	0.90
6	Reduce the rate of changes in a project scope	4.06	0.62
7	Eliminate ambiguity in project requirements	3.58	0.88
8	Enable adequate access to skilled labour force in the construction industry	3.90	0.73
9	Enable construction industry to easily source for projects fund	3.92	0.81
10	Eliminate all forms of external threats in construction firms	2.81	1.22
11	Enable resources to be abundantly available at every phase of construction projects	2.81	0.88
12	Effective projects governance	2.81	0.91
13	Provide clear project goals and objectives	3.90	0.73

Conclusion

This study identifies on-the-job training and development, employee involvement and empowerment, and performance management as the most prevalent High-Performance Work Practices (HPWPs) in the study area. The consistency of responses underscores their widespread recognition and relevance. Findings indicate that HPWPs positively influence project planning, communication, stakeholder management, funding, skilled labour availability, and scope control, but exert limited impact on external risks, resource sufficiency, and project governance. The study concludes that HPWPs are critical drivers of project performance, particularly through training, empowerment, and performance management, yet they cannot fully resolve governance and external challenges. Theoretically, the research reinforces human capital and resource-based perspectives by evidencing the link between workforce investment and project outcomes. Practically, it offers construction managers and policymakers actionable insights for enhancing project delivery through targeted human resource strategies. Limitations include reliance on self-reported data and the Nigeria-specific context, suggesting the need for comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method studies to deepen understanding of HPWPs in construction. Therefore, the study recommends that construction firms should invest more on On-the-job training and development and allow employee involvement in decision making process.

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