



MANAGERS' PLANNING SKILLS AND SUCCESS OF CONSTRUCTION

PROJECTS IN MOGADISHU, SOMALIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to describe the key planning skills which construction managers ought to possess and practice and correlate them with success of construction projects in Mogadishu, with a view of suggesting practical recommendations to enhance project success. In addition, the study intends to identify the strength and weaknesses of project managers in terms of planning skills and project success. It will also test the null hypotheses of no significant relationship between planning skills and project success. The study adopted a descriptive co-relational, ex post facto and a cross-sectional survey research design. The descriptive co-relational design was used to establish the relationship between managers' planning skills and success of construction projects in Mogadishu. The ex post facto design was used because respondents were requested to things that have already happened. The cross-sectional design was employed because; a cross-section of construction managers was selected to participate in the study all at once. It was a survey since many respondents were included in the answering of questionnaires. This study was set to find out the relationship between planning skills and project success among construction projects in Mogadishu-Somalia. Finally This study contributed towards knowledge generation by revealing that having direct impacts on the project success, in terms of cost and schedule performance, will require a project planner to be equipped with enough knowledge on how to do it in pre project planning phase.

Keywords: *planning skills, Construction Projects, Managers'.*

INTRODUCTION

Project management involves coordinating various aspects of a project in order to bring forth a positive result (Almaraji et al, 2007). This coordination can include elements such as personnel, materials, procedures and facilities. Over the past five to ten years, there have been increasing challenges faced by Project Managers (Almaraji et al, 2007). There are numerous challenges facing today's construction manager. Some are new to the industry, and some are centuries old. Many of these challenges are a direct result of construction operations, while others a result of indirect, peripheral activities. A surprising number of challenges are not construction issues but must be addressed and managed by the construction manager (CM) to ensure project success (Muir, 2005). One such major challenge has been poor planning on the side of construction managers leading to project failure. Planning is the process of setting goals, developing strategies, and outlining tasks and schedules to accomplish the goals (Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre, 2011). Litman (2011) defines planning as the process of deciding what to do and how to do it. According to the Management study guide.com Planning means looking ahead and chalking out future courses of action to be followed. It is a preparatory step. It is a systematic activity which determines when, how and who is going to perform a specific job. According to Urwick, "Planning is a mental predisposition to do things in orderly way, to think before acting and to act in the light of facts rather than guesses". Planning is deciding best alternative among others to perform different managerial functions in order to achieve predetermined goals. For this study planning skills will mean the ability and capacity of project managers to set goals, develops strategies, and outlines tasks and schedules to accomplish the construction project goals.

On the other hand, the term project success which is the dependent variable in this study is not so readily identified in literature. In 1988 Pinto and Slevin concluded from their research work that "Project success is a complex and often illusory construct, but nonetheless, it is of crucial importance to effective project implementation," and, "project success is suggested to have two major components: issues dealing with the project itself and issues dealing with the client. Aaron and Wideman (2000) identify two perspectives to project success namely; process and product perspectives. From the process perspective, project success is about being "On time, within budget and meeting requirements." From a product perspective, a successful project is clearly

one in which the "customer" ends up satisfied (Aaron and Wideman, 2000). Ryan and Grossman (1998) consider a project to be successful if the desired results and outcomes as agreed upon are achieved; the client's problem is solved, the problem is finished on time and within budget, when there is a high quality working relationship with the project team and the client and when clients say they are satisfied. According to Cleland et al (1988), a project is termed successful if it passes four success test criteria i.e., the time criterion – completed on time; the cost or budget criterion – completed within budget; the effectiveness criterion – completed in accordance with the original set performance and quality standards; and client's satisfaction criterion – accepted by the intended users or clients.

According to Chizea (1991), a project has failed if any or a combination of the following anomaly happens:- cost overrun, time overrun, contractor not making a profit, quality of completed project unsatisfactory, project abandoned. The study will adopt the Cleland et al (1988) definition of project success.

The slippage of project plans with respect to budget, schedule and quality specifications are indicators of poor performance and imminent failure. Many projects in developing countries usually suffer from project failure due to poor planning skills, resulting into stagnated infrastructural and economic development (Ubani et al, 2010). In Somalia, a number of projects have failed due to a number of factors, poor planning being one such factor. The current study seeks to examine the relationship between planning skills and project success among project managers in Mogadishu Somalia.

