# DIFFERENCES IN STAKEHOLDER ABILITY IN ADDRESSING UNETHICAL PRACTICES: INSIGHTS FROM THE SURVEYING PROFESSION

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## Abstract

While several measures have been suggested to address unethical practices within the built environment, it remains unclear whether some stakeholders are more able to influence improvement in unethical practices than others, and if so whether such phenomenon manifests similarly or differently in different national contexts. This study pioneers the exploration of: whether different built environment profession stakeholders (i.e. the practitioner/individual professional, the practitioner's organization/company, and the professional body/association) have different abilities to influence improvement (i.e. positive change) in unethical practices; and subsequently whether such phenomenon manifests differently in different national contexts. The study used cross-sectional surveys of built environment surveying professionals in three countries: Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania. The findings revealed that there are significant differences in the abilities of stakeholders to influence improvement in unethical practices like political interference, and discrimination and nepotism. The findings further revealed that differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices can manifest differently in different national contexts. The implication is that, in different national contexts, specific stakeholders could play a leading role in efforts to address unethical practices in which they are more capable of influencing improvement.

**Keywords**: ethics; questionnaire survey; surveying profession; unethical practices.

## Introduction

While the built environment sector of no particular nation may be able to claim perfection in terms of the absence of unethical practices, there are indications that the prevalence of unethical practices is not uniform across countries (Transparency International, 2014).

Regardless of the disparities in the prevalence of unethical practices among market sectors, there is acknowledgment that these practices in general have dire repercussions for the health of industries, professions and eventually the growth of a country (see Schwab, 2013; Runde et al., 2014). Globally, various estimates put the cost of corruption to be in excess of US $1 trillion (Runde et al., 2014). For the construction and property sectors, the costs resulting from unethical practices are not only in the form of colossal financial losses but also often in human life (e.g. deaths resulting from the collapse of structures due to sub-standard construction (CIOB, 2010). Clearly, the detrimental impact of unethical practices presents a strong case for their mitigation, especially in the built environment where unethical practices are pervasive.

Generally, it is recognised that unethical practices are a complex and multi-faceted problem which require appropriate mitigation efforts by several stakeholders at various levels e.g. profession, industry, national, regional and global. At the level of professions, the role of key stakeholders such as practitioners, their firms/organisations, and professional bodies cannot be neglected. While the contribution of each of these stakeholders towards addressing unethical practices is interconnected, it is also reasonable to state that for some unethical practices, individual practitioners by themselves may have limited influence in bringing about improvement (i.e. positive change). For such practices, the firms/organisations or the professional bodies may be more able to influence improvement. The notion of different industry stakeholders being able to influence improvement at varying extents runs parallel to the view in risk management that some risks are more easily mitigated by some parties more than others and therefore the recommended practice that risk items should be transferred to or held by the party that is most capable of dealing with them (CIOB, 2010). Although this notion may

so hold true and perhaps be fundamental in addressing unethical professional practices in the built environment, it is also important to clarify that an argument is not being made for various stakeholders to be boxed into solely or exclusively focussing on addressing some particular unethical practices. Rather, the notion of some stakeholders being better placed to influence improvement in some unethical practices is being presented. This argument is presented from the standpoint that some stakeholders could consequently act as 'champions' or 'frontrunners' to spearhead efforts to address unethical practices while others continue to lend support in a unified manner.

While such an approach could be useful given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the problem of unethical practices, the built environment lacks any empirical study that seeks to ascertain the differences in stakeholder influences in addressing unethical practices. Such empirical inquiry is necessary to provide a sound basis for guided action against unethical practices so that mitigation efforts are appropriately applied. This study therefore explores whether different stakeholders of the built environment surveying profession have different abilities to influence improvement (i.e. positive change) in unethical practices; and whether such a phenomenon manifests differently in different national contexts.

## Literature review

As a term that is very difficult to define, various researchers have tried to give meaning to the word 'ethics' by describing it in several ways. According to Mason (2009), ethics broadly describe the way in which one looks at and understands life, in terms of good and bad or right and wrong. Sohail and Cavill (2008, p. 730) indicated that "it is the study of what one ought to do (actions and decisions) when faced with ethical dilemmas and how he/she does it, both as part of an organization and as an individual". Delbridge (2000) defined ethics in a broader way to include: a system of moral principles, by which human actions and proposals may be judged good or bad, or right or wrong; the rules of conduct recognized in respect of a particular class of human actions; and moral principles, as of an individual. The issue of ethics continues to be topical, with particular emphasis on unethical practices

in the construction sector. This section is dedicated to reviewing literature on ethics and it is in two parts: 1) highlighting the prevalence of unethical practices in the construction sector; and 2) various forms of unethical practices in the sector.

***Prevalence of unethical practices in construction***

As a global industry, the construction industry has seen contractors and consultants operating across international markets (Moodley et al., 2008). If properly harnessed, such an industry can make a significant impact on the economic well-being of citizens and countries as a whole (Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013). Though the construction industry has become a key driver to the economic growth of many countries, it does so with numerous ethical challenges (Ho, 2011). As a matter of fact, code of ethics has become increasingly important to the construction industries in most developed and developing countries worldwide (Oladinrin and Ho, 2016). Oladinrin and Ho (2016) further iterated that, though the code of ethics exists, it has not contributed much to the reduction in the intensity of ethical problems within the industry, probably because of the domineering effect of unethical practices which is restricting its progress.

