



# **THE ROLE OF CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY ON ADAPTABILITY AND EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS OF CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**-----

*This study empirically investigated the relationship between corporate responsibility, adaptability, and effective operations in construction companies in South-South Nigeria. From a finite population of 320, a sample of 175 was derived. For data analyses, descriptive statistics were utilized alongside univariate analyses and multivariate analyses. For the test of hypotheses, Pearson Moment correlation was used alongside partial correlation for testing the stated null hypotheses. From our findings, both adaptability and effective operations had a significant relationship with corporate responsibility. The study recommended that all activities geared towards economic, social, and environmental responsibility have a significant outcome that could be favorable to the firm.*

**KEYWORDS:** *adaptability, responsibility, social, sustainability, construction, operations*-----

## **Introduction**

Adaptability is an aspect of resilience that reflects, learning, flexibility to experiment and adopt novel solutions, and the development of generalized responses to broad classes of challenges (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). According to Aaltonen, Jaakko, & Tuomas, (2008) researching the past world war, the adaptive capability is the ability or inclination of individuals or groups to maintain an experimental attitude towards new situations as they occur and to act in terms of changing circumstances. Adaptability is addressed in this context through two approaches; socio-environmental and organizational (Adeleke, 2014). An organization's ability to adapt is at the heart of its ability to display resilient characteristics. Abolore (2012) discusses the importance of adaptation and notes that the aim is to create advantages over less adaptive competitors. This suggests that adaptability is also linked to competitiveness. Achterkamp, & Vos 2008) define adaptability as the engagement and involvement of organizational staff so that they are responsible, accountable, and occupied with developing the organization's resilience through their work because they understand the links between the organization's resilience and its long-term success. The system can respond to the changes in its external environment and recover from damage to internal structures within the system that affects its ability to achieve its purpose. Adaptability - Practically, resilient people are those who are usually aware of and sensitive to the changes and happenings in their environment.

Adaptation is, perhaps, one of the most pervasive concepts in organizational theory and strategic management. Indeed, Bansal, (2005) describes adaptation as "the primary purpose of strategic management." Dating back to the early 20th century and the emergence of scientific management and industrial administration Anderson, (2017), multiple perspectives have underscored the role of adaptation in explaining organizational success (Aldrich & Ruef 2006). Underlying much of the literature is the assumption that managers possess the capacity to assess their environments and capitalize on relevant opportunities to act, be successful, and increase the organizations' survival odds. Unfortunately, the broad applicability of adaptation has led to the proliferation of imperfect synonyms (e.g.,



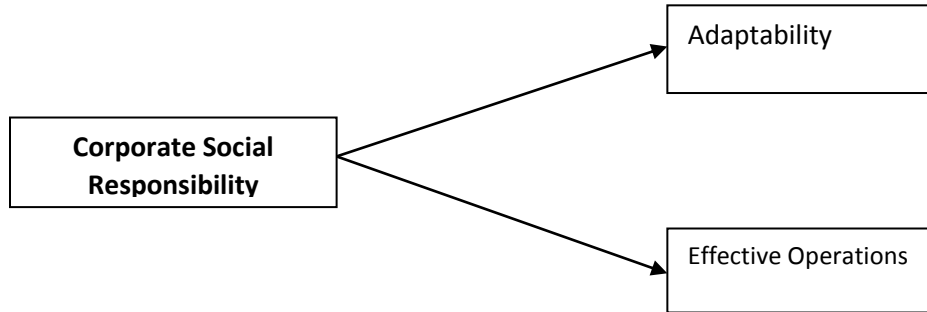
“fit,” “alignment,” “congruence”) that are applied in place of, or alongside, adaptation, blurring the comprehension of the notion.

