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PURPOSEFUL PROJECT MANAGEMENT: A PANACEA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT - CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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Abstract
The existence of poor project planning and implementation culture is an anti-thesis to development. This is because the growth of any nation is essentially dependent on successful execution of critical development projects and infrastructures. The purpose of this paper is to explore the current issues around project planning and implementation in Nigeria's public sector vis-à-vis international best practices. The methodology adopted was a documentary review of past and current literature which enhance critical and contextual analysis of project implementation and execution culture in the country. It was found that the three tiers of government have not really planned, implemented and executed projects with due diligence in accordance with global best practices. Thus there exists a widespread institutional mediocrity in project execution, deficiency of vision, and inadequate budgetary allocations leading to high cost of project financing and corruption in the long run. The paper recommends amongst other things the establishment of National Public Projects Implementation System (NPPIS),public projects governance institutional framework and project management offices (PMOs), in Ministries Departments and Agencies to support processes for better public projects delivery system.

Keywords: Project, Project Planning, Project Implementation, Best Practice, Public Project Management.

Introduction

Project management is a pivotal element in driving national development, ensuring that projects are completed successfully, efficiently, and effectively. In Nigeria, where infrastructure deficits, corruption, and security concerns pose significant challenges, purposeful project management emerges as a vital solution for addressing these issues and fostering sustainable growth. The effective management of projects can serve as a linchpin for tackling Nigeria's numerous developmental hurdles, from enhancing infrastructure and mitigating bureaucratic inefficiencies to improving security and building a competent workforce. This article delves into the various aspects of project management within the Nigerian context, exploring both the challenges and the opportunities that define the landscape. By examining the progress made and the strategies employed, it aims to underscore the critical role of project management in national development and highlight the transformative potential of adopting best practices and innovative approaches. Through a detailed case study, the discussion will shed light on how Nigeria can leverage purposeful project management to drive its developmental agenda and achieve long-term economic and social benefits.

The existence of poor planning implementation and execution culture is an antithesis to development. All of mankind's greatest accomplishments from building the great pyramids to discovering a cure for polio, ebola and even putting a man on the moon began as a project. It is nearly impossible to pick up a Newspaper, government periodicals or business magazine and not find something about projects. Project Planning and Implementation is no longer a special-need management. It is rapidly becoming a standard way of doing both private and public sector businesses (Gray and Larson, 2008). This is because the growth of any developed or developing nation is hinged upon successful project planning and implementation of development projects and infrastructures. For the projects to be successfully executed and completed, they must be adequately planned, budgeted for and funded. Funding is normally done by government or donor agencies through the allocation of scarce resources. This brings us to the general view held by economists that every resource has an alternative use, hence an opportunity cost. The implication is that any project embarked upon not only consumes resources but denies other potential projects the opportunity to exist and contribute to the growth of the country especially in this time of economic recession biting every individual, group, organisation and even government. That is why the failure of a project be it in private or public sector through poor projects planning and implementation practices carries three serious repercussions to the economy and environment. First is the waste of resources/finances and human effort(s) used in its execution. Secondly is the denial of opportunity for other projects from coming on streams. Thirdly is the consequence on the mental psyche of the failure syndrome on the project participants and stakeholders (Ewurum, Eboh and Igwe, 2009). As Okorafor (1997) remarks, that it is better not to embark on a project implementation than to start, get stuck and abandon. A critical look at our environment today especially in the South East would reveal the ugly sights of poorly planned, uncompleted, abandoned and/or even aborted projects. Observable examples of these projects are in the areas of road construction, airports, electricity, water and hospital projects. If their costs were to be calculated, it would reveal a colossal waste of scarce resources (Ikedianya, 1998; Eboh and Igwe, 2007). The question on the lips of every cost sensitive patriotic professional has been: were there no proper feasibility studies before executing these projects? It seems very strange and unfortunate that political expediency overrides every other consideration in the selection of projects for execution in Nigeria. Inother words, such projects are never implemented with the needs and aspirations of the would-be beneficiaries. Commenting on this lackadaisical attitude to project planning and implementation, Imaga, Igwe and Nwoji (2005), aptly stated that the European Scientific Journal May 2018 edition Vol.14, No.14 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 154 problem is that of poor conceptualization and management of development projects, most of which have inbuilt deceitful mechanism meant to serve and sub-serve selfish and self-centred objectives other than national interests and that of improving the lots of Nigerian people. In other climes these actions would have sent the perpetrators of such crimes against the masses to outright life imprisonment. Given the poor track record of project planning and implementation in Nigerian environment, the significance of sound project management practices cannot be over emphasized. Sound project management has gained popularity as a distinct management concept used to drive change objectives in business organisations and also the economic agenda of developing countries including Nigeria. Consequently, any research that attempts to analyze project planning and implementation in the context of international best practices would be meaningful to re-inventing administrative and transformational strategies, for sustainable project development and implementation. This paper is intended to fill this gap. The paper therefore seeks to explore the issues around project planning and implementation in Nigerian public sector in relation to international best practices in other climes especially the developed economies. The paper highlights the urgent need for value-driven project monitoring and evaluation especially the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) and the World Bank Models. The paper is divided into sections. The introductory section is followed by conceptual definitions which briefly discuss the concepts around the topic. Sections three and four present the methodology adopted and the literature review on project planning and implementation respectively.The section five throws light on the dynamics of project implementation and completion in Nigeria. Section six presents the proven international best practice success factors in project planning and execution. Section seven and eight respectively present the conclusion and the recommendations towards a value-driven project planning and implementation culture in Nigeria.

