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AN ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP STYLE OF PROJECT MANAGERS ASSOCIATED WITH PROJECT SUCCESS IN COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

As more organizations are moving towards projects to achieve their business objectives, the demand on competent project managers is growing steadily. The main objective of this research is to ascertain the leadership style associated with project managers who have successfully delivered commercial construction projects in the selected region. To ensure a better project performance, it is essential then to formulate a systematic process that helps Human Resource Management build a pool of project managers based on their leadership competency profiles and match them with the appropriate project type. The author in this study hope that his effort would contribute towards that aim. In order to achieve the determined objectives, this study examined and compared the leadership styles of project managers who have successfully delivered commercial construction projects in the selected towns of Ndola, Mufulira, Chingola and Kitwe against managers who failed by collecting data from 111 project sites using questionnaires and a form of structured interview prior to questionnaire administration and or when collecting the questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered in a set of three for each project, one to the project manager, one to employer or owner and the last but not least to the party that recruited the project manager. The projects relevant for this research were the completed ones undertaken in 2009 and 2010 and not those under construction. While there are several schools of leadership existing, this study focuses on the competency based school and particularly the framework developed by Dulewicz and Higgs (2003) for organizational change projects and later extended for other application areas by Müller and Turner (2007) Turner et. al. (2009). Based on the quantitative results, the findings demonstrate that the predominant leadership style in successful commercial construction projects is task oriented leadership style which goes with a competency profile of high intellectual, high managerial and medium emotional quotient.

KEYWORDS

assessment, leadership style, project success.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional research on project management has paid scant attention to the capabilities needed for firms that depend on projects in their business operations (Soderlund, 2005). There is no doubt that the success of individual projects is decidedly fundamental to the success of the organization. This is evident by the number of studies undertaken towards determining the critical success factors of a project (Baker et al., 1988; Morris, 1988; Pinto and Slevin, 1988). But what is worth noting is that earlier researchers failed to associate project success to a project manager's competency and leadership style. For project managers to be effective and successful they must not only demonstrate efficient administrative skills and technical know-how, but must also practice an appropriate style of leadership. The leadership style used can profoundly affect employee morale and productivity so that the success of the project may be directly dependent on good leadership. The Association of Project Managers (APM) says, '...leadership is about setting goals and objectives and generally enthusiasm and motivating amongst the project team, and stakeholders, to work towards those objectives.' (Burke, 2008)

Crawford (2007) defined project manager competence as a combination of knowledge (qualification), skills (ability to do assignment), and core personality characteristics (motives + traits + self concepts) result to excellent consequences. He thought that project manager's competency is highly-related with project success. Crawford stated that leadership is the highest-ranking category among project manager competency. Earlier research suggests that a manager's leadership style can be defined in terms of emotional quotient (EQ), managerial quotient (MQ), and intellectual quotient (IQ) competencies; however, different kinds of projects require different competencies. In engineering and construction projects, conscientiousness, interpersonal sensitivity, and engaging communication contribute most to project success. This is because of the need for discipline and due diligence in managing these complex projects and also because of the need to evoke and integrate various opinions and possible solutions to problems.

There is a consensus that effective project managers have a combination of skills, such as, leadership skills, management skills, and communication skills. Rees et al., (1996) ...found that effective project managers are usually highly intelligent and have better problem solving abilities than normal project managers. These features are similar to the intellectual quotient (IQ) theory that Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) developed as part of their leadership competency theory.

ROLES OF THE PROJECT MANAGER

Turner and Müller (2005) reviewed the contribution of the project manager's competency and leadership style to project success and concluded that "the literature has largely ignored the impact of the project manager, and his/her leadership style and competency, on project success." They found that in the general management literature, it is widely recognized that the functional manager's leadership style contributes to the success of the organization or organizational unit he or she manage, but the project manager's leadership style is generally ignored when identifying project success factors.

Project managers especially those working on technical projects, need to demonstrate leadership and management skills. Leadership and management are terms often used interchangeably, although there are differences. A leader focuses on long-term goals and big picture objectives, while inspiring people to reach those objectives. A manager often deals with the day-to-day details of meeting specific goals.