Project failure and abandonment are frequent phenomena among construction managers in Mogadishu Somalia (Somalia Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction, 2011). A number of private and construction projects have failed or been abandoned. Abandonment and failed projects which are more predominant in the public sector litter every corner of the country. A few typical examples of project failure and abandonment can be cited. The construction of secondary schools by government in Shibis district failed, construction of a water drainage channel in Karan district failed and Electricity generation project in Hamar weyne district was abandoned. As a result of these failed programs, a monumental economic loss is incurred in terms of heavy cost overruns, periodic waste of resources, Wastage of resources overtime, and

projects that metamorphose into bottomless pits gulping scarce resources with no concrete completion time in sight.

Continued project failure could be a result of a number of factors including limited human resource capacity as evidenced by the presence of project managers, who lack the basic project management skills, technical construction skills, low education levels, inexperience and poor planning skills. Though a number of factors are responsible for poor project performance in Mogadishu, it is important to find out how planning skills of managers affect the success of construction projects in Mogadishu Somalia. This is because planning has been sighted as one of the factors that impact on project success (Somalia Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction, 2011). And yet no empirical study has been carried out to determine the impact that planning has on project success, hence the need for a study like this one to cover this gap.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A number of scholars define planning differently. According to Litman (2011), planning refers to the process of deciding what to do and how to do it. Planning occurs at many levels, from day-to-day decisions made by individuals and families, to complex decisions made by businesses and governments (Litman, 2011). According to Urwick (2007), “Planning is a mental predisposition to do things in orderly way, to think before acting and to act in the light of facts rather than guesses”. Planning is deciding best alternative among others to perform different managerial functions in order to achieve predetermined goals (Powers et al, 1986).

Planning skills refers to the ability by a manager to decide the best alternative among others and to perform different managerial functions in order to achieve predetermined goals. According to Powers et al (1986), Planners need to develop skills related to the following seven competency areas: analyzing and interpreting data and situations, diagnosing problems and identifying relevant causal factors, predicting and forecasting, goal setting and identifying possible courses of action, evaluating and comparing possible courses of action, communicating and implementing actions and monitoring them.

Various scholars have attempted to define the concept project success. According to Lim and Mohamed (1999), project success is the achievement of some pre-determined project goals.

Aaron and Wideman (2000) identify two perspectives to project success namely; process and product perspectives. From the process perspective, project success is about being “On time, within budget and meeting requirements.” From a product perspective, a successful project is clearly one in which the "customer" ends up satisfied (Aaron and Wideman, 2000). Ryan and Grossman (1998) consider a project to be successful if the desired results and outcomes as agreed upon are achieved; the client’s problem is solved, the problem is finished on time and within budget, when there is a high quality working relationship with the project team and the client and when clients say they are satisfied. According to Cleland et al (1988), a project is termed successful if it passes four success test criteria i.e., the time criterion – completed on time; the cost or budget criterion – completed within budget; the effectiveness criterion – completed in accordance with the original set performance and quality standards; and client’s satisfaction criterion – accepted by the intended users or clients.

The study was guided by Deming's (2000) Quality Management Principles model. According to this model, performance excellence results from five organizational elements: top management's leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, process management, and human-resources focus. Because quality assurance depends on the reduction of uncontrolled variation in production (or service) processes, organizations must focus on the five listed factors, which are the underlying keys for controlling variation. Each of these factors must be measured with ongoing performance metrics for assessing the reliability of processes, operations and products. Such reliability would lead to improved employee, customer, operational and financial performance (Steuwe & Zohar, 2011). The study was based on the Deming model because it calls for adopting strategic planning and improvement of internal business processes like planning in order to improve organizational performance.

According to Frese and Sauter (2003), the first indicator of project success, requires excellent forward planning, which includes detailed planning of the process implementation stages, task timeliness, fall-back positions, and re-planning. Hence project managers who do not prepare to re-plan, or have not considered and planned fall-back positions when initial plans fail, will often find that the project first stalls, and then fails (Frese and Sauter, 2003).

A number of empirical studies have been conducted with planning as an antecedent variable to project success. The findings of these studies indicate that planning skills are an important

prerequisite for project success. Ubani et al (2010) analyzed the variation factors of project plan and their contributions to project failure in Nigeria. They found that design errors, management problems and resource delivery constraints are the significant variation factors of plan that contribute significantly to project failure.

In a study similar to the Ubani et al study, Ibeawuchi and Okoli (2010) investigated the constraints to project implementation success in a developing economy and found that poor planning was a great constraint to project success. Failure to plan led to failure to complete project, delay in completion or poor quality products.

