

The Impact of Leadership Styles on Project Success

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of leadership style, trait and competences that an effective leader must have, when and how to apply them towards achieving project success. The study adopted the conceptual literature review (synthesis) of related literature on leadership styles, traits, competences and how these influence project successes was conducted. Resources were identified through electronic databases provided by the University of Dundee. Data bases utilized includes Google scholar and web of science. The search was entirely constraint to only reviewing articles published in English language which were further analyzed critically. The study disclosed that leadership style has a positive impact on project success and that the style adopted by a project manager is influenced by various factors such as personal traits. It was also discovered that there are numerous leadership styles (transactional, charismatic, democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire), but are only applicable either base on circumstance, team or project type. It was concluded that Personal traits lead to competences which in turn influence the choice of leadership style and project success. To achieve project success, a project leader must be adaptive to range of styles and can identify which one suits a situation. The combination of technical, emotional and conceptual competence is necessary for the project leader to be effective and often leads to project success.

Keywords: leadership styles, traits, competences, project success, project manager.

Introduction

Project management is a practice that is currently experiencing exponential growth, applicable to numerous types of facilities. The process is usually headed by a project manager who is responsible for the monitoring and execution of the entire project and managing the project team towards successful completion of the project (Novo et al, 2017). Though the project manager's leadership style, skills and traits are greatly not considered in the project success literature as a success factor (Turner & Muller, 2005), since they are regarded as managers rather than leaders (Russels & Stoufer, 2003), their inability to recognize themselves & their leadership styles as factors necessary for project success (Turner & Muller, 2005). Conversely, project managers are recognized as leaders not managers for their role in managing the traditional triple golden triangle (budget, schedule & quality), managing change (influencing others), building relationships within team members to enhance performance and achieve project success (Pandya, 2014), motivates, inspire, employ several tactics and strategies towards performing necessary task for goal accomplishment (Prabhakar, 2005). Moreover, several studies have shown that leadership styles, traits, competences and skills of project managers among other factors have a great influence on project success (Chinowsky et al, 2007; Ozorovskaja et al, 2007; Giritli & Civan, 2008; Ogunlana, 2011; Yang et al, 2011), which are applicable at different situations and project type (Young & Dulewicz, 2009; Muller & Turner, 2010) and are required by project managers of the 21st century (Toor & Ofori, 2008). Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine the impact of leadership style, trait and competences that an effective leader must have, when and how to apply them towards achieving

project success. The paper is structured into five sections, the second section is review of literature & critical analysis (leadership styles, traits, & competences; types of leadership styles, leadership style & project success), third section is the methodology, fourth section is discussion of findings and lastly the conclusion.

Research Problem

There is a persistent failure of projects both locally and internationally due to the inability of organizations to apply appropriate leadership styles, project techniques and methods. This is because most organizations and projects managers lay much emphasis on technical and managerial aspect of the project. There is an estimated project failure of about 66% to 99% globally (Standish Group, 2009). These failures may be attributed to several factors such as inadequate information on the relationship between leadership styles and project success, when and how to apply the appropriate leadership style required for the successful completion of the project.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of whether project success is influenced by leadership styles, traits and competences and to further examine how and when each style is to be adopted. The co-objective is to systematically review related literature on the link between leadership styles and project success.

Research Questions

The key research questions for this research are:

- Does leadership style, traits and competences influence project success?
- What leadership style is best for project success?

Leadership Style, Traits & Competences

The success of a project manager to some extent depends on his personal traits which has a great influence on his leadership skills (Kendra & Taplin, 2004). Another strong trait that a project leader should possess is being organized. Organized leadership is a necessary requirement for project leaders in order to optimize their operations regarding scope, schedule, quality and speed (Dickerson, 2010). According to Larson & Gray's (2014) successful projects are directly linked to certain traits which are core for effective leadership and includes; integrity, proactiveness, emotional intelligence, optimistic, business oriented, time management, system thinker and being a politician. Moreover, the desirable attributes possessed by a project leader depends on the type of project and have a greatest impact in achieving success (Hossein et al, 2011). According to Hossein et al, (2011) these traits are exhibited based on the type of project which includes integrity, meticulousness and intelligence for urgent projects; integrity, meticulousness and creativity for complex projects; integrity, creativity and intelligence for innovative projects; integrity, persistence and meticulousness for standard projects. Therefore, it can be deduced that traits of project leaders are influenced by their personality and that there is a relationship between traits and project type. It can also be observed that integrity is the most common desirable trait across project type.

Traits plays a vital role towards the development of competence, which is considered as a critical factor for project success (Muller & Turner, 2010; Madter et al (2012), Gallagher et al (2015), Maqbool et al (2017). The project leader's competence (s) directly emanates from already performed roles, functions and appropriate tasks implementation (Anantamula, 2010; Cobb, 2012) which can be sub-divided into hard competences (technical, vocational, functional and professional skills required to address technical issues), soft competences (social, interpersonal and behavioural skills required to

enhance team work, cooperation and motivation) and conceptual competences (strategic decision-making skills) (Trivellas & Drimoussis, 2013). Thus, competences are products of personality traits, and have a great impact on the choice of leadership style a project leader adopts in order to achieve project success. Traits and competences have a significant impact on leadership style and lead to project success.

