

# Client and Employee Satisfaction: Non-Financial Measures for Gauging Performance of Small and Medium Construction Firms (SMCFs) in Abuja, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study investigated the performance of small and medium construction firms in Nigeria using non-financial measures particularly client and employee satisfaction. Information from ninety-four SMCFs who engaged in estate development were employed for this study to enhance ease of access to clients and employees on their project sites; one firm was considered per project site, therefore the study considered 94 firms with 94 project sites. Two employees and two clients of each of the firms were selected for questionnaire administration. Hence, a total of 376 copies of questionnaire were administered, out of which 238 were retrieved. The data were analysed using frequency, percentages, multiple response percentages and mean score (MS). Findings revealed that SMCFs had good communication strategy with employees and clients, good management / managerial capabilities, delivery to cost and specification but performed poorly with regards to project management skills that had to do with quality, time when delivering products to clients. SMCFs also recorded low performance with employees' satisfaction on short term and long term benefits. The study therefore recommended that SMCFs should pay attention to project management skills and employees' salary, health, pension, mentoring and training benefits.

**Keywords:** Performance, SMCFs, Clients' satisfaction, Employees' satisfaction

## 1.0 Introduction

In most countries, the construction industry accounts for about 3 to 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Arditi and Mokhtar, 2000; Aiyetan and Olotuah, 2006); about 3-6% in developing countries and 7-10% in developed countries (Aiyetan and Olotuah, 2006). This is because every sector needs the product of the construction industry to carry out her activity. This view was reinforced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2008) when the construction industry was described as an industry that provides the buildings and infrastructure upon which virtually every other sector depends. Ali and Rahmat (2009) noted further that the construction industry is an engine of growth; acting as a catalyst to stimulate the growth of a nation's economy.

In Nigeria particularly, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that the construction industry accounted for averagely 2.19% of the national GDP in 2012 and contributed a total of about 3.27% within the first quarter (Q1) of 2013; sectoral growth recorded an average of 12.58% in 2012 while by first quarter of 2013, an average of 15.66% for the industry (NBS, 2013). The analysis showed that there was increased construction activities between 2012 and the first quarter of 2013. This can be said to be as a result of increasing population growth in Nigeria as well as industrialization which in-turn has led to increase in Small and Medium Construction Firms (SMCFs) within the Construction Industry.

Sanusi (2008) opined that the construction industry through its SMEs has the capacity to provide large scale of employment. SMCFs have helped increase the Gross Domestic Product of the nation as well employing a large percentage of the workforce (Abdullah, Bilau, Enegbuma, Ajagbe, Ali & Bustani, 2012). Abdullah *et al.* (2012) further noted that Small and Medium Sized Firms (SMFs) have been a source of economic development through diverse creation of employment, wealth creation and innovation, making them different from other larger firms. Therefore, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in all sectors are an integral part of a healthy economy as they play important roles in job creation and fostering innovation.

There is no generalized definition of Small and Medium Enterprises or Firms (SMEs or SMFs) (Donglin, 2009); it is defined in terms of the number of employees (not casual employees) and either annual turnover or balance sheet total (Onugu, 2005). According to Holtacker and VanderVlist (2010), small firms have 1 – 10 employees, medium sized firm have 11 – 50 employees and large firms have more than 50 employees. Oyeyinkan (2008) defined SMEs as businesses with turnover of less than 100million naira per annum and / or less than 30 employees. SMEs cut across all the sectors of an economy, their growth and developmental process has the ability to transform each corresponding sector and set them to the path of growth and stability. Studies by International Financial Council (IFC) showed that approximately 96% of Nigerian businesses are SMEs (Oyeyinkan, 2008). However, most of the challenges SMEs face arises from the nature and mode of operation of

the enterprises and external environment which entrepreneurs have to combat with (Onugu, 2005). Some of the challenges include poor administrative and managerial skills, ownership structure, lack of effective policies or framework, low documentation of policies, little or no training and development of staff, financial constraints and poor infrastructure (Onugu, 2005; Solomon, 2010).

