

Managing Project Team in Local Government

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Abstract

The paper carried a distilled analysis of activities of managing project team in the local government and discovered that managing project team is indispensable in local governments because of its expertise in project execution; its professionalism in project conception and Implementation; the technical nature of projects; The paper therefore recommended that there is need to make managing project team a permanent structure in local government and support the team with adequate finance by the chief executives of our local government.

Introduction

Any Local Government that is desirous of improving the living standard and conditions of its people must of necessity accomplish this task through development programme. A development programme of any local government normally breaks down into specific, identifiable, self-contained but well – integrated development projects. The project activities, if effectively and meticulously implemented will contribute to the achievement of the overall development programme of the local government. In other words, projects are the implemented or actionable elements or activities that make up development programmes of a local government.

In the history of existence of local governments in Nigeria, there have existed uncountable development programmes and projects with the objectives of achieving projected targets and goals. Some of these projects and programmes were fairly managed while some others failed as a result of multidimensional factors, which include ineffective management and the phenomenon of urgency attached to positive execution of projects. But across the broad spectrum of the African continent, there is shift in emphasis from project initiation and fund raising towards effective project management. As Amujiri (2004) noted, this development is instrumental to a host of changes that have taken place at this level of government. In fact, both governmental and non-governmental agencies have over the past two decades stressed the importance of effective, efficient and result – oriented project management at local government level as a way of making the impact of government felt

at the grassroots. Indeed, given the fact that most rural areas lack the basic social services needed for meaningful existence, the task of fashioning appropriate strategy for maintaining the available ones becomes a development out of necessity.

This paper therefore, is an attempt to briefly engage in the discourse of managing the project team of local government in order to translate projects into reality. In addressing the above, the paper tends to raise the following questions.

1. What does the terms: project, programmes, project management and managing project team means?
2. what does managing a project team require?
3. of what relevance is effective project team management to the success or otherwise of development projects in local government?
4. what are the challenges facing managing project team?

Conceptual Clarification

A programme is a coherent set of policies, activities and instruments designed to achieve a specific time – bound development objectives. As Okoli (2008) rightly noted, programmes consider the ill – structured nature of development and sectional inter – linkages and communities.

Project is defined as a set of organized activities directed to achieve specific objectives within a given period of time and financial budget.

According to Gittinger (1981) it is the smallest operational element prepared and implemented as a separate entity within a programme. It is clear from the above, that there are a functional relationship between programmes and project. Projects translate programmes into reality.

Project management as the name connotes, refers to the network of managerial activities needed for translating and transforming project plans or proposals into action. As Ogunna (1988) observes, it involves the subordination of group activity wherein the manager plans, organize, staff and controls human and

material resources to achieve an organization. Project management is a complex series of administrative action, which involves project initiation, financing, execution, supervision and evaluation, aimed at completing a project at an acceptable time and according to specification and with minimal cost.

Managing a project team is a concept encompassing a gamut of activities and processes, which are handled by a team or a group to ensure the success of a project. It covers all activities from the conceptualization, planning to organizing, reporting, and controlling through implementation to appraisal or evaluation of the project. Effective a project team management involves getting the members of the team involved in and committed to all the stages in the project execution

What is required in Managing a Project Team?

Effective and satisfactory execution of projects will lead cumulatively to the attainment of the overall goal of the development programme of the local government, which is reducing rural – urban migration by improving the living standard of its rural population. When the living standard of the people is substantially improved through the activities of the local government projects, there will be no compelling reason for the able bodied members of the local government to migrate to urban centers, thereby compounding urban problems.

We can therefore state unequivocally that well – articulated, well – managed and well- executed projects are the oil that lubricate the wheel of development programmes.

Given the centrality of projects in the development process, the conceptualization, packaging and management become a veritable and tasking enterprise, requiring and commanding a lot of expertise, skills and techniques. Managing a project team therefore, requires, involving project management team at the conceptualization/planning stage. Their contributions are needed during the “project start-up meeting” where the aims, objectives and

scope of the project are discussed. At this definition stage, team members are properly briefed on the tasks and work involved.

It requires the establishment of breakdown structure team. The breakdown structure team members should review each task in detail and report on the feasibility, risks resources and time frame to the project manager.

Managing a project requires pooling of resources, not just money and other materials, but more importantly, of requisite human resources to manage them effectively and efficiently.

It requires other series of activities which include the following

- a. Identification of project activities and determination of programmes specifications in terms of time, cost and quality standards.
- b. Allocation of task and responsibilities to the group members.
- c. Monitoring of performance, and progress review of achievement of targeted goals.
- d. Adjustment of specified standards in line with reality.
- e. Project completion and disbandment of project execution group.

In the final analysis for the managing project team to be considered successful, the criterion of time, efficiency, effectiveness and quality service delivery among others are to be satisfied. This fact, is important because some public officials are in the habit of stage-managing the commissioning of project whenever the Head of State or Governors are visiting their areas of jurisdiction for impressionistic purposes. This usually happens when in the name of meeting the deadline for completion and commissioning of projects, they over – look performance and execution standards or specification and settle for completion.

