Project Leadership and Quality Performance of Construction Projects

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ABSTRACT

Background: The construction industry in Nigeria, is pigeonholed by poor quality of construction products as a result of the inherent corruption in the country. Lack of purposeful leadership and inappropriate choice of leadership styles in the industry have been attributed to project failure. Abandoned and failed projects are more predominant in the public sector which litters every corner of the country. Objectives: The objective of this paper is to assess the impact of leadership styles on quality performance criteria of public projects in Nigeria.

Methodology: A total of 43 questionnaires were distributed to 3 key groups of respondents (Quantity Surveyors, Builders, and Architects) who are project managers in Nigeria. Descriptive and Inferential statistics were used to analyse the data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Likert Scale was used to measure the independent variables (leadership style): facilitative, coaching, delegating and directing; and the level of achievement of projects based on the dependent variables (quality and function performance criteria) which are: achieving highest aesthetic quality; and functional building that fits its purpose. Findings: The study revealed that Directing is the major leadership style used by project managers in Nigeria. Amongst the leadership styles which has the most impact on quality performance indicators is also directing which has the most relative influence on achieving highest aesthetic quality and functional building that fits its purpose. Conclusion/Recommendation/Way forward: The underlying relationship between Directing leadership styles and the performance criteria of achieving highest aesthetic quality and functional building that fits its purpose will be beneficial to the Nigerian construction environment.

1. Introduction

The poor quality of construction is favoured by the corrupt climate in Nigeria also, the materials scarcity has made most contractors employ all kind of materials just to finish the project as scheduled leading to poor quality output which most times results in late delivery of projects to the clients, cost overrun of the projects, and poor workmanship (Onwusonye, 2007). “Leadership is a key factor for success in any activity that involves collaboration among a group (or groups) of people. The construction industry has a greater need for leadership than any other field of endeavour. Public procurement in Nigeria, in the recent past, lacked transparency, with inflated contract cost, use of processes that were discretionary and abuse of public power” (Ameh, 2014). “The need for effective leadership in construction is even more acute especially in the developing countries because there are evidence which indicates that project performance deficiencies, such as cost and time overruns, poor work quality, technical defects, poor durability, as well as inadequate attention to safety, health and environmental issues are more prevalent in developing countries than elsewhere. Despite this recognition that leadership is important at all levels of the construction industry, the emphasis has been on the technical and management aspects, and leadership receives inadequate attention” (Skipper and Bell, 2006).

On the issue of quality and leadership, “Whatever the structure and management process of any organisation, the necessary links must be built up between people, and we must learn to accept that employees are not only our greatest and most expensive asset but that they alone are the creators of quality, i.e. people make quality” (Kanji and Asher, 1993). Leadership is defined “as the process of influencing others to understand what needs to be done and how it can be done, coordinating and motivating the work of various individuals and subcontracts, and delivering a successful product in the context of a project” (Morris and Pinto, 2004). Delivering a successful product in the context of a project has to do with the fact that the project performs. The performance criteria which is looked into in this paper is Quality. “To get a project started off right, the project manager must perform. The performance criteria which is looked into in this paper is Quality. “To get a project started off right, the project manager must become a leader. It is clear that leadership is important to the success of a project because leadership is essentially about motivating people” (Max. Leadership and the Project Life Cycle, 2011).
Leadership has been defined in a lot of ways by different experts. For the purpose of project leadership it will be defined “as the process of influencing others to understand what needs to be done and how it can be done, coordinating and motivating the work of various individuals and subcontractors, and delivering a successful product in the context of a project” (Morris et al. 2004).

2. Background of the Study

Projects are dynamic, iterative and involve continuous change throughout their development and execution. In this environment, controlling project performance is therefore essential. For project control to be effective, the project goals have to be clearly defined (Artto et al., 2001; Morris and Jamieson, 2005) in (Haponava, 2010).