Literature review

Conceptual Review

Imaga, Igwe and Nwoji (2005) define project as a scientifically evolved work plan devised to achieve a specific objective within a specified period of time. For Gray and Larson (2008), a project is a complex, nonroutine, one-time effort limited by time, budget, resources and performance specifications designed to meet customer needs. While project has several definitions, a simple and relatively inclusive one is that a project is a sequence of tasks performed to achieve a unique goal within a specific time frame (Mingus, 2002). Uniqueness is the key word. It is what separates projects from operations and what makes them more difficu1t to manage. To standardize further on the definition of the word, the Project Management Institute (2008) European Scientific Journal May 2018 edition Vol.14, No.14 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 155 in its Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide defines a project as a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique value or service. Meredith and Mantel Jr.(2000) view projects as characterized by general attributes such as the purpose, life cycle, uniqueness, interdependencies and conflicts. Project management is the planning, directing and controlling of organization's resources for a relatively short term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives (Kerzner, 2002). For this paper project is viewed as a related set of tasks planned, performed and coordinated to achieve a specific objective or output at a given location within a limited scarce resource and period of time. For the Project Management Institute (2006) project management is "the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities, in order to meet or exceed stakeholders' needs and expectations. It is designed to make better use of existing resources by getting work to flow horizontally as well as vertically within the project organization. The growth of application of sound project management principles has come about through necessity than through desire. The economic environment in Nigeria and indeed other developing countries today characterized byfrequent changes in monetary and fiscal policies have made it more imperative for sound management of projects in business and public sectors. Project planning is concerned with establishing a predetermined course of action within a forecasted environment. Planning involves decision making of choosing alternative courses of actions to accomplish the project set objectives. Banjoko (2009) remarks that project planning involves all managerial activities necessary in structuring a course of action. Consequently, project planning in the project environment must be systematic, flexible enough to handle unique activities, disciplined through reviews, controls and ever ready to accept multifunctional inputs. Planning is never "etched on concrete". Project implementation in the public sector management represents a well-considered and thought-out plan of action required to deploy resources considered appropriate and adequate to achieve the desired objectives and quality specifications in an environment. A project is implemented through programs, activities and tasks that serve to deploy resources to interact within the environment.

International best practice for this paper would be seen as specifications, standards or benchmarks that have been agreed, promoted by academics, practitioners donors and stakeholders for achieving objectives in a stable and dependable environment. Project Planning and Implementation cannot succeed unless a good project manager is in control. A project manager is the individual responsible for the success of a project in terms of time, cost and technical performance (Ewurum, Eboh and Igwe, 2009). He provides the management and leadership necessary to bind the people and groups from different departments and European Scientific Journal May 2018 edition Vol.14, No.14 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 156 companies working on a project into one managerial organization and team. The project manager throughout the life cycle of the project is able to see the project as a whole and also see how the various parts fit together. He is like an "ombudsman" between the customer and the top-management. The project manager is a senior manager and therefore performs all the functions of a manager particularly as regards the success of the project.

