

Communication Practices in the Workplace: A Critical View of Professionals in the Built Environment

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ABSTRACT

Communication is very important in carrying out any activities in the workplace especially in the execution of functions of the Professionals in the built environment. The research aims at appraising communication practices in the workplace in the built environment in Abuja, Nigeria as perceived by the Professionals in the execution of their functions with a view to improving project delivery. The method adopted in carrying out this research is by the use of questionnaires. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to the built environment professionals out of which 131 were returned with a response rate of 87%. From the results of the survey, it was observed that the most prevalent modes of communication in the Built Environment workplaces in Abuja are the use of drawings, verbal, written (memos, letter, e-mails, instructions), body sign languages, motivations, telephone and meetings and do not vary among professionals. Though, drawings are most often used in the built environment workplace in Abuja but cannot be very effective without adequate verbal explanation. Accuracy and distortion have very high effect on built environment project time. In addition, accuracy and timeliness have very high effect on project cost and safety. From the foregoing, it is recommended that there should be appropriate training and retraining of all stakeholders in the implementation of built environment projects in order to keep abreast with best ways of communication as information not understood is likely not well communicated.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of communication has been looked at differently by different scholars to mean

different things. The term "communication" is coined from the Latin word "communis," which means "common". Thus, one can say – "to communicate" means "to make common" or "to make known", "to share" and includes verbal, non-verbal and electronic means of human interaction. To typically describe messages in communication, it takes place when a sender - displays, transmits or otherwise directs a set of symbols to a receiver, with the aim of changing something or directing his perception (Sharma, 2017). The act of communication is a process that involves verbal face-to-face or telephone discussion between two or more people, it is the action of exchanging thoughts and ideas. Keyton, (2011) stated more clearly that Communication is the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another.

The importance and role of Communication cannot be overemphasized especially in the execution of projects in the built environment (Ujene, Edike & Achuenu). From the beginning of time, the need to communicate has been a great part of man's inherent being. The survival of mankind is due to their ability to communicate (Amudavalli, 2016). In an organizational setting especially in the built environment, messages typically have a definite objective: to motivate, to inform, to teach, to persuade, to entertain, or to inspire. The purpose of communication in organizations makes it different from casual conversation. Organizations engage in communication in carrying out their activities, as such communication exists between managers and the employees within the same organization and among different organizations (Dainty, Moore & Murray, 2006).

Effective communication is mandatory for the success and smooth running of the organization, its importance to the design process has clearly indicated the positive relationship between communication and design success (Xie, Thorpe & Baldwin, 2000; Aulich, 2013). Effective communication in the built environment is very critical as activities in the workplace are highly dependent on information that are timely and accurate for continuous decisions making to ensure timely, cost effective and quality project delivery (Ujene et al., 2014). According to Ujene et al (2014), effective communication translates to the receiver understanding the exact idea transmitted by the sender and failure in communication results from many variables that are people oriented to thus causing a good plan to fail (Xie, Thorpe & Baldwin, 2000, Keyton, 2011, Berenger & Justus, 2016)

Communication methods are mostly oral and electronic which may be written, nonverbal and visual. The oral and electronic means of communication are more appropriate, it involves the face-to-face expression of oneself through spoken words and demonstration. (Zulch, 2014).

Good communication skills are important factor in relating good project ideas to a client. According to Markovic and Omolaja (2009) to effectively achieve a plan, the manager or professional must be able to communicate effectively. For instance, a successful professional is one who communicates effectively his plans to the client. When a professional fails to communicate effectively he would not be able to manage the activities around his plan especially in the workplace. In order therefore for a professional to be able to communicate fluently he must acquire basic skills of communication (Markovic & Salamzadeh, 2018).

From the above arguments, it is central to know that communication has great influence in connecting two or more persons. Communication has a way of transmitting ideas between persons and/or places through a medium (Perumal, 2011).

Communication therefore, has always been and would remain integral to the assessment and delivery of any project. In the built environment, project activities without proper communication are faced with challenges that hamper the processes, practices and delivery. Project delivery presently has become more technologically complex, with bigger structures, spatial challenges, higher, built in more crowded places, combine more advanced systems in an increasingly dynamic environment (Akunyumu, 2016).

From the foregoing, this research aims at appraising communication practices in the workplace in the built environment in Abuja, Nigeria as perceived by the Professionals in the execution of their functions with a view to improving project delivery

The methodology adopted is by the use of structure questionnaires. The data used for this research were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are raw (unprocessed) data collected in the course of a research process in addition to interviews and survey of written documents, due to the fact that the application of multiple methods often proves to be more powerful than one single research method. Secondary means of data was from published and unpublished work with respect to communication in projects. Analysis was carried out using SPSS statistical tools with results presented in tables and figures.

II. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Demography of Respondents

A total number of 150 of questionnaires was administered to selected professionals in the built environment within Abuja and its environments out of which 131 were retrieved representing a response rate of 87.00% used for analysis. The summary of the demography of the respondents is as presented in table 1.

Table 1: Professional Affiliation of respondents.

Professional Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Architect	30	22.90
Town Planners	14	10.69
Builder	30	22.90
Quantity surveyor	28	21.37
Civil Engineer	29	22.14
	131	100

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Respondents years of Practice

The years of experience of the selected built experience professionals is as presented in table 2. Nine (9) respondents representing 6.87%

have working experience of 1 – 5 years, 6-10 years (11.5%), 11-15 years (29.01%), 15-20 years (25.19%) and above 20 years (27.48%).

Table 2. Respondents Years of Practice

Professionals' Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	9	6.87
6-10 years	15	11.45
11-15 years	38	29.01
15-20 years	33	25.19
Above 20 years	36	27.48
	131	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Channels of Communication in the workplace in the built environment in Abuja

Out the respondents, 44% were of the opinion that the available channels of communication in the built environment workplace in Abuja are satisfactory while 13% believe they are excellent, 17% good, 11% not satisfactory and 15% poor.

Academic Qualification of Respondents

Table 3 presents the academic qualification of the respondents showing that 13.74% possess Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Science Degree (54.20%), Master of Science Degree (25.95%) and 6.11% are having a Doctorate of Science Degree (6.11%).

Table 3. Academic Qualification

Academic Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Higher National Diploma (HND)	18	13.74
Bachelor of Science Degree (BSc.)	71	54.20
Master of Science Degree (MSc)	34	25.95
Doctorate of Philosophy Degree (PhD)	8	6.11
	131	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Various Modes of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

From Table4, according the respondents, the most available and effective medium of communication used in the built environment workplace is Face to Face communication with a mean of 3.99 followed closely by use of phone devices with a mean value of 3.77. This effectiveness is attributed to the ease of communicating complex technical issues with the

added advantage of obtaining immediate feedback associated with verbal communication. However, the major limitation in the deployment of phone devices for communication in remote areas is problem of network. Use of reports and drawings ranked 3rd and 5th respectively with proposal request and request for information/ interpretation (RFIs) respectively the least (see table 4)

Table 4. Various Modes of Communication Available in the Built Environment Workplace

Communication Mode	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
Meetings	95	20	9	7	131	3.55	0.84	6
Reports	102	16	8	5	131	3.64	0.77	3
Drawings	85	40	6		131	3.60	0.58	5
Telephone Communication	110	14	5	2	131	3.77	0.59	2
Faxes	19	30	66	16	131	2.40	0.88	13
E-mails	60	33	8	30	131	2.94	1.20	10

Facebooks	28	36	40	27	131	2.50	1.05	12
Twitters	18	46	17	50	131	2.24	1.11	14
Text messages	70	9	10	42	131	2.82	1.37	11
Request for information/ interpretation (RFIs)	2	5	16	108	131	1.24	0.60	20
Proposal request		5	23	103	131	1.25	0.52	19
Change orders request	5	11	22	93	131	1.45	0.81	17
Change order	3	12	3	113	131	1.27	0.72	18
Face to face discussion	123	7	1		131	3.93	0.28	1
E-conference	65	49	10	7	131	3.31	0.83	7
Project intranet	13	37	11	70	131	1.95	1.10	16
On-line chat system	99	21	7	4	131	3.64	0.72	4
3-D design drawing	42	64	10	15	131	3.02	0.93	9
4-Dsimulation construction	19	10	80	22	131	2.20	0.89	15
Video conference	67	40	17	7	131	3.27	0.89	8

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Preferred Mode of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Table 5 shows the preferred mode of communication indicating that most Professionals

prefer Drawings, Face to face discussion and Meetings with the lowest as Change order request (See table 5).

Table 5: Preferred Mode of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Preferred Communication Mode	5	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
Meetings	88	39		5		132	4.59	0.69	3
Reports	80	21	10	17	3	131	4.21	1.17	9
Drawings	94	37				131	4.72	0.45	1
Telephone Communication	95	21	9	6		131	4.56	0.81	5
Faxes	40	30	40	10	11	131	3.60	1.23	14
E-mails	90	17	17	7		131	4.45	0.91	7
Facebooks	99	20		12		131	4.57	0.89	4
Twitters	50	36	40		5	131	3.96	1.02	11
Text messages	50	50	27	4		131	4.11	0.84	10
Request for information/ interpretation (RFIs)	10	17	18	33	53	131	2.22	1.31	16
Proposal request		19	34	20	58	131	2.11	1.13	17
Change orders request		7	20	16	88	131	1.59	0.94	20
Change order		7	20	16	88	131	1.59	0.94	19
Face to face discussion	101	17	11	2		131	4.66	0.70	2
E-conference	60	13	40	18		131	3.88	1.14	13
Project intranet	9	17	60	2	43	131	2.60	1.26	15
On-line chat system	93	19	12	7		131	4.51	0.87	6
3-D design	60	27	20	24		131	3.94	1.16	12

drawing									
4-Dsimulation	10	10	8	19	84	131	1.80	1.29	18
construction									
Video conference	78	31	22			131	4.43	0.76	8