This continued failure in project performance can be attributed to a large degree to lack of long-term successful strategies and accompanying metrics (Daniel, 2004). Sambo (2009) commented saying “Many studies have identified factors that are critical to the success of projects. For example Pinto and Slevin (1987) designed a project implementation profile to categorize factors that influence project performance and found that there are certain factors that would influence the success of the project. Many other studies on critical success factors have been undertaken. Larson and Gobelli (1989), Alacon and Ashley (1998), Pocock and Kim (1997), Kliem et al (1996), all studies factors impacting on project performance. Many of the studies on critical success factors have identified several human resource management factors including leadership issues as impacting on project performance”. For example Chan et al (2001) project team commitment as one of the issues critical to performance in design and build projects.

The impact of project managers’ leadership styles and leadership skills on performance has also been studied (Sambo, 2009). For example Muller and Turner (2007) examined the interaction between the project manager’s leadership style with project time and their combined impact on project success. They concluded that project manager’s leadership style influences project success and that different leadership styles are appropriate for different types of projects. Skipper and Bell (2006a) in studying leadership in the construction noted that there is a recognition in the construction industry for the need to improve leadership skills in the construction industry. Skipper and Bell (2006b) also suggested that leadership behaviour has attracted less attention in research concerning performance of construction projects. Hyvari (2006) examined leadership behaviour in fourteen managerial practices and found that planning, organizing networking and information were the most significant managerial practices in the leadership behaviour of project managers.

The evaluation of the impact of leadership on performance and generally factors impacting on leadership effectiveness has been a subject for research (Sambo, 2009). Chen and Lee (2007) addressed the issue of project manager’s performance arguing that there is less concern in literature for factors related to the project manager. They used various leadership behaviours to evaluate the performance of project managers. Many other studies have focused on the influence of the leader on their followers. Sy and Cote (2005), for example, examined the effects of the leader’s mood on three factors including the mood of the team, the effective tone of the group and other group processes. They found that there were positive relationships between the leader’s mood and the three factors. Mathieu et al (2008) reviewed literature on team effectiveness. Their review suggests that there are various ways to measure team outcomes.

Sambo (2009) in his exploratory study on the factors impacting on project leadership performance used the three way model found in Winch (2002) to understand the influence of leadership on performance. Sambo identified that the model in Winch (2002) depicts appropriate leadership factors falling into three categories. These are the leader, the led and the project mission.

Winch (2002) suggests that the nature of the mission will require different management strategies. For example projects under great uncertainty will require a different management approach to those that are running smoothly. In this respect various factors identified as critical to project success would have an influence. This study recognized the type of project, contract sum, contract period, and delays as providing the context for managing the project mission. These depict the key issues the project manager has to deal with. Table 1 includes factors under each of the three constructs.

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<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project Mission</td>
<td>Type of project</td>
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<td>Contract sum range</td>
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<td>Roles and responsibilities of the project manager</td>
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<td>Definition of clear goals</td>
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<td>Level of authority given to the project manager</td>
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<td>Suitability of organisation structure</td>
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<td>PMs involvement in briefing</td>
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<td>The leader</td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities of project team</td>
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<td>Team skills and knowledge</td>
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<td>Cooperation between team members</td>
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<td>Capability of team</td>
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<td>Working relationship in team</td>
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Table 1 Key Issues The Project Manager Has To Deal With


There are various ways in which the effectiveness and performance of leadership can be measured. However the most used measures of effectiveness is the extent to which the leader attains the set goals (Hyari 2006 & Andersen 2006). Project leaders mostly take someone else’s vision and carry it out, it is imperative that they are able to comprehend the basic concept that is being developed. In other cases, project leaders develop the vision and sell their idea to the funding sources. The ‘how’ aspect of project leadership has to do with the leader’s technical expertise that is being brought into the project through personal knowledge and experience or by recruiting competent team members who have the expertise. For example, “a number of subcontractors work on large projects, which makes it necessary for the leader to organise and schedule the work of various team members while providing a motivating work environment. The leader must be constantly aware of criteria that should and will be used to measure project success. Continuous assessment and monitoring of performance are a critical component of the delivery of the finished
product” (Morris and Pinto, 2004).

Northouse (2013) submitted that, some researchers conceptualise leadership as a trait or behaviour, were as others view leadership from an information processing perspective relational standpoint.