Factors Necessary for Successful Project Implementation and Execution

Despite the challenges and failures, projects will remain the dominant means of organizing investment in the foreseeable future especially in the developing countries. They offer important advantages to all participants in development, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, Time Cost Building Resources Scope European Scientific Journal May 2018 edition

Vol.14, No.14 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 158 international donors, aid agencies and beneficiaries. This is because, by definition, they are or should be manageable units of activity. A properly designed project should be a related set of tasks co-ordinated to achieve a specific objective or output at a given location within a limited budget and period of time. The process of project implementation involves the successful development and introduction of projects in the organization currently, presents an on-going challenge for managers. The project implementation process is complex, usually requiring simultaneous attention to a wide variety of human, budgetary and technical variables. As a result, the organization's project manager is faced with a difficult job, characterized by role overload, frenetic activity, fragmentation and superficiality (Pinto and Levin 1987). Often the typical project manager has responsibility for successful project outcome without sufficient budget or people to handle all of the elements essential for project success. In addition, projects are often initiated in the context of a turbulent, unpredictable and dynamic environment. Consequently, the project manager would be well served by more information about those specific factors critical to project success. These critical factors are discussed as follows:

CHALLENGES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Nigeria faces numerous challenges in project management, including:

i. **Infrastructure Deficit:** The country has a significant infrastructure deficit, encompassing roads, power supply, water, and sanitation. Effective project management is crucial for addressing these deficits and ensuring the successful implementation of infrastructure projects.

ii. **Corruption and Bureaucracy:** Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles are persistent challenges in Nigeria. These issues can lead to delays, cost overruns, and the misallocation of resources, affecting the successful completion of projects.

iii. **Security Concerns:** Nigeria has grappled with security challenges in certain regions, particularly in the northeastern part of the country due to insurgency and militancy. These security concerns can disrupt project timelines and increase risks for project managers.

iv. **Skilled Workforce Shortage:** The availability of a skilled and competent workforce is crucial for successful project management. However, Nigeria faces a shortage of professionals with expertise in project management, engineering, and related fields.

MOST SUCCESSFUL PROJECT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES USED IN NIGERIA

i. **Government Commitment:** The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of effective project management and has taken steps to address the challenges faced, ensuring that projects are completed on time and within budget.

ii. **Capacity Building:** Various institutions and organizations in Nigeria have initiated training programs and workshops to equip professionals with the necessary skills to manage projects effectively, bridging the skills gap.

iii. **Technology Adoption:** The adoption of project management tools and technologies has improved collaboration, communication, and decision-making processes, enhancing the overall project execution.

iv. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Encouraging PPPs can help attract private sector expertise and investment, which can be pivotal in implementing large-scale projects effectively.

6. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ENHANCING PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Technology plays a crucial role in enhancing project management in Nigeria by:

i. **Improving Collaboration:** Technology has improved collaboration among team members, stakeholders, and clients, ensuring that everyone is informed and aligned throughout the project.

ii. **Enhancing Communication:** Technology has enhanced communication processes, reducing misunderstandings and miscommunications that can lead to project delays and cost overruns.

iii. Streamlining Processes: Technology has streamlined project management processes, reduced inefficiencies and improving the overall efficiency of project execution.

BENEFITS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) offer several benefits in project management in Nigeria, including:

i. Increased Efficiency: PPPs can bring in private sector expertise and resources, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of project execution.

ii. Reduced Costs: PPPs can reduce costs by leveraging private sector resources and expertise, which can lead to cost savings and improved project outcomes.

iii. Enhanced Accountability: PPPs can enhance accountability by ensuring that both public and private sector partners are held accountable for project outcomes and performance.

iv. Increased Investment: PPPs can attract private sector investment, which can be crucial in implementing large-scale projects and addressing Nigeria's infrastructure deficit.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

The main barriers to effective project management in Nigeria include:

i. Infrastructure Deficits: Inadequate infrastructure, especially in transportation and energy, can hinder project progress and increase costs.

