

The Use of Project Management Skills to Overcome Organizational Challenges

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Abstract:- Project management has emerged as the leading tool used by most organizations in addressing real time organizational challenges. In as much as projects were implemented as far back as ancient days, yet this concept of project management has undergone exponential growth that is affecting various disciplines. The effect ranges from civil or chemical engineering projects to pure scientific research projects.

(Lock, 2012) Stated that ‘Project management is the management discipline that plans, organizes and controls people, money and cash so that projects are completed successfully in spite of all the risks. Public as well as private sector institutions have been able to use project management skills to improve effectiveness in the working environment. This effectiveness has aided these institutions in gaining competitive advantage over their competitors.

Keywords:- Organizational Challenges; Competitive Advantage; Organizational Objectives; Organizational Growth; Differentiated Product.

I. INTRODUCTION

Project management is seen by organizations as new methods to plan and manage changes. These planned activities if not properly coordinated using project management skills will lead to unsuccessful project. Project success depends on number of factors ranging from project efficiency, impact on the customer, impact on the project team and business or organizational success (Assudani & Kloppenborg, 2008).

Project management has emerged as a reliable tool to meet the increasing demands of management in a competitive world. Several forces are responsible for this increasing drive and some of these are; the increasing expansion of human knowledge, growing demand for highly differentiated products and services, the evolution of globally competitive markets. Organizational response to these forces cannot take an instantaneous transformation but rather a systematic and evolutionary approach (Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009).

Projects are initiated to meet specific objectives or goals. The project objectives are; performance, time, cost and there is a fourth one called client expectations. The project manager should understand these objectives to ensure project success. Some scholars mostly overlook the

fourth objective, which is also part of the project specification. (Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009) stated that the “project team implements project based on client specifications”.

Project is a venture that is temporary in nature, bounded by scope and budget that produces unique output. The expertise and tools needed in project to meet customer requirements are referred to as project management. Most organizations using project management, experience better control, improved customer relations, and to a greater extent increase in project return on investment.

Projects like organisms go through several stages of development called life cycle. Most projects follow similar stages from initiation to closure. Depending on the type of project, you can have different project life cycle shape. For instance, the S-shaped follows the slow start, quick momentum and slow finish pattern. The J-shaped follows the fast start, slow momentum and fast finish. Each pattern suits the type of project implemented. Project manager should understand the various project life cycle pattern in project implementation. It is also incumbent on the project manager to identify the different project stakeholders and know their priority in the project. It is extremely difficult to satisfy all the stakeholders, but conscious efforts must be made by the project manager to relate well with them.

II. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Project management is undeniably as an effective means used to realize organizational objectives. This has resulted in its increasing importance in the organizational ladder (George, 2020). A project is considered as an effort that is usually temporary in nature undertaken to deliver unique product, service or result with predefined timeframe, budget and scope to meet goals and objectives in order to create value addition in the organization. It differs from the routine operations of the organization that is characterized by repetitive functional activities to achieve objectives; rather, it involves unique activities bounded by time to produce results. In essence, the management of such discrete production tactics needs the development of different technical skills and management strategies (Wikipedia, 2020).

The three primary goals of project are:

- Performance (scope) – this talk of specified deliverables required to complete a given task
- Time (schedule) – well-defined project always has deadline and completing the project within that set deadline is considered a significant performance objective.
- Cost (budget) – projects are limited in cost to ensure that the benefits of the project exceed that of the cost.

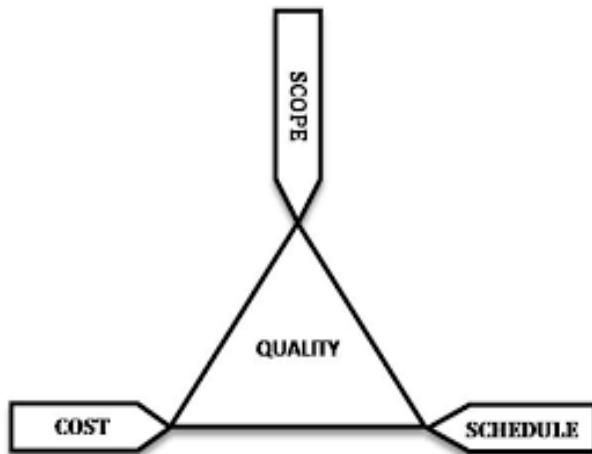


Fig 1

Source:(https://www.google.com/search?biw=1366&bih=606&tbn=isch&sa=1&ei=tEO_W-KFLYuia8X2pbgP&q)