3. Significance

The findings of this study will assist in establishing the relationship between project leadership styles and quality performance of construction projects. This will improve the performance of the construction industry by bridging the gap between leadership styles and quality criteria.

4. Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of leadership styles on construction project performance in Nigeria with an objective of establishing how much impact a project leaders’ style of leadership has on construction project quality performance in the Nigerian public projects.

5. Leadership Theories

According to (Morris and Pinto, 2004), most leadership theories fall into either contingency or universal categories.

5.1 Universal Theories

“The universal theories of leadership are based on a belief that a good leader is a good leader, regardless of the situation, because of personal traits and patterns of behaviour that always work. The Great Man Theory was one of the earliest theories of leadership. This theory tells us that great leaders are born and are born to be effective. When this theory evolved, leaders were typically male and inherited their positions of power. Although few people give this theory much credibility today, other universal theories do not differ much from the idea that some leaders ‘have it’ and others do not” (Morris, 2010).

5.1.1 Charismatic Leadership Theory

Was introduced in 1947 and refined later (Weber, 1947). Charisma is a Greek word that means “divinely inspired gift.” It refers to the ability to perform miracles or predict the future. Modern theorists use the term to describe the ability of a leader to solve an immediate crisis, articulate a vision, attract followers, and achieve parts of the vision. A recent version of the theory suggests that charisma is attributed to the leader by followers (House, 1977). Followers are more likely to see a leader as charismatic if the leader:

1. Advocates a vision that is different from the status quo but socially acceptable.
2. Acts in unconventional ways to achieve the vision.
3. Makes personal sacrifices, takes risks, and pays a cost in order to achieve the vision.
4. Appears to be confident.
5. Uses persuasive appeals rather than using an authoritative approach with followers.

Charismatic Leadership Theory suggests that these types of leaders influence others because followers identify with and want to please and imitate the leader. Followers measure their own success by gaining approval from the leader. Leaders who praise and recognize followers who perform well reinforce desired behaviour. In addition, charismatic leaders introduce and develop new values and beliefs. For project leaders, the implications are a bit more complicated, since these theories suggest that one is either charismatic or not. Charismatic leaders are most apt to emerge during a crisis. For example, if a project is in serious trouble, there is an opportunity for a project manager to demonstrate the behaviours typical of charismatic leaders. These behaviours may occur naturally, or it might take hard work on the part of the leader to change and inspire followers.

5.1.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

Bass (1985), is the most widely studied theory in the past 20 years. This theory distinguishes between transformational leaders and transactional leaders. Transformational leaders motivate followers by making them aware of the importance of their work, convincing them to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the group, and encouraging them to achieve higher-order needs like belonging to a group and achieving important goals that help others. Transactional leaders simply exchange rewards for task performance, but do not inspire followers or build commitment to the group or organization. Bass suggested that transformational leaders engage in specific behaviour that allows them to affect followers’ motivation. These behaviours are as follows:

1. Idealized influence. Behaviour that brings about strong emotions among followers who identify with the leader
2. Individualized consideration. Providing support and encouragement to followers and coaching them to bring about improved performance
3. Inspirational motivation. Communicating a positive future vision, using symbols to focus work effort, and modelling desired behaviour
4. Intellectual stimulation. Increasing follower awareness of problems and influencing them to see problems from a different perspective.

A number of other leadership experts have explored the behaviours that seem to make transformational leaders so effective in bringing about organizational change. Kouzes and Posner have studied this behaviour for many years and suggest that there are five critical behaviours common to transformational leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 1995):

1. Challenging the process. Continuously seeking new options and exploring others. Transformational leaders want to make things better even when the current system is broken.
2. Inspire a shared vision. Creating a vision that appeals to the values, goals, and interests of followers. Transformational leaders have an uplifting and rewarding image of the future that they effectively communicate to followers.
3. Enable others to act. Empowering followers to make decisions and act. Transformational leaders educate followers, allow them to make important contacts, and encourage them to create and try new things.
4. Model the way. Modelling the behaviour that they value and want others to practice. Transformational leaders set an example for others. They are dramatic, take their work personally, and tell stories which reinforce their values.
5. Encourage the heart. Rewarding and encouraging followers. Transformational leaders reward and recognize followers publicly. They provide feedback to followers and create winners by helping people become successful, even when it seems unlikely.
5.2 Contingency Leadership Theory