Unethical practices have the tendency to impose negative costs at personal, group and organizational levels, and an organization that is in the constant behavior of creating such negative behaviors will encounter a diminishing market for its services and withdrawal of public approval (Poon and Hoxley, 2010). This has been the case of the global construction industry because of the inter-organizational relationship that exists between the project team members (Poon and Hoxley, 2010). Researchers have studied the issue of ethical behavior in the construction industry and have reported that there are clear cases of unethical practices during the delivery of construction projects (May et al., 2001; Vee and Skitmore, 2003; Seun et al., 2007; Adnan et al., 2012; Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013). The following sections discuss examples of unethical practices in the construction sector.

***Common unethical practices in the construction industry***

Different professions have different reputations as far as ethical behaviors are concerned (Vee and Skitmore, 2003). Unethical practices within the corporate and operational levels of the construction industry have become commonplace, making the industry no stranger to the issues of ethical malpractices (Oladinrin and Ho., 2014). Issues relating to construction faults and ethical malpractices

are often directed towards all the parties who are directly involved in the execution of such projects (Adnan et al., 2012). Examples of commonly reported unethical practices in the construction industry are discussed below.

*Fraud, Bribery and Corruption*

Defining corruption has always been a problem because what one perceives to be a corrupt practice may not be so by another person. However, over the years, one definition that has received attention is that given by Shakantu (2006, p. 43), who defined corruption as the "offering, giving, receiving or soliciting of anything of value to influence the action of an official in the procurement or selection process or in contract execution". Fraud, bribery and corruption is without doubt a pervasive trait in doing business, with a growing worldwide concern over a high level of corrupt activities among corporate organizations of which construction is key (Arewa and Farrell, 2015). Vee and Skitmore (2003, p. 119) presented fraud to indicate "deceit, trickery, sharp practice, or breach of confidence, by which it is sought to gain some unfair or dishonest advantage". The construction industry is frequently noted as one of the most fraudulent and corrupt industries worldwide (Kenny, 2009). According to Arewa and Farrell (2015, p. 61), corrupt practices may normally manifest in the form of "bribery, embezzlement, extortion, influence peddling, unlawful gratuity, favor, commission, nepotism and illegal payments". Research on fraud, bribery and corruption has been extensively reported in literature (see Vee and Skitmore, 2003; Bowen et al., 2007; Kenny, 2009; Osei-Tutu et al., 2010; Ameh and Odusami, 2010; Bowen et al., 2012; Liao, 2013; Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013; Le et al., 2014; Arewa and Farrell, 2015; Loosemore and Lim, 2015; Ameyaw et al., 2017).

*Conflict of interest*

Conflict of interest if pursued, could keep professionals from meeting their professional duties (Vee and Skitmore, 2003). This ethical malpractice is defined to mean "a situation in which someone in a position of trust, has competing professional or personal interests which could make it difficult to fulfil his or her duties impartially" (Bowen et al., 2007, p. 634). Liao (2013, p. 88) also defined conflict of interest to mean "any situation in which an individual or corporation is in a position to exploit a professional or official capacity in some way for their personal or corporate benefit". To the engineering professionals, conflict of interest is closely related to impartiality, and it is very necessary

that one does not encroach upon conflicts that may bias their judgements in technical aspects of reviewing a design, or in the construction of a project (Liao, 2013).

Clear cases of conflict of interests are presented in literature (Ameyaw et al., 2017). It is very much mentioned among construction procurement (Bowen, 2007; Osei-Tutu et al., 2010), and it is defined as a clash between the interest of the client organization and personal interest of an official in the client organization (Ameyaw et al., 2017). Bowen et al. (2007) indicated that it is better to declare all potential instances of conflicts of interests before proceeding to undertake any projects. This ethical malpractice has been mentioned in the construction industry of several countries including Australia (Vee and Skitmore, 2003), Zambia (Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013), Nigeria (Ameh and Odusami, 2010), Ghana (Osei-Tutu et al., 2010), among others.

*Unfair conduct*

According to Loosemore and Lim (2015), fairness has a close relationship with ethical concepts and justice. It involves "treating people consistently, impartially and equally without favoritism, discrimination or improper prejudices; not taking unfair advantage of people's mistakes or ignorance; and fully considering peoples' rights, interests and perspectives" (Loosemore and Lim, 2015, p. 310). Bowen et al. (2007) indicated that these unfair conducts may occur in competitions, contracts, staff promotion/dismissal/demotion, and in business practice. According to Ameyaw et al. (2017), this ethical malpractice may also be termed as 'fronting', and it may manifest itself when officials within government agencies or client organizations create front companies to obtain construction contracts. Such companies obtain unfair or illegal benefits in awarding public contracts because of the owners' powerful positions in government (Ameyaw et al., 2017).

*Collusion*

Collusion is contrary to the principle of free competition because it only benefits the parties to the collusive agreement at the expense of those who are not privy to the agreement (Bowen et al., 2007). Ameyaw et al. (2017) indicated that collusive tendering and bid rigging are referenced alike, possibly because it is a secret agreement between two or more parties engaged in a fraudulent activity. This ethical malpractice though serious has not received much attention from the research community. However, for those studies that have addressed this issue, it has been revealed that collusion is very

serious and should be addressed. Available literature has revealed that this issue is evidenced by tender rigging that predominantly transpire at bid evaluation and tendering phases of project developments (see Vee and Skitmore, 2003; Bowen et al., 2007; Kenny, 2009; Osei-Tutu et al., 2010; Ameh and Odusami, 2010; Bowen et al., 2012; Liao, 2013; Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013; Le et al., 2014; Arewa and Farrell, 2015; Loosemore and Lim, 2015; Ameyaw et al., 2017).

