

# Identification of Challenges Facing Public Construction Industry in Palestine

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**Abstract:** This study titled as Identification of Challenges Facing Public Construction Industry (PCI) in Palestine end at finding out the challenges facing PCI in Palestine and clarifying the ways those are dealt with. To achieve its objective the researcher has designed the questionnaire for this purpose. Besides that, the researcher has conducted some interviews with the key stakeholders of construction industry in Palestine .The questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS program. The major results of this study are:

The major challenges related to health and safety, time, and quality that faces Public Construction industry in Palestine .The result found no statistical differences out to demographic factors to this study.

The objective of this research is to study to set a recommendation for dealing those challenges and help in developing the future of this sector by minimizing the problems with using the maximum resources and opportunities to make construction management more efficient and responsive, by discusses how to implement best management practices in public construction project PCP in West Bank. And recommended the designer to be more creative and the special condition for every single project should be considered such as location, used material, end user...etc. and the government is recommended to be stricter, to be more effective, and to facilitate this issue with the specialized authorities to make such a step is easier to typical citizen. Also legislate laws giving labors their rights. Increase staff realizing and understanding of safety importance by training, and achieve a certified degrees in quality commitment the ISO by hiring quality engineer. The recommendations introduce some solution for practitioners by acquiring the right skills and apply appropriate management strategies in managing construction projects.

**Key words:** Public construction industry, Construction Sector, Construction Projects, Palestine (West Bank).

## I. INTRODUCTION

Public construction industry (PCI) is the backbone of the economic activity in human life, and described as a key sector and one of the milestones of the economy. It contains projects for a living, other for human transactions and industrial uses [1]. As such, it relates to and serves all aspects of human activity. It is an inevitable infrastructure for keeping life safe and progressing.

In Palestine, the construction industry (CI) is one of the key economic sectors and the main force motivating the Palestinian national economy. In 1994, the construction sector (CS) has witnessed a remarkable expansion. It resulted in the recovery of the CI and subsidiary industries The CS has occupied the foremost position among the rest of other sectors, attracting investments and creating new jobs [2].

Since the Government is responsible for organizing the CI, it puts standards describing the features of public constructions (schools, hospitals, roads, bridges and irrigation systems; and water and power infrastructure), [3]. So construction

specifications are major requirements for an effective handling of the various serves offered to the public.

CI in Palestine is one of the largest and the most important industrial sector. It became one of the major mobilizer of the economy mainly in terms of employment and income, and its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP).

The role of this industry clearly appears in improving and facilitating the quality of living in light of the above and the need for improving the construction sector in Palestine; developing a holistic approach is a strategically important goal in Palestine as well as in other countries. We need to think of the future, being aware of such issue is one way in which we can guarantee a future with savings in time, cost, and resources that we require to achieve the quality needed, by knowing the contribution of performance, technical, scientific, legal, organizational and other projection that improve the performance and satisfy the needs. This chapter should include first and foremost.

## 1. PREVIOUS STUDIES

### A. The construction, and the construction industry (CI)

Construction has many characteristics common to both manufacturing and service industries. Definitely, there are physical products in this sector as in other industries. But in other ways, construction is more like a service industry because it does not accumulate significant amounts of capital when compared with industries such as steel, transportation, petroleum, and mining [4].

[5] defines “Construction management (CM) entails the planning, scheduling, evaluating, and controlling of construction tasks or activities to accomplish specific objectives by effectively allocating and utilizing appropriate labour, material, and time resources in a manner that minimizes costs and maximizes customer/owner satisfaction”.

[6], defines “(CI) is the large, complex and diverse wide range coverage of business interests and activities, united by their common usage and development of land”

Understanding these concepts and the responsibility of the experts working in this field could be help getting better awareness of the process of construction industry management (CIM).

Due to the multi-stakeholders that involved in the construction sector there is an initiative for identifying the CI deported from the viewpoint of those who identify with it. For instance law makers focus on the legal issues in their definition, while practitioners focus on the technicalities and the administrators focus on procedures, roles and responsibilities, and all other focus on their field. It should be noted that this sector is very sophisticated that hold a numerous number of activities and procedures.