“Contingency leadership theories suggest that different times, tasks, and organisations may require different types of leaders or leadership behaviour. These models imply that leaders can and do change their behaviour as the needs change”. In respect to this, Suresh et al. (2009) contributed that the very concept of leadership is elusive for the construction industry. As leadership skills are so vastly different from the traditional technical skills required by construction professionals these are often overlooked or difficult to promote.” In that sense, Suresh et al. (2009) also added that “the construction Industry is unique with many exclusive department and professionals to organise, and particularly to rigid time and budgetary constraints”.

“Universal theories suggest that an effective leader is an effective leader regardless of the situation. He further added that these theories describe traits and behaviours that should work with any organisation” (Morris and Pinto, 2004). Below are examples of four types of theory that relate to project leadership.

5.2.1 The Situational Leadership Model

“Leaders need to use more relationship-oriented behaviour in some situations and more task-oriented behaviour in others. Specifically, they tell leaders that when a team member is capable but lacks motivation, a participative style is best. When a team member is capable and motivated, it is best to delegate authority. When a team member is inexperienced but motivated, the leader should provide guidance, explain decisions, and clarify procedures. When the team member is inexperienced and lacks motivation, the leader should dictate tasks and closely monitor the work. This theory focuses on the follower’s level of maturity and how leaders should interact with them” (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977).

5.2.2 Path-Goal Theory

House (1971) explains how the behaviour of a leader influences the feelings of satisfaction and performance of subordinates. Essentially, this theory suggests that leaders should increase the personal payoffs to team members for work-goal attainment and make the path to these payoffs easier by clarifying work direction, eliminating roadblocks, and increasing opportunities for personal satisfaction on the way to meeting the goal. According to this theory:

1. Leaders must clearly communicate the desired outcomes and any necessary steps or requirements along the way.
2. Leaders must ensure that team members are consistently rewarded. The rewards must fit the needs and interests of the individual team member.

5.2.3 The Normative Decision Model

Vroom & Yetton (1973) and Vroom & Jago (1988), provides a framework to help leaders determine the optimal level of participation of team members needed for effective decision making. Levels of participation are as follows:

AI. The leader makes the decision alone using only information available at the time.

All. The leader obtains information from team members and makes the decision alone.

CI. The leader shares the problem with team members individually, gets input, and makes the decision alone.

CII. The leader shares the problem with team members in a group setting, gets input, and makes the decision alone.

GII. The leader shares the problem with team members as a group, and the group generates alternatives, reaches agreement on a solution, and reaches a decision.

The model provides questions that help the leader determine which level of participation is best for each situation. In general, the following guidelines can be used by project leaders:

1. The more important the decision, the more participation is needed.
2. The less information the leader has, the more participation is needed.
3. The more information team members have, the more participation is needed.
4. The more important it is that team members accept the decision, the more participation is needed.
5. The fewer rules, procedures, and policies, the more participation is needed.

5.2.4 Leadership Substitutes Theory

Kerr & Jermier (1978), is one of the most useful for project leaders because they are likely to be working with experienced professionals on their teams. This theory suggests that certain characteristics of a project team may actually substitute for leadership. These substitutes include team members with a professional orientation, experience, ability, and training. Other substitutes for leadership include structured and routine project tasks, intrinsically satisfying work, and feedback that comes directly from the work, like automatically generated progress reports. Finally, other substitutes include a cohesive team and established formal roles and policies. This theory helps leaders understand that choosing the right team members and setting up efficient work systems make the job of a leader much easier. Individuals who enjoy what they do and receive feedback about their work through the system do not need the level of interaction and supervision required in other situations.

In addition to the lessons we can learn from the theories described. Yukl provides some other suggestions relevant to project leaders that are based on the research done on contingent leadership theories (Yukl, 2002).

