

Project Implementation in Grass-root Support Non-Governmental Organisations in Kenya: Is Project Leadership a Determinant?

Mbogoh, Elizabeth Wanjira¹, Prof. Elegwa Mukulu², Dr. Esther Waiganjo³

¹PhD Student, College of Human Resource Development

²Professor of College of Human Resource Development

³Department of Entrepreneurship, Technology, Leadership and Management

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

Nairobi, Kenya



Abstract- This Literature Review intends to demonstrate that Project Leadership is a pivotal determinant of Project Implementation. It has a great effect on Project Management, a key area in development. As such, it requires competence in crucial skills which determine whether the projects implemented will attain the expected outcomes or not. One of these skills is leadership. Project managers must be equipped with great project leadership skills for projects to be completed successfully. Project teams should prioritise successful completion of projects as their primary responsibility and goal, lead and guided by the project managers. Leadership qualities can occur naturally in some people but they still need to be sharpened through experience. Other aspects of leadership are acquired through classroom and social learning. Each leader may have a different approach towards decision making but what is important is that the right decisions are made as this is what will determine if projects will be effectively implemented or not.

Keywords - Project Managers, Project Team, Project Leadership Qualities, Decision Making, Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

From the early days it was accepted that the management of projects and temporary systems had its own distinctive problems and characteristics. Even project literature at that time gave the impression of project leadership diverging from a task oriented view point. Leadership was usually seen as a human phenomenon that was needed in order to help the project team deliver according the project plan [1]. Project management is important for effective carrying out, with reasonable success, of temporary tasks, which cannot be carried out through permanent

organizational arrangements. This shows that project leadership is majorly a task-oriented occurrence and requires a temporary change of relations to allow the execution of the project plan efficiently. In the same instance, the projects and the teams belong to a permanent organizational environment which has to be managed intelligently. As a result, the early project leadership literature focused on leadership as the tasks of project-internal team management by specialists and project-external management of other stakeholders carried out at the same time in the matrix organizations structure [2]. Project leadership does not imply special

practical tools or tricks, or even a special theoretical body, very different from general leadership theory, and as a result, it does not become a totally different phenomenon compared to other types of leadership but it is still a special sub-field of leadership. The project manager is the new leader category and is fronted to the world, [3], as a boundary-less Jack-of-all-trades who is able to deal with complex issues, both technological and business. The double abilities and experiences were expected to be the best although it was not expected from this individual to be the best engineer or the best businessman in the organization. This reasoning has been extended in project leadership literature, to a distinct interest in the managers who are successfully able to perform such a role.

II. THE PROCESS

The ability to motivate and make people enthusiastic about the project, coordination and facilitating internal communication, providing participative leadership to create a good organizational climate, leading through ideas and visions, managing external contacts and stakeholders, solving conflicts, being able to handle stress and searching for adequate information are some of the key traits and abilities expected of project leadership[4]. The project manager is also expected to be more task oriented than the average leader. Increased relation orientation positively correlates with project effectiveness and at the same time the traditional tasks to plan, make decisions, control and maintain discipline remain. A pro-active problem solver is what is needed, not a reactive one constantly busy handling chaotic situations [5].

In the background of this ideal kind of project manager who is both a generalist and specialist but still a strategist and technician with eye for details, is a theoretical conception of project leadership which is equally wide, informed by several sources of inspiration, and can be found in several good quality textbooks and professional publications in the field.

Although clear plans and sound organization may set the stage, a manager must also provide leadership if the people in his/her organization are to work together to achieve its goals and mission. It was noted that

participating in the implementation of project plans varied with some companies exhibiting high participation while others had low participation as dictated upon by their management style [6]. Corporate leadership in Kenya has caught the attention of different stakeholders and organization. This has made them rethink and embrace their various organizational concepts in order to implement strategic plans effectively, in a very competitive atmosphere [7]. Most organizations in Kenya emphasise on democratic leadership where maximizing participation of group members together with empowerment for decision-making are most important [8]. Even though the Grassroot Support NGO sector is leading in embracing and practicing the idea of strategic management planning, the question remains whether the complexity of implementation is reduced for these GSNGOs. It is argued that learning, development environment and empowerment of employees who are the cogs of implementation, inform good implementation of strategic plans [9].