Type of Leadership Styles

Leadership style is a vital and essential factor for achieving success in any type of activity especially when it involves team work (Belout & Gauvreau, 2004; Turner & Müller, 2005; Ogunlana, 2008; Feger & Thomas, 2012). Project management success largely depends on the project leader (Munns & Bjeimi, 1996) who exhibit range of leadership styles and apply them in the right circumstances (Zhang, 2009). Numerous leadership styles have been identified in several project management literature some of which includes;

Transactional Leadership: Relationship based on exchange between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2000). It is a process that motivates followers with extrinsic form of reward such as pay, promotions, extra payment for performing their tasks effectively and efficiently. Subordinates who strictly follow the laid down policies and procedures by the leaders towards goal achievement are appreciated through recognition and praises while they receive punitive and negative actions for inability to perform as expected (Boseman, 2008). The type of behaviours that exist may be in the form of interactive goal setting, personal recognition and personal reward (Price, 2009). This style often leads to result achievement, profitability and efficiency. However, it limits personal growth, restrict innovation, flexibility and individuality (Bass, 1990), and its preference on projects that are simple in nature (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004). Several studies revealed that transactional style of leadership impact positively on job performance efficiency and goal achievement which often lead to project success, although it may also have negative impact on employee motivation and morale (Boseman, 2008). Therefore, it can be observed that this type of leadership style is primarily task-oriented, focused on result achievement, based on specified regulations and instructions without concern on the employee's motivation & satisfaction on the job.

Transformational Leadership: This type of style brings about favourable change on followers through being inspired by the leader (Cherry, 2017), who listen to the subordinates with attention and assist them towards developing their leadership skill (Bass, 1995; Price, 2009). Transformational leaders display several attributes such as trust, respect, vision, charisma to inspire & motivates subordinates which in turn enhance appropriate attitudes and job performance (Bass, 1990), making it the most effective style accepted to both superiors and followers (Fiol et al., 1999; Lowe et al., 1996) and found to be an indicator for achieving team performance and project success (Keller, 1992), which is more suitable to be exhibited by project managers (Keegan & Den, 2004), more preferred style on projects that are complex in nature (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004). Thus, it can be observed from the above that, transformational leadership style is people-oriented and tends to boost employee morale, pride and performance through building trust and innovation which often leads to achieving team collaboration, performance and project success. However, it is meant to be successful mostly on complex project which implies that it might not be successful in other forms of project that are less complex or simple in nature, signifying its success on project type.

Charismatic Leadership: This type of leadership style tends to enhance the commitments of followers towards achieving desired result through the leaders charisma (Price, 2009) which is more suitable and operational in environment that are found to be stressful to followers (i.e where a lot of obstacle and constraint exist making work performance difficult) and especially in certain

circumstance where subordinates are looking forward to their leaders to help them in times of difficulty (Northhouse, 2000). Therefore, it can be deduced that, charismatic leadership style indicates that the leader is a role model (having certain features on the job such as; technical knowledge, charisma, managerial ability) and must be seen as better than the followers which sometimes is not realizable and often leads to delay in terms of operation. This style will be more effective and works very well for the fact that it establishes value conformity (bringing together values of followers and that of the organization).

Democratic Leadership: This type of leadership is highly concerned with group effort and joint decision-making process which emanates from active individual participation, cooperation, collaboration and involvement in teams' action. The style give room for team members or followers to decide on what goal to achieve and how to efficiently and effectively it can be achieved, stimulating follower's self-direction and actualization (Bartol et al, 2003). The leader is directly open-minded and trust his followers which can lead to collaboration and team innovativeness (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Anantatmula, 2010) and is applicable mostly in the planning stage of the project (Muller & Turner, 2010). Joint decision-making enhances the understanding of team members of their expected tasks, room for gaining experience and finally improve their commitment on the job (Gibson et al, 1992) which in turn leads to project success. Therefore, the democratic style brings about effective communication and builds the spirit of team work among members thereby leading to a form of coaching and achieving team success which can be translated to project success.

Autocratic Leadership: The leader using this style tends to be strict and highly task-oriented and is the direct opposite of democratic style. Work structure, specifications, decision making, and implementation are sole responsibilities of the leader (Lamb, 2013). There is a distinction between leaders and followers. Expectations/tasks are clearly defined, procedures for task performance clearly stated as well as their completion time and by who, decisions are made without team consultation and the teams progress is the responsibility of the leader who may sometimes accept contributions from the team (Evans, 2002). This style is most appropriate to team that is task oriented and at the project implementation stage (Turner & Muller, 2005). The team members rarely engage in communication with one another in relation to the task instead they communicate with their leaders (Evans, 2002). Therefore, one can deduced that the style will provide efficiency and effectiveness especially in terms of task performance but will negatively affect team work which is regarded as a critical factor for securing project success.