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Effect of Communication on Built Environment Project Objectives

Table 6 presents the effect of communication on the Built Environment Project objectives which are time, cost and safety. From the table, it could be seen that quality of information is the most important that factor that

determines the achievement of project objectives in terms of cost and safety. However, ability to understand the spoken and written words and quickly discern the messages and formulate a response determine achievement of time objectives the most (See table 6).

Table 6: Effects Communication on Built Environment Project Objectives

VARIABLE	Time		Cost		Safety	
	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank	Mean Rank
Good quality information free from errors	3.69	2	3.57	1	3.6	1
Queries arising regarding design and not being easily and accurately answered	3.66	3	3.54	2	3.53	2
Conflicting and inconsistent information and instruction	3.51	10	3.34	11	3.31	8
Being able to understand the spoken and written words, quickly discern the message and formulate a response	3.71	1	3.54	2	3.46	4
Poor coordination	3.66	3	3.46	5	3.31	8
Not understanding information expectations and requirements between each other	3.6	6	3.4	6	3.4	5
Getting the needful information at the right time	3.34	16	3.31	13	3.2	13
Contacting the right person and being able to provide the needed information and support	3.54	8	3.49	4	3.5	3
Conflict arising between members	3.46	12	3.31	13	3.31	8
Being able to get access to relevant document when needed	3.54	8	3.34	11	3.09	15
Not having enough information to make decisions and implement work	3.46	12	3.4	6	3.34	6
Having more than required information at a particular time than can be utilised	3.49	11	3.37	8	3.26	11
Message changes meaning during diffusion by adding or deleting bits of information	3.37	15	3.37	8	3.34	6
Certain messages being withheld at a particular time	3.6	6	3.31	13	3.26	11
Communication occurring and not being followed up with written documents to confirm the trivia that has passed between	3.66	3	3.31	13	3.14	14
Availability, reliability and ease of assimilation of project information	3.23	17	3.09	17	3.03	17
Having an understanding of the technology, terminology and philosophy of another discipline's work	3.43	14	3.37	8	3.09	15

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Barriers of Communication

Barriers are aspects that restrict communication flow. Respondents highlighted the

barriers of communication in the workplace is shown in Table 7 with the highest-ranking barriers as Frame of Reference (with mean value of 4.32),

Technical language and jargon (4.08) and Ability to receive and decode information (4.02) which are ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. On the other

hand, the lowest free for all, selective listening and time pressure ranked as 11th, 12th and 13th respectively.

Table 7: Barriers of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Barriers	5	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
Absence of feedback and need for clarification	46	37	13	13	22	131	3.55	1.47	8
Ability to receive and decode information properly	63	23	30	15		131	4.02	1.08	3
Ability of information to provide clarify for proactive action	24	25	63	19		131	3.41	0.95	10
Channels of communication should to be free for all	69	17	27	12	6	131	4.00	1.23	4
Timely dissemination of information	37	48	29	15	2	131	3.79	1.03	5
Technical language and jargon	82	13	14	9	13	131	4.08	1.38	2
Frame of Reference	77	21	29	3		130	4.32	0.92	1
Information overload	56	21	30	13	11	131	3.75	1.33	6
Selective Listening	35	15	30	10	41	131	2.95	1.59	12
Sender credibility	21	65	27	18		131	3.68	0.91	7
Status differences	12	80	17	3	20	132	3.46	1.18	9
Filtering	9	67	24	18	13	131	3.31	1.11	11
Time pressures	15	23	10	15	68	131	2.25	1.51	13

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Drivers of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Drivers are factors that promote communication flow. Respondents highlighted the drivers of communication in the workplace is as shown in Table 8 with the highest-ranking drivers as timeliness of receiving and sending information (with mean value of 3.95), consistency in the use of

communications and language (3.87) and consistency in the use of channels of communications and language (3.85) which are ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. On the other hand, mobile popup meetings and appropriate use of technical jargons, unions formed and appropriately organised ranked as 8th, 9th and 10th respectively.