According to Schwalbe (2007) "leadership determine the vision and managers achieve the vision," you lead people and manage things. However, project managers often take on the role of both leader and manager. Without the role of the project manager there would be no such thing as project management. The project manager is the glue holding the project together and the maker and shaker spurring it on.

To be a project manager, a person wears many different hats; they include the hat of an integrator, communicator, decision maker, motivator, evangelist, entrepreneur and change agent.

According to Nicholas and Steyn (2008), the project manager is the project communication hub, the end of the funnel for all reports, requests, memoranda and complaints. He/she takes input from more sources and directs information to more receivers than anyone else in the project. Between sources and receivers, he/she refines, summarizes and translates information to make sure that project stakeholders are well informed about policies, objectives, budgets, schedules, requirements, progress, and changes. ...it is the project manager who instills a sense of direction and commitment to action. ...the project manager is the sort of evangelist who conveys faith in the project, its value and workability. ...the project manager is the change agent who initiates passage into new and promising, though sometimes murky areas. He/she is always alert to developments that could impinge on the project, ready to adopt new and innovative ideas, and strives to overcome the resistance to change.

Verma (1995) lists the following people skills that are important for project managers, apart from the technical knowledge and decision making skills that they require: communication, motivation and negotiation, self-confidence, reliability, maturity and emotional stability, a constructive positive attitude, and flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. Kerzner (2003) states that effective leaders are not completely task or relationship focused in their action rather they maintain a balance between the two.

It is these roles that makes the project manager cardinal to the project hence the need to study the position visa vis project success.

THE CASE FOR COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Due to the high level of complexity involved, construction projects tend to be one of the most challenging environments to deploy effective project management techniques. The construction projects environment is characterized by a high level of uncertainty and unpredictability relative to static production industries (Dainty et al., 2005), which challenge the performance of the project manager and his ability to orchestrate a wide range of technical and administrative expertise. Studying commercial projects is preferred as most client's demand all of the project tenets of cost, time and quality, thereby putting pressure on the project manager to deliver according to the project brief. A project brief means the immediate need as stated by the client which initially will be nothing more than a statement of intent which the designer may expand on to delight the client (Hackett et al., 2007). For instance, from a brief, a client may want a play park built within 10 months with a projected official opening on December 25th 2011, to attract fun goers at Christmas and any delay would jeopardize the business benefits, so this project would require a project manager with the right and relevant competencies to deliver within the given time at the budgeted cost and desired quality. In addition, a client may have a project to build a hotel or shopping mall in order to take advantage of a periodical event like the world cup championship whose start and end dates are fixed, any delayed completion will result in lost opportunity cost, hence such projects require the best possible fit in terms of project leadership.

Commercial construction projects are those constructed for business or profit related intentions and include lodges, offices, schools, shops and shopping centres, financial institutions and churches in some places but exclude industrial buildings.

Further, construction in general is important because of its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the economy, provision of employment as it is highly labour intensive compared to other industries, such as, manufacturing and mining which are highly automated. The construction sector has a great absorptive capacity for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour because of the means of production, and it allows capital formation.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The broad aim of this paper is to ascertain the leadership style exhibited by project managers associated with successful project delivery of commercial building (construction) projects, to provide a guide on matching right project managers to right projects and further provide a guide to current and aspiring leaders in the profession.

STUDY SCOPE

The study is aimed at pin-pointing the leadership style practiced by project managers who have successfully delivered commercial construction (building) projects, in the four selected towns on the copperbelt province of Zambia (Ndola, Mufulira, Chingola and Kitwe). The study is based on leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AN OVERVIEW OF PROJECTS AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Projects are undertaken at all levels of the organization. They may involve a single person or many thousands. Their duration ranges from a few weeks to a few years. Projects may involve a single unit of one organization or may cross-organizational boundaries. The earlier assertion is supported by Burke (2008) who stated that projects range in size, scope, cost and time from mega international projects costing millions of dollars conducted for many years to small domestic projects with a low budget taking just a few hours to complete.