1. Spend more time planning for long complex tasks.
2. Consult with team members who have relevant knowledge.
3. Provide more direction to team members with interdependent roles.
4. Monitor critical tasks and unreliable team members or subcontractors more closely.
5. Provide more coaching to inexperienced team members and to those who have stressful tasks.

Situational leadership allows for the development of individuals along a path from high dependence, through interdependence to Independence (Marshall, 2014). Situational Leadership is not something you do to people, but something you do with People.
From these theories examined above “the failure to find universal leader traits or behaviours that would always determine effective leadership lead researchers in a new direction. Although leader behaviour was still examined, the central focus of the new research was the situation in which leadership occurred. The basic tenet of this focus was behaviour effective in some circumstances might be ineffective under different conditions. Thus, the effectiveness of leader behaviour is contingent upon organisational situations. Aptly called contingency (a theory meaning one thing depends on other things) approaches; these theories explain the relationship between leadership styles and effectiveness in specific situations” (Daft, 2008). “In response to the early criticisms of the trait approach, theorists began to research leadership as a set of behaviours, evaluating the behaviour of ‘successful’ leaders, determining behaviour taxonomy and identifying broad leadership styles” (Spillane et al., 2004). For instance, “from Mahatma Gandhi to Winston Churchill to Martin Luther King, there are as many leadership styles as there are leaders. Also that fortunately, business people and psychologists have developed useful and simple ways to describe the main styles of leadership, and these can help aspiring leaders understand which styles they should use” (Mindtools Leadership Styles, 2016).

This research is concentrating on “what does a leader do?” that is how a leader behaves in a different situation which leads to the behaviour theory of leadership. Theorists who adopt the behaviour perspective on leadership attempt to answer the question, what behaviour makes a leader more effective? These theorists observe what individual leaders do and, in particular how they behave towards subordinates” (Bratton and DLN, 2005).

In business, the need for adaptive management styles in the theory of ‘Situational Leadership have been explained (Hersey and DE, 2001). This model was developed in the late 1960s on the belief that people are more or less able and more or less willing to execute certain tasks. Depending on the situation, the leader would then be required to do one of the following:

1. “Directing, according to this model, would be appropriate for people who have limited skills and need to be told specifically what to do. Constant feedback is required to allow such people to gauge their progress;
2. Coaching is needed when a person has certain skills, is keen to train and can progress on certain tasks without supervision. Once they have reached a certain level, they need new challenges to get their teeth into;
3. Support or facilitative is for people who have some idea of what they want to do but may need help with the process. They are not as competent as they may think just yet, so they will need guidance;
4. Delegation is for people who have reached a level of competence in their skills and have a clear idea of what they want to achieve. They want to retain contact for occasional feedback but see themselves as partners rather than subordinates”.

Looking at the styles of leadership exhibited by some countries for example Rowlinson et. al. (1993), in his research observed that in “Hong Kong different leadership styles were employed by the same project leader due to different situations these situations and leadership styles are: Supportive style in the feasibility studies and pre – contract stage of work and directive in the post – contract stage of Works”. Also, In a study conducted by Odusami and Iyagba (2003) on the relationship between project leadership, team composition and project performance in Nigeria using a questionnaire to collected data in which eight personal variables of the project leader such as age, profession, academic and professional qualifications, industry experience, overseas or local training, interpersonal relationship (introvert/extrovert) and leadership style where included. He concluded that “the most appropriate leadership style identified by the study is a consultative autocrat”. However, he said any project leader can improve on his natural leadership style by undergoing leadership training. The important thing is to know where one belongs and from there, find out how one can improve on the present style of leadership.

“The impact of project managers’ leadership styles and leadership skills on performance has also been studied” (Sambo, 2009). For example, in examining the interaction between the project manager’s leadership style with project time and their combined impact on project success, Muller (2007), concluded that “project manager’s leadership style influences project success and that different leadership styles are appropriate for different types of projects”. In studying leadership in the construction there is a recognition in the construction industry for the need to improve leadership skills in the construction industry (Skipper and Bell, 2006a). Also a suggestion that “leadership behaviour has attracted less attention in research concerning the performance of construction projects” (Skipper and Bell, 2006b). Now seeing how these leadership theories relate to project leadership and the various styles involved, it will be important to see how this leadership styles impacts on project quality performance.