Wang and Gibson (2008) investigated the relationship between pre-project planning and project success in the construction industry in the United States. The Wang and Gibson research summarized pre-project planning data collected from 62 industrial projects and 78 building projects, representing approximately \$5 billion in total construction cost. Based on the information obtained, pre-project planning was identified as having direct impact on the project success (cost and schedule performance).

The review of literature above provides important information about the effect of planning on project success. However, it says nothing about the relationship between planning skills and project success and how the two are related. The current study seeks to fill this knowledge gap.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a descriptive correlational, ex post facto and a cross-sectional survey research design. The descriptive correlational design was used to establish the relationship between managers' planning skills and success of construction projects in Mogadishu. The ex post facto design was used because respondents were requested to things that have already happened. The cross-sectional design was employed because; a cross-section of construction managers were selected to participate in the study all at once. It was a survey since many respondents were included in the answering of questionnaires.

RESEARCH POPULATION

The study population was comprised of all the 230 construction managers in Mogadishu. The list of construction managers were obtained from the Somali Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction.

SAMPLE SIZE AND PROCEDURE

The study sample was consisted of 146 project managers; the respondents to the study were selected using simple random sampling technique. A list of construction managers were obtained from the Somali Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction. The names were put in rota and randomly selected to participate in the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study was set to find out the relationship between planning skills and project success among construction projects in Mogadishu-Somalia. It was guided by four specific objectives, that included determining the i) profile of respondents in terms of age, gender, marital status and education qualification; ii) determining the level of planning skills iii) the level of project success; iv) the relationship between planning skills and project success among construction projects in Mogadishu-Somalia.

The findings indicated that majority of respondents were between 26-35 years (68%) of age, over 53% were male, majority were married (50%) and these were masters' degree holders (over 45%).

Data analysis using means showed that the following planning skills are high; i) having the necessary skills to evaluate and compare possible courses of actions in the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.85), having the necessary skills to identify relevant causal factors to problems in the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.83), having the necessary skills to plan for the monitoring of the actions in the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.78), having the ability to set goals for the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.76), having the necessary skills to predict and forecast situations in the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.74), having the necessary skills to communicate possible courses of action to the other stakeholders to the project (mean=2.73), having the necessary skills to identify the possible courses of action in the projects that one undertake (mean=2.73), having the necessary skills to diagnose problems in the

projects that one undertake (mean=2.73), having the necessary skills to analyze and interpret situations in the projects that one undertakes (mean=2.71).The level of project success was found to be high all aspects (over all mean=2.77).

Finally, the findings indicated a positive significant relationship between the level planning skills and level of project success. This is shown by the fact that the sig. value was less than the maximum sig. value of 0.05 considered in social sciences.

CONCLUSIONS

From the purpose of the study, the researcher generated the following conclusions;

Strengths

Most of the managers, were youths, married and had attained high qualification of masters' degree confirming that majority of workers in construction projects in Mogadishu-Somalia are generally qualified.

The level of planning skills was generally high, which indicated that managers usually use enough skills that are required while planning. On aspect like you have the necessary skills to evaluate and compare possible courses of actions in the projects that you undertake was the highest among others.

The level of project success was found to be also high this indicated that projects have successfully taken off.

Weaknesses

There were more male managers compared to the female, indicating a big gender gap in construction projects.

The level of planning skills was lowest on aspect like having the necessary skills to analyze and interpret situations in the projects that one undertake which indicated that, though managers have skills but not all the necessary skills to help them analyze and interpret situations.

The level of success was lowest on how the projects that one undertakes are completed in time, indicating that managers hardly complete the project tasks in time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and the conclusions of the study, the researcher recommends that there is need to encourage women also directly involve themselves in project planning in construction projects in Mogadishu.

1. In line with above, women need to be empowered with knowledge about project planning in construction projects in Mogadishu.
2. There is a need to encourage people in late adults to share their experience and knowledge with youths hence succeeding in construction projects. This is so because the sample was dominated by youths neglected people in their late adulthoods of Mogadishu.
3. There is a need to ensure quality working relationship between the project team and the client hence improving on the success of the project.
4. The ministry of public works and reconstruction of Mogadishu should train managers so that they happen to have the necessary skills to analyze and interpret situations in the projects that they undertake.
5. There is a need for the ministry to ensure that managers have necessary skills to plan for the monitoring and evaluation of the actions in the projects that they undertake.

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