Unravelling the Critical Role of Project Manager in Project Management Success

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Abstract: *A project that lacks competent project manager is definitely heading for failure. The motivation, passion and direction needed in project management comes from the project manager. He supervises project team members and ensures that each member is assigned project tasks. Project manager must ensure that these assigned tasks are completed within the stated timeframe. The project manager performs the following responsibilities: 1) Management of project resources; in doing this, care must be taken to avoid wastages and thefts. 2) Identification of critical project tasks during the early stages of the project. 3) Management of stakeholders; this is an important aspect that contributes to project success. The project manager must learn how to relate with the various stakeholders of the project. Creating and maintaining that good relationship will contribute immensely to the success of the project. 4) Financial management; even though the project manager is not a financial expert but he should have fair knowledge on how to manage the finances of the project to keep the project alive. However, it is advisable for project managers to start from small to large projects. This gives them the opportunity to fully understand management principles and skills needed for bigger projects. Projects create an excellent learning atmosphere for project managers. Project initiation, planning and implementation are rigorous stages that requires someone with the requisite knowledge, temperament and technical skills to meet project deadlines. As a project manager, having gone through such, will leave you with the adequate knowledge and skills needed for future organizational growth hence, improving one's career path. Imagine the challenges associated with the implementation of projects, if the project manager is able to meet project requirements within those constraints then it becomes imperative for senior management to consider such project manager for future senior position in the organization. In essence, the project manager's functions in the management of projects cannot be over emphasized.*

Keywords: Project Manager; Project Environments; Project Conflicts; Technical Skills; Senior Management

1. Introduction

Project managers are the ones steering the project ship. Managing a project is a difficult and time-consuming task which senior managers are not ready to undertake hence, the need for a project manager. Senior managers are mostly busy with other activities of the organization. The project manager is the project boss that ensures that the objectives of the project are achieved within given schedule, budget and scope. The project manager relies on the functional managers of the parent organization for most of the resources needed to accomplish project goals. In essence, he should create a smooth working relationship with the functional unit and other project stakeholders in the management of the project. Clear lines of authority should be established between the organization and the project to avoid misunderstandings that might degenerate to conflict situations that will eventually hinder the progress of the project. In as much as the project manager is the boss, he does not have monopoly of knowledge hence, the need for a robust project team to help accomplish project requirements. Project team members should be selected based on competence and project specifications than using personal sentiments as criteria for selection. Once, the selection process is predicated on personal affiliations and emotional sentiments then the project becomes a breeding ground for stagnation and eventual failure. If the project is engineering based, then it is mandatory for the project manager to have engineers on the team than bringing people of less importance to the success of such project. Project managers have to be more than just technical managers; they should be team builders, mentors and good negotiators as well. There is a popular adage which states that "To whom much is given much is expected". Every project manager must understand that their roles and responsibilities is central to the outcome of the project. Therefore, they need to have a broad knowledge in all aspects of organizational management. One of the major challenges facing project managers are those associated with the management of human resource (Taylor, 2006). Humans are difficult to manage and it takes a skilled project manager endowed with the right administrative, leadership, ethical and management style to coordinate and organize these different stakeholders in order to achieve the overarching project goals.

The project manager and skills
A project manager is an individual charged with the responsibility of directing the affairs of the project from its inception to the point of termination. He is a professional and first point of contact for all project related issues in the organization. In addition, he seeks to achieve project success by mitigating risk, minimizing cost and enhancing project quality through effective management. Managing a project is a daunting task that requires someone with the necessary knowledge and technical skills. The enthusiasm or push to finish project tasks is considered an important attribute in selecting a project manager. In addition, this attribute should be perceived by senior managers and other project stakeholders. The skills needed by the project manager in order to effectively manage the project are thus:
a) Technical skills: Project managers should possess strong technical skills to manage projects effectively. This skill should be seen by the stakeholders of the project in order to command strong influence that is necessary for soliciting project resources. As a project manager, it is essential to be knowledgeable in the project area. It does

not mean that the manager should have absolute knowledge about the project or be knowledgeable than the other team members; rather, the project manager should understand the projects, interpret the technical requirements and be able to communicate the project with senior management.