The conceptual roots of adaptation emanate from a natural integration of organizational theory and strategic management, most prominent in the work of Chandler (1962), which layered the ideas of strategic decision-making and functional efficiency onto the concept of adaptation. Classical works, such as *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Cyert & March 1963) and *Differentiation and Integration in Complex Organizations* (Lawrence & Lorsch 1967), influenced and explicitly elaborated on the related notions of “adaptation” and “fit.” Cyert and March (1963) identified the adaptation of decision rules as a critical element in the learning process, whereby organizations evaluate feedback received from the environment and attempt to reconcile misalignments. Concurrently, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) elaborated on the strategy–structure relationship by identifying the optimal configurations of differentiation and integration that catalyzed research in structural contingency theory. The appropriate fit between internal structures and external sub-environments facilitated superior performance for organizations (Lawrence & Lorsch 1967). Both seminal works established an association between adaptations and fit as notions describing the interface between organizations and environments. Moreover, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) explicitly relates these two terms by defining “adaptation” as the noun form of the verb “adapt,” which means “to make fit (as for a new use) often by modification.” Yet, nuanced interpretations of what it means to adapt developed over time, with prominent works emphasizing different aspects of fit, fitness, ability, and modification to varying degrees.

A competitive organization’s main focus is to increase revenues and/or reduce its costs, improve its performance, and generate higher levels of profit (Amezcuca, et al 2013). Johnson, (2003) thinks that the essence of any profit-generating organization’s survival is based on its ability to understand the environment in which it operates. Environment influences form three series of ‘layers’ that help organizations with ways of coping with change, namely macro-environment; industry/sector, and the competitors/markets.

The concept of strategic groups can help identify close and more remote competitors as well as direct and indirect competitors. The success or failure of organizations also depends on how well they understand and can meet customers’ needs. In the understanding of markets, the concept of market segments can be useful in understanding similarities and differences between groups of customers or users. It is especially important to understand what different customer groups particularly value, as these values form the critical success factors of an organization (Johnson, 2003).

Operational activities and management continue to be of central importance in developing construction. Seen from a management perspective, organizational, quality, and productivity issues on the site still are very important explanations for the lack of economic success for contractors, with important implications for clients, architects, and consulting engineers. The competitive advantage of an entity comprises the implemented strategy, thereby creating a system, which competitors cannot duplicate or find too costly to implement. Even though no competitive advantage is permanent, all organizations strive to have as many competitive advantages as possible, to avoid losing their competitive edge in the future. This competitive advantage allows an organization to generate above-average returns, which represent the ideal state for any profitable entity in any competitive industry. Organizations with a below-average return will invariably cease to exist, if the low return rate continues, due to investors and stakeholders withdrawing their investments from an organization (Zollo. & Winter, 2002).



**Fig 1. Operational framework**

*Dimensions Adapted from Sanela et al., (2017)*

*Measures Adapted from Van Bommel, (2011).*

### Research Objectives

- i. To empirically examine the extent to which corporate social responsibility relates to adaptability in construction companies in South-South Nigeria
- ii. To empirically examine the extent to which corporate social responsibility relates to effective operation in construction companies in South-South Nigeria

### Research Hypotheses

H0<sub>1</sub> Corporate social responsibility does not relate to the adaptability of construction companies in South-South Nigeria

H0<sub>2</sub> Corporate social responsibility does not relate to the effective operation of construction companies in South-South Nigeria

### Theoretical framework

#### Stakeholders’ Theory

The word "stakeholder", as used now, first appeared in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute (now SRI International, Inc.), in 1963. The term was meant to challenge the notion that stockholders are the only group to whom management needs to be responsive. By the late 1970s and early 1980s scholars and practitioners were working to develop management theories to help explain management problems that involved high levels of uncertainty and change. Much of the management vocabulary that had previously developed under the influence of Weberian bureaucratic theory assumed that organizations were in relatively stable environments. Also, little attention, since Berardi, (2013), had been paid to the ethical aspects of business or management, and management education was embedded in a search for theories that allowed more certainty, prediction, and behavioral control. It was in this environment that Freeman & Phillips, (2002) suggested that managers apply a vocabulary based on the “stakeholder” concept. Throughout the 1980s and 1990’s Freeman and other scholars shaped this vocabulary to address these three interconnected problems relating to business.