Every project is characterized by the following:

- Importance – senior management should be clearly convinced of initiating a project. That means a project should be of high importance for it to be setup. Project in organizations, is a specialized unit outside the normal organizational structure. The importance of project must not be overemphasized, it includes the following; initiated by senior management and assigning a project manager that has proven track record.
- Scope – actually, this talk of what the project will deliver called deliverables. The project team must address each deliverable. The project manager has the responsibility to manage both the scope and impact of any change in project.
- Life cycle with a finite due date – project like any other organic entity has a life cycle. This life cycle depicts the different phases of the project within a given timeframe.
- Interdependence – this talk about the interaction that exists between projects.
- Uniqueness - projects are distinctive in nature. Projects do not involve repetitive processes. Each project undertaken is different from the last, unlike operational activities.
- Bounded by specific start and end dates. It should always have a time to begin and a time to finish.
- Conflicts – conflict is almost inevitable in project implementation. Team members are frequently against each other's throat for the scarce resources and available positions in the project (Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009). Project managers should be knowledgeable in resolving conflict. Some conflict types are helpful and it is on the

project manager to distinguish between helpful and non-helpful conflict.

- Usually terminated when it accomplishes its goal or becomes irrelevant to the organization.
- Acts as change agent in an organization. It typically enhances organizational performance through the execution of business change.
- Initiated to add value to the organization. The result of every project implemented by an organization is to add value to its products or services that enables the organization to gain competitive edge over its rivals.
- Budget allocation. This enables the project to produce its deliverables in order to achieve client's requirement. In fact, a project cannot accomplish its objectives without proper budget allocation.
- Projects have limited resources. The limited resources are to be managed by the project manager in order to complete project tasks as scheduled.
- A project is not devoid of risk. Every project has some degree of risk associated with it. Therefore, it becomes incumbent on the project team to identify possible risks associated with the project.

However, project management refers to how project knowledge, skills, tools and techniques can be applied to the outlined project tasks in order to accomplish the requirements of the project. Project management is guided by the following processes; initiation, planning, execution, controlling and monitoring and closure drawn from knowledge areas such as; integration, schedule, scope, budget, quality, procurement, human resources, communications, risk management and stakeholder management (Heldman, 2018). The predominant objective of managing a project is to finish the project in accordance with the strategies of the organization in order to achieve client's requirements. Project management conveys a unique effort guided by project goals, resources and schedule. The value of that effort is proved by the rapid, worldwide growth of project management (Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009).

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN AN ORGANIZATION

(Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009) highlighted three important factors that have influenced project management practices in our era:

- Expansion of human knowledge
- Increasing demand for highly differentiated products and services
- The gradual development of global markets that is competitive in nature to meet consumer's demands.

Project management involves high level of interaction between project stakeholders. This creates a healthy learning atmosphere that supports knowledge acquisition. Project team is formed that comprises of several members. As this team continues to work on the project, members have the opportunity to learn many things required for the

development of the project. Throughout the execution of the project, there is an exponential increase in knowledge. Knowledge gained can be used to solve organizational challenges. Thus, making project management relevant in contemporary organizations.

Customers/clients all over the world are craving for highly differentiated and customized products and services. Organizations are under extreme pressure to meet their customer demands. This has led these organizations in accepting the design of their product as a significant part of the production and distribution systems.

Another significant societal force is the fierce competition within the global market. This competition has led to the rigorous implementation of marketing strategy by various organizations to capture the market. This on-going marketing fight has resulted in the production of standardized product and services by organizations to attract more customers. This marketing warfare goes beyond just production of goods and services but encompasses the time to market. Time is critical, responses must come fast and decisions are to be made faster. Project management is key in addressing these factors. Change within the organization is considered a project management approach and as such should be spearheaded by management at the strategic level.