b) Administrative skills: This is an important skill needed by the project manager. The project manager is acting like a liaison officer that relates with project clients, senior management, functional departments and project team. He should manage these different stakeholders properly in order to achieve project success. He needs materials, human resources, equipments and other resources from these stakeholders in a timely manner for him to meet agreed project requirements.

c) Sensitivity: A project manager should be sensitive to both the internal and external environments. He should be aware of the following:

- Relationship amongst team members. How they relate with each other and how vices such as jealousy, malice, rivalries and hostilities are detected.
- Political dimensions within and around the project as well as parent organization.
- Members of the team who are not up to the task but are unwilling to make such revelation.

d) Leadership skills: Project managers are leaders. This is a strong personal skill that every successful project manager must possess. Leadership encompasses strong interpersonal impact exercised through proper communication to meet organizational goals. Leaders lead instead of dictating. The project manager should lead by example, setting the pace for team members to follow. He should possess strong ethical character that helps to sharpen and direct the project team in achieving project goals. He should be free of vices such as:

- Bribery
- Violation of project standards
- Use of substandard materials
- Bypassing project procedures
- Compromising on project safety standards

The project manager should be seen operating above such reproach at least for his reputation and in the interest of the project.

e) Stress management skills: Stress is inevitable in project implementation. As a project manager, you should have a thick skin to deal with stress. Never allow stress to weigh you down because if that happens, the project is going down. The project manager might be stressed up with several activities such as managing people, meeting project deadlines, availability of project resources, one's future after the project and relating with parent organization. It takes someone with calm and consistent approach in management to deal with such. However, bitten more than you can chew approach is also a source of stress in project. Project managers are advised to take what they can handle not the other way around. (Meredith & Mantel (Jr.), 2009).

f) Strong communication skills: This skill is so important for the project manager to possess because he is at the center of the project and as such will have to relate with project stakeholders. Stakeholders require updates on the progress made so far and this warrants the project manager to effectively communicates to them in an appealing manner. The project manager's duty encompasses writing reports for management consumption, attendingmanagement meetings in order to provide project updates, negotiating with suppliers and other key players, instructing and supervising team members and lobbying with functional unit for project resources; all can be easily achieved when the project manager is an effective communicator.

The project manager versus functional manager

Project and functional managers are both strategic to the successful completion of a project. Even though their priorities are different but their contributions to the project is of immense value to its success. These two people are expected to collaborate, putting aside their personals for the benefits of the organization. However, the functional manager shows loyalty and commitment to the organization whereas the project manager's focus is on the project. The project manager needs resources and other supports from the organization through the functional manager and in the same vein the functional manager needsto achieve organizational objectives through the implementation of projects; which is controlled by the project manager. This makes their roles in the organization completelyintertwined. However, the major differences between both managers are thus:

- Functional managers supervise or oversea the functional unit of the organization. For instance, units such as finance, production, operation etc. are headed by the functional manager. Project managers on the other hand, are in charge of the project. They coordinate, organize, plan, budget and direct the project from start to finish.
- Functional managers are more analytical in their approach whereas project managers use the systematic approach, even though both managers are technically skilled.
- Technical decisions concerning the various departments of the organization is made exclusively by the functional managers unless he requires the project manager's expertise. In the same vein, the project manager who is the technical person leading the project, is responsible for making project decisions. Nevertheless, the functional manager can also make meaningful project decisions especially in areas where the project crosses departmental interest.
- Functional managers are more technical in their role as supervisors whereas project managers facilitate and act as generalist.