Economic growth is pivotal to the existence and the survival of any economy and the nation; it is a good indicator for assessing the potential of productive sectors of an economy. In the advanced economies, the SME sector has been acclaimed as the engine of economic growth and development. However against international best practices, according to the Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN] (2009), Nigeria is rated poorly. Similarly, Solomon (2010) opined that in the case of Nigeria, SMEs have performed below expectation due to a combination of problems. Fatai (2012) affirmed also that the Nigerian SMEs have performed below expectation especially when compared to other countries where SMEs are the harbinger of economic development. Based on the established advantages of the construction industry and SMEs, there is great need to assess the performance of SMEs in the construction industry whose product has a lot to do with economic growth.

## 2.0 Performance of SMCFs

Akal (1996) defined performance as a concept that describes the qualitative or quantitative results of activities. Amaratunga, David & Marjan (2000) defined organisation's performance as the manner or quality of functioning. In simple words, performance is a widely used concept which describes an appraisal, assessment or measure of how well a system, process or firm achieves its goals and purpose. Kaydos, (1991) noted that it is of great need to measure performance to avail managers or firms adequate performance information in order to know what areas of responsibility the firm tend to work harder to accomplish greater organisational goals.

Performance can be evaluated using certain measures, the measures can be financial or non-financial. According to New York State [NYS] (2005), these measures help improve a tool for organisations to track and manage progress towards achieving set goals, defining key indicators of organisation performance and customer satisfaction. According to Chong (2008), business organisations can measure their performance using the financial or non-financial measures. The financial measures include profit before tax and turnover while the non-financial measures focus on issues pertaining to customers' satisfaction and customers' referral rates, delivery time, waiting time and employees' turnover.

Neely (1999) reported that the reasons why financial measures are criticised are because they encourage short-termism, lack strategic focus and fail to provide data on quality, responsiveness, flexibility, encourage local optimization, do not encourage continuous improvement. He concluded that the main reason for the above failings of financial measures is that they are 'lagging metrics', reporting on results and decisions made in the past and therefore of little use in improving current performance. In effect, they are reporting on an organisation's past performance rather than its current performance. Based on the argument on the inadequacy of using financial measures to evaluate the performance of firms, the study used non-financial measures clients' satisfaction, employees satisfaction to evaluate performance of SMCFs.

According to Kai, Anne, Lars and Solbjer (2000), customer satisfaction is an increasingly powerful dimension of business performance. In measuring performance based on the Balanced Scorecard for measuring performance, a firms' performance can be measured first by client satisfaction, employees' satisfaction and financial performance (Kaplan and Norton, 1992).

Locke (1990) explained that satisfaction has to do with how an individual perceive an outcome against with the expectation for the outcome. The Contract Journal (2004) asserted that construction industry clients are usually dissatisfied owing to use of inferior quality and delayed project completion and high project cost. For construction firms to constantly improve on their performance, they must pay attention to client's satisfaction (Ali and Rahmat, 2009).

A paper from the Corporate Leadership Council (2003), there is a direct relationship between employee satisfaction, retention, customer satisfaction and loyalty and increase in a company's profitability. In addition, employee satisfaction is strongly related to employee commitment, loyalty and both measures have proven relationships to retention and productivity.

Employee satisfaction describes the level of individual contentment with his or her job. Employee satisfaction is considered to be weighty when it comes to defining organisation success; it is important to the business of an organisation as it affect customer satisfaction and financial performance (Afshan, Sadia and Khusro, 2011). Kristen (2008) opined that high rate of employee contentedness is directly related to a lower turnover. Thus, keeping employees' satisfied with their job should be the major priority for every employer. According to Afshan, Sadia and Khusro (2011), employee satisfaction is an innermost concern and plays a significant role in achieving organisational success; it does not only enhance productivity but also increases quality of job and customer satisfaction. Thereafter, concluded that factors influencing organisational performance are employee salary and promotion, employee satisfaction related to the guidance and training to

employee and their physical working conditions and employee response related to workload. Therefore from literature, there are a number of reasons why employees can become discouraged with their jobs; these include high stress, low pay, lack of communication, lack of recognition and limited opportunity for growth.

