

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS

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Abstract. In this study, the participation of employee architects in decision-making in architectural firms is investigated. This is with a view to identifying the organisational contexts that enhance employee participation in decision making. The impact of such participation on the performances of the firms was also assessed. This study was carried out through a questionnaire survey of employers of architects in Nigeria. In agreement with findings of previous studies, participation of the employees of the architectural firms in the study in decision making is low. Employee participation in decision making in the firms was dependent on the staffing strategy and proportion of junior staff in many cases. The positive impact of employee participation in decision making on firm performance varied with the nature of the decision. This study concludes that there is need for employers in architectural firms to identify the categories of decision that employees should be involved in and to modify their firm contexts to encourage participation where desired.

Key words: Employer of architects, employee involvement, firm performance, organisational context

1. Introduction

Traditional organisations often emphasize hierarchy and control. However, in an increasingly democratic society, coupled with more educated and technologically oriented workforce, many organisations are increasingly adopting participatory practices (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*,

2011). The reasons given for the adoption of participatory practices by organisations are three-fold (Barg *et al.*, 2014). First, organisations are beginning to sense the need to extend the democratic dispensation that is prevalent in the larger society to their workplaces. The second reason is that organisations often face

problems when they deny powerful groups within their organisations the opportunity to exercise their rights, while the third is that organisations often find it difficult to negotiate with their employees, especially in the face of inflation. For this reason, participation in decision making has been used over the years to empower employees (Huang *et al.*, 2010). It is often seen as a way to enhance psychological empowerment and motivation of employees. In fact, some researchers (Irawanto, 2015; Kok *et al.*, 2014) noted that it leads to the fulfilment of individual and organisational goals and strengthens the sense of group identity and individuals' loyalty to the organisation (Mizrahi, 2002). It has however been observed that actual participation of employees in decision making is determined by the willingness of the employees to participate as motivated by organizational contexts (Zhu *et al.*, 2015). For these reasons, organisations often try to create contexts that enhance employee participation in decision making.

There is synthesised literature on the new public management policies in Estonia, Romania and Hungary (Dan, 2015). A major component of these policies was the restructuring of public organisations to achieve decentralization. The aim of this was to enhance effectiveness, efficiency and quality of public service. Participative decision making in urban renewal and conservation of heritage buildings has also been investigated (Racu and Oprica, 2015). The foregoing suggests the importance attached to participation in decision making even in public sector.

This becomes very essential for the architectural industry, where, as in most professional service organisations, the main resources are the workforce. This is as a result of the fact that the persons in this

workforce are expected to make decisions related to their work during service deliveries. The ability to make proper decision may be determined by how knowledgeable and in control the employees feel (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011). There is therefore a need for employers to create atmospheres that facilitate the involvement of their employees in decision making. This was corroborated in another study (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011), which premised employee participation in decision making on an organizational context characterized by an open and collaborative human resource strategy, where employees are in control and are free to exploits their knowledge and skills in rendering services. Being in control is a function of freedom to make decisions relating to their work without having to revert to management. One would however note that proper decisions can only be made when the goals of the organisation are aligned with those of the employees who deliver services.

There are basic studies on employee participation in decision making (Mokoena, 2011; and Barg *et al.*, 2014). Scholars have also empirically investigated employee participation in decision-making in relation to work performance (Huang *et al.*, 2010), employee empowerment (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011), firm performance (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011); employee satisfaction, (Pacheco and Webber, 2016; Irawanto, 2015), employee motivation (Irawanto, 2015; Barg *et al.*, 2014). These all connote positive impact of employee participation in decision making. However, the context and the form of employee participation in decision making will determine whether such participation has positive influence or not (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011). Moreso, many studies on employee participation in decision making have been carried out

from the point of view of employees. To capture the context created by organisations for their employees to participate in decision making, it is important to investigate this subject from the point of view of the employers.

It would also be noted that studies on employee participation in decision making have also been carried out in telecommunication companies (Huang *et al.*, 2010; Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011); manufacturing industries (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Barg *et al.*, 2014, Chan *et al.*, 2016); schools (Mokoena, 2011; Kok *et al.*, 2014), state-owned enterprises (Irawanto, 2015), ready-made garment sector (Bhuiyan, 2010), insurance company (Barg *et al.*, 2014), publishing firms (Ezennaya, 2011). The architectural industry, as a professional organisation, is however little investigated, particularly in Nigeria.