While many definitions for project management and projects exist in the body of literature, most of them show resemblance and are comparable in some way. They basically describe projects as;

"The making of a product, system, physical construction or service by undertaking a set of activities involving various resources, which have to be delivered within the triple constraints of quality, cost and time" (Gardiner, 2005; Winter et al., 2006).

As the project concept has developed over the years, its definition has extended as well to include a broader meaning.

Turner (2008) describes a project as: "an endeavour in which human, material and financial resources are organized in a novel way, to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives".

Projects are recognized as instruments for achieving continuous improvement and innovation (Kreiner, 1992), and project management (PM) can be described as a set of models and techniques for the planning and control of projects and complex undertakings (Packendorff, 1995). Packendorff (1995) mentions that planning is the core of project management, however, the human side of it include; controlling, structuring and leading as well.

"Project management is the process of the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements" (PMI, 2004), i.e. project management is an interrelated group of processes that enables the project team to achieve a successful project. These processes manage inputs to produce outputs from specific activities; the progression from input to output is the nucleus of project management and requires integration and iteration. This view is similar to how Mullins (2005) explained the open system approach in his book "Management and Organization Behaviour". For example, a feasibility report could be an input to a design phase; the output of a design phase could be a set of plans and specifications. This progression requires project management acumen, expertise, tools and techniques, including risk management, contingency development, and change control.

THE PROJECT MANAGER

The project manager is the key to operation ability and success of project management so choosing the right qualified and competent person will be the beginning of success.

The key responsibility of the project manager is to successfully accomplish the project objectives by balancing the competing demands for quality, scope, time, and cost (PMI, 2004).

Derivative responsibilities include identifying the project requirements, establishing clear and achievable objectives, and adapting the specifications, plans, and approach to the different concerns and expectations of the various stakeholders. Fundamentally, the project manager must direct the project from its inputs, through its nucleus, to delivery of its outputs. In order to accomplish these multifaceted responsibilities, the roles of the project manager include that of a leader, administrator, entrepreneur, facilitator, arbitrator and mediator, liaison, and coordinator.

The project manager must lead teams to operate cross functionally towards a common objective while assuring cohesiveness and continuity as the project progresses through project processes and project phases. "The project manager, acts as the key catalyst to stimulate effective communication and coordination between design, procurement and construction activities" (Bent, 1983).

Due to the complex nature of construction projects and the high level of technical and managerial features required, construction project leadership was traditionally perceived around power, authority, and task orientation (Toor and Ofori, 2008). However, the increased level of internationalisation coupled with greater technical and cross-cultural challenges in construction projects call for a new breed of project leaders. In a study paper addressing Hong Kong construction managers, Rowlinson et al., (1993) suggest a direct link between the Chinese leadership style, being more relationship-oriented than its Western counterpart, and the Hong Kong record in completing projects to budget and in seemingly impossible times. Pheng (1995) extended on the argument and highlighted the 84 virtues for effective project leaders extracted from Lao Tzu's teachings, 2500 years ago, and their relevance to modern construction project managers.

Most of the attributes highlighted in the study are again emotional; they focus on raising the self-awareness and present a method for leadership through guiding and educating others in harmony with the natural law.

PROJECT SUCCESS

There are few topics in the field of project management that are so frequently discussed, and yet so rarely agreed upon, as what constitutes project success (Pinto and Slevin, 1988a). Nowadays, critical success factors (CSFs) are popular with project management, as a means of assessing project success. Today, project success takes stakeholder satisfaction, product success, business and organization benefit, and team development as measures of project success (Atkinson, 1999; Baccarini, 1999). In the 1980s, literature on project success factors grew rapidly. Some authors defined functionality (performance), project management (schedule

and on budget), commercial success, termination efficiency, and client satisfaction as success factors (Baker et al., 1988; Pinto and Slevin, 1988a). But there is no proof that project manager's leadership characteristics are related to project success. Organizations involved in projects are now focusing on effective leadership as an important success factor (Pinto 1986; Pinto and Slevin 1988). Crawford (2000) suggests that project leadership is the highest ranking category among project management competence factors. Project management leadership style affects overall project performance. Recent research supports the idea that successful projects are led by individuals who possess not only a blend of technical and management knowledge, but also leadership skills that are internally compatible with the motivation of the project team (Slevin and Pinto, 1988; Turner et al., 1998).