### B. Construction sector in Palestine:

The strategic geographical location of Palestine and situation along with its topography, ecosystem diversity and climatic variations present a suitable environment for the occurrence of reptiles, additionally the importance of this region makes it vulnerable against assaults and endeavors to control it by numerous nations of the world, making it a politically unstable region.

This study takes West Bank as a sample study to represent Palestine zone and will focus on public types and through several governmental organizations dealing in this field.

Each few years CI in Palestine confronted allot of changes due to discriminating circumstance that influences all segments, and for some reasons confronting the country

According to [7], felt that the CI contribution to the economic growth was limited from 1948 up to 1994. During that period a lot of changes have taken place. According to Abdulhadi who said that in 1950s -1960s raise house were in blasted, and

a large portion of the Palestinians were deported from their homes following the Zionist action of the occupation. That cost them allot for constructing new houses. However the construction of public projects, such as, schools, hospitals, new roads, water, et al.... and so forth was done by the central authorities or their agencies during that period, and projects were executed in Palestine.

Through 1967 to 1972, i.e. It was around then the first decade of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the construction sector witnessed an extreme decay contrasting with its growth during the sixties. This was related to two reasons, firstly a political instability degree and secondly the Israeli restrictive approaches wide range [8].

After that high rate growth was attaining by the CI and job opportunities to the labor force was opened in the occupied territories in the CS but that situation weren't maintained for a while [7].

Through 1985 and till 1991 the entire economic and social conditions were influenced by many external shocks and construction was one of these sectors. So Palestine confronted a slowdown in the economy, high inflation rates, devaluation of the Jordanian Dinar (JD), the most noticeable factor affect the construction sector in this period is the Intifada [7]. And Palestine was generally under two sorts of Israeli restrictions: physical and financial instructions that made CI had experienced a sharp decrease due to closure of large areas of land and prevention of expansion of villages, and preventing any transformed cash from outside Palestinian or funds from the abroad donor associations because of tight controls were imposed on them in the utilization of these funds in the West Bank and Gaza Strip [9]. In spite of these facts, it appears that the construction activity was less affected than the total economy; its average share of GDP during the period (1987-1991) was around (21-23%). [10].

As a result of the restriction and until 1994, After the peace accord "OSLO agreement", an emergency program was established to perform a plan to improve the infrastructure in Palestine and build as much as possible in short duration [10], housing was a real problem for the Palestinian Authority, which found that there were urgent needs for over 100,000 new houses [11]. By millions of US dollars had been contributed to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) from the international community and Arabs. And by that the GDP was dramatically increased 25% in 1994.

TABLE 1: ECONOMIC MAIN SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO GDP 1950's - 2007

Sector	1985's	1994	1999	2002	2007
Industry	8	12	17	12	16
Services	11.5	21	62.6	70.2	65
Agriculture	29	14	10	10	8
Construction	17	22	8.5	5.5	2.5
Others	34.5	31	2	2.3	8.5

And during the years 2010, 2011 figures demonstrate a bit increment in the construction segment's commitment to GDP to reach (9.2%) at 2010, and additionally expanding in the first two quarters of 2011 to reach (9.9%) and (11.5%), respectively [12]& [13] .Figure (2.1) shows the distribution of GDP by the major construction sector of the Palestinian economy for selected years 2000 - 2012. [14].