It is in the light of this that this study investigates employee participation in decision making in architectural firms from the point of view of employers, taking samples from Nigeria. Three questions are answered in this study. These are: (1) How involved are employee architects in decision-making in their firms? (2) Which organisational contexts influence the participation of employees in decision making? (3) How does employee architects' participation in decision-making influence the performance of the architectural firms? This study is justified in three ways. First, a study of this nature will provide empirical basis for enhancing the participation of employees in decision making as it identifies the contexts that enhance such participation. Second, it extends literature by adding findings from the architectural industry as a professional service industry, where the major resources are the workforce. Third, it provided empirical data on the influence

of employee participation in decision making on firm performance, from the context of architecture firms.

2. Literature review

Participation in decision making was first used in the field of management by Coch and French in 1948, in an investigation of individual and small group performance. Subsequently, participation in decision making has been studied in relation to forms (level of formality, level of directness and degree of influence); length of participation (long term or short term) and outcomes (job satisfaction, organisational commitment and employee motivation) (Shaed *et al.*, 2015; and Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011). Employee participation in decision making imply that power is shared with subordinate positions by their superiors in work situations (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011). In this case, employees that are affected by decisions are involved in their formulation and implementation. This has been identified as a way of mitigating the problems that manifest in the work life of modern employees (Barg *et al.*, 2014). Some other researchers (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011) put this succinctly by describing employee participation in decision making as sharing decision making with subordinates to achieve organisational objectives. These subordinates would otherwise not have been involved in decision making in the traditional hierarchical system of management (Pacheco and Webber, 2016). Employee participation in decision making is expected to make it possible to achieve outcomes that would otherwise be unattainable under the hierarchical structure (Mokoena, 2011). It is also said to be important to the survival of organisations in the increasingly competitive business environment. This is in the light of the belief that participation in decision making helps individuals and groups within an organisation to secure their interests in the process

of contributing to the choices made in such organisations.

Employee participation has also been described as a management philosophy which focuses on enabling employees to contribute to the continuous improvement of their work (Kok *et al.*, 2014). Describing the process of decision making, these authors noted that in order to make a decision, the problem must be identified, relevant information gathered and alternatives to solve the particular problem generated. Three factors are suggested to be in place during employee participation in decision making (Bhuiyan, 2010). The first is that employees are emotionally and mentally involved, while the second is that employees release their resources and creativity in contributing to group/ organisational goals. The third factor is that employees take responsibility to see the goals fulfilled. These imply that employees bring on board their expertise, ideas and efforts.

There are two distinct levels of employee involvement in participation in decision making in literature (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011). The first is high degree of involvement, referred to as complete decentralisation (Ezennaya, 2011), where all or nearly all levels of employee are involved in all decision making processes. The second is low degree of involvement or complete centralisation (Ezennaya, 2011), where decision making involves members of top management only. Participation in decision making is therefore a matter of degree and highly situational (Ezennaya, 2011). This is the reason that the two levels may be considered as extremes, as many firms operate in between. In fact, absolute employee participation in decision making may lead to a situation where employees attempt to maximise their

own interest to the detriment of the organization (Mizrahi, 2002).

Four theoretical arguments have been used in literature to support the idea of employee participation in decision making. These are the democratic, socialist, human growth and development; and the productivity and efficiency arguments (Mokoena, 2011). While the democratic argument posits that individuals have a right to exercise some control over their work, the socialist argument emphasise that individuals should be allowed to participate in decisions that influence their well-being. The productivity and efficiency argument on the other hand stress that employee participation in decision making is necessary for organisational effectiveness occasioned by resultant higher quality services, less employee turnover, and better decisions that result from employee participation. The human growth and development argument focuses on the need to give employees greater autonomy and responsibility to enhance their intrinsic motivation, growth and learning within the workplace. These theoretical positions emphasise the positions of the employees and the management. While the democratic, socialist and human growth and development arguments view rationale for participation in decision making from the position of the employees; the productivity and efficiency argument view it from the position of the management.