Table 8: Drivers of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Drivers	5	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
Clarity between the sender and receiver	60	27	17	18	9	131	3.85	1.32	3
Appropriate use of technical jargons and symbols	23	30	9	9	60	131	2.60	1.64	10

Consistency in the use of channels of communications and language	29	71	16	15		131	3.87	0.89	2
Truthfulness in delivering information	30	17	65	19		131	3.44	1.00	4
Timeliness of receiving and sending information	55	40	10	26		131	3.95	1.14	1
Free flow of information	22	50	33	2	24	131	3.34	1.30	5
Regular organisation of meetings and interactive section	9	69	24	10	19	131	3.30	1.17	6
Unions should be formed and properly organised	31	13	5	66	16	131	2.82	1.42	9
Mobile popup meetings		33	71	22	5	131	3.01	0.76	8
Website communications	2	44	60	7	18	131	3.04	1.00	7

Source: Field Survey (2021)

Roles of Technology in Accessing Information in the Built Environment Workplace

Table 9 shows the result of the roles of technology in accessing information in the built environment project performance. Respondents highlighted the roles of technology in accessing information in the workplace as shown in Table 7 with the highest-ranks as it helps in gaining access

to quality information globally (with mean value of 4.39), reduces the time of getting feedback on the availability of information (4.14) and reduce the time frame of recruitment process (3.63) which are ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively. On the other hand, the lowest helps to facilitate instruction delivery, save cost by reducing paper and time cost ranked as 4th and 5th respectively.

Table 9 The Roles of Technology in accessing Information in the Built Environment Workplace

Role of Technology	5	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
It helps to reduce the time of getting feedback on the availability of information	63	32	30	3	3	131	4.14	1.00	2
Reduces the time frame of recruitment process	33	45	34	9	10	131	3.63	1.16	3
It helps in gaining access of quality information from any part of the world	79	28	20	4		131	4.39	0.86	1
Helps to facilitate instruction delivery	20	13	68	10	20	131	3.02	1.19	4
Save cost by reducing paper and time cost	20	9	8	55	39	131	2.36	1.38	5

Source: Field Survey (2021)

The Quality of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Table 10: The Quality of Communication in the Built Environment Workplace

Preferred Communication Mode	5	4	3	2	1	SUM	MEAN	Std. Deviation	RANK
Meetings	0	27	95	5	4	131	3.11	0.60	16
Reports	19	32	36	33	11	131	3.11	1.19	14
Drawings	11	43	45	11	21	131	3.09	1.18	17
Telephone Communication	0	34	29	45	23	131	2.56	1.06	20
Faxes	5	20	55	42	9	131	2.77	0.92	19
E-mails	0	11	96	7	17	131	2.77	0.78	18
Facebooks	9	45	51	17	9	131	3.21	0.99	12
Twitters	28	56	32	13	2	131	3.73	0.96	10
Text messages	21	45	45	12	8	131	3.45	1.06	11
Request for information/ interpretation (RFIs)	14	34	48	22	13	131	3.11	1.12	15
Proposal request	25	37	32	13	24	131	3.20	1.36	13
Change orders request	73	35	18	3	2	131	4.33	0.91	2
Change order	77	33	13	6	2	131	4.35	0.94	1
Face to face discussion	70	37	18	6	0	131	4.31	0.88	3
E-conference	36	60	24	10	1	131	3.92	0.91	8
Project intranet	34	62	26	9	0	131	3.92	0.86	7
On-line chat system	45	55	21	8	2	131	4.02	0.94	6
3-D design drawing	56	34	34	7	0	131	4.06	0.95	5
4-Dsimulation construction	49	53	21	6	2	131	4.08	0.93	4
Video conference	34	47	43	4	3	131	3.80	0.94	9

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study focused on the appraisal of communication practices in the built Environment workplace in Abuja, Nigeria. From the results, it was observed that:

- The most prevalent modes of communication in the Built Environment workplaces in Abuja are drawings, verbal, written (memos, letter, e-mails, instructions), body sign languages, motivations, telephone and meetings and do not vary among professionals.
- Different professions have different modes of communication which are most effective to them. Drawings, telephone communication and face to face communication were most often

used while faxes and video conferences were less often used with twitter and face-book were never used. Though, drawings are most often used in the built environment workplace in Abuja but cannot be very effective without adequate verbal explanation.

- Accuracy and distortion have very high effect on built environment project time. In addition, accuracy and timeliness have very high effect on project cost and safety.
- Language is the most frequent barrier to effective communication in the built environment workplace in Abuja. Many of the Artisans require continuous training to be able to keep abreast with the changing trend of their works.

From the foregoing, it is recommended that there should be appropriate training and retraining of all stakeholders in the implementation of built environment projects in order to keep abreast with best ways of communication as information not understood is likely not well communicated.

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