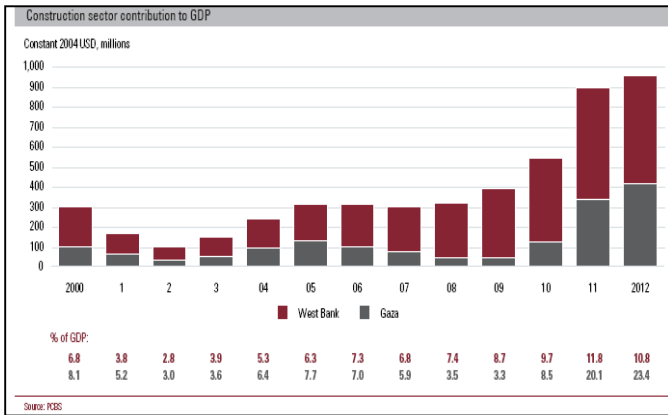


FIGURE 1: CONSTRUCTION SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO GDP IN 2000-2012

Realizing the importance of the structural sector in Palestine and its impact on the national, and economic income in this country, and major importance in supporting and developing country in the construction public sector. Therefore the development of the economy and national income, who is in turn affects all other sectors to build a better future, so it is important to identify the factors affecting the performance of this sector to be studied, analyzed and thus get the results that help finding practical solutions that contribute to the resolution of the problems facing the sector to avoid them in future plans and projects.

### C. Palestinian Public Construction Sector in Palestine

This study focuses on identifying the challenges facing public construction industry, for that it is necessary to review the types of the public construction facilities in Palestine, in which we can find out which Category should be targeted in the study.

Generally, the constructed facilities can be classified into four major categories, each with its own characteristics. These classifications are: Residential Housing Construction, Institutional and Commercial Building Construction, Specialized Industrial Construction, and Infrastructure and Heavy Construction.

The greater part of the construction project (C.P) in Palestine has been completed by the private sector. As indicated by [7], the rate of the total construction completed by public sector during 1980-1987 was less than 1.5% in the West Bank and less than 3.2% in the Gaza Strip. However, after the peace accord (OSLO agreement), this rate has expanded due to the great funds from both the worldwide and Arab communities

### D. Key challenges facing (PCI) in Palestine

In this research all those challenges took into consideration to highlight the impact of them in the Palestinian's PCI, to find solutions dealing with them to get the best practice in managing projects with the best result for the whole society by having best using the CM concepts, such as recourses and getting the best quality, performance and society and government satisfaction.

The challenges that will be examined will be: culture; socio-political Pressures; environment; work force considerations; health and public safety; legal issues; the; governmental regulation; and Performance through studying the challenges related to Quality, time and cost in Palestine and how its impact on the CI and Economy to find practice to deal with them.

## II. METHODOLOGY

There are two populations targeted in this research, they are Organizational population: it will cover all PC projects in west bank governorates, in the last five years, and Human population: it will cover all individuals and groups concerned with the CP that will focus on engineers, and other staff who is related to CI, local authorities, NGO's agencies and contractors who implement the CP. and according to the contractor The researcher chooses the three principle classifications first class A, first class B, and second class; since it was found that around 95% of the total implemented projects in West Bank were finished by the first three degrees of the registered classified contractors (PCU records cited in [4].

The sample consisted of 350 various parties as explained in the sample and the population who work in West Bank in the last five years , the respondents were (300). Those aged from 20 to- more than 50 years, their qualifications ranged from (high school, Diploma to PhD). Moreover, the respondents were varied in terms of job title and years of experiences. The demographic variables are shown in Tables 2 and 3

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE ACCORDING TO STUDY INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable	Class	Frequency	Percentage %
Sex	Male	219	73
	Female	81	27
Age	Less than 20	2	.7
	20-less than 30	141	47.0
	30-less than 40	95	31.7
	40-less than 50	23	7.7
	over 50	39	13.0
Qualification	Secondary	4	1.3
	Diploma	10	3.3
	Bachelor	218	72.7
	Master	63	21.0
	Ph.D	5	1.7
Position	Project Engineer	142	47.3
	Project	76	25.3

	Manager		
	Employee	23	7.7
	General Manager	15	5.0
	Other	44	14.7
Experience	Less than 2 years	24	8.0
	2-less than 5 years	59	19.7
	5-less than 10 years	107	35.7
	10-less than 20years	65	21.7
	20-less than 30years	31	10.3
	More than 30 years	14	4.7
Total		300	100%

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE ACCORDING TO GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY.