The foregoing suggests that participation in decision making has the potential to exert positive influences both for employees and for their organisations. In line with this, scholars have investigated outcomes of employee participation in decision making. The outcomes of employee participation in decision making vary from good relationship with supervisors (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011), increased employee satisfaction (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Zhu *et*

al., 2015), better decisions premised on employees' use of private information (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Wainaina *et al.*, 2014; Pacheco and Webber, 2016), improved firm performance (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Mokoena, 2011), commitment of employees to outcome of decision making (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Wainaina *et al.*, 2014; Irawanto, 2015; Golkar 2016), improved job productivity (Ezennaya, 2011), improved employee motivation (Irawanto, 2015) and sense of ownership (Mizrahi, 2002; Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011).

Decisions are often premised on certain factors. For instance, Moa-Liberty *et al.*, (2016) found that sex, age, ethnicity and self-efficacy of Nigerian Youth Service Corp (NYSC) members influenced their decision to become entrepreneurs. Certain contexts are also believed to foster employee participation in decision making (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011). Based on these contexts, the level, as well as, the mode of employee participation in decision making is expected to vary across organisations. One of those contexts is work redesign. This is in line with the fact that participation in decision making requires a context where task interdependence is low (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011). The choices available to the employees also have to be clear. In addition, interests of the organisation have to be aligned with the interests of the employees (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011). Team work and good communication must also be practiced in organisations that desire that their employees participate in decision making (Irawanto, 2015). Other factors that must be in place are authorisation of, possession of relevant skills by, and offer or incentives to, employees to make decisions (Kok *et al.*, 2014).

The managers of an organisation have to be disposed to allowing employees to get

involved in their decision making process for this to occur (Yoerger *et al.*, 2015). This lays emphasis on the leadership style that is prevalent in the organization. An indication of this was found in foreign-owned companies in Russia with low power distance culture, where employee participation in decisions making was high, when compared to their Russian counterparts where the leaders practice high power distance culture and employee participation in decision making was low (Efendiev *et al.*, 2014).

When managers allow their employees to participate in decision making, they have some confidence in the potentials of their employees (Ezennaya, 2011). This confidence may be based on the employees' job tenure/ experience, training and self-efficacy (Kok *et al.*, 2014). As such, some groups of employees are said to be excluded from the decision process when their employers perceive that they lack excellence (Timing, 2015).

Generally, gender (Blaschke, 2015), attitude, trust in management (Shim and Park, 2016), perceived leadership style (Efendiev *et al.* 2014), age and educational levels of employees have been found to influence employee perception of participation in decision making (Mitonga-Mongam *et al.*, 2011). Employee participation behaviour has also been found to be influenced by their job levels (Huang *et al.*, 2010, Cihangiroğlu *et al.* 2014). With particular reference to professional organisations, it has also been found that employee participation in decision making is a function of the characteristic of the job as well as the reward system adopted by the organization (Hassan, 2014).

Different studies exist on participation in decision making. A basic one is that which investigated the extent to which

rural stakeholders perceive and implement participation in decision making, using qualitative approach (Mokoena, 2011). A related study investigated participation in decision making, using a sample of 217 non-management staff in two organisations in Nigeria (Barg *et al.*, 2014). These studies revealed that although employees were interested in participating in decision making, their actual participation is low. The authors found that participation in decision making by the respondents varied with their ages and educational levels. Another basic study investigated employees' perception of their involvement in decision making (Kok *et al.*, 2014), focusing on aspects of power, information, knowledge and rewards. The power dimension investigated issues like freedom to do what employees do best, say in how work is structured, and contribution to strategic vision and goals. The information dimension of decision making focused on feedback and relevant information to employees, while the knowledge dimension assessed issues related to the availability of training programmes to improve employee work. The last of the dimensions, reward, focused on employees having a say in how they are rewarded and recognised. The authors (Kok *et al.*, 2014) found that, in the University of Technology sampled in South Africa, the level of employee involvement in decision making was low. In another study (Bhuiyan, 2010), the nature of employee participation in decision making in the ready-made garment sector of Bangladesh was investigated. This author found that decision making was still highly concentrated at the top management level, with 70% of the respondents agreeing that most decisions are made at that level. Only 3% of the respondents agreed that some decisions are made at the workers' level. The decision activities investigated were broadly divided into

three. These were managerial activities, goal setting and other activities.