The project manager and team

An effective project team is referred to as group of individuals with strong and common understanding in ensuring that project goals and objectives are met within agreed time, scope and budget (Smith, 2013). Project management team forms the core of every project. Project team has the responsibility to successfully implement the project based on the requirements set by stakeholders. In order for the project manager to succeed, he needs competent team that is full of varied technical abilities to push the project to a successful completion. The selection of team members should be based on competence and project suitability and not sentiments and unethical basis that contravenes project management standards. That is a recipe for project sluggishness and subsequent failure. On the other

hand, having team members endowed with good technical skillswill enhance project stability that leads to successful project. Some of the essential characteristics of an effective project team are thus:

- High-quality technical skills: Project team is formed by the project manager. It is imperative on the project manager to ensure that team members have the necessary technical skills required for the project. A project team with high technical skills will be able to deliver at the highest level. It is worth noting, that these members can have varied technical abilities that the project manager should be able to synchronize for the betterment of the project. Technical challenges are bound to occur during project implementation but the team members should be up to the task to handle such. When technical problems are addressed by the project team, it allows the easy and smooth flow of work instead of outsourcing or consulting the functional unit for assistance.
- Problem-oriented skills: Team members should be problem oriented. This gives them the enthusiasm in the pursuit of solution to the problem. Remember, every project is initiated to solve a problem. In essence, project team members with strong problem-oriented skills have strong chances of successful implementing a project. This makes problem-oriented attribute an essential ingredient of an effective project team.
- Self-esteem: Team members should be able to display high level of professionalism in their work. Members should have the courage to accept their weaknesses and complement others when they are performing. Creating such atmosphere in the project will breed motivation, team work and high performance.
- Political sensitivity: Project manager and team members should be aware of the political dynamics in the organization.The projectdepends on its parent organization for relevant resources which makes the parent body a significant contributing factor to the success of the project. Project manager and team should create good rapport with senior management of the organization to get their full commitment otherwise, the project will struggle for management's attention.
- Goal-oriented: Projects are best managed when the goal-oriented approach is used. Team members are encouraged to focus on result achievements than just individual activities. Achieving the project goal is the hallmark of the much-needed success desired by project stakeholders.

Ideally, the project team should be put together by the project manager. In the formation of the team, the project should take center stage in the project manager's decision as to who should be selected. In addition, the project manager should carefully select those individuals who are competent and have the requisite knowledge and skills for the job. Notwithstanding, (Bondale, 2017) stated some key responsibilities of the project manager towardshis team and these are:

- Ensuring that there is absolute understanding of project goals and objectives by team members in order to enhance the capacity of the team to achieve project results needed by the parent organization.
- Establishing an effective mode of communications towards the team on key project updates such as risks, service delivery, project milestones and work status.
- Involving team members in all aspects of project planning, designing and implementation.
- Assigning tasks to each member of the project team. This helps to minimize confusion and hostility in project implementation.
- Providing regular feedbacks on team member's performance to their functional Managers.
- Giving project team members overall project insight so as to invigorate them and creates a healthy atmosphere for improved performance.
- Looking for suitable fall back strategy for team members especially when the project is approaching completion. Project managers should be mindful of the fact that projects are temporary in nature and must come to an end someday. Some of these members are from the functional unit of the organization and must be returned by the project manager when the project finishes. This is so critical that project managers cannot afford to ignore if they want the project to be successful.

The project manager and communications
Communication refers to the mechanism of transmitting information from one person or entity to another through speaking, writing or the use of mutually understood signs and symbols using a specific transmission medium. Communication plays an integral role in project management. A project managerwho acts as liaison officer spends most of his time communicating. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver developed a communication model called Shannon-Weaver Model. This model identifies four parts involved in the communication process; sender, message, medium of transmission and receiver as shown in the diagram below:
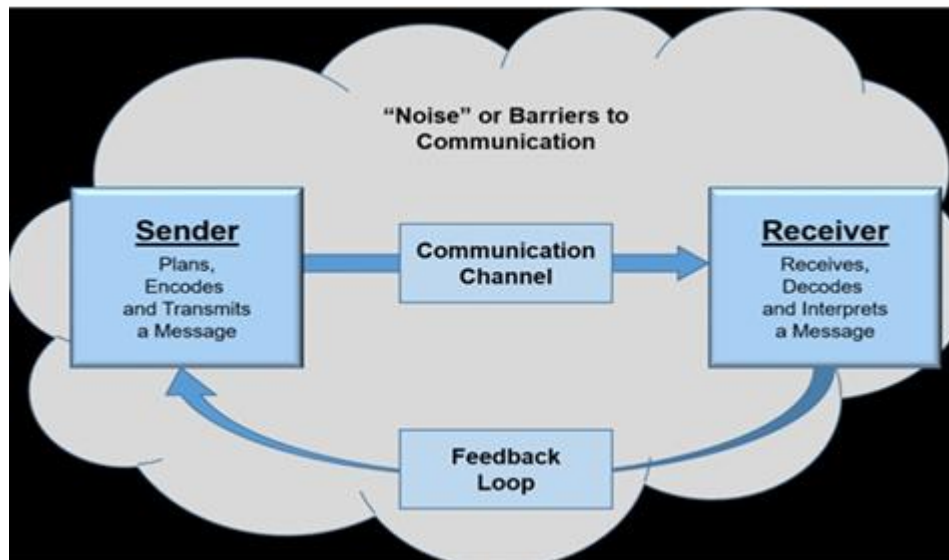
Source: https://www.google.com/search?q=communication&source