*Other unethical practices in the construction industry*

In addition to the commonly encountered unethical practices previously described, literature further reports on other unethical practices in the construction industry such as: failure to protect public health, safety and welfare; mishandling of sensitive data (e.g. revealing or discussing confidential information); failure to protect the environment; improper relations with other parties (e.g. excessive gifts); abuse of company resources; abuse of client resources; misrepresentation of competence; and political interference (Jackson, 2004; Kang, 2009; Kang et al., 2017).

## Research methodology

Aligned with the study's aim, a quantitative research strategy, particularly a survey was used. The choice of this strategy is supported by its suitability for obtaining a generalized view of a phenomenon (Fellows and Liu, 2008; Creswell, 2014), which in this study is stakeholders' ability to influence improvement (i.e. bring about positive change) in unethical practices. Consequently, three cross-sectional surveys were conducted in Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania. The administration of surveys in the different locations was mainly to enable further exploration of the phenomenon in terms of whether it could manifest differently in different national contexts.

### *Survey design*

A questionnaire was designed for the survey and it consisted of two main sections: respondent demographic information; and respondents' assessment of the extent to which different built environment stakeholders (i.e. the practitioner/ individual professional, practitioner's organization/company, and professional body/association) can influence improvement in unethical practices.

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198 *Section 1:* respondent demographic information. This section captured respondent demographic
199 information including: professional role; highest level of education; and professional experience.
200

201 *Section 2*: assessment of the extent to which different built environment stakeholders can influence
202 improvement in unethical practices. There are several stakeholders within the built environment and it
203 is not practicable to survey them all in a single study. As such this section focused on three important
204 stakeholders: the practitioner/ individual professional; practitioner's organization/company (i.e.
205 practitioners' employer); and the professional body/association (i.e. the national professional
206 body/association related to the practitioner's profession). The assessment of the extent to which each
207 stakeholder can influence improvement in unethical practices was done by relying on the judgement
208 of the practitioners. This approach was used because practitioners, through personal knowledge of
209 themselves, their organizations, and through their knowledge and interactions with their professional
210 association are well placed to provide credible assessment of the extent to which they, their
211 organization and professional association can influence improvement in unethical practices.
212 Consequently, this section requested built environment professionals to rate the extent to which they
213 perceive that they (personally), their organization and their national professional association can
214 influence improvement (i.e. bring about positive change) in the unethical practices. A five-point
215 Likert scale (1 = Not at all; 2 = Low; 3 = Moderate; 4 = High; 5 = Very High) was used. Drawing
216 from the review of literature, the unethical practices that were examined in the study are: failure to
217 protect public health, safety and welfare; collusion; mishandling of sensitive data (e.g. leakages);
218 production of fraudulent documents (e.g. invoices & claims); failure to protect environment; bribery;
219 improper relations with other parties (e.g. excessive gifts); abuse of company resources; abuse of
220 client resources; discrimination and nepotism; misrepresentation of competence; and political
221 interference. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix A.

222 ***Survey administration***

223 To enable exploration of the phenomenon of different built environment stakeholders having varying
224 ability to influence improvement in unethical practices, the survey was administered to built

environment surveying professionals (i.e. quantity surveyors, property/estate valuers, and land surveyors) within three study locations. The Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy (CASLE) (www.casle.org), which is an association for built environment surveying professionals in the Commonwealth, holds annual conferences in conjunction with the surveying professional bodies in Commonwealth countries. These conferences bring together surveying professionals (usually predominantly from the country of the conference venue) to share information and discuss issues that are relevant to the surveying profession. Considering the difficulty in obtaining participation in built environment surveys, the CASLE conferences presented a useful platform to administer the survey. A cross-sectional survey was thus administered to delegates at the CASLE conferences held in Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania from 2015-2017. The survey yielded a total of 266 useable responses comprising 121 from Ghana, 86 from Nigeria, and 59 from Tanzania.

***Data analysis***

The data from the retrieved questionnaire were coded into IBM SPSS Statistic version 23 for analysis. Descriptive statistical analyses (e.g. frequencies, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistical analysis - one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) – were performed on the collected data. The ANOVA was applied to the aggregated sample from the three locations (i.e. 266 responses) in order to address the primary research objective of exploring whether there are differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices. In order to further explore whether such differences could manifest differently or similarly in different national contexts, the ANOVA was also applied to each country-specific sample. ANOVA was used due to its suitability for assessing differences in responses for different groups (Field, 2013).

## Findings

The findings of the study are presented below under three sub-headings: respondent demographic information; differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices; and country-specific differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices.

***Respondent demographic information***

The respondents were drawn from three countries (Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania), and their combined demographic information is shown in Table 1.

*[Insert Table 1]*

Table 1 shows that the respondents occupied various roles ranging from Land Surveyors/Geomatic Engineers (40.6%), Estate Surveyors/Valuers (28.6%), and Quantity Surveyors (26.3%). The majority of respondents (i.e. 85.7%) hold a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, and over half of the respondents have more than 10 years of professional experience. Overall, based on the demographic information, the respondents are sufficiently well placed to respond to the subject of inquiry.

***Differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices***

For each of the unethical practices examined, respondents rated the extent to which they can influence improvement, the extent to which they perceive that their companies can influence improvement, and the extent to which they perceive that their professional associations can influence improvement. Table 2 shows the mean scores, standard deviations and standard errors of the twelve unethical practices that were assessed.