Laissez-faire Leadership: This type of style authorizes the team in developing decisions on its own without the influence of the leader since he has no power (Boonyachai, 2011). The leader here is termed as a figure head who only watch and sometimes can responds to query, provides relevant information and offer group re-enforcement. The followers are responsible for decisions and will have to find alternative sources in order to enhance their decision-making process. According to Turner & Muller (2005) it is suitable to use only when there is a collective team and at the commencement stage of the project. However, it was rejected as an option that is practicable to any project team (Van Soest, 2013) and has no correlation with project success (Liphadzi et al, 2015). Thus, this style is considered as not a contributing factor to achieving project success for making the leader a dormant participant who does not play any role in terms of decision- making.

Leadership Style and Project Success

Leadership style is defined as a type of relationship that a leader uses to accomplish a common goal through various methods, techniques and ways in engaging people to work together (Fiedler, 1974). It is conceived as a major critical factor in determining project success (Turner & Muller, 2005; Feger & Thomas, 2012) and cannot be under-stated (Turner, 2005). Project leaders apply various styles

ranging from autocratic, democratic, charismatic, transformational, laissez-faire leadership styles (Turner & Muller, 2005) with each of them impacting differently on project performance, while some enhance project success achievement, others tend to hinder project success thereby leading to project failure and dissatisfaction (Schmid & Adams, 2008).

Project success is defined as achieving the golden constraint triangle of scope, cost and time (Meredith & Mantel, 2012), including the satisfaction of various stakeholders and meeting end users' requirements (Muller et al, 2012). This success is greatly influenced by the project managers ability to apply different leadership styles at different situations and for different project types (Muller & Turner, 2007), making the project manager's effectiveness depending on several situations and team attributes (Larson & Gray, 2014). To be successful, project managers need to be flexible to properly adjust to the most appropriate leadership style in response to changes in certain situations (Prabhakar, 2005; Muller & Turner, 2007). Thus, it can be deduced that there exists no universal leadership style for all project types and situations to achieve success. Project success, therefore, depends on the project manager's ability to evaluate situations correctly and his/her personal prejudices and flexibility on the best choice of style.

Research by Jiang (2014) disclosed that there is a positive relationship between leadership styles adopted by project managers and project success. According to Gorog (2013a) project manager's leadership style has a considerable impact on both project delivery, project lifecycle and project success. Similarly, Bass (2010) opines that project manager's leadership style positively contribute to team work, performance, members satisfaction, perceived effectiveness of the leader and enhance project success. Therefore, it can be deduced from this researches that leadership style has impact on several variables such as individuals, team work and even the leader himself which invariably leads project success.

Methodology

The general objective of the study is to examine the impact of leadership styles on project success. A conceptual literature review (synthesis) of related literature on leadership styles, traits, competences and how these influence project successes was conducted. Resources were identified through electronic databases provided by the University of Dundee. Data bases utilized includes Google scholar and web of science. Key words include leadership style, trait, project manager, competences and project success and were also used to search for useful information. The search was entirely constraint to only reviewing articles published in English language and were further analyzed. The study provided additional value to the existing literature by evidently disclosing the relationship between leadership styles, traits, competences and project success.

Analysis & Discussion of Findings

The literature disclosed that leadership style has a positive impact on project success and that the style adopted by a project manager is influenced by various factors such as personal traits. Most common traits are integrity, intelligence, organization, meticulousness, which are positively correlated to project success, and are exhibited on the type of project (urgent, complex, innovative and standard) with integrity as the most desirable to all types of projects. These traits lead to the development of competences which significantly influence projects success. Competences discovered include hard (ability to deal with technical issues), soft (ability to cooperate with others, people oriented and emotional intelligence) and conceptual (ability to make strategic decisions) which a project manager must possess in order to achieve success in managing project. It was also discovered that there are numerous leadership styles (transactional, charismatic, democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire), but are only applicable either base on circumstance, team or project

type. This implies that there is no universal style for every situation, requiring project managers to have a range of leadership styles and the ability to employ each style appropriately in varying situations. Turner & Pearce (2011) disclosed that, the key to project success and performance is leadership style, traits and competence. Therefore, leadership styles play a vital role towards project success and can be considered a success factor regardless of team composition and type of project.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that, Personal traits lead to competences which in turn influence the choice of leadership style and project success and that leadership styles have significant impact on project success and because it seems to be intangible, it makes it difficult to be implemented as a success factor. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand that various leadership styles have been identified but are only applicable either base on the project type or phase, because it is elusive to have an ideal style for all situations.

Recommendations

- To achieve project success, a project leader must be adaptive to range of styles and can identify which one suits a situation.
- The combination of technical, emotional and conceptual competence is necessary for the project leader to be effective and often leads to project success.

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