Variable	Class	Frequency	Percentage %
Location of work	North W.B	27	9.0
	Middle W.B	40	13.3
	South W.B	113	37.7
	Arab countries	21	7.0
	Foreign countries	3	1.0
	North, Middle and South	53	17.7
	Middle and South	43	14.3
Work type	Governmental organization	60	20.0
	Engineering Consultant office	102	34.0
	Contractor	102	34.0
	Donor Institute (NGO's)	36	12.0
Firm classification	1st class (A)	183	61.0
	1st class (B)	57	19.0
	2nd Class	60	20.0
Number of accomplished projects	Less than 10	70	23.3
	10-49 projects	159	53.0
	50-100 projects	51	17.0
	More than 100 projects	20	6.7
main-sector of projects	Building	118	39.3
	infrastructure	79	26.3
	Electro-mechanical	27	9.0
	Others	76	25.4
projects that your organization prefer	Governmental Organization	44	14.7
	Non-profit Foreign Institutes	58	19.3
	Municipalities	139	46.3
	Private Local Institutes	29	9.7
	Other	63	21.0
Types of construction	Lump-Sum Contracts	11	3.7
	Unit Price	37	12.3

	Contracts		
	Cost Plus Contracts	163	54.3
	Design-Build Contracts	14	4.7
	Other	82	27.3
The disagreements happening during execution of works are mostly between	Owner and engineer	4	1.3
	Owner and Contractor	23	7.7
	Engineer and Contractor	82	27.3
Total		300	100.0

#### A. Research limitations

Constraint and obstacles are natural and logical matters that faced the researcher through conduction of the research. The respondents' indifference is the most important obstacle while presenting their views on such topics. Although the researcher first explained the aim of the research, by introducing the questionnaire with a brief introduction, a large number of them showed a lack of cooperation and they delegated the answers to others, and few number of participants easily and quickly replied without a continuous reminding from the researcher.

Despite submitting a letter to facilitate the task by the name of AL-Najah National University, and the stakeholders accept to participate and showed interest in the subject of the research, they were provided with a questionnaire copy to answer it, within six weeks to take their time in understanding the questions and answering them. The researcher tried to phone them many times to remind them within the period of time to finish preparing questionnaires in order to be collected. Unfortunately, the responses were disappointing due to their answers that they can't reply because they don't have enough time, or they lost it, others will answer it soon, and others are not interested. The researcher sent the questionnaire times and times, phoned most respondents two, three and four times, and visited some of them more than once, every time they had a new argument, until the researcher succeeded at last to collect a suitable number of responses.

The most important barrier was determining the number of the contractors and engineering offices because it is allowed for these companies to have several classifications in different specializations, so one company may be counted several times.

The willingness of the respondents to reveal weaknesses in their respective organizations was uncertain due to cultural issues in which persons did not like to show their weakness even if the researcher kept reminding them that this is a research for academic purposes only.

Due to work commitment, some respondents could not fully concentrate during the interview sessions, this caused the intended in-depth interview could not be fully achieved. Most of them did not have enough time to respond due to the work

pressure, so the researcher had to keep reminding them to respond to the questionnaire to achieve a good percentage of responsiveness.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

The tables shown below illustrates the main level of the most disagreements happening during execution because of , means and standard deviations of the reason of contractual disagreements, means and standard deviations of the most impact of challenges facing public construction industry in Palestine in general.