From Table 2, 'company' is seen as the topmost ranked stakeholder that is able to influence improvement in 11 out of the 12 unethical practices examined. Among the unethical practices are: 'failure to protect public health, safety and welfare' (mean score (MS) = 3.32, standard deviation (SD) = 1.314); 'mishandling of sensitive data' (MS = 3.30, SD = 1.296); 'abuse of company resources' (MS = 3.27, SD = 1.350); and 'bribery' (MS = 3.22, SD = 1.373). The professional association emerged as the topmost stakeholder that can influence improvement in 'political interference' (MS = 3.34, SD = 1.373), while the individual professional did not emerge as the topmost stakeholder for any of the unethical practices.

While the ranking gives an indication of the stakeholders' relative ability to influence improvements in unethical practices, inferential statistical analysis is required in order to establish whether the differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement are significant. A one-way analysis of

variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to determine if there are any statistically significant differences in the means between groups (i.e. the individual professionals, the professional's companies, and the professional association) in terms of the ability to influence improvement in the unethical practices. From the one-way ANOVA test, the combined sample revealed that different stakeholders are perceived to have significantly different abilities to influence improvement in three out of the 12 unethical practices: abuse of company resources; discrimination and nepotism; and political interference (as shown by Table 3). Tukey post hoc comparisons (as shown by Table 4) was further conducted to determine the differences in the stakeholders' ability to influence improvement in the three unethical practices. The post hoc comparison is frequently used in conjunction with ANOVA to determine which pairs of groups show statistically significant mean differences (De Vaus, 2002). The Tukey's test detects a pairwise comparison with means that are significantly different from each other at a 0.05 significance level (Skibniewski, 2009).

From the Tukey post hoc test, the differences in the mean scores for the various groups were determined and the mean differences are shown in Table 4. The pairs of groups which showed statistically significant mean differences at 0.05 significance level are shown in the superscript 'a'. Table 4 further shows that the mean score of organization ability to influence improvement in the 'abuse of company resources' is significantly higher than that of the professional association (mean difference (MD) = 0.405, $p = 0.003$). The comparison of the mean score of the individual professional with that of the organization and professional association yielded no significant difference. The post hoc comparison in Table 4 further reveals that the comparison of the mean score of organization ability to influence improvement in 'discrimination and nepotism' is significantly higher than that of the individual professional (MD = 0.347, $p = 0.022$). The comparison of the mean score of the professional association with that of the organization and individual professional yielded no significant differences. Finally, Table 4 shows that the mean scores of the ability of the organization (MD = 0.670, $p < 0.001$) and the ability of the professional association (MD = 0.717, $p < 0.001$) to influence improvement in political interference is significantly greater than that of the individual professional.

*[Insert Table 2]*

*[Insert Table 3]*

*[Insert Table 4]*

***Country-specific differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices***

Country-specific ANOVA analysis was conducted to further explore whether the observed differences in stakeholder ability to influence unethical practices manifest similarly or differently in the three survey locations: Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania. The results are in the following sections.

*Differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices (Ghana sample)*

The one-way ANOVA test conducted for the Ghana sample revealed that different stakeholders are perceived to have significantly different abilities to influence improvement in 3 unethical practices as follows: abuse of company resources; discrimination and nepotism; and political interference (as shown by Table 5). The Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons for the Ghana sample ANOVA is shown in Table 6. The Tukey post hoc test revealed differences in the means for the various groups. Table 6 shows that the mean score of company's ability to influence improvement in the 'abuse of company resources' is significantly greater (MD = 0.719, $p < 0.001$) than that of the professional association. With regards to 'discrimination and nepotism', the mean score of company's ability to influence improvement is also significantly greater than that of the individual professional. Concerning 'political interference', the ability of the company (MD = 0.992, $p < 0.001$) and the professional association (MD = 0.688, $p = 0.001$) to influence improvement is significantly greater than that of the individual professional.

*[Insert Table 5]*

*[Insert Table 6]*

*Differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices (Nigeria sample)*

As shown by Table 7, the one-way ANOVA test conducted for the Nigeria sample revealed that different stakeholders are perceived to have significantly different ability to influence improvement in only one unethical practice (i.e. political interference). Table 8 which shows the Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons reveal that the mean score of the professional association's ability to influence improvement in political interference is significantly greater (MD = 0.726, $p$ = 0.001) than that of the individual professional.

*[Insert Table 7]*

*[Insert Table 8]*

*Differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices (Tanzania sample)*

Like the Nigeria sample, the one-way ANOVA test conducted for the Tanzania sample revealed that different stakeholders are perceived to have significantly different ability to influence improvement in only one unethical practice (i.e. political interference). This is shown in Table 9. The Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons (shown by Table 10) shows that the mean score of the ability of the professional association to influence improvement in 'political interference' is significantly greater (MD= 0.761, $p$-value=0.010) than that of the individual professional.

*[Insert Table 9]*

*[Insert Table 10]*

**Discussion**

*Discussion based on combined results*

Over the years the issue of ethics has received much attention among companies, professional associations, and individual professionals (Perry et al., 2014; Joyce, 2014). The combined results of the study show that, out of the three stakeholders, 'company' emerged as the topmost stakeholder that is able to influence improvement (i.e. positive change) in the examined unethical practices, followed by the professional association, with the individual professional having a relatively limited ability to influence improvement. The results of the combined sample ANOVA also revealed significant

differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in 'abuse of company resources', 'discrimination and nepotism', and 'political interference'.

