

RECORD KEEPING AND MANAGEMENT IN CONSTRUCTION: ITS IMPORTANCE AND INUNCTIONS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on (lie function and importance of record keeping and management in construction. It provides guides as to eliminating needless flaw in record keeping and management in the Nigerian construction industry, tonally some recommendations arc made in the belief that their adoption would go a long way towards correcting some of the problems encountered in the management of records in construction.

Introduction

The Nigerian construction industry is increasingly burdened with disputes. Today, construction projects are the subject of more disputes than in any other time in history. The depressed economy has created an environment in which construction firms arc forced to bid projects at or below minimum profit levels. Furthermore, clients are demanding more complex projects without increasing the quality of the contract document. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the number of disputes within the construction industry continues to increase.

In Nigeria today, arbitration remains the preferred alternative method to litigation for resolving disputes within the construction industry, however, other disputes resolution methods such as mediation, dispute-resolution board (ADR) and materials are gaining popularity (Taiga,1998).

In a majority of construction disputes resolved through arbitration, the evidence presented is primarily document-based. Thus without adequate documentation, a claimant or respondent will have a difficult time proving the standing of his or her case to a panel of arbitration. Unfortunately, record keeping and management is often viewed a non-value added component of (he construction process.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is two-fold. First to give construction professional guidance on the most important aspects of record keeping on projects and secondly to suggest ways that can be used to improve the organization and presentation of document-based information.

Record Keeping / Management Defined

Realizing the fact that construction records arc the prime movers of facts and figures that every firm needs in order to operate successfully, it is proper that every construction professional should be exposed record to keeping and management techniques. Oloycdc (2003) defined record keeping as the act of holding, guarding, collection and preserving information or data on a specific subject. While Ekch-Momoh (2000) gave a working definition of record management as the planning, organizing, directing and controlling the creation, distribution, maintenance, retention, preservation, retrieval and disposal of records. Furthermore, he said the classic sub-process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling is utilized in this definition of management of records. The various activities involved in the management of record are planned. The material and the people to carry out the various activities are organized and since human beings perform these activities, motivation and direction come into play in order to achieve the planned goal.

The Purpose Record Management

There are four purposes of record management, which according to Leffinwell et al (1971) are summarized as follows:

1. To keep an orderly account of progress,
2. To make possible the preparation of true condition of the business,
3. To make comparison between period of lime and another, comparison with firms operation in the same line ofbusiness and between different product lines,
4. Record management helps to expose errors, wastes and prevents financial losses in an organization by guiding against misfiling or misplacement of vital financial documents.

Record Keeping and Management: The Corner Stone of Document Supported Evidence

The importance of record keeping and management cannot be over emphasized. In a majority of construction disputes resolved through arbitration in Nigeria today, the evidence presented is primarily document based. Arbitrators rely on this document-based information to help reconstruct the

circumstances or “story” under which the dispute occurred. This enables the arbitrators to evaluate the merits of each case presented and to determine which party, if any deserves an award (Obasi, 1993). Thus without adequate record keeping/ management, a claimant or respondent will have a difficult time proving the standing of his or her case to a panel of arbitrators. When a dispute arises during the project, it is far more likely to be settled in an expedient manner if proper management of document- based information has been maintained. As can be seen from above, the records themselves are as important as the way in which they are used and managed.

It is important at this point to mention certain aspects that are key to document supported evidence.

- i) **Construction Schedule.** The construction schedule indicates the contractor’s timing, sequence, and coordination of the construction process and his or her overall approach to the project. However the importance of the construction schedule depends on the nature of the claim. For example in cases dealing with delays, acceleration or other time- sensitive issues the construction schedule is the central piece of evidence.
- ii) **Video and Photographs.** Video and photographic evidence serve as a visual means of recording the effect of actual job progress and provides a foundation in which to establish the status of the project at a specific point or in time. Video and photographic evidence is also important in case of specific issues such as lack of compliance, workmanship and damage claims. For construction professional attempting to record projects with video and photographs he should note the following suggestions:
- iii) **Timing.** Start obtaining photos or video before construction starts; take photographs periodically (preferably monthly) in sync with interim Valuation and if an incident occurs, get it when it happens to record what ever it is.
- iv) **Control.** Sign and date each photograph; note the photograph with respect to location / pointer; and control location and storage of the negative.
- v) **Scope.** Record specific items and get full job views.

Guides for Record Keeping/ Management in Construction

Record keeping and management just like the other functional aspects of the construction has some principles, which acts as guides in its execution. However, the writers are making the following additional suggestions to help construction professional have detailed and comprehensive records. A brief summary of the suggestions include:

- (a) lucid supervisors should prepare detailed daily reports outlining workforce levels, job progress, work description, material deliveries, equipment used, weather, unusual conditions other factors.
- (b) Site logbooks should be completed meticulously; a copy should be sent / faxed to the head office daily.
- (c) Progress photos should be taken at least weekly and always of critical items and photographs should be dated signed and filed.
- (d) Telephone conversation should be confirmed immediately with letter of understanding.
- (e) All documents, samples, pictures and others should be dated, stamped as received.
- (f) Chronological files should be kept on all job activities i. e delivery tickets, variation, additional works and certificate of valuation requisition.
- (g) Duplicate files should be kept of all documents. Originals should be kept at the site with copies stored in the head office.
- (h) Minutes of weekly meetings should be maintained and stored in the head office.
- (i) **All parties in the contract (i.e. sub-contractors and design professionals) should have a file each for documentation.**

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to stress the importance and function of record keeping and management in construction, with a view to pointing out to construction professionals essential points that will help them properly gather, organize, and record project information before a dispute arises. Based on the foregoing, it is the recommendation of the writers that organization should evolve conscious policies in conducting their record management functions. Also regular evaluation should be made to ascertain the efficiency of existing record keeping/ management systems.

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