Empirical evidence also exists on the effect of employee gender, qualification and work status on participation in decision making (Blaschke, 2015). It was found that female employees with higher qualifications were more disposed to participate in decision making. In addition, female employees with blue collar status participated in decision making less than those with white collar status. The low participation of employees the lower levels have however been attributed to non-complementary, as well as little understanding of the, objectives of the organization by these lower level employees (Nirmal *et al.*, 2015). The observed low level of participation in decision making may not be restricted to the blue collar employees however. This is in the light of the fact the findings of a previous study that found that employee engineers in an organisation in Berhad also indicated low participation in decision making (Hashim and Wok, 2015).

Different scholars have investigated participation on decision making using various scales. A likert scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represented "no freedom for decision making" and 10 represented "great deal of freedom for decision-making" has been used in a previous study (Pacheco and Webber, 2016). The scores were later reconstructed into dichotomous variable, depending on whether the score is below or above average. This suggests that measures of participation in decision making are self-rated and therefore subjective. Similar self-rated scales were adopted in this study, although from the point of view of employers.

A study that investigated the relationship between employee participation in deci-

sion making and firm performance was in the context of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011). Although, the researchers found low employee involvement in decision making, the influence of participation in decision making on firm performance was significantly positive. The study however considered participation in decision making as a single variable. It would be insightful to find out if this positive influence applies to all types of decisions.

3. Research methods

Employee participation in decision making in architectural firms is investigated in this study from the point of view of management. The point of view of management is considered important since participation is investigated in relation to the contexts in the firms. In this study, we measure employee participation by asking the employers to indicate the cadre of staff that are allowed to make specific decisions, ranging from design ideas, salaries, job procurement, service fees, hiring and promotions, to management of projects (Ezennaya, 2011; Kok *et al.*, 2014). Six options were given. These were any staff, any administrative staff, any architect, administrative manager / accountant, senior architect and firm principal. Decisions made by any staff, any administrative staff or any architect were considered to be highly participative, while those made by administrative manager, accountant or senior architect were considered to be moderately participative. On the other hand, decisions that have to be taken by firm principal were considered to be highly non-participative. The likert type was adopted (Pacheco and Webber, 2016). However instead of the 10 scales used by these authors, which were later recoded into two, three scales were adopted. These were recoded into dummy vari-

able; where 1 represented non-participative, 2 moderate participative and 3 highly participative.

The contexts that were investigated included age, size and ownership form of firms, level of job specialisation, qualifications of employees, incentives to employees, use of teams in project delivery, and the age, sex, experience and leadership style of principal. These variables were constructed into questions which were used in the cross-sectional questionnaire survey. The performance of the firms was measured in terms of the perception of profit in the last two years. It was measured on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represented very poor and 5 represented very good.

Samples for the study were selected from the list of architectural firms registered to practice in Nigeria. A total of 92 firms randomly selected from the cities where the firms were most concentrated participated in the questionnaire survey. The respondents to the questionnaires were the principals of the firms, or their representatives, where the principals were not available. Eight of the principals were also interviewed to clarify some issues.

The unit of analysis in this study was the firm. Data were analysed using the IBM Statistical Software for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics were used in analysing the participation in decision making variables. This was to assess the level of involvement of the employees as perceived by their employers. The decision activities were then reduced by principal component analysis to identify the basic decisions that are made in the firms. To examine the contextual variables that influence the levels of participation in the firms, regression analyses were carried out.