This model does not include feedback, which is now an important entity in the communication process. Feedback reassures the sender that he has communicated with the recipient. Communication is a difficult aspect in project management especially when the project manager is working abroad. Communication is part of people's culture, so tounderstand the people, you must try to understand the way they communicate. People communicates in languages as well as in signs and symbols. A particular word in your society might mean something different in another society. Therefore, it becomes incumbent on the project manager to understand both the art and language of communication in that locality in order to understand the people you are working with.Misunderstanding is a major source of conflicts in project management and this arises from the fact that the project manager is not communicating effectively.Theart of communication reinforces the project manager's language of communication. In some of these communities, people tend to understand you better when you make use of symbols and signs during communication than just using mere words. Words have different meanings to different people. Words can have connotative and denotative meanings (Taylor, 2006).Establishing an effective communication in the project brings the following assurances to the project manager:

- Identification of all stakeholders to the project and the development of an efficient communication plan to facilitate smooth communication in the project. In essence, this robust project communication plan will bring clarity and easy understanding among stakeholders of the project.
- Reduces internal strife or conflicts especially amongst team members because there are clear lines of authority. Team members can understand what the project manager is saying in its correct perspective.
- Good communication enhances the project manager's capability to showcase an in-depth knowledge in the management of the project. Such, can help persuade senior management in their commitments to the project. This is key to project success, if this commitment is absent or weak, the project manager will struggle to get the necessary support needed to deliver the project on schedule, performance and budget.

- Development of an outdoor communication strategy especially when dealing withgovernments, customers, vendors and other related projects and organizations.
- Development of a strong feedback mechanism in the project. This mechanism helps the project manager to learn vital lessonsthat will be useful in the implementation of future projects.
- Enables the project manager to foster an effective mediation between the project and its stakeholders.
- Increases community participation because the people fully understand the pros and cons of the project.

Therefore, project managers should have strong persuasive skills in order to communicate project requirements to team members. In addition, project managers must negotiate and persuade functional managers for project resources. If they are unable to lobby through the organizational hierarchy, it becomes difficult for them to get all the needed resources for the successful implementation of the project. The project manager has to relate with customers, senior management, team members and other relevant stakeholders for project objectives to be accomplished.

The project manager and conflicts
Conflicts are part of our daily lives of which project management is no exception. Conflict which simply means disagreement or clash between opposing factions or ideas (Guan, 2007)is inevitable in the management of projects. The management of people is a difficult job especially when they are from different backgrounds; even people from the same region or community can be difficult to manage. In managing the project team, challenges such as disagreements, resentments, bitterness, fightings, and even a breakup of the team can ensue. In this regard, conflicts in project management; destroy project team, build up the team, must be managed and unavoidable.(Guan, 2007) highlighted some of the most common conflicts that occur among project stakeholders:

- Conflicts in the project environment: The environment is made up of people from different backgrounds. The success of the project depends on how these people behave. Project managers must be able to manage conflict

situations in order tosave the project. The following are conflict stimulating factors in the project environment;infighting for project positions or roles, communication problems, lack of commitment from project personnel and personal indifferences such as interests and decisions of team members.