ii. Corruption and Bureaucracy: Corruption and bureaucratic hurdles are persistent challenges in Nigeria, leading to delays, cost overruns, and the misallocation of resources.

iii. Security Concerns: Security challenges in certain regions of Nigeria can disrupt project timelines and increase risks for project managers.

iv. Skilled Workforce Shortage: The availability of a skilled and competent workforce is crucial for successful project management, but Nigeria faces a shortage of professionals with expertise in project management, engineering, and related fields.

v. Cultural Barriers: Cultural differences and miscommunication among team members can lead to misunderstandings and conflict, hindering project execution.

vi. Limited Resources: Projects are often launched without proper resource allocation, leading to budget overruns and delays.

vii. Inadequate Project Planning: Many projects in Nigeria lack a detailed and comprehensive plan, leading to poor execution and delays.

viii. Regulatory Complexities: Navigating Nigeria's regulatory landscape, characterized by bureaucracy and inconsistent policies, can be time-consuming and frustrating.

CONCLUSION

An effective state is the corner stone of successful economies. Different administrations in Nigeria have made concerted efforts to plan and execute development projects. More often than not these projects are riddled with rough shoddy planning and implementation problems. Management and delivery of projects by the three tiers of government have exhibited a high degree of inefficiency, a general lack of the desired capacities, institutional structures required to plan and implement projects that would improve the living standards of the Nigerian people. There is therefore the urgent need for European Scientific Journal May 2018 edition Vol.14, No.14 ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857- 7431 170 the Federal Government to constitute a transparent National Public Projects Implementation System (NPPIS) just like in other developed climes to check project planning and implementation abuses. It cannot continue to be business as usual.

The references compiled for this review underscore the multifaceted landscape of project management in Nigeria, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities within the sector. Nigeria's developmental aspirations are intricately tied to effective project management practices, which serve as a linchpin for overcoming obstacles such as infrastructure deficits, corruption, and security concerns. The insights gleaned from various studies emphasize the critical role of purposeful project management in driving sustainable development and economic growth in the nation.

Studies like those by Agwu (2018) and Chima (2019) delve into the specific challenges faced in project management, such as corruption and capacity building, while Awodele and Ayodele (2018) explore the transformative impact of public-private partnerships on infrastructure development. Furthermore, the influence of technology, as discussed by Olanrewaju (2019) and Ofori (2018), emerges as a crucial factor in enhancing project efficiency and effectiveness.

Moving forward, integrating sustainable practices, fostering innovation, and strengthening regulatory frameworks, as advocated by Oluwole (2017) and the World Economic Forum (2018), will be essential for advancing Nigeria's project management capabilities. These efforts are pivotal not only for addressing immediate challenges but also for positioning Nigeria as a hub of successful project execution on the global stage.

In conclusion, the synthesis of these references underscores the imperative for collaborative efforts between public and private sectors, investment in capacity building, and adoption of cutting-edge technologies to propel Nigeria towards sustainable development goals. By leveraging these insights and implementing strategic reforms, Nigeria can navigate its developmental journey with resilience and achieve lasting socio-economic progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. There is need to establish a transparent national public projects implementation system in the presidency powered by an act of the National Assembly. It will regulate projects and development projects planning and implementation.

ii. A careful risk management framework must be based on identification of the key factors and the inter-dependencies among these factors inherent in each project environment. This can be achieved by ascertaining the product of risk probability and impact of the project.

iii. There is need for improved effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation of project/ program. This can be done by timely communication of the results of M & E to the users for decision making purposes. It is said that communication in project management is the 'oil" that lubricates the project movement in the attainment of stated project objectives.

iv. Public projects typically have multiple stakeholders. There is need for engagement and subsequent management can be facilitated by providing accessible channels of information transfer between actors implementing projects and stakeholders.

v. There is an urgent need to check the incidence of accidental project managers. Public institutions can play a pivotal role in this regard with the enactment of project/program improvement and accountability act by the National Assembly.

vi. The Federal government can improve on efficient project delivery modes by massive infrastructural development in the critical sectors of the economy such as power, roads, education, communication and health.

vii. There is need to enshrine punitive actions against defaulting contractors, project managers, government officials responsible for project failures or abandonment in the constitution through legislation especially when it is established that such actions were as a result of corrupt and unethical conducts.

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