Table 1. Profile of firms

	Profile	Percent(%)
Age of Firm	5 years or less	9.9
	6-10 years	16.0
	11-15 years	27.2
	15-20 years	19.8
	21-25 years	13.6
	Above 25 years	13.6
Size of firm	1-5 staff	14.9
	6-10 staff	33.3
	11-20 staff	27.6
	21-30 staff	8.0
	31-40 staff	6.9
	41-50 staff	5.7
Ownership form of firm	Above 50 staff	3.4
	sole principal	52.3
	partnership	21.6
	unlimited liability company	8.0
	limited liability company	17.0
Gender of principal	Public company	1.1
	male	89.8
Age group of the principal	female	10.2
	below 30 years	1.2
	31-40 years	22.4
	41-50 years	43.5
	51-65 years	27.1
Highest qualification of the principal in architecture	above 65 years	5.9
	Higher National Diploma	3.5
	B.Sc	3.5
	M.Sc	43.5
	B.Arch	42.4
Leadership style of principal	Others	7.1
	a mentor in the firm	9.3
	a visionary and innovative leader	38.4
	an efficient manager	11.6
	a productivity oriented achiever	40.7

Factor scores of each firm for the decision components were entered as dependent variables in separate regression analyses, while the contextual variables were entered as independent variables. In another regression analysis to assess the influence of employee participation on firm performance, the rating of the firm performance was entered as the de-

pendent variable, while the factor scores of the firms for the decision components were entered independent variables.

4. Results and discussion

The results reveal that many of the firms that participated in the survey had existed for more than 10 years, with staff strength of 20 or less (Table 1). About half of the firms were owned by sole proprietors, who were mostly men and older than 40 years.

The most prevalent leadership style was the productivity oriented style. Although the firms as well as their principals could not be considered as very young, their staff size may be considered small. Many of the principals held the professionally recognised Masters degree (Master of Science in Architecture-M.Sc Arch; or Bachelor of Architecture-B.Arch).

Table 2. Factors that represent the basic decisions taken in architectural firms

Factors	Variables	Component Loading
Factor 1: Operational Scheduling (20.7%)	decisions on hiring and promotion of architects	.719
	decisions on fees to be charged for projects	.689
	decisions on salaries of staff	.643
Factor 2: Job execution (17.7%)	decisions on collaborations with other firms	.888
	decisions on design ideas to use for projects	.621
Factor 3: Firm operations (17.6%)	decisions on managing projects	.853
	decisions on managing the non-design staff	.575
Factor 4: Job procurement (13.8%)	decisions on how to get new jobs and clients	.876

The variables that measure the decisions made on the architectural firms were first reduced to three using principal component analysis. Table 2 shows that the four basic decisions made in the architectural firms were operational scheduling, job execution, firm operations and job procurement. These appear to be different from earlier classification of decisions as managerial, goal setting and others (Bhuiyan, 2010).

Table 3 shows the level of participation in decision making by the staff. The results show that the decision component that staff are most involved in is firm operations. This is followed by that on job execution.

Table 3. Level of participation in decision making

Decision component	No participation (%)	Moderate participation (%)	High participation (%)
Firm operations	43.2	35.1	21.7
Job execution	57.9	30.3	11.8
Job procurement	75.3	12.3	12.3
Operational Scheduling	73.3	26.7	0
Overall level of participation	66.7	33,3	0

The least participative decision components were job procurement and operational scheduling. The mean scores revealed that even the most participative decision component were only moderately participative, with mean score of 1.78 on a scale of 1 to 3. The overall level of participation was computed for each firm. More than half (66.7%) of the firms recorded averages of 1.63 and below. None of the firms recorded an average greater than 2. This result suggests an overall low participation in decision making by the employees of the architecture

firms. This agrees with the results of other studies, where employee participation in decision making has been found to be mostly low (Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011; Kok *et al.*, 2014; Hashim and Wok, 2015).

In the light of fact that earlier scholars (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011) suggested that level of participation in decision making is an indication of how knowledgeable and in control the employees are, this result may suggest that many of the employees of the architectural firms investigated have been exposed to little knowledge on issues of operational scheduling and job procurement. Interviews suggest that principals are reluctant to allow employees to take part in such decisions, because, according to one of the interviewees “many architects today take off (leave the organisation) after they have been trained.”

