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Challenges of Social Sustainability Practice in Project Management

Review Paper

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Abstract

There is a major concern for social and environmental sustainability in project management. Pioneering solutions are needed to cope with the twenty-first century challenges of globalization especially project management. In the circumstances of the 21st century challenges, the organizations and countries from diverse milieu have started to review their sustainability and project supervision approaches. Even though two distinct key-elements of an organization, with importance attributable to the performance of an organization, they are interrelated, and sustainability can be integrated within project management. In order to evaluate this fact, the present study has conducted to identify the challenges of project management. The review paper was a documentary analysis typed. The study was conducted during the period between December-2017 and May-2018. From the result, some challenges of project management such as developing an understanding on project lifecycle, stakeholder management, and engagement, developing sustainability strategies, integration of social sustainability dimensions, developing sustainable procurement, and resource scarcity. However, project monitoring, and evaluating authority should be experienced, qualified and free from any kind of unethical behavior. Moreover, sufficient knowledge about the project management process as required for a project successful.

Keywords: Project management, sustainability, challenges, resources

1. Introduction

Project management is a vital step for the development of a country. Many projects are launched each and every year in many countries of the world. After successful completion of developmental projects, the long-term capacity of the works varies from organization to organization or country to country. The developed countries implement their projects with vision of long term. But some countries specially the developing countries complete their developmental projects; the works do not last many years in some extent.

However, sustainability should think about short and long consequences in actions rather than short-term gains (Garies *et al.,* 2011 cited in Silvius and Schipper, 2014). Sustainable development is reflecting the values and ethical thoughtfulness of society as a normative concept (Robinson, 2004 cited in Martens and Carvalho, 2016). Incorporation of sustainability

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dimensions in an organization is a balance, holistic and long-run ways to achieve benefit for current and future generations (WCED, 1987 cited in De Lange *et al.,* 2012).

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study aimed to identify the key challenges of project management and to provide recommendations to face the challenges successfully. The data were collected from the secondary sources and were analyzed to depict the major challenges of social sustainability on project management.

3. Literature Review

Sustainability is a complex term; extensive insights keen on sustainability as well as its practices (Marcelino-Sadaba, et al, 2015). The Brundtland commission defined the sustainability concept as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need" (Silvius and Nedeski, 2011: p.2; United Nations, 1987 cited in Sanchez, 2015: p.1). Since the publication of Brundtland report in 1987, the sustainability came into consideration in the project management as familiar typology of three pillars: economic, environment and social (Aarseth et al, 2017; Bostrom, 2012).

4. Methodology

The study was documentary analysis type. Data were collected from secondary sources like books, research reports, journal, internet etc. Critical research and review papers from 2011 to 2017 were considered to review the related issues in the present study-field.

5. Findings and Analyses

5.1. Developing Understanding on Project Lifecycle

A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a product or service or result (PMI, 2017: p.4). Projects themselves took outlast the impact of the three pillars of sustainability and project authority should bear the clear concept of project lifecycle (Sanchez, 2015). The importance of planning is comparatively prominent to other phases and it has notable influence in project success (Heravi *et al.,* 2015). The PMBOK guide also acknowledges that a project will be benefited if social needs are discussed in planning stage (Silvius and Schipper, 2014). Business Case addresses the total benefit of the project without considering the potential benefit of social aspects but principles of social sustainability need to be reflected in the project justification (Silvious and Schipper, 2014). However, Levitt (2007) opined that awareness of social sustainability practice still far from the whole project life cycle.

5.2. Stakeholder Management and Engagement

The stakeholder concept was first adopted in management aspects at the Stanford Research Institute in 1963 and it described as individuals or any group of people who are essential for an organization (Mok *et al.,* 2015; Oppong *et al.,* 2017). Moreover, Freeman (1984) defines the stakeholder as "who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (Mok *et al.,*2015: p.447; Oppong et al, 2017). Mok *et al.,* (2015) identifies four steps for Stakeholder Management Process as stakeholder identification, classification, and analysis as well as strategy development. The stakeholder engagement came under project management in 2006 (Mok *et al.,* 2015) and it includes communicating, involving as well as a developing relationship with stakeholders (Missonier and Loufrani-Fedida, 2014). Stakeholder engagement plays a vital role in project success (Heravi *et al.,* 2015) and an important variable for social sustainability (Martens and Carvalho, 2016). Moreover, Tinoco et al., (2016) noted those stakeholders are the socially, economically and politically important for project success. Project failure is the result of

inefficient project management practice, and social relation with stakeholder (Missonier and Loufrani-Fedida, 2014). A project manager has to simplify the stakeholder input in project life cycle to achieve the project success, (Heravi *et al.*, 2015; Oppong *et al.*, 2017).