*Abuse of company resources*

Organizations should act to protect their assets against misuse and abuse by employees. Such assets may be physical, intellectual and electronic or digital in nature. According to the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners' (ACFEs) 2016 Report to the Nations, abuse of company resources is considered as the most common form of occupational fraud, and it occurs in approximately 83% of all unethical cases reported. From the finding of this study, it is evident that the respondents perceive organization to be more able to influence improvement in this unethical practice than the other stakeholders. In most instances, client databases with personal and financial information, internal documentations which detail out trade secrets, contents and technologies produced can be exposed, opening the real possibility for data to be misused, either intentionally for personal gain, or inadvertently. Maicibi and Yahaya (2013) and Wilks (2011) have reported this unethical practice to be an issue which is of a major concern to organizations. It is a practice that is very difficult to curb, especially on individual or professional association basis. There is therefore the need for a collective action by an entire company to be able to control such practices. These acts of misconducts are vastly reported in other industries, apart from construction, a typical example being the ICT (Kernel, 2011). Since it manifests itself in different ways among different stakeholders, there is the need to identify different ways to address it. It causes a huge challenge to organizational and societal development (Maicibi and Yahaya, 2013), and organizations should seek to lead efforts to design and implement measures to tackle the abuse of company resources by employees. In most instances, organizations can put in place measures like identifying common asset misappropriation schemes (e.g. skimming, billing schemes, and information theft), analytical reviews, independent checks, segregation of functions and duties and access limitation and authorization controls to check the misuse of company assets. However, such measures may be more likely to be effective if their design were to include some level of employee involvement so that employees would take some ownership of the measures.

*Discrimination and nepotism*

Discrimination and nepotism are often seen in actions which actors may not consider as unethical (Sezer, 2015). These unethical practices if encouraged in companies, among professional associations and amongst individuals can cause great feelings of resentment. The findings of this study revealed that the respondents perceive companies to be more able to influence improvement in discrimination and nepotism than the individual professional. Nepotism is favoritism that is shown to relatives by individuals in a position of authority (Pelletier and Bligh, 2008). This means that as an individual professional, there is always the temptation of favoring a family member or a close ally when it comes to providing a service. Such individuals if left unchecked may always prefer to fill vacancies in the companies in which they work with people they are very much familiar with. In most instances, companies are seen to be well positioned to have the needed structures in place to check against these unethical acts. This means that, in a company where nepotism is very common, there must be clear policies and practices against such acts. When organizations fail to enforce their anti-discrimination and anti-nepotism policies with consistency, they expose themselves to liability. For instance, Büte (2011) found that within the Turkish banking sector, nepotism had a significant negative effect on intention of employees to quit the job, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and human resource management practices. Furthermore, in the Turkish Police Organization, it is reported that the most essential problems encountered stem from discrimination and nepotism (Mutlu, 2000). Mutlu (2000) further reported that though the police organization had its own culture, appointments, promotions, and the honoring system were left in the hands of individuals who could easily be manipulated by political organizations. Addressing discrimination and nepotism can be controversial and difficult. In view of this, organizations should seek to design and enforce measures that would address discrimination and nepotism within businesses and in cross-business interactions. Organizations should not leave efforts to address discrimination and nepotism to individuals but should have systems or procedures in place to help detect such practices and encourage individuals to voice out acts of discrimination (Good Practice Note, 2006).

*Political interference*

418 The findings of the study show that the professional association and company are perceived as being
419 more able to influence improvement in political interference than the individual professional. Politics
420 plays a key role in the procurement of construction projects. This is because several large projects
421 undertaken in different countries are government sponsored projects. This therefore creates the needed
422 room for governments to politically interfere in such projects (Mukumbwa and Muya, 2013). Political
423 interference in unethical practices within the construction industry is greatly seen in what is termed
424 'fronting' (Bowen et al., 2007; de Jong et al., 2009; Ameyaw et al., 2017). According to Ameyaw et
425 al. (2017, p. 3), 'fronting occurs when officials within government agencies or client organizations
426 create front companies to obtain construction contracts'. de Jong et al. (2009) iterated that such
427 companies obtain unfair benefits in awarding public contracts because of the owners' powerful
428 positions in government. In Ghana for instance, Ameyaw et al. (2017) revealed that high political
429 connections were used to enhance secrecy in the award of public contracts. Ameyaw et al. (2017)
430 further indicated that individuals did not report corrupt practices because of the fear of dismissal (or
431 other occupational penalties) that may be imposed by their employers on them. There is also the fear
432 that if such an unethical practice is conducted by an official with high political influence, the whistle
433 blower may not be well protected, leaving him and the family exposed to danger in the future. The
434 inference drawn from this finding is that professional bodies and organizations may be more capable
435 of influencing improvements in political interference than the individual practitioner because the
436 individual practitioner could more easily become a victim or target of political
437 victimization/persecution. Hence, professional bodies and organizations could champion efforts to
438 tackle political interference within the industry.
439 *Discussion of results on country specific basis*
440 On country-specific basis, the ANOVA revealed some differences as well as similarity in the findings.
441 For all the three samples the professional association is perceived as being more able to influence
442 improvement in 'political interference' than the individual professional. However, within the Ghana
443 sample only, organization is also perceived as being more able to influence improvement in 'political
444 interference' than the individual professional. Furthermore, within the Ghana sample only, significant

differences emerged regarding stakeholder ability to influence improvement in 'abuse of company resources' and 'discrimination and nepotism'.