Stakeholder theory suggests that if we adopt as a unit of analysis the relationships between a business and the groups and individuals who can affect or are affected by it then we have a better chance to deal effectively with these three problems. First, from a stakeholder perspective, a business can be understood as a set of relationships among groups that have a stake in the activities that make up the business (Walter, et al, 2016). It is about how customers, suppliers, employees, financiers (stockholders, bondholders, banks, etc.), communities, and managers interact to jointly create and trade value. To understand a business is to know how these relationships work and change over time. It is the executive’s job to manage and shape these relationships to create as much value as



possible for stakeholders and to manage the distribution of that value. Where stakeholder interests conflict, the executive must find a way to re-think problems so that the needs of a broad group of stakeholders are addressed, and to the extent, this is done even more value may be created for each (Harrison, 2004). If tradeoffs must be made, as sometimes happens, then executives must figure out how to make the tradeoffs, and then work on improving the tradeoffs for all sides (Freeman & Phillips, 2002).

Stakeholder theory requires changes to current law (Hendry, 2001a, 2001b; Van Buren 2001). Some have argued that the law needs to be changed, either to overcome the concern that doing anything other than shareholder management is illegal or to make it easier to practice stakeholder theory (i.e. making it more transparent than using stakeholder theory to manage does not violate core principles of business law). For example, Humber (2002) takes the view that Freeman seems to advocate the passage of enabling legislation that will force corporations to be managed in the interests of stakeholders (2008). The core reply offered is that while there may be reasons to consider various changes to the legal system, stakeholder theory contains no requirement that the law is changed to allow firms to practice it.

Marens & Wicks (1999) show that the business judgment rule allows firms to use stakeholder theory without fear of running afoul of the theory or practice of the law. Enacting specific changes in the law that force management to consider stakeholders (e.g. corporate constituency statutes), may prove useful, but they are not to be confused with the core of what constitutes stakeholder theory or to be seen as essential concomitants to embracing the theory. Stakeholder theory is socialism and refers to the entire economy (Barnett 1997; Hutton 1995; Rustin 1997). In parts of the UK and other parts of Europe, there is talk of a stakeholder economy (e.g. a term used by British Prime Minister Tony Blair). Phillips et al (2003), argue that stakeholder theory is first and foremost a theory of organizations, not a theory of political economy. Also, while there may be some merit in drawing from stakeholder theory to discussions of economies within a political context, doing so makes truly problematic the concerns raised about the breadth of the theory and for what purposes it is being used (p. 491-2). Stakeholder theory has been developed as a system of voluntary exchange for individuals within a capitalist economy. It is decidedly not a form of socialism or a set of social policies to be enforced by the state. Stakeholder theory is a comprehensive moral doctrine (Orts & Strudler 2002). In his discussion of what constitutes a comprehensive moral doctrine, John Rawls (1993) claims that it is a theory that can address the full array of moral questions that arise without reference to any other theory.

According to Phillips et al (2003), stakeholder theory is not a comprehensive doctrine. Rather, it is a theory of organizations that do not even cover all the moral questions relevant to a business context, let alone the rest of the moral world. Stakeholder theory, like most theories, is a tool to better describe and act in a complex world. Tools have better and worse applications. In our view, Stakeholder theory is best used to make sense of issues revolving around the three problems we outlined in the previous section. Scholars from a variety of disciplines have picked up stakeholder theory to better address the issues that the three problems have created in their respective areas. We now turn to detail on how stakeholder theory has been used and how it might be used more effectively in the future. One way to think about the work developed under the banner of stakeholder theory is to see it as providing a normative justification for the theory and its associated activities. Such an activity is usually thought of as the domain of philosophers, who seek to develop complex and sophisticated arguments to show a given idea or activity can be defended using normative reasons and notions of what should be the case.

Although such an approach may be appealing to an ethics scholar, it is weak in that it separates moral concerns from business concerns. As first articulated by Freeman (1994), the Separation Thesis posits that the “discourse of business and the discourse of ethics can be separated so that sentences like  $x$  is a business decision have no moral content, and  $\neg x$  is a moral decision‘ have no business content” (1994: 412). Wicks (1996) extended Freeman’s argument and demonstrated how deeply embedded the assumptions of the Separation Thesis were within the business ethics and management literature.