The factor scores were entered as dependent variables in different regression analyses. The contextual factors were entered as independent variables. These analyses were carried out to determine the contextual factors that influenced employee participation in the decision-making dimensions. The results show that the contextual factors significantly influenced all the decision components. The factors accounted for more than half of the employee participation in decision making. A closer look at the data (Table 4) shows that participation in decisions on operational scheduling was influenced by the staffing strategy as well as the ownership form of the firms. These factors accounted for 64% of the variance in participation of the employees in operational scheduling ($R^2 = 0.64$, $F = 5.18$, $p = 0.000$). Specifically, the highest participation in operational scheduling decisions was observed in firms that had all the staff they need on their regular payroll,

followed by those who employed temporary staff for each project. The least participation in decisions on operational scheduling was observed among firms that held a small core staff and employed additional staff on contract as needed. Similarly, the least participation in this component of decision making was found among firms owned by sole principals. On the other hand, partnership firms were more liberal in allowing employees to participate in decisions concerning operational scheduling of fees, salaries and hiring and promotion of staff. This probably suggest that employees in the sole proprietor firms were not motivated to participate in decision making as a results of the high power distance that often characterise sole proprie-

tor firms (Efiendiev *et al.*, 2014). However, this needs to be further investigated.

Similar to the findings on employee participation in operational scheduling decision, highest participation in firm operations decisions was observed in firms that placed all the staff they need on permanent employment, than those that had temporary staff ($R^2 = 0.53$, $F = 3.32$, $p = 0.000$). It would therefore appear that when it comes to employee participation in decisions on how the firms run, the tenure of such employees matter. Another contextual factor that influenced employee participation in decisions that concern firm operation was the sex of the principal.

Table 4. Contextual influences on participation in decision making

Standardized Beta Coefficients				
	Operational scheduling	Job execution	Firm operation	Job procurement
Adjusted R Square (R^2)	0.64	0.68	0.53	0.53
F	5.18	6.16	3.32	3.23
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
ownership form of firm	.348**	.256	.155	.312
ages of firms	-.200	.378	-.294	.209
total number of staff	.342	.487	-.176	-.134
sex of the principal	.167	.075	.572**	.029
age of the principal	-.558	.044	.250	.103
Leadership style of principal	.185	.163	.195	.047
years of experience of principal	-.058	-.139	.238	-.342
degree of job specialization	.308	.164	.421	-.306
number of partners	.188	-.638	-.286	-.224
number of senior staff	.317	.306	-.204	-.264
number of junior staff	-.212	-.966**	.566**	-.313
number of trainee staff	.124	.190	-.043	.128
rewards by improved salary	-.014	.048	-.066	-.084
rewards by retention bonus	.109	.046	-.037	-.087
rewards by performance bonus	.059	-.129	-.094	-.204
rewards by recognitions	.016	.038	-.344	-.118
rewards by staff training	.007	.093	.143	-.026
rewards by leadership development	-.420	.125	.056	-.020
reward through other means	.056	.162	-.158	-.181
staffing strategy	.557**	.379**	.361**	.266
presence of departments/ work units	.118	.126	.166	.373
project execution strategy	-.108	-.094	-.272	-.506**

Female principals indicated higher participation of employees in deciding how to manage projects and non-design staff than their male counterpart. Another contextual factor that influenced employee participation in firm operations decisions was the number of junior staff. Firms that had high number of junior staff involved them in making decisions on firm operations, while those that had few of such junior staff made decisions on firm operations non-participatory. This is probably a confirmation that lower level employees demonstrate increased desire to participate in decision making (Nirmal *et al.*, 2015) The combined effect of these factors accounted for 53% of the variance in employee participation in firm operations decisions.

Sixty-eighth (68%) of the variance in employee participation in job execution decision dimension was accounted for by number of junior staff in the firm, as well as the staffing strategy of the firms ($R^2 = 0.68$, $F = 6.16$, $p = 0.000$). Architectural firms in the study that have high number of junior staff indicated low participation of employees in decisions concerning project execution. The opposite is the case for firms that had few junior staff. This may be expected as many of the junior staff are still being mentored and may not be entrusted with such decisions. It therefore appears that this is one decision where experience/ job level of the employee matter, (Ezennaya, 2011; Huang *et al.*, 2010). Contrary to the findings on employee participation in operational scheduling decisions however, firms that held a small core of committed staff and employed additional contract staff as needed made decisions on job execution most participative, while those that employed all staff needed made the decision least participative. This probably suggests that a greater degree of freedom is

given to contract staff when executing projects than permanent staff.