Why Managing Project Team is Necessary.

A well – articulated, well – integrated and well – executed projects are the oil that lubricates the wheel of development programmes. Given the centrality of projects in the development

process, the idea of managing project team becomes a development out of necessity. The following accounts for its necessity.

Avoiding unnecessary bureaucratization

Opinion analysts and scholars like Levine (1988), Okoye (1997) Ogunna (1986) Ukwu (1984) among others are of the opinion that project teams are inaugurated in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucratization prevalent in our ministries. In line with the above views, Ugwu (2008) argues that project teams are inaugurated because “formal and normal ministries or government departmental structures are usually too rigid, conservative, unduly bureaucratic and legalistic to make for speedy dispensation of problems requiring urgent attention”. In a similar observation, scholars like Okeke (2001) Obasi (1998), Viswasam (1978) among others in their individual observations noted that project managing teams are planning and implementation structures enabling organizations to coordinate and direct their resources and skills better, managing with greater dispatch and ease and tackling problems arising during the execution of any project.

The need for quick results.

The relevance of managing project teams has long been underscored by social analysts and government related agencies and commission. This was instrumental to setting up of Udoji public service review commission of 1974, which strongly advocated the use of managing project team management technique, as one of the essential mechanism of achieving quick results, in execution of development programmes of government.

Technicality of some projects.

Another justification for institution of managing project team is because of technicality of projects. Most projects are technically loaded requiring and commanding a lot of expertise, skills and techniques that leaving it to all Dick and Harry will be counter productive. The functions of managing project teams are as diverse

as there are different types of projects, and their peculiar environmental dynamics.

Application of cost – Benefit Analysis.

Rational application of knowledge of cost – benefit analysis accounts for the establishment of project managing team. Most members of the team are experts and professionals in their various fields. They, more often than not apply cost- benefit analysis strategy in the management of projects in the local government. As the name connotes, cost-benefit analysis involves the identification and quantification in Naira of the benefits and the costs involved in a proposed action, and then choosing the alternative project whose benefits are greater than the cost involved. The cost-benefit approach helps in assessing the desirability of projects in the public as opposed to the private sector; identification of costs and benefits; measurement of costs and benefits; measures the effect of time in investment appraisal and presentation of results – the investment criterion. The technique provides better and rational decision – making device to the problem of resources allocation in the management of local government projects. Cost –benefit analysis will help to determine if a project will continue to be executed, maintain or whether it should be stopped automatically.

Heavy reliance on management by objectives.

Another relevance of managing project team is their heavy reliance in management by objectives. Management by objective according to Ejiofor (1980) is a system of management, which aims at improving the performance of an organization by motivating, assessing and training its employees through integrating their personal goals with the objectives of their organization. It is a management strategy whereby superior and subordinate managers of an organization agree on its broad goals, translate these goals into a chain of specific short-term goals. The heavy reliance of project managing team on management by objectives is developmentally significant as it will help define an individual's major areas of responsibility in an organization in terms of result expected and

continually review the accomplishment of such subordinate; use goal accomplishment as the sole basis of assessing and rewarding the subordinate; improve employee motivation; improve communication between managers and subordinates; judge employees on the basis of clearly stated objectives etc.

Challenges Facing Managing Project Team

Lack of Adequate Information

One of the major challenges facing managing project team is lack of adequate information. As Amujiri (2004) rightly noted, successful managing project team requires a great deal of accurate and relevant information. The level of rationality of a project depends on the amount of relevant and accurate information available. The success in the execution of projects equally depends on availability of adequate information. One of the most important causes of faulty management and consequent failure of project is inadequate and inaccurate information. Project managers in the local government should keep in their store accurate records of the various aspects of its operations and relevant information about their socio-economic, geo-political and cultural environment of its area before a project is sited in such area. This will help in proper management of such project

Inadequate Finance

Another big challenge confronting managing project team is lack of adequate finance to execute identified projects. Local government project team managers lack adequate finance. This is because local governments lack solid financial base to manage effectively their projects. As Ogunna (1998) noted, revenue collection is uncertain and haphazard in most local governments. The experience is that only those whose collection are more or less automatic, i.e. those whose payers have a strong incentive to pay or are otherwise obliged to pay, get collected anywhere near the estimate. Besides that, most rural areas are in deplorable state of poverty with the result that there is absence of reasonable tenements worthy of valuation and rating. Some internal revenue sources of

local governments are generally poor, inelastic and difficult to collect. Sometimes the expenditure to be incurred in collecting revenue from a particular revenue source would far exceed the expected proceeds from that revenue source. Besides that there is high incidence of corruption, fraud and embezzlement among revenue officials. The level of rate evasion is notoriously high. All these have resulted in poor finance and have consequently affected adversely the managing project in local governments.

The Ad-hoc nature of the team

Ugwu (2008) observes that the ad-hoc nature of the operations of managing project teams constitutes its own challenges and problems. Since the project team disbanded immediately after the execution of the development scheme, the other important stages in project cycle delivery, as operation, maintenance and post – project impact evaluation procedures are quickly abandoned and neglected. The obvious consequence of it is that local government is full of abandoned projects, and those not abandoned lacks adequate maintenance.