TABLE 4: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND ESTIMATED LEVEL OF THE MOST DISAGREEMENTS HAPPENING DURING EXECUTION BECAUSE OF

Item	Means	Standard Deviations	Estimated Level
Interfering in woks & changing their specifications repeatedly	3.60	1.06	High
Delay of contractor payments	3.62	1.12	High
Supervising engineer un-commitment	2.74	1.16	Moderate
Slow in making decisions	3.41	1.09	Moderate
Not compensating the contractor under force majeure conditions	3.15	1.18	Moderate
Delay in receiving or delivering the work site	2.79	1.17	Moderate
Lack of authorities given to engineers	3.25	1.14	Moderate
Poor experience in work execution	3.23	1.15	Moderate
Oral instructions & orders	3.60	1.09	High
Delay in work execution	3.84	1.04	High
Not documenting the daily works	3.43	1.11	Moderate
Shortage of manpower assigned to the project	3.41	1.13	Moderate
Non abidance with needed specifications	3.75	1.04	High
Absence of the implementation plan	3.67	1.14	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.69</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Table 4 demonstrates that the total degree of the reasons for the most disagreements happening during execution was (3.69) which suggest a moderate level of estimation. The highest mean was given to the item "Delay in work execution.", which scored (3.84), which is reasonable due to the prevailing culture to delay the activities till the last moment. Furthermore, the item that had the lowest mean score was given to "Supervising engineer un-commitment" which scored (2.74), general speak we have a commitment through our engineers.

TABLE 5: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND ESTIMATED LEVEL OF THE REASON OF CONTRACTUAL DISAGREEMENTS

Item	Means	Standard Deviations	Estimated level
Not feeling in contract importance	3.38	1.16	Moderate
Speed in contract formulation and un review it	3.03	1.2	Moderate
Lack of essential understanding and perception of contractual and legal consequences.	3.62	1.05	High
Differing interpretations of the contract due to lack of clarity	3.49	1.09	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Table 5 demonstrates that the total degree of the reason of contractual disagreements was (3.38) which suggest a moderate level of estimation. The highest score of mean was given to the item "Lack of essential understanding and perception of contractual and legal consequences " which scored (3.62), because basically in Palestine the tendering process somehow is new, most of people are biased to the traditional way, they didn't like the contracts and documentation process. Furthermore, the item that had the lowest mean score was given to "Speed in contract formulation and un review it" which scored (3.03), that's mean the consultants firms usually review their documents, tenders and contracts.

TABLE 6: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND ESTIMATED LEVEL OF THE FACTORS AND THE TOTAL DEGREE

Item	Means	Standard Deviations	Estimated Level
Challenges related to culture	3.18	.813	Moderate
Challenges related to Political Considerations	3.62	0.86	Moderate
Challenges related to Environmental Considerations	3.07	0.81	Moderate
Challenges related to Work Force Considerations	3.47	0.85	Moderate
Challenges related to health and safety	3.78	1.04	High
Challenges related to legislations	3.32	0.87	Moderate
Challenges related to quality	3.53	0.77	High
Challenges related to time	3.54	0.78	High
Challenges related to cost	3.39	0.77	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Table 6 shows that the total degree of challenges was (3.43) which suggest a moderate level of estimation. The highest mean was given to the domain "Challenges related to health and safety." which scored (3.78) that really emphasis the safety component as one of the most leading components through the project life cycle and managerial basic that is

safety is first and foremost. Furthermore, the item that had the lowest mean score was given to the domain "Challenges related to Environmental Considerations" which scored (3.07).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

##### A. The Research Contribution

CI studies in West Bank will be added participate by this research. By illuminate and identifying essential issues affect the challenges that face this sector and the best implementation practices in the C.P in West Bank.

After literature auditing, several interviews were directed to measure the stakeholders perception about the most important challenging issues facing them and how they deal with this issues through implementing C.P to achieve the best performance in West Bank, the researcher distributed a questionnaire, by checking different researchers endeavors and researching the momentum circumstance in the West Bank utilizing the outcomes achieved from the questionnaire analysis, a customized framework were developed to pass the obstacle, enhance and improve the performance concept in region of the C.P and reach the required level of the fulfillment to reach the customer satisfaction.

The core of this research is introduced through the created framework to encourage the execution of management principles in C.P on West Bank.

The researcher recommends taking the implication of this study seriously and used by the decision maker and to be highly considered from the contractors union, engineers association and the other cooperation in West Bank related to increase the willingness toward changes regarding the issue of performance through execution of the C.P in West Bank due to its noticeable benefits. To the author's knowledge, this framework for implementing management in West Bank PCP that handles the challenges that face this sector by implantation stages in parallel with construction project life cycle.