According to Christie et al. (2003), responses to questions of an ethical nature from any particular group of individuals from any country are a function of multiple constructs. It is worth noting that such differences are possible and may stem from the differences in culture, organizational behaviors or dynamics across the countries, among others. Several studies have shown that ethical behavior varies cross-culturally (Arnold et al., 2007). For instance, Ahmed et al. (2003) found that while there was a basic agreement on ethical business practices, differences were present in respondents' tolerance to damages caused by a particular unethical behavior. Jackson (2000) believed that the structure of ethical judgements varied by countries, and so conducted a study to prove this. The findings of his study revealed that managers' ethical judgements were influenced by country specific cultural differences. In the light of organizational dynamics, Kuntz et al. (2013) indicated that the extent to which an organization exhibits ethical capability is contingent upon the interplay of competencies and behaviors of incumbents, the organizational infrastructure, and the ethical stance of organizational leaders. It is therefore very likely that across countries, individuals and organizations may share different ethical principles. Vitell and Hidalgo (2006, p. 31) therefore suggested that "as businesses have globally expanded, the study of ethics has become increasingly important due to the different cultural/country specific environments in which global businesses operate on a daily basis". Hence, as countries differ greatly in terms of their levels of economic development, legal-political systems, cultural standards, and expectations concerning business conduct, decision makers who operate in other countries and negotiate with the business people from such countries should take into consideration the ethical stance of such individuals and their businesses in order to learn to trade cautiously (Vitell and Hidalgo, 2006).

In summary, the empirical realities revealed by the country-specific analyses demonstrate that the phenomenon regarding differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices can indeed manifest similarly as well as differently across different countries. More importantly, what that implies is that measures designed to tackle unethical practices need to also consider local contextual issues within a particular country rather than simply adopting or 'borrowing'

measures from other contexts which may eventually not be effective. Nonetheless, within the confines of this study, across the three study locations, the professional association could be a better champion for spearheading efforts to address political interference within the surveying profession.

## Conclusions

The built environment is notorious for the prevalence of unethical practices and while concerted effort by all stakeholders is needed to address such practices, some stakeholders within the sector may be more capable to lead change or influence improvement. This study has examined: whether different built environment profession stakeholders, particularly the surveying professional, the professional's company, and the professional association, have different abilities to influence improvement in unethical practices; and whether such phenomenon manifests differently in different national contexts. The results from the study demonstrate that for some unethical practices there are significant differences in the ability of stakeholders to influence improvement. Such unethical practices are 'abuse of company resources', 'discrimination and nepotism', and 'political interference'. The results also show that the differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement can manifest similarly and differently in different national contexts. The results hold significant practical implications in the sense that stakeholders that are more able to influence improvement in an unethical practice should spearhead efforts aimed at addressing those unethical practices. Within the specific context of the three study locations, professional bodies could spearhead efforts to address political interference within the surveying profession or more broadly within the built environment sector in those locations. As shown from this study that differences in stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices can manifest differently in different national contexts, it is imperative that further studies of this nature are undertaken in other countries in order to understand what pertains in each specific country. It is based on such studies that tailored efforts to address unethical practices can be designed and implemented within a country. Such studies could also eventually inform the development of a tool to assist companies and professionals to navigate ethical issues in different countries.

Additionally, a limitation of this study is that it was restricted to built environment surveying professionals within three countries. Further studies involving other built environment professions could yield additional empirical realities to broaden understanding of various stakeholders' ability to address unethical practices within the construction sector.

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632 **Table 1**. Respondent demographic information (N=266)

| Demographic information | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| *Role* | | |
| Estate Surveyor/Valuer | 76 | 28.6 |
| Quantity Surveyor | 70 | 26.3 |
| Land Surveyor/Geomatic Engineer | 108 | 40.6 |
| Other e.g. cartographer | 6 | 2.3 |
| Non-response | 6 | 2.3 |
| *Education* | | |
| Pre-degree education (i.e. basic education, secondary education, diploma and higher national diploma) | 32 | 12.0 |
| Bachelor's degree | 112 | 42.1 |
| Postgraduate degree (i.e. masters' degree and doctorate degree) | 116 | 43.6 |
| Non-response | 6 | 2.3 |
| *Professional Experience* | | |
| 0-10 years | 116 | 43.6 |
| 11-20 years | 78 | 29.3 |
| Over 20 years | 69 | 25.9 |
| Non-response | 3 | 1.1 |

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647 **Table 2.** Stakeholder ability to influence improvement in unethical practices

