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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The study analyses the role of public sector management within the public sector environment. The study seeks to establish the significance and the role of project management in government. The qualitative research methodology is adopted by the study with reference to the desktop approach which is entirely derived from secondary data. The study explores the significance of the nine knowledge areas of project management in government projects. The paradigm shifts of Public Administration from a traditional approach to the New Public Management and post-New Public management brought increasing demands, which required the intervention of the principles of project management. Project management is a difficult process, especially when it involves the project team and other stakeholders working for a long time. The escalating difficulties need the best management principles and mechanisms to determine the utilization of resources. Therefore, public project management can add value to the public sector environment. Project management plays a notable role in ensuring the development of successful projects and completion of projects within the agreed timelines both in the private and public sectors.

Keywords: Projects, project management, government, governance, public service

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Project management is embedded within the public sector environment. However, specific research is inadequate in this field. Since the 1980s, globally, many governments have tried to transform certain characteristics of the public sector to respond to increasing pressure to cut budgets and increase the quality of public services. As a result of that, there was a great movement toward the amendment of procedures and structures to focus on the principles of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness with the application of business principles and projects aimed at modernizing the public apparatus. Public projects are politicised and are subject to the attention of the media and stakeholders. They have a legislative framework and are subject to public pressure, as well as to demands for governance with a focus on transparency. On the other hand, project management in the public sector involves Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) (Clemente et al.,2018).

Project management is a specialization that is interconnected with organizing and managing resources, such as human resources, efficiently and effectively. Content and consideration of quality, timing, and cost factors are a priority to ensure the success of project management implementation within the public sector. The objective of the project management policy framework is to provide guidelines that will determine the efficiency of projects and the completion of projects within the agreed timelines. Project management enables organizations to tackle project obstacles and guarantee the quality of business operations (Khayyat,2020).

The public sector normally embarks on different projects with the objective of establishing improved services or enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of existing ones. There is a need for appropriate skills and technical soundness to go beyond technical expertise. The specialized skills will encompass good and sound skills to manage limited budgets while dealing with human resources and organizational-related issues. It is very difficult to assess

the quality of the quality of project evaluation practices. However, in most of the European Union (EU) countries, the results of the appraisal process do not necessarily determine the decision about which projects will go forward, and the system still allows wide political discretion in the selection of individual projects. There is a huge and differentiated scope of utilization of resources efficiently and effectively that has a positive impact on the well-being within the South African political landscape. Furthermore, the scarcity of resources is the major problem that makes it difficult for the government to implement one proposal which eventually prevents the implementation of other proposals. It is very important to compare alternatives even if the choice is between execution and non-execution of proposals. It is of vital importance for decision-makers to ensure that overall welfare of society is raised because of proposed action when considering a proposal (Plmanis, 2014).

Typically, within the public sector, huge business opportunities are segmented in areas within policy or main categories. Project team members and project leaders report to project leadership. The sound leadership of the projects is significant for enhanced service delivery. The execution of projects is appraised by creating realistic, achievable, and realistic project deliverables that resonate with the strategic objectives of the public sector government department, ascertaining that project outcomes are realised by applying the collective approach of the project team and the collaboration of all stakeholders and the role players of the project at large. project (Van der Waldt, 2015).

2 METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methodology with specific reference to the conceptual approach was adopted by the study and heavily relied on secondary data. The data used was extracted from articles, books, and conference proceedings of academic journals. Several journal articles focus on the role of public project management within the public sector environment.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Koskela and Howell (2002) encapsulate that theory consists primarily of attributes and causal relationships that resonate with these attributes. It is possible to broadly characterize a target theory of production or operations management. This characterization also applies to project management, which is a special type of production or operations management. A theory of project management should be viewed in