For Jones & Wicks (1999), stakeholder theory represents a bridge between the normative analysis of the philosopher and the empirical/instrumental investigation of the management scholar. By being at once explicitly moral and requiring support from instrumental analysis, stakeholder theory offers a new way to think about management theory. To provide a defensible normative core, researchers need to be able to show that it is



simultaneously defensible in terms of moral norms and principles and terms so that enacting these norms and principles is likely to help the firm generate economic value to remain a sustainably profitable enterprise). Such an agenda gives researchers on both sides of the ethics/social science divide an important role in the future development of stakeholder theory. This focus also addresses the concern that existing management theory is amoral and provides little room for ethics to become integral to the conversation. From this perspective, stakeholder theory is part of management theory, should explicitly draw upon management theory and methods, but is equally a part of ethics and moral theory.

## Empirical Review

Amole, Sulaiman, and Awolaja (2012) postulated that the rising cost of running business organizations, business extension, and the lack of basic infrastructure, as well as divergent views in the literature regarding the effect of the relationship that exists between CSR and corporate Survival, necessitated their examination in the Nigerian banking industry using First Bank Plc as the case study. Their study employed annual reports as the main source of secondary data and covered the period between 2001 and 2010. The data collected for the study were analyzed using correlation and regression techniques. The findings revealed that for every unit change increment in the CSR expenditure, there was a .945 or 95 percent increase in profit after tax of the company. The study concluded that there is a positive relationship between banks' CSR and profitability and recommended that banks need to demonstrate a high level of commitment to CSR based on stakeholders theory to enhance their profitability in the long run.

According to the definition of the Socially Responsible Business Forum of Ukraine, the social responsibility of business is the responsible attitude of any company to its product or service, to consumers, employees, and partners; the Active social position of the company, which consists of harmonious coexistence, interaction and constant dialogue with society, participation in solving acute social problems (Okhrimenko and Ivanova 2015). Worldwide experience shows that a responsible attitude to the product and the consumer may be formed as initiative associations, unions that represent certain groups of companies, market sectors, and the initiative of the state through the mechanism of forming and developing community ombudsman. CSR in the most general interpretation (Kolot 2014, pp. 70-71) is seen as rational feedback of the organization to the system of contradictory expectations of interested parties (stakeholders) aimed at sustainable development of the company; it is the responsibility of those who make business decisions to those who are targeted by these decisions.

The works of Suharti & Suliyanto (2012) have exposed the extent to which the environmental components of CSR can bring about Organizational Survival. in their study comprising 350 employees of multinational companies in Romania, the authors realized that there is a very strong relationship between green environment and corporate growth, alongside Survival, in a related study, Warrick (2017) reveals that the more environmental friendly an organization is, the more sustainable. Environmental Survival is "the ability to maintain things or qualities that are valued in the physical environment. This is the simplest and most fundamental way to express the concept. But people using the term environmental Survival can specify or elaborate the term further to add extra meaning or to apply the concept to more specialized contexts. For example, the land, water and atmosphere, physical resources and buildings and roads, and other physical elements go to make up the urban environment. Rural environments are made up of the farms and living areas of people and the land and waters and atmosphere and biological elements (species utilized by agriculture, pest species, native species, and ecological communities both human-induced and natural). Natural environments are those where the influence of wild species (indigenous and naturalized) is dominant or very strong.

Kraplych (2005) interprets the SRB as a responsible attitude of any company to its product or service, to consumers, employees, and partners; an active social position of a company, which is a harmonious existence and constant dialogue with society, participation in solving the acute social problems. The need to increase the level of the SRB for all economic actors and institutions of society is caused by the loss of stability of economic development, which requires searching for new factors and sources of economic growth; deepening asymmetries between economic and social development that enhances economic and social danger; need to find new competitive advantages; ignoring of cultural and moral aspects in activities of economic entities (Kaminski and Polinkevych



2018) and government structures; aggravation of environmental problems that can lead to disasters regional and national scale (Khovrak 2016). Three main institutions the state, the public (public organizations, research institutes, and other think tanks), and business circles represented by either companies or the business community can be involved in the process of regulating and supporting the social responsibility of business.