IV. BENEFITS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Business organizations prioritize profit maximization and therefore, are willing to embrace new innovations that support that drive as long as it does not contravene organizational policies. The fierce and rigorous strategies employed by business entities in order to thrive in the global market speaks a lot about the complexities of doing business. In order to overcome these growing challenges, organizations must adopt new methods or approaches in conducting business. Project management has been identified by most organizations as the new norm in achieving organizational objectives. In as much as, there are series of challenges associated with project management practices yet, it is a vital tool used to enhance organizational capacity. However, some of the benefits of project management to organizations are:

➤ *Enables the organization to achieve its goals and objectives*

The use of project management to achieve organizational goals and objectives stands as the core driver for embracing project management practices in organizational operations. There are several activities that the organization is unable to undertake either because of lack of required expertise or unwillingness on their part to dedicate time for such activities. These activities can be undertaken by initiating a project, where the necessary expertise will be recruited and appropriate time given. Since the project is fully dedicated to solving problem, it will deliver these activities in a timely and efficient manner as compared to what the organization would have

delivered. In addition, project management serves as a strategic tool in accomplishing the strategic goal of the organization. For instance, the organization wants to increase its customer base; a project can be initiated to differentiate its products in order to attract more customers. So, the project here is to differentiate organizational products, make it more appealing to customers and consumers thereby increasing the number of people patronizing the product. On the other hand, the organization can initiate a project to introduce new product into the market thus, providing its customers and consumers with alternative products or a new product that is appealing to them. In essence, project management is a resourceful tool that helps achieve organizational goals and objectives in a dramatic fashion (Picincu, 2018).

➤ *High level of expertise*

With the introduction of a project, the organization has the opportunity to bring in highly skilled personnel with expert knowledge; these experts' interface with staff of the organization and help in building up their capacity. Therefore, staff have the opportunity to learn from experienced personnel brought in by the project. You will notice that organizational staff would have gained significant knowledge by the time the project nears completion and that knowledge acquired will be used to enhance organizational growth. It is imperative on management to take advantage of the projects being implemented by the organization especially in terms of developing its human resource capacity.

➤ *Competitive advantage*

Competitive advantage is the edge an organization has over its competitors. Organizations all over the globe compete in order to thrive in the market. The one with the most appropriate strategy will likely capture the market. Business as usual is one of the antagonistic statements that has wrecked so many organizations that were doing fine; it kills motivation and dampens one's push for innovations. Project management on the other hand, promotes business innovations and eventually leads to the production of unique products and services. Making your product distinct in the market earns your organization the core competence and ability to become market leader. A market leader enjoys competitive advantage over its rivals; an edge that can be easily attained with the use of project management.

➤ *Greater customer satisfaction*

Every business organization considers its customers as key stakeholders in its operations. In that, the organization prioritizes the requirements of its customers and seeks to achieve those requirements. In order to capture and meet customer's requirements, most organizations prefer using the project management approach; because project management revolves around achieving client's requirements. In a project, the client has the opportunity to dictate the requirements and the project team is expected to complete the project by accomplishing the outlined requirements. There is a better synergy between the customer and the organization when project management

approaches are used and hence, greater customer satisfaction.

➤ *Enhance flexibility*

Project management gives the organization a flexible approach to doing business. Businesses usually do not follow a 'hard and fast' approach. Several factors can militate against a business (especially external factors) that might change the trajectory of the organization. Therefore, employing a rigid approach might not help the organization in overcoming its prevailing challenges. However, with the use of project management the organization will be in a pole position, flexible enough to respond to impromptu circumstances. Project course can be easily diverted or modified depending on the priorities of the organization.

➤ *Accurate risk assessment*

Risk is an integral component of every project. Proper risk assessment saves the organization from undertaking a project that will eventually fail. This is a vital benefit of project management to the organization.

➤ *Collaboration*

This is when employees work together in order to achieve organizational objectives. Collaboration is a strong pillar that facilitates organizational growth and it is embedded in the project management approaches used by most organizations. It serves as one of the benefits of project management to organizations as it enhances togetherness and team work needed by management to accomplish organizational goals.

V. CHALLENGES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

In spite of the discussed benefits of project management to organizations, there are quite a number of project management challenges and these are:

➤ *Time, cost and quality constraints*

The major challenge faced by all organizations using project management is guaranteeing that their projects deliver the agreed objectives within time, cost and to the stated quality. These factors must be balanced in relation to the overall scope of the project (Picincu, 2018). Failing to meet these standards might cause the client to reject the project and that signals project failure. On the other hand, project implementation comes with additional costs that might exceed the financial capacity of the organization; forcing the organization to reject such project. Time, cost and quality are significant constraints posed by project management to the growth of an organization.