Absence of full community involvement

One of the cardinal objectives of creating local government is to serve the interest of local communities and siting of project in their areas is a practical demonstration technique employed to serve their interests. It, therefore, follows that local communities should be involved in management of projects located in their communities. But regrettably, aloofness and communication gap exist between the inhabitants and project management team in local governments.

In fact, in Nigerian local government development programmes execution, it has been noted that the project team ignores or downplays the participation of the local people (the main beneficiaries of the project) in the planning and implementation process. This grass-root alienation in project affair is caused occasionally by the managing team, not wanting the rural populace to know the project capital outlay. With this financial

ignorance of the beneficiaries, Ugwu (2008) asserted, shoddy jobs are quickly packaged and delivered, with a lot of money saved by the managing. Sometimes, projects, sited in a particular locality are at variance with the priorities of the people as they are not involved and this result in vandalization. Once the community is not involved, they will contribute directly or indirectly to the failure of such project but if they are fully involved, they will see it as their duty to bring about the success of such project

Contractors' influence

Another big challenge facing managing project team is contractors' influence. It has been observed that, in cases where contractors are assigned projects with an attached government appointed monitoring team, such contractors always overwhelm the monitoring team, making it ineffective. Such influence or domination hinders adversely managing project team into not monitoring project effectively.

Adoption of Advanced Techniques.

One of the major problems facing managing project team in Nigeria is the "Wholesale importation" of technique used by developed countries. Ogunna (1991) gave the following reasons why projects fail in Nigeria. The paucity of resources directly related to Nigerian situation and environment

- a. A heavy reliance on the so-called foreign experts and
- b. Failure to involve the grassroots people in planning and managing the project affecting them.

Lack of culture of continuity and interference

We do not have culture of administrative continuity in Nigeria. We have constant change of administration in our political system. Each administration will like to initiate its own project instead of completing the existing ones. In a bid to have a project of their own, it has become the norm of most administrations not to spend meaningfully in managing project it inherited. In fact, most administration in Nigeria particularly in

local government system likes the projects of their predecessor to collapse so that the incumbent can use it as a campaign strategy.

Lack of appropriate utilization of programmes evaluation and review technique (PERT)

Another big challenge facing project management team in our local government system in Nigeria today is lack of appropriate utilization of programme evaluation and review technique (PERT). This was originally developed in the late 1950s as a planning and schedule technique but has today been expanded to be involved in project management, especially at local government level. The procedure starts with a clear statement of the objective of the project then a list of all activities or events required in completing the project. This will help to know whether the project meets the original specification. With PERT, progress is constantly being reviewed with a view to introducing a more functioning and rewarding technique.

Human factors

Managing project team is not done by gods or angels but human beings. Thus, they are often influenced by their own values, likes, prejudices, attitudes and norms. These situations results in those, involved in managing a project responding to their own personal value and attitudes. Sometimes, when available data and din formation show clearly the best and appropriate way to manage a project, the project management team disregards this and makes the choice based on their personal values and preferences.

What should be Done

Establishment of permanent managing project team

Local government should strive towards an establishment of permanent managing team members. The present ad-hoc status of managing project team does not guarantee job satisfaction among members.

Adequate funding

There is need for provision of adequate fund. No project can be well managed without fund. Finance is the “life – wire” of every project. It determines the success or failure of any project. Fund is needed for proper supervision of projects especially those located in rural areas. Once it is not properly supervised, the contractor involved will do a shoddy job.

Getting the major beneficiary involved.

There is the need to involve fully the people at the grassroots. The people at the grassroots should be allowed to contribute significantly in determining their needs and identifying their problems on which projects would be executed in their area.

Information data bank

One of the major challenges facing managing project team in local government is that those responsible do not always possess adequate knowledge of the total environment in which their local government operates. A good grasp of the totality of the environment of the local government area by project officers is an indispensable requirement of not only citing of a project but also in its execution and management.

Minimization of anti- developmental Behavioural Mannerism.

There is need to resist such anti – developmental behavioural tendencies like criminal disservice and institutionalized stealing; inflation of contracts, mismanagement of project funds; politicization of projects; wrong sitting of projects, due to sectionalism; inter and intra- community conflict; vandalisation; bribery and corruption among others.

Conclusion

One of the major problems confronting local governments in Nigeria is how execute projects successfully. In fact, the high incidence of uncompleted or abandoned projects, the frequency of collapse or breakdown of projects shortly after commissioning due to shoddy execution has assumed an alarming proportion and a disturbing dimension to attract the attention of every meaningful

Nigerian. This necessitated the establishment of managing project team in our local governments in Nigeria

In conclusion, we note that why many projects fail to achieve its objectives in most of our local governments is a reflection of the inappropriate strategy adopted by managing project team. This anomalous situation occurs, because there is no organized pressure from the intended beneficiaries – the poor and the programmes are administered by distant people on the uncoordinated rural poor, who are not empowered to demand the benefits of the programme as part of their minimum social and economic right.

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