Clients' satisfaction is an organisation's ability to attract and retain customers and to improve customer relationship overtime; the degree to which there is match between the customer's expectations of the product and the actual performance of the product; an important measure of the ability of an organization to successfully meet the needs of its customer; helps demonstrate an organization's worth and effectiveness to its stakeholders which is critical in maintaining their support and finally considered to be the key to a company's performance, success and long-term competitiveness within the market (Milan and Martina, 2008).

### 3.0 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study used primary data administered on clients and middle management employees which includes project managers, audit officers of 94 SMCFs engaged in estate development within Abuja. The firms were selected randomly from the archive of Real Estate Developers Association of Nigeria (REDAN) in Abuja. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on the performance of SMCFs using non-financial measures and indicators with each divided into two sections. Section 1 of the questionnaire administered on the SMCFs' employees and clients elicited information on personal data and general information. For the employees' questionnaire, section 1 elicited information such as years of incorporation, staff strength, duration with the firm, profession and academic qualification of respondent while section 2 elicited information on employees' satisfaction. For the clients' questionnaire, section 1 determined the type of client, length of association with the firm and number of contracts awarded while section 2 elicited information on measures of clients' satisfaction. The respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction with each firm on a 5-point likert satisfaction scale of Very Dissatisfied (VDS), Dissatisfied (D), Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied (NSD), Satisfied (S) and Very Satisfied (VS) with ratings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 respectively. Data collected were analysed using Mean Score called Employee Satisfaction Score (ESS) and Client Satisfaction Score (CSS) as respective. To arrive at the Mean Score, the sum weight value (SWV) for each measure / indicator was obtained through the summation of the product of the number of responses for each rating measure and the SWV expressed mathematically as:

$$SWV = \sum(\text{Rating weight} \times \text{Number of respondent}) \dots \dots \dots (3.0)$$

Finally, the mean score was arrived at by using the mathematical expression:

$$MS = ESS = CSS = \frac{SWV}{\text{Total number of respondents}} \dots \dots \dots (3.1)$$

## 4.0 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Employee Satisfaction Score (ESS)

In evaluating the performance of SMCFs using employee satisfaction measures, twenty-five (25) employee satisfaction measures were used. Table 1 shows the satisfaction of employees with SMCFs. Using the mean score called ESS and thereafter mean deviation (MD), the study had positive score called the satisfiers and negative score called the dissatisfiers. Thus, it was deduced from the study that management's communication with employees ranked the highest with ESS of 3.23, while communication of company's business strategy with employees ranked the lowest with ESS of 2.48 on the satisfiers scale.

This study revealed that employees of SMCFs were dissatisfied with short term and long term benefits and thus had a negative mean deviation. These dissatisfiers were salary increment scheme, salary, mentoring on the job opportunity, on-the-job cross training availability and opportunity, job security, employee promotion scheme, pension plans, health plans, access to trainings and seminars sponsored by SMCFs.

The implication of this study is that short-term and long-term benefits such as salary, better pay, training and pension plan would offer more job satisfaction for an employee and have a greater impact on the satisfaction of employees and overall performance on the job which will also affect how the firm achieve it set organisational goals and thus agrees with the findings of Muse *et al.* (2003), McIntosh and Brown (2003) and Abdullah *et al.* (2012).