The only predictor of the level of participation of employees in making decisions related to job procurement was the project execution strategy adopted by the firms. It is interesting to note that this factor accounted for 53% of the variance in employee participation in job procurement decisions ($R^2 = 0.53$, $F = 3.23$, $p = 0.000$). Confirming earlier assertion (Irawato, 2015), the result of this study suggest that teamwork was an important context for participation of decisions on job procurement. Firms that use one team to begin and finish a project indicated the highest participation in job procurement decisions. This is in contrast with firms that assigned any person, as the situation demands, to different projects, where employee participation in such decisions is limited.

The regression result on the influence of the level of employee participation in dimensions of decision making on firm performance is presented in Table 5 ($R^2 = 0.29$, $F = 4.79$, $p = 0.000$). Three out of the four decision making factors significantly predicted firm performance. These dimensions of decision making, as shown in Table 5, were operational scheduling (standardised beta $\beta = 0.36$, $p = 0.020$); job execution ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.003$) and firm operations ($\beta = -0.30$, $p = 0.012$).

Firms that indicated higher employee participation in decisions on job execution and firm operation recorded lower performance in terms of profit, while those that indicated that employee involvement in these decisions was low performed better. In contrast, firms that indicated higher employee participation in decisions on operational scheduling performed better than those that allowed

little employee involvement in this decision. It would therefore appear that the positive influence of employee participation in decision making on firm performance (Emamgholizadeh *et al.*, 2011; Kuye and Sulaimon, 2011) is contextual and may not be applicable to all decision activities.

Table 5. Regression analysis on the influence of participatory decision on firm performance

	Standardized Coefficients		df	F	Sig.
	Beta	Bootstrap (1000) Estimate of Std. Error			
Operational scheduling	.364	.179	2	4.123	.020
Job execution	-.281	.133	4	4.453	.003
Firm operation	-.300	.138	2	4.705	.012
Job procurement	-.177	.191	2	.859	.427

It is interesting to note that although participation of employees in decisions on operational scheduling ranked lowest (Table 3), high employee participation in this decision predicted better firm performance. On the other hand, in areas where the firms in the study indicated the highest employee involvement (firm operation and job execution), such high involvement predicted poor performance of the firms. This probably calls for a need to re-prioritise the areas that employees are allowed to get involved in decision making. One may also observe that operational scheduling captures areas of project fees, salaries, hiring and promotions, which on their own may serve as motivations for the staff to perform their work better. The other areas are however more related to the firms. This may suggest that involving employees in decisions that relate directly to their interest may not be as positively impactful on

firm profit as involving them in those decisions that they may have personal interests in. This assumption however needs to be further investigated.

5. Conclusion

Many previous studies on employee participation in decision-making have investigated this subject from the point of view of employees. In a bid to identify the contexts that enhance employee participation in decision making, the views of employers have been sought in this study. The impact of employee participation in decision making on firm performance was also investigated. This paper has extended literature in this area by identifying the components of the decisions made in architectural firms and how involved the employees are. The findings of the study agree with results of previous studies in that employee participation in decision making in the firms is low. In the light of the fact that staffing strategy predicted the levels of employee participation in all components of decision making except job procurement, there may be the need for architectural firms to pay attention to their staffing strategy, when employee participation in decision making is desired. It would also appear that the effect of high employee participation in decision making on firm performance is not altogether positive. This is because high employee involvement in decisions such as job execution and firm operations predicted poor performances of the architectural firms in the study in terms of profit. The implication of this is that firms need to identify when to allow employees to participated highly in decision making and when such decisions should be the reserve of top executives.

Despite the contributions of this study however, there are a few limitations. One is that the study was only carried out in

architectural firms in Nigeria. The second limitation is that the views of only employers have been considered. Further studies may extend this study by investigating the subject in other professional fields. It would also be insightful to carry out a gap analysis, using both employers' and employees' views.

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