| Unethical Practice | Stakeholder | N | Mean Sore (MS) | Std. Deviation (SD) | Std. Error (SE) | Rank by mean score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Failure to Protect Public Health, Safety and Welfare | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.15 | 1.286 | 0.079 | 3 |
| | company | 266 | 3.32 | 1.314 | 0.081 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.30 | 1.327 | 0.081 | 2 |
| Collusion | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.04 | 1.444 | 0.089 | 3 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.09 | 1.301 | 0.080 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.08 | 1.316 | 0.081 | 2 |
| Mishandling of Sensitive Data (e.g. Leakages) | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.19 | 1.514 | 0.093 | 2 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.30 | 1.296 | 0.079 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.08 | 1.343 | 0.082 | 3 |
| Production of Fraudulent Documents (e.g. invoices & claims) | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.95 | 1.688 | 0.104 | 2 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.06 | 1.474 | 0.090 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 2.87 | 1.516 | 0.093 | 3 |
| Failure to Protect Environment | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.00 | 1.373 | 0.084 | 3 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.18 | 1.221 | 0.075 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.09 | 1.323 | 0.081 | 2 |
| Bribery | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.05 | 1.687 | 0.103 | 2 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.22 | 1.373 | 0.084 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.03 | 1.432 | 0.088 | 3 |
| Improper Relations with Other Parties (e.g. Excessive gifts) | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.97 | 1.467 | 0.090 | 2 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.04 | 1.280 | 0.078 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 2.94 | 1.306 | 0.080 | 3 |
| Abuse of Company Resources | Individual Professional | 266 | 3.09 | 1.598 | 0.098 | 2 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.27 | 1.350 | 0.083 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 2.87 | 1.324 | 0.081 | 3 |
| Abuse of Client Resources | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.94 | 1.626 | 0.100 | 2 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Company | 266 | 3.08 | 1.397 | 0.086 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 2.89 | 1.424 | 0.087 | 3 |
| Discrimination and Nepotism | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.88 | 1.626 | 0.100 | 3 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.22 | 1.451 | 0.089 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.04 | 1.433 | 0.088 | 2 |
| Misrepresentation of Competence | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.97 | 1.538 | 0.094 | 3 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.21 | 1.354 | 0.083 | 1 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.16 | 1.457 | 0.089 | 2 |
| Political Interference | Individual Professional | 266 | 2.62 | 1.447 | 0.089 | 3 |
| | Company | 266 | 3.29 | 1.377 | 0.084 | 2 |
| | Professional association | 266 | 3.34 | 1.373 | 0.084 | 1 |

Note: Scale: 1 = not at all; 2 = low; 3 = moderate; 4 = high; 5 = very high.

655 **Table 3.** One-way ANOVA test for stakeholders' ability to influence improvement in unethical
656 practice

| Unethical practice | Comparison | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abuse of company resources | Between Groups | 21.844 | 2 | 10.922 | 6.104[a] | 0.002 |
| | Within Groups | 1624.119 | 527 | 2.043 | | |
| | Total | 1645.963 | 529 | | | |
| Discrimination and nepotism | Between Groups | 16.007 | 2 | 8.004 | 3.403[a] | 0.030 |
| | Within Groups | 1802.439 | 528 | 2.267 | | |
| | Total | 1818.446 | 530 | | | |
| Political interference | Between Groups | 85.573 | 2 | 42.787 | 21.848 | 0.034 |
| | Within Groups | 1556.942 | 795 | 1.958 | | |
| | Total | 1642.515 | 797 | | | |

Note: [a] Welch's F is used due to significant difference in group variances

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659 **Table 4.** Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons table for stakeholders' ability to influence
660 improvement in unethical practice

| Unethical practice | Stakeholder (I) | Stakeholder (J) | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Abuse of company resources | Individual Professional | Company | -0.181 | 0.124 | 0.309 | -0.47 | 0.11 |
| | | Professional body | 0.223 | 0.124 | 0.170 | -0.07 | 0.51 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.181 | 0.124 | 0.309 | -0.11 | 0.47 |
| | | Professional body | 0.405[a] | 0.124 | 0.003 | 0.11 | 0.70 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | -0.223 | 0.124 | 0.170 | -0.51 | 0.07 |
| | | Company | -0.405[a] | 0.124 | 0.003 | -0.70 | -0.11 |
| Discrimination and nepotism | Individual Professional | Company | -0.347[a] | 0.131 | 0.022 | -0.65 | -0.04 |
| | | Professional body | -0.161 | 0.131 | 0.432 | -0.47 | 0.15 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.347[a] | 0.131 | 0.022 | 0.04 | 0.65 |
| | | Professional body | 0.185 | 0.131 | 0.332 | -0.12 | 0.49 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.161 | 0.131 | 0.432 | -0.15 | 0.47 |
| | | Company | -0.185 | 0.131 | 0.332 | -0.49 | 0.12 |
| Political interference | Individual Professional | Company | -0.670[a] | 0.121 | 0.000 | -0.96 | -0.39 |
| | | Professional body | -0.717[a] | 0.121 | 0.000 | -1.00 | -0.43 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.670[a] | 0.121 | 0.000 | 0.39 | 0.96 |
| | | Professional body | -0.046 | 0.121 | 0.923 | -0.33 | 0.24 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.717[a] | 0.121 | 0.000 | 0.43 | 1.00 |
| | | Company | 0.046 | 0.121 | 0.923 | -0.24 | 0.33 |

Note: [a] The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

661 **Table 5.** One-way ANOVA test for stakeholders' ability to influence improvement in unethical
662 practice (Ghana sample)

| Unethical practice | Comparison | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abuse of company resources | Between Groups | 31.335 | 2 | 15.668 | 9.727[a] | 0.000 |
| | Within Groups | 669.885 | 238 | 1.861 | | |
| | Total | 701.221 | 240 | | | |
| Discrimination and nepotism | Between Groups | 17.915 | 2 | 8.957 | 4.032[a] | 0.019 |
| | Within Groups | 826.137 | 239 | 2.295 | | |
| | Total | 844.051 | 241 | | | |
| Political interference | Between Groups | 62.483 | 2 | 31.242 | 15.409 | 0.000 |
| | Within Groups | 729.892 | 360 | 2.027 | | |
| | Total | 792.375 | 362 | | | |