##### B. Result and Recommendations

The practical recommendations to all interested institutes; owners and to project managers, engineers, a governmental organization that related to the CS, and contractors which could prompt better practices to accomplish performance in PCP in West Bank are as following:

- The main challenge affecting the health and safety component with around 76.8% of respondents and give the reason for that to: staff negligence for the health and safety procedure in the project, It is exceptionally prescribed to Palestinian contracting union (PCU) and engineering association (EA) to direct serious workshops, and training and education programs through periodic sessions , lectures,

courses that helps the development staffs to be acquainted with vital issues such as safety concepts, quality issues and ideas and its advantages. These preparation programs plan to build staff acknowledging and comprehension of management triangle importance and to enhance their practices for future safety and health management.

- Contract documents must be reviewed by contractors very well before signing the contract. Enough time should be spent study these documents and make necessary site visits to take a good picture of the contract conditions and the safety issues related to the proposed work, and check all the contract documents especially the documents concerns with safety issues.

It should be noted that more than 80.2% of the respondents considering the delay of owner's payments to contractor are the most important challenge regarding the **time** challenges through the project life cycle, according to that the researcher is highly recommend the owner to commit himself to the chashflow, and the payment should be paid on time, to decrease the bad effect of such delaying on the contractor.

- More than 75% of the respondents reply that the most important challenge regarding **quality** is the shortage in integration within strategic governmental plans related to construction industry, since around 50% of Palestine contracting firms have no quality departments or quality certification, so the researcher recommend to be more seriously in this field and create a comprehensive quality system in this sector organizations, through creating a quality department in the organization , and hiring staff specialized in this field; and focus on achieving the needed certified degrees such as ISO certificate [4].

Since we have no coordination between the official departments, then we need a more comprehensive plan to remedy the current situation. Regarding the **cost** the respondent with percentage 78.6% reply that awarding the contract to the lowest bidders is most important challenge facing the sector in West Bank, so the consultant and owners should award the tender based on criterion exceed the monetary value such as the reputation, quality issues, technical experience, On the other hand, The lowest mean was given to the item "Currency exchange rate fluctuation", this could be attributed to the implementation of new policy in some project by subjecting the tender to the CCI (construction cost index) in which if there is a noticeable variation in exchange rate the contractor should be compensate.

- Around 80.6% of the respondents ranking difficulties in issuing licenses in C areas challenge related to **political issues**, so the government is recommended to be more effective, to facilitate this issue with the specialized authorities to make such a step is more easy to typical citizen.

- 73% of the respondents ranking hiring labors without contractual documents related to **workforce**, so the government is recommended to **legislate laws** to punish those

who use the labors and not giving them their rights, to make the labors more secure and invulnerable which for sure affect the whole sector.

- 68.6% of the respondents ranking blindly imitate other projects as the most important challenge related to culture, so the designer is recommended to be more creative, and the special condition for every single project should be considered such as location, used material, end user...etc.

- 67.2% of the respondents ranking neighbors objection on implementation of some activities in the project related to **environmental**, so the government is recommended to be stricter, compensate the citizen when needed and stop them otherwise.

- Moreover, regarding the prevailing legislation and laws the contractors should take advice, support, and help from specialists to clarify any equivocal thing or vague sentences through the contract, since more than 69% of respondents entail that the most noticeable challenge regarding the legislation issues is the variance of explanation regarding the contract and specification paragraph.

- General speaks the contractors, consultants, owners should think deeply about the tradeoff of the project component, because for example in some cases to keep the firm competitive advantage it is essential to focus on quality more than the cost, it obvious that all the challenges facing the project in the construction sector is highly related, the result found is -based on the distributed questionnaire and the results that the researcher get- a statistical relation between all variables so all the challenges should be considered as once on parallel, since the project is one unit, then its component and challenges should be handled as once.

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