In daily activities, managers are people who work through other people to organise their activities in order to achieve their organizational goals [8]. In the studies on the importance of strategic management in project performance, it was established that management was an important factor in successful strategic plans [6]. The studies showed that poor top-down management style or poor vertical communication can be a cause of resistance to strategy implementation. At the same time, he observed that top management is responsible for the marshaling and allocating implementation factors such as leadership, organizational culture and others to facilitate project implementation. It may be argued that management of an organization strategy should not be restricted to the top managers but it is the responsibility of managers at all levels. In fact various authors appear to have the idea that implementation failures occur at middle and lower level management. Effective management demands effective use of power in overcoming barriers to change [10]. Power is a leader's ability to get things done in the way he or she wants them done. It can also be said to be the ability to influence other people's behavior, to persuade them to do things that they

would otherwise not have done and to overcome resistance and opposition to the process of changing direction. Effective exercise of power is essential for successful leadership [9].

Lee Bolman and Terry Deal (1991) in their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, outlined their Four-Frame model of leadership. Bolman and Deal submit that leaders

should look at and approach organizational issues from four perspectives, which they called 'Frames'. In their opinion, if a leader works with only one habitual Frame (frame of reference), the leader risks being ineffective. The Four Frames outlined by Bolman and Deal are Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames descriptions and differences	
Structural	This Frame focuses on the obvious 'how' of change. It's mainly a Task-orientated Frame. It concentrates on strategy; setting measurable goals; clarifying tasks, responsibilities and reporting lines; agreeing metrics and deadlines; and creating systems and procedures.
Human Resource	The HR Frame places more emphasis on people's needs. It chiefly focuses on giving employees the power and opportunity to perform their jobs well, while at the same time, addressing their needs for human contact, personal growth, and job satisfaction.
Political	The Political Frame addresses the problem of individuals and interest groups having sometimes conflicting (often hidden) agendas, especially at times when budgets are limited and the organization has to make difficult choices. In this Frame you will see coalition-building, conflict resolution work, and power-base building to support the leader's initiatives.
Symbolic	The Symbolic Frame addresses people's needs for a sense of purpose and meaning in their work. It focuses on inspiring people by making the organization's direction feel significant and distinctive. It includes creating a motivating vision, and recognising superb performance through company celebrations.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames

Bolman and Deal recommend that a leader should see the organization's challenges through these four Frames or 'lenses', to gain an overall view and to decide which Frame or Frames to use. The leader may use one Frame (implying a behavioural approach) for a time, and then switch to another. Alternatively the leader might combine and use a number of Frames or all four at the same time. A key aspect of Bolman and

Deal's model seeks to avoid the temptation for leaders to becoming used to viewing and acting on conditions through one lens or Frame alone. Bolman and Deal assert that because no Frame works well in every circumstance, then a leader who sticks with one Frame is bound to eventually act inappropriately and ineffectively.

Instead, it is the leader's responsibility to use the appropriate Frame of reference, and thereby, behaviour

for each challenge. Central to this methodology is asking the right questions and diagnosing the vital issues. For example: Where a leader ascertains that the biggest problem in a group is lack of motivation and commitment, the leader should probably adopt a Symbolic and/or Human Resource (Frame) approach. If the main group challenge is confusion around priorities and responsibilities, then the leader will probably be more successful adopting Structural and Political (Frames) orientation. If the group is experiencing uncertainty and anxiety about direction, then Symbolic and Political (Frames) leadership behaviours are more likely to produce effective results. The leader should use a multi-Frame perspective before choosing how to act.

Organizations tend to use the Structural Frame but pay less attention to the other three Frames. According to the Four-Frame theory, this is due to lack of awareness of the need for multi-Frame thinking and behaviour or behavioural rigidity due to unconscious limiting beliefs.

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