Note: [a] Welch's F is used due to significant difference in group variances

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664 **Table 6.** Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons table for stakeholders' ability to influence
665 improvement in unethical practice (Ghana sample)

| Unethical practice | Stakeholder (I) | Stakeholder (J) | Mean Difference, (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Abuse of company resources | Individual Professional | Company | -0.339 | 0.175 | 0.131 | -0.75 | 0.07 |
| | | Professional association | 0.380 | 0.175 | 0.078 | -0.03 | 0.79 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.339 | 0.175 | 0.131 | -0.07 | 0.75 |
| | | Professional association | 0.719[a] | 0.175 | 0.000 | 0.31 | 1.13 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | -0.380 | 0.175 | 0.078 | -0.79 | 0.03 |
| | | Company | -0.719[a] | 0.175 | 0.000 | -1.13 | -0.31 |
| Discrimination and nepotism | Individual Professional | Company | -0.521[a] | 0.195 | 0.021 | -0.98 | -0.06 |
| | | Professional association | -0.123 | 0.195 | 0.802 | -0.58 | 0.34 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.521[a] | 0.195 | 0.021 | 0.06 | 0.98 |
| | | Professional association | 0.397 | 0.195 | 0.104 | -0.06 | 0.86 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.123 | 0.195 | 0.802 | -0.34 | 0.58 |
| | | Company | -0.397 | 0.195 | 0.104 | -0.86 | 0.06 |
| Political interference | Individual Professional | Company | -0.992[a] | 0.183 | 0.000 | -1.42 | -0.56 |
| | | Professional association | -.688[a] | 0.183 | 0.001 | -1.12 | -0.26 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.992[a] | 0.183 | 0.000 | 0.56 | 1.42 |
| | | Professional association | 0.304 | 0.183 | 0.223 | -0.13 | 0.73 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.688[a] | 0.183 | 0.001 | 0.26 | 1.12 |
| | | Company | -0.304 | 0.183 | 0.223 | -0.73 | 0.13 |

Note: [a] The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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667 **Table 7.** One-way ANOVA test for stakeholders' ability to influence improvement in unethical
668 practice (Nigeria Sample)

| Unethical practice | Comparison | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Political interference | Between Groups | 23.046 | 2 | 11.523 | 6.314 | 0.002 |
| | Within Groups | 465.394 | 255 | 1.825 | | |
| | Total | 488.439 | 257 | | | |

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670 **Table 8.** Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons table for stakeholders' ability to influence
671 improvement in unethical practice (Nigeria sample)

| Unethical practice | Stakeholder (I) | Stakeholder (J) | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Political interference | Individual Professional | Company | -0.283 | 0.206 | 0.357 | -0.77 | 0.20 |
| | | Professional association | -0.726[a] | 0.206 | 0.001 | -1.21 | -0.24 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.283 | 0.206 | 0.357 | -0.20 | 0.77 |
| | | Professional association | -0.443 | 0.206 | 0.082 | -0.93 | 0.04 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.726[a] | 0.206 | 0.001 | 0.24 | 1.21 |
| | | Company | 0.443 | 0.206 | 0.082 | -0.04 | 0.93 |

Note: [a] The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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**Table 9.** One-way ANOVA test for stakeholders' ability to influence improvement in unethical practice (Tanzania sample)

| Unethical practice | Comparison | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Political interference | Between Groups | 18.601 | 2 | 9.301 | 4.736 | 0.010 |
| | Within Groups | 341.694 | 174 | 1.964 | | |
| | Total | 360.295 | 176 | | | |

679 **Table 10.** Tukey post hoc test multiple comparisons table for stakeholders' ability to influence
680 improvement in unethical practice (Tanzania sample)

| Unethical practice | Stakeholder (I) | Stakeholder (J) | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Political interference | Individual Professional | Company | -0.576 | 0.258 | 0.068 | -1.19 | 0.03 |
| | | Professional association | -0.761[a] | 0.258 | 0.010 | -1.37 | -0.15 |
| | Company | Individual Professional | 0.576 | 0.258 | 0.068 | -0.03 | 1.19 |
| | | Professional association | -0.185 | 0.258 | 0.754 | -0.79 | 0.42 |
| | Professional association | Individual Professional | 0.761[a] | 0.258 | 0.010 | 0.15 | 1.37 |
| | | Company | 0.185 | 0.258 | 0.754 | -0.42 | 0.79 |

Note: [a] The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

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## **Appendix A**: Questionnaire

**Section 1**: Please provide the following background Information. *Please tick the most appropriate box*

| | |
|---|---|
| Professional Role | □ Estate Surveyor/Valuer □ Quantity Surveyor<br>□ Land Surveyor/Geomatic engineer □ Other, specify:_____ |
| Highest level of Education | □ Basic education □ Secondary education □ Diploma ☐ Higher national diploma<br>☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate Degree |
| Length of Professional Experience (years) | □ 0-10 □ 11-20 □ 21-30 □ 31-40 □ Over 40 |

**Section 2**: Please rate the extent to which *you feel, you (individual professional), your organization* and your *affiliated national* surveying *professional body* can influence improvement (i.e. bring about positive change) in the following practices. Rate using the following scale:

1 = Not at all; 2 = Low; 3 = Moderate; 4 = High; 5 = Very High

| | Professional | | | | | Organisation | | | | | Professional Body | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| Failure to Protect Public Health, Safety and Welfare | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Collusion | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Mishandling of Sensitive Data (e.g. Leakages) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Production of Fraudulent Documents (e.g. invoices & claims) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Failure to Protect Environment | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Bribery | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Improper Relations with Other Parties (e.g. Excessive gifts) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Abuse of Company Resources | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Abuse of Client Resources | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Discrimination and Nepotism | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Misrepresentation of Competence | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Political Interference | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |