The Impact of Cross-Cultural Factors on Heavy Engineering Projects: Case Kenya and UK

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ABSTRACT

Managing in today’s environment provides many challenges and project teams are frequently confronted with situations which challenge the traditional ways projects have been managed. Project success is dependent upon the effective management of people and at the heart of this process is client leadership. Terms such as responsive project manager, issue resolution and value criteria are increasing in popularity, however, dealing with the mutual inconsistency these three terms provides a challenge to most of today’s multinational construction organizations. In spite of recent extensive research, there has been little consideration given to how to classify success factors that influence cross-cultural project team performance. The reported research employed both in-depth interviews and postal questionnaires methodologies to capture the relevant experiences of senior managers in Kenya and the UK. The results were grouped under three major headings: (i) monitoring project team performance; (ii) achieving team goals; and (iii) maintaining team affiliations. The project leaders agreed that successful cross-cultural project team performance can be achieved by creating an effective integrated cross-cultural construction team. The findings accentuates a need for future research into project success factors to investigate the experiences of virtual project leaders and the difficulties faced in realizing effective project team performance.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Team Performance, Kenya, Project Integration, Project Success, UK

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INTRODUCTION

The link between project management and the development of construction projects in organizations already have been analyzed (Betts & Lansley 1995; Chen & Chen 2007; Crawford, 2002; Evaristo and Fenema 1999; Ng et al., 2009; Yng Ling et al., 2009; Wang and Huang 2006). However, these analyses do not relate to the presentation and discussions of research data specifically obtained from Kenya, but tend to be based on an interpretation of the reasons for the success and failure of construction in Kenya. From the reviewed literature, it emerged that project performance can be illustrated in two key ways (Khang and Moe 2008; Dvir et al., 1998; Nguyen et al., 2004). Firstly, models, which help organizations provide effective project management performance can lead to positive results regardless of the success or otherwise of the project being managed. Secondly, success factors of project management performance may influence the overall outcome of a project. As project environments have become more demanding and complex, the need for better project management techniques have increased as well.

As globalization advances at an ever-increasing rate, the amount of international or cross national construction activity is increasing. Large domestic and international organizations are continuing to establish overseas subsidiaries. At the same time, any governments, particularly in developing countries, are seeking international aid in terms of project finance, technology and know-how, in order to maximize their development. Unfortunately, the inherent project complexity, uncertainty and dynamics of most construction projects can create excessive difficulties for even the best multinational construction organizations in developed and developing countries. It is widely accepted that a project is successful when finished on time, within a budget, in accordance with environmental and legal specifications, and to the client’s satisfaction (Ochieng, 2008). One could therefore suggest that due to a number of factors such as resource accountability, cross-cultural team performance and project success need to improve, especially in heavy engineering construction projects.

A significantly larger body of knowledge has been built up on the generic and critical factors responsible for the project success or failure. Research carried out over the last four decades can be found in Pinto and Slevin (1987), Belassi and Tukel (1996), Cooke-Davies (2002), Westerveld (2003), Yu et al., (2005), Baiden et al., (2006), Fortune and White (2006), Toor and Ogunlana (2008), Ahadzie et al., (2008). From the viewpoints relevant to managing project teams, the most prominent studies of the period suggest that these factors are closely interconnected, and at times overlapping, and can be grouped in five categories: collectivism, higher job satisfaction, higher empathy satisfaction, team selection and composition. Much of the published literature on project success factors fails to examine the success factors that influence projects in a developing and developed country (Belout & Gauvreau, 2004; Bryde & Robinson, 2005; Diallo & Thuillier, 2004; Lyer & Jha, 2005; Westerveld, 2003). The reported research surveyed senior managers
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