6. Methodology

A quantitative research approach was employed in this paper of which 43 Questionnaires were disseminated to professionals in the construction industry who are project managers in Nigeria. They are quantity surveyors, building engineers and architects.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used as the data collected were presented and analysed using descriptive Statistics, regression and correlation being inferential Statistics. Likert Scaling was used to measure the independent variables leadership style: facilitative, coaching, delegating and directing; and the level of achievement of project base on the dependent variable quality and function performance criteria which are achieving highest aesthetic quality and functional building that fits its purpose. Quantitative Studies statistical inference is employed to determine the applicability of the results to the issue under investigation and, the drawing of conclusions. Different forms of presentation will be useful also – notably charts and graphs.
So, this paper reported result by the use of inferential statistics as well as descriptive so as to draw a conclusion on the findings as well as to see how the relationship exist between the variables.

7. Results and discussion

Figure 2 shows the percentage rating of the dominant leadership style per respondent summed up together. It shows that directing is the dominant style with 54.76% of the respondent having directing as their dominant style. The second is coaching with 35.71% of the respondent exhibiting this style as the dominant style. The third is delegating with 21.43% of the respondent exhibiting this style as the dominant style while facilitative is 0% of the respondent exhibiting this style as the dominant style.

Some respondents exhibited more than one leadership style as the dominant style such like 7.14% of the respondent exhibiting both delegating and directing as their dominant styles while for all others 0% of the respondent exhibits the blend of leadership.

Table 2 displays the values of the coefficients in the regression equation and measures the probability that a linear relationship exists between each leadership style and Achieving highest aesthetic quality. In this table, the ‘Sig’. value of Coaching and Directing each is less than 0.05 i.e. 0.010 and 0.014 respectively which means there exist no significant linear relationship between this two (2) independent variables and achieving highest aesthetic quality.

The ‘Beta’ value of Coaching and Directing are -0.466 and 0.487 respectively meaning that a standard deviation increment in Coaching predicts 0.466 of the standard deviation increase in achieving highest aesthetic quality while a standard deviation increase in Directing predicts 0.487 of the standard deviation increase in Achieving highest aesthetic quality. This means that Directing has the most relative influence on achieving highest aesthetic quality.

Table 3 displays the values of the coefficients in the regression equation and measures the probability that a linear relationship exists between each leadership style and functional building that fits its purpose. In this table, the ‘Sig’. value of Coaching and Directing each is less than 0.05 i.e. 0.004 and 0.001 respectively which means there exist no significant linear relationship between this two (2) independent variables and functional building that fits its purpose.

The ‘Beta’ value of Coaching and Directing are -0.499 and 0.607 respectively meaning that one standard deviation increase in Coaching predicts 0.499 of the standard deviation decrease in a functional building that fits its purpose while one standard deviation increase in Directing predicts 0.607 of the standard deviation increase in functional building that fits its purpose.

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<tr>
<th>Table 2 Highest Aesthetic Quality</th>
<th>Table 3 Building Fit for Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Variable</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Beta</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>.149</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
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Dependent Variable: haquality

Dependent Variable: fitpurpose

Figure 2: Percentages Rating vs. Dominant Leadership Style of Respondents
building that fits its purpose. This means that Directing has the most relative influence on functional building that fits its purpose.

8. Conclusion

This research aimed at investigating the impact of leadership style on construction project Quality performance in Nigeria. Leadership has been shown to be an important factor in successful project execution in a number of studies therefore, different leadership theories were studied of which all theories either contingency or universal dealt with the fact that leaders influence their team members in a way to meeting the desired goal. This research noted that in order for the project leader to achieve good project performance as against quality, the leader must motivate and commit people in the group to integrate into a team situation so that they will achieve project goals. On the Nigerian construction industry, it was observed that only a little has been done on Project leadership in the construction industry in Nigeria.

References