- Conflicts arising from culturaldifferences: Cultureplays a pivotal role in the management of projects. There is a popular adage which says "when you go to Rome you do as the Romans do". Project managers should be ready to adapt to changing environment in order to succeed. It is easy for conflict to arise in such situations where team members are coming from different backgrounds with varied orientations.Mostof suchconflicts are due to misinterpretation or misunderstanding among team members.Projectmanagers should be conscious of such and allow team members to interact officially and unofficially to increase the level of understanding and intimacy among members.
- Conflicts due to project priorities: Every project has several stakeholders. The project manager should manage the expectations of these stakeholders in order to prevent conflict.
- Individual personalities: Every individual is unique, so our personalities. Most of the problems we encounter in project management team are due to personal indifferences. Some people are moody and intolerable, bringing such attitude in the project environment can hinder progress and ultimately leading to project failure. Individuals of such nature should be carefully managed in order to prevent conflicts.

The project manager,culture and the project environments

Culture refers to a specific way of thinking and behaving by group of people in a society exhibited around shared values, beliefs, symbols and practices fundamentally different from the arrangements of other set of people and societies (Kuchta, Sukpen, & Technology, 2013). Environment on the other hand, refers to the area where the project is processed. The environment has huge impacts on the project that the project manager must be aware ofand make adequate plans to manage. Environmental factors such as physical, ecological, social, economic, legal, technological should be carefully monitored throughout the project. These factors are considered external and hence, mostly beyond the control of theproject manager. In the case of culture, it defines the values and beliefs of employees in the organization. However, for cross cultural projects; the project manager will have to deal with the culture of the people where the project is implemented. Culture in this setting is considered part of the environmentwhich is external to the organization. The project manager needs to understand the cultural settings adequately for the smooth implementation of the project. Culture and environment are important factors that can adversely affect project management when not carefully managed. Every project should abide by the legal instrument of that community or nation for the project to be implemented; failing to do that can lead toserious legal conflicts that will damage the project as well as the parent organization. In essence, culture and project environments are close phenomenon that plays pivotal roles in the

management of project. Examples of project environments are:

- Economic environments: The economic environment of the society forms the bedrock of successful projects. A booming economy creates an increaseeconomic activity within society that leads to increase in project activities.Project activities tend to decline in a stagnating economy. This makes the economic environment more relevant in project management.
- Political environments: This looks at the political will from the powers that be in project management. Politics is within and without the organization and can sway project in either positive or negative direction. This environment should be properly understood by project managers inorderto succeed in the management of projects.
- Legal environments: This refers to the statutory regulations guiding project implementation. Projects are managed within the legal framework of the society and this environment can stifle project activities if not done within the ambits of the law.
- Socio-technological environments: This refers to the social and technical aspects of project implementation. Cultural settings, technical skills and relationships existing among workers and community people also form part of this environment.

Challenges facing the project manager in the closing stages of the project

When a project is in an advanced stage, you have limited time to rearrange and fix activity schedule, when the unforeseen occurs. In essence, when a project is in its completion phase, schedule takes priority over the other parameters such as cost and performance. In fact, cost declines significantly during the completion phase. Aproject is seriously affected by the following factors during its completion phase:

- Unexpected change in project schedule and technical requirements.
- Fall back strategy for project team members. As the project completion draws near, team members become jittery as to what the future holds for them. If this is not properly managed, it will lead to team demotivation, lackluster behavior and unsuccessful completion of the project.

Unexpected changes are difficult to manage especially when the project is in its final stages. In the early stages of the project, it is easy to rearrange tasks and resources when the unexpected occurs. Indeed, it is difficult to make changes to the project at the closing stages than when the project is just starting.

2. Conclusion

The project board formed by the parent organization should ensure that a competent project manager is recruited that will be able to manage the project. Once the project manager is selected, the parent organization can hand-over the rest of the project to him.Recruiting a project manager is a strategic objective of every organization that is using project management to achieve its goals. The project manager now

becomes the chief pioneer of the project and as such should be administratively and technically competent to accomplish the objectives of the project.

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