5.3. Developing Sustainability Strategies in Project

Sustainability emerged as one of the guiding ideologies of policy formulation, and consequently sustainable development depend on integration of the three pillars (Gawel *et al.*, 2015). Silverman et al., (2014) opined that sustainability is a process; there is no end point and the result of an assessment should treat as partial. Epstin (2018) opined that developing sustainability strategies is frequently a significant challenge for authority. It also noted that strategy depends on internal and external factors where internal factors depend on management commitment, and external factors come from government regulation, marketplace and competitors (Epstin, 2018). Hicks *et al.,* (2016) argued that government and society should address the social concept in their policy to ensure the sustainable future for human and nature. There are challenges for a company or organizations have to consider the host countries strategy in their own strategy (Aarseth *et al.,* 2016).

5.4. Integration of Social Sustainability Dimensions in Project

Different types of organization like multi-national corporations, non-government organizations, and international governmental organization are faced challenges to incorporate and practice as well as in partner organizations (De Lange *et al.,* 2012). Epstin (2018) opined that determining the best ways to incorporate the sustainability dimensions for improving the performance in all parts of organization is still a challenge. Sanchez (2015) introduced the balance scorecard (BSC) that allows translating a measurement strategy to operational terms. Moreover, Sanchez (2015) elaborate how to report social performance in a strategy with other dimensions where commitment focuses as a key factor. However, Business model innovation is dramatically recognized as a key element to deliver a systematic social and environmental sustainability in industry (Bocken *et al.,* 2014).

5.5. Developing Sustainable Procurement

In a contemporary competitive world, the notion of project management become changed in multi-dimensions, especially keen on procurement management (Lock, 2013).The purpose of good procurement management is to obtain a standard quality products and services within just-in-time as well as fulfil the organizational objectives but now most of the organizations try to ensure the best value for money and maintain the supply chain through developing relationships effectively (Baily *el at.,* 2015).

Siddiqui (2017) opined that the procurement includes contracting as specification, solicitation, sources and contract management. Siddiqui (2017) opined that only public sector procurements represent almost 40-50% of the world economies. In addition, Siddiqui (2017) mentioned that in manufacturing sectors supply chain management bears almost 70-80% of organizational budget. But corruption in public procurement affects the judicial expense of money, social justice (Siddiqui, 2017). The eradication of corruption is becoming a key challenge of organization that faces worldwide and treated it in project management as "elephant in the room" that needs to be addressed (Locatelli *et al.,* 2017). In ethical perspective on the supply chain, buyers should play a vital role to ensure the social sustainability in sourcing (Huq *et al.,* 2014) and also protect unethical supplier selection (Silvius and Schipper, 2014). Significant failures in social aspects are happened in the sub-supplier supply chains (Wilhelm *et al.,* 2016). Evidence shows that poor management of social sustainable issues leads the suicidal record in apple sub-supplier Foxcom (Wilhelm *et al.,* 2016).

5.6. Resource Scarcity

In developing countries or organization face challenges in resource scarcity, especially in textile and clothing industry (Soundararajan and Brammer, 2018). For achieving and managing sustainability with social sustainability, it is urgent required for skill, resource, knowledge, and organizational capability (Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen, 2014). It also seen that employees are not highly educated as well as inadequate trained officials or lack of strategies that impacted on social sustainability practice (Soundararajan and Brammer, 2018). But the acquirement of social sustainability is the alleyway depended and it may call for well-built learning (Soundararajan and Brammer, 2018). In addition, Mair and Marti (2009) cited in Soundararajan and Brammer (2018) also opined that lack of institutional arrangement is one of the key challenges for developing countries.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear from all the discussion that project management process is not universal method. It changes case by case nature. Sustainable development is desired to all. So, sustainable project management is an urgent need to all sectors. Projects are always designed to achieve ultimate goal and objectives that relates to the beneficiaries. Thus, end beneficiaries or interested groups should have important focus throughout the management process. Ownership building of the stakeholders or local interested groups ultimately wills success the project. However, the study recommends some points to be noted. For example, stakeholders, especially the beneficiaries or interested group participation from the problem identification to planning, execution and closing of a project must be ensured through a transparent way. All projects must be analyzed in the view of economic, environment and ecological, social viability during the initiation and planning process. Project manager must have sufficient knowledge about the project management process. Project personnel must also have specific task-oriented knowledge as required for a project. For successful project management, a project must be time bound, cost bound and quality bound. Uniform flow of project funds and input measures must be ensured. Finally, business model innovations for sustainability create the significantly positive or significantly reduce the negative impact on society that captures the value for an organization (Bocken *et al.,* 2014).

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