**Table 1: Employee satisfaction with SMCFs**

MEASURES	V D	D D	NS D	S	V S	SW V	ES S	RAN K
Communication with employees	17	9	49	3	18	420	3.2	1 <sup>st</sup>
Overall relationship	17	3	37	3	6	370	2.8	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Boss management capabilities	37	1	37	2	18	364	2.8	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Sharing knowledge with colleagues	41	6	37	3	11	359	2.7	4 <sup>th</sup>
Ease to plan work without interference	36	1	30	3	13	357	2.7	5 <sup>th</sup>
Recognition received from boss	35	1	49	1	17	349	2.6	6 <sup>th</sup>
Opportunity for advancement	41	1	37	2	15	349	2.6	6 <sup>th</sup>
Your employers involvement in your career development	35	2	41	1	18	344	2.6	8 <sup>th</sup>
Connection between pay and performance	41	7	55	1	14	342	2.6	9 <sup>th</sup>
Opportunities for career development within the company	16	3	62	1	3	335	2.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
Employees' view in decision making accepted	24	4	37	2	6	335	2.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
Benefits	13	5	49	1	6	336	2.5	10 <sup>th</sup>
Workload	23	3	50	1	3	334	2.5	13 <sup>th</sup>
Flexibility of work hours	37	1	49	1	9	333	2.5	14 <sup>th</sup>
Ease to apply trainings to work	39	1	47	2	7	333	2.5	14 <sup>th</sup>
Communication of business strategy of the company to employees	53	4	35	3	5	323	2.4	16 <sup>th</sup>
Salary increment scheme (if any)	37	2	46	1	5	320	2.4	17 <sup>th</sup>
Salary	49	1	41	4	18	314	2.4	18 <sup>th</sup>
Opportunity to be mentored by the job/ by a mentor in the company	51	1	41	2	3	307	2.3	19 <sup>th</sup>
Opportunity to cross train and learn new skills	49	1	60	6	2	289	2.2	20 <sup>th</sup>
Job Security	56	1	49	2	6	275	2.1	21 <sup>st</sup>
Employee promotion scheme (if any)	62	4	9	5	13	256	1.9	22 <sup>nd</sup>
Pension plans (if any)	67	1	35	6	5	255	1.9	23 <sup>rd</sup>
Health plans	74	1	24	1	6	254	1.9	24 <sup>th</sup>
Access to company sponsored trainings and seminars	62	3	24	6	3	243	1.8	25 <sup>th</sup>

Where: **VDS** = Very Dissatisfied, **DS** = Dissatisfied, **NSD** = Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied, **S** = Satisfied, **VS** = Very Satisfied

#### 4.2 Clients' satisfaction with SMCFs

The study went further to examine the satisfaction of clients after evaluating employee's satisfaction with their firms. The clients were identified by collecting a log of at least two clients of the SMCFs who were then

contacted, since SMCFs engaged in property development were considered, most of the clients had their houses and lived in the estates; some few public clients were contacted amongst which are Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and UACN Property Development Company (UPDC).

#### 4.2.1 Clients' perception on project quality

Table 2 gives clients' perception on the quality of projects delivered by SMCFs. Information was sought from client on the possibility of referring the firm to their friends and family, this revealed thus; 37 (34.3%) indicated that they will refer the firm to someone else while 71 (65.7%) will not offer a referral on the firm. Of the 71 clients who will not offer referral, 74.6% would not do so because they are dissatisfied with the quality of work, 69% are dissatisfied with the delivery time, while 22.5% are dissatisfied with the attitude of the company and employees. This showed that inadequate project management skills such as delivery of project to time and quality resulted to some degree of dissatisfaction.

As regards clients generalized view on quality of products delivered by SMCFs, 5 (4.6%) indicated that the quality of project delivered was excellent, 16 (14.8%) reported that it was very good, 43 (39.8%) good, 24 (22.2%) fair, while 20 (18.5%) poor. It appears from the study that SMCFs deliver their projects to minimum accepted quality.

**Table 2: Clients' perception on project quality**

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Willingness to refer the company to a friend</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	37	34.3
<b>No</b>	71	65.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Clients' Reasons for no referral</b>		
<b>Dissatisfied with the quality of work</b>	53	74.6
<b>Dissatisfied with the delivery time</b>	49	69.0
<b>Dissatisfied with the attitude of the company and employees</b>	16	22.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>*118</b>	<b>*166.1</b>
<b>Rating of Projects' Quality</b>		
<b>Poor</b>	20	18.5
<b>Fair</b>	24	22.2
<b>Good</b>	43	39.8
<b>Very good</b>	16	14.8
<b>Excellent</b>	5	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Note** \* total exceeded the number of clients who will not offer referral because some respondents chose more than one reason. Multiple response percentage was applied and used to arrive at values on clients' reasons for no referral.