**Methodology**

From a finite population of 320, a sample of 175 was derived. For data analyses, descriptive statistics were utilized alongside univariate analyses and multivariate analyses. For the test of hypotheses, Pearson Moment correlation was used alongside partial correlation for testing the stated null hypotheses.

**Data Analyses and Findings**

**Distribution of Respondents**

Name of Company	Staff Strength	%
Julius Berger	51	29
Lubrikk Construction Company	32	18
Monier Construction Company	24	14
Raynold Construction Company	35	20
Setraco Construction Company	33	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1 reveals that out of the 175 respondents, 51 were drawn from Julius Berger which represents 29%, 32 were drawn from Lubrikk Construction Company representing 18%, 24 respondents were drawn from Monier Construction Company, representing 15%, 35 respondents were drawn from Raynold Construction Company representing 20% while 33 respondents were drawn from Setraco Construction Company, representing 19% of total respondents.

H0<sub>1</sub> Corporate social responsibility does not relate to the adaptability of construction companies in South-South Nigeria

		Correlations	
		Corporate Social Resp	Adaptability
Corporate social Resp	Pearson Correlation	1	.712**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	175	175
Adaptability	Pearson Correlation	.712**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	175	175

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Our first hypothesis also reveals a significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and adaptability with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.712 and a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the alpha of 0.05. We also reject the stated null hypothesis and accept the alternate.

H0<sub>2</sub> Corporate social responsibility does not relate to the effective operation of construction companies in South-South Nigeria



Correlations			
		Corporate Social Resp	Effective operation
Corporate social Resp	Pearson Correlation	1	.625**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	175	175
Effective operation	Pearson Correlation	.625**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	175	175

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Our second hypothesis also reveals a significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and effective operation with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.625 and a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the alpha of 0.05. We also reject the stated null hypothesis and accept the alternate.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis one reveals a significant relationship between corporate social responsibility and adaptability. This means that when corporate social responsibilities are carried out responsibly, there would be fewer legal litigations against construction companies, and this would keep the minds of management at rest with the hope that all is well. However, when they default on their corporate social responsibilities, there would be a lot of legal sanctions and this would affect the firms negatively.

Our second hypothesis reveals a stronger relationship between corporate social responsibility and effective operations. Indicating that the outcome of the market is also determined by the corporate social activities and how much the firm would be responsible in carrying out its obligations. This can manifest itself in form of loyal customers, high performance, and quality of service.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has revealed that no firm, (especially construction firms) can be sustainable without effective corporate social responsibility. This means that the economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibilities carried out by firms can lead to sustainable development which can be represented as adaptability, and effective operations with such significant relationships, firms would realize that any budget on corporate social responsibility is not a wasted budget but an investment for Organizational Survival. Furthermore, the study also examined how much social responsibility can bring about much-needed Organizational Survival. The outcome reveals that it does relate significantly to adaptability and effective operations. That is to say that the social aspect of every organization matters a lot if it must be Survival. when the firm takes an active role in the cultural activities of their host communities when they recognize the traditional rulers and make them believe that they are culturally attached to the environment in which they find themselves, such gestures would always have the outcome of fewer clashes with host communities and they would always protect the firms from any danger that would arise from within. Even though the community would shield them from dangers, they would also promote their activities and provide a sustainable market for business activities.

### Recommendations

- i. There is a need for constant sensitization of companies toward their responsibilities. Host communities should diplomatically engage these firms and bring them closer to their responsibilities.
- ii. Community leaders should be selected based on competence so that these engagements can be sustainable, and harmony would be established.
- iii. Firms should allocate a percentage of their profit toward the development of economic activities within their host communities. This could come in form of employment, scholarships, empowerment, etc.
- iv. Firms should also consider the health of the environment where they operate. After their activities, the environment should be a place where humans, animals, and vegetation can survive.



- v. Construction firms should build a culture that would enable workers to pay attention to stakeholders' needs. This means ensuring the quality of performance and professionalism in all transactions.

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