➤ *Increased complexity*

Project management is a complex process with several stages. Some project personnel are in the habit of complicating every process, which might cause confusion among team members and lead to unnecessary delays in project delivery. In addition, they can develop rigid plans that are inflexible in order to create tension within the organization. In essence, projects with larger scope will be

more complex to deliver, especially in cases where the project team is not showing full commitment (Picincu, 2018).

➤ *Communication overhead*

Every project has a project team and this team is part of the organization throughout the project lifespan. This stretches the communication layer of the organization. It is therefore advisable for project managers to have a sizable team in order to lower the communication overhead of the organization. Some projects require large team thus, stressing the need for a competent project manager with strong communication skills across a diversity of people.

➤ *People*

People are by far the most important resource of any project. Organizations using project management to achieve its objectives must be mindful of that and be able to coordinate these people in order to efficiently maximize their potential. It is essential for the organization to have people with the requisite knowledge and skills so as to enhance organizational performance. In addition, managers should be magnanimous in dealing with employees especially when there are disagreements. People management is a huge challenge to organizational growth but if properly handled can boost organizational performance.

➤ *Technology*

Since projects are distinct in nature, there is always the need to embrace new technology. Even though, new technology brings dynamism to project management yet, it is marred with several challenges that might destroy the project if not properly handled. Some of the challenges that come with new technology are; cost of the technology, staff with the knowledge to manage such technology, cost of training employees to use this technology, relevance of the technology to the project etc. The inability of the organization to answer the following questions relating to embracing new technology is a challenge by itself. Although, technology is needed in project management, care should be taken for the organization not to invest in a technology that will not yield the required benefits.

➤ *Legal*

Every project will have to address the legal ramifications of its implementations. The project must comply with government and organizational regulations. Projects often involve the use of contracts. It is the responsibility of the organization to determine the legal system guiding the operation of each project. Even though, there are also industry-specific legislation that must be followed.

➤ *Environment*

You cannot implement a project in isolation; in order to deliver successful projects an organisation must be aware of those factors (both internal and external) that will have an influence on the project. Internal factors are mostly within the capacity of the organization to handle but the external ones are sometimes complex and difficult to

address. external factors include; government regulations, economic trends, social factors, political dynamics and technological features. They are difficult to handle because they are not within organizational control.

VI. SITUATIONS IN WHICH PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES ARE INEFFECTIVE

Project management would probably not be effective in the following circumstances:

- Projects with shorter timeline. In this kind of projects, it will be difficult for you to setup a project plan because the project is expected to complete within hours. In that case applying project management skills will be challenging.
- Having a smaller project team. A smaller project team can pose serious human resource challenge to a big project. Having an elaborate project plan can result in project failure if the size of the project team is small.
- Project with few tasks. It becomes challenging to apply project management skills in projects that only require one or a few tasks.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

(Admin, 2010) Stated several limitations of project management, which are thus:

- Failure to stick with the project scope: Project scope is not static, changes do occur. These change requests normally make it difficult for project managers to stick to the original scope. This usually causes many problems during project implementation. The completion of the project within the given time and resources becomes challenging.
- Mal-alignment of project objectives with the business/organizational strategy: Project managers are employed to manage project not organization. Project managers are cut in the middle when it comes to meeting organizational objectives. Even though, senior management in line with corporate strategy initiate the project, project managers are not fully responsible for the alignment. Program management has addressed this limitation. The introduction of program management at the strategic level enables management to exact control and hence guarantying a sustainable alignment.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Project management is an evolving approach to strengthen organizational competence. It provides an effective means of growth and development in an organization. Notwithstanding, it comes with several challenges in its implementation. These challenges ranging from management endorsement to having competent and reliable personnel with the right attitude and knowledge for proper implementation.

It fosters methodical and accurate approach in undertaken tasks to meet tight deadline in an effective manner. It has prime objectives central to project

management which are; time, performance, budget and customer expectations. These independent constraints have overlapping effects on projects. Project outcome largely depends on these objectives. The project manager should be smart enough to identify the tradeoffs among these constraints and make reasonable decision to ensure project success.

The growing awareness of project management skills in solving organizational problems has led to its adaptation in most organizations. In essence, project management is the way forward in contemporary organizations.

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