#### 4.2.2 Clients' satisfaction score

This study evaluated the performance of SMCFs using clients' satisfaction. Table 3 revealed that measures of satisfaction include: communication with clients regarding progress and any other information (CSS = 3.44), clients' satisfaction with respect to product (CSS = 3.39), clients' satisfaction with cost of construction (CSS = 3.31), clients' satisfaction relative to SMCFs' competitors (CSS = 3.25), management functionality (CSS = 3.20), the rate at which contractors perform their work (CSS = 3.08), clients' satisfaction with respect to delivery to specification (CSS = 3.06), planning and scheduling of the project / work (CSS = 3.04).

On the other hand from Table 3, clients were dissatisfied with the following SMCFs performance measures: Application of edging technology, decision making process, delivery to time, defects correction, quality of work and defect avoidance with CSS 2.91, 2.90, 2.89, 2.71, 2.65, 2.56 respectively. The finding showed the importance of communication and SMCFs' management process in clients' satisfaction and thus agrees with the findings of Suma, Juha-Matti and Veli-Matt (2009) which emphasized the importance of communication and improvement of firms' central processes.

**Table 3: Clients' satisfaction with SMCFs**

Performance Measures	VDS	D	NSD	S	VS	SWV	CSS	RANK
Communication with clients regarding progress and any other information	5	10	40	39	14	371	3.44	1 <sup>st</sup>
Clients' satisfaction with respect to product	4	22	28	36	18	366	3.39	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Clients' satisfaction in terms of cost of construction	5	13	44	36	10	357	3.31	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Clients' satisfaction relative to competitors	8	20	33	31	16	351	3.25	4 <sup>th</sup>
Management functionality	7	28	29	24	20	346	3.20	5 <sup>th</sup>
The rate at which contractors perform their work	11	25	30	28	14	333	3.08	6 <sup>th</sup>
Clients' satisfaction with respect to specification	9	24	47	8	20	330	3.06	7 <sup>th</sup>
Planning and scheduling of the project / work	18	14	32	34	10	328	3.04	8 <sup>th</sup>
Application of edging technology	36	11	13	23	25	314	2.91	9 <sup>th</sup>
Decision making process	16	26	35	15	16	313	2.90	10 <sup>th</sup>
Clients' satisfaction with respect to delivery to time	17	29	26	21	15	312	2.89	11 <sup>th</sup>
Defects correction	26	27	18	26	11	293	2.71	12 <sup>th</sup>
Quality of work	21	25	41	13	8	286	2.65	13 <sup>th</sup>
Defects avoidance	27	28	21	29	3	277	2.56	14 <sup>th</sup>

Where: **VDS** = Very Dissatisfied, **DS** = Dissatisfied, **NSD** = Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied, **S** = Satisfied, **VS** = Very Satisfied

## 5.0 Conclusion

This paper has addressed issues on the performance of small and medium construction firms in relation to their clients and employees satisfaction which are non-financial measures of gauging performance. The study showed that even though most SMCFs employees in Abuja are satisfied with firm's communication skills and managerial capabilities; areas of employees' dissatisfaction were salary, career development, career advancement, health, expenses relieves and retirement benefits centric, which can be categorized as very important short-term and long-term benefits.

Also, the study concluded that most SMCFs clients in Abuja are satisfied with SMCFs based of measures such as communication with clients regarding progress and any other information, product, cost of construction, satisfying the need of a client relative to SMCFs competitors, management functionality, delivery with respect to specification, planning and scheduling of the project / work. However, SMCFs need to improve in areas which had to do with application of edging technology and project management skills such as decision making process, delivery to time, defects avoidance and correction and quality of work. The study therefore recommends that SMCFs in order to enhance effectiveness of employees and repeat business from clients which in turn affects the ability of the firm to attain set goals, they should pay attention to employees' short term and long term benefits such as salary, training, pension, on-the-job security and proper project management geared at putting the clients happiness within the constraints.

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