Zimmerer and Yasin (1998) found that positive leadership contributed almost 76% to the success of projects. Negative or poor leadership contributed 67% to the failure of projects. Projects which are virtual in nature and are rapidly changing their structure make project leadership more challenging. Project leaders need both relationships and task oriented leadership styles to cope up with the challenges of different phases of projects (Slevin and Pinto, 1991). In projects, the project leader must lead his or her team towards completing the defined goal within a fixed time scale.

Verma (1997) states that "achieving the goal or final aim is the ultimate test of leadership". Goals or tasks are achieved through people thus making people an important resource for projects.

The aforementioned discussion provides the rationale to take the style approach to study leadership behaviour in project environment.

LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Leadership affects all facets of human enterprise. Though there are many definitions of leadership, each definition has a different focus on leadership, for instance, Robbins and Judge, (2009), define leadership as; "the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals".

Leadership according to Hemphill and Coons (1957; in Gregoire and Arendt 2004) is a; "behaviour of an individual...directing the activities of a group towards a shared goal".

Fiedler (1967) advances almost similar definition, "by leadership behaviour we generally mean the particular acts in which a leader engages in the course of directing and coordinating the work of his group members. This may involve such acts as structuring the work relations, praising or criticizing group members, and showing consideration for their welfare and feelings".

Hersey and Blanchard (1993) defined leadership as; 'the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation.

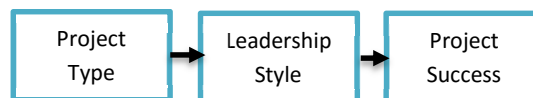
In the general management literature, the positive correlation and impact of leadership on the success of the organization has been well documented. Building on this, Turner and Müller (2005) detail the impact of the project manager on project success. Their review of the available literature showed that the role of project managers and their leadership abilities is a critical success factor in projects via direct (i.e. motivation to succeed, and self-perception of success) and indirect means (i.e. via leading a team that ensures project success), specifically stating that "the project manager's personal characteristics, including leadership style and emotional intelligence, does make a contribution to project success."

This relationship between project success and project leadership is correlated by other research showing that "projects often fall short of achieving their anticipated results, not due to a lack of project management, but rather from a lack of project leadership."

It is clear that the profession of project management adds value in several quantifiable ways to organizations, and leadership plays a critical role in project success thereby reinforcing the importance of discovering what makes great leadership within the profession of project management.

CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

The conceptual model shown below indicates that a type of project been undertaken demands a project manager with a certain leadership style in order to achieve project success.



MODEL ELEMENTS

Project Type: A project with its uniqueness usually demands varying competencies according to type, for instance, constructing a smelting plant will demand a certain type of competencies different from constructing a factory though the contractor may have the same qualification. Each project type will attract more of a certain competency.

The project type is modelled to be the input to the conversion process whereby a manager with the right mix of competencies for successful delivery of that project type is sought and assigned to the project. For instance, managing a construction project will demand certain competencies different from managing a humanitarian project.

Leadership Style: Leadership style is modelled to affect the output indirectly either negatively or positively. It will give a negative effect if the leader use a leadership style not suited with the project type though possessing the desired competencies and hence result in project failure. On the contrary, it will give a positive effect if the leader with the relevant competencies use a leadership style appropriate for the project at hand and hence result in success.

Project Success: Project success is modelled to result if a project manager with the relevant competencies and practicing the appropriate leadership style is hired and assigned to the project. Project success will result into a number of issues such stakeholder satisfaction, repeat business, lessons learned and much more.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

To achieve the objectives of the research, descriptive research was ideal and therefore adopted. The researcher targeted a total of 196 completed projects at the time of data collection. The list of completed projects was provided by the local authority and each project accounted for one respondent-the project manager. These projects were deemed complete and relevant for the research according to the completion certificates provided by the local authorities. The researcher undertook to collect data using a census approach and analyse it using Microsoft Excel tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PROJECT MANAGER AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

The researcher visited 196 project sites and administered the questionnaires. However, the researcher discovered that from the 196 projects deemed complete, only 111 were actually completed representing 57% of the initial population. This reduced the relevant population from 196 to 111.

The table 1 shows clear understanding and agreement of project success criteria by the managers and developers at commencement of the project. This is true where the project manager is independent from the project owner, in contrast, where the project manager is the project owner, success criteria was adopted as a target.

TABLE 1: PROJECT SUCCESS CRITERIA

Project Manager Knowledge on Success Criteria	
Project Success Dimension	Number of Respondents
Meeting Cost	111
Meeting Schedule	111
Meeting Quality	111
Client Satisfaction	111
Repeat Business	111
Product Functionality	111

From the 111 questionnaires administered, 48 project managers associated with successful delivery of projects exhibited three types of leadership styles namely task and people oriented, task oriented and transformational leadership style. On the other hand, 63 project managers associated with failure exhibited four leadership styles namely task and people oriented, task oriented, transformational and people oriented leadership styles.

The table 2 below shows the leadership styles practiced by the project managers in the study area.

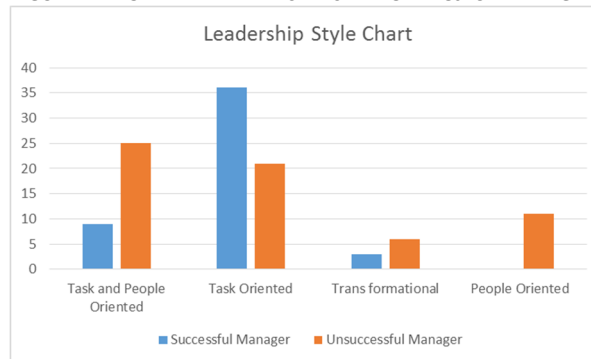
TABLE 2: LEADERSHIP STYLE OF PROJECT MANAGERS

Leadership Style					
Description	Task and People Oriented	Task Oriented	Transformational	People Oriented	Total
Successful Manager	9	36	3	0	48
Unsuccessful Manager	25	21	6	11	63
Total	34	57	9	11	111

This table above clearly show task orientation style of leadership to be prominent among project managers associated with successful delivery of projects and a combination of task and people orientation is prominent in managers associated with failure. The task oriented leadership style yielded 51% prominence from the entire research participants and yielded 75% prominence among successful project managers. This is not corroborating with literature according to the behavioural school which revealed that successful project managers mostly practice a combination of people and task oriented leadership or team management according to the managerial grid. This is where the project manager scores 50% concern for people and 50% concern for the task.

This result could be due to the economic situations in Africa and particularly the region under study, where unemployment rate is high and the difference between educated and uneducated workers is high. The result is represented using a bar chart as shown below:

FIGURE 1: PROMINENT LEADERSHIP STYLE OF PROJECT MANAGERS



CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the current research on the relationship between project manager’s leadership style and project success, it can be concluded that there is some indication that the project manager’s leadership style can influence project success. Therefore, in order to choose an appropriate project manager for a project, the project manager’s leadership competencies and leadership style should be matched to the needs of the project stakeholders. In addition, doing so should increase the likelihood of the project being successful. Therefore, project managers in this region should show more of task orientation leadership style if the project should have higher chances of success. On other hand, transformational and people orientation leadership styles are highly likely to lead the project manager to failure while a combination of task and people orientation may have a chance of success.

As previously mentioned, leadership is very important in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of the employees in an organization. It also influences how people communicate with each other in order to solve problems and make decisions. There is a traditional notion that construction project managers are mostly production oriented rather than relationship-oriented; they concentrate more on managing their team rather than leading their team towards long-term objectives (Toor and Ofori, 2008). This notion is true from the trend observed in this research. This means that managers in this region are concerned with work and goal achievement as first priority hence showing a practice of task orientation type of leadership.

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RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is recommended that future research undertake to increase the study area profile to the rest of the country and later on to the southern part of Africa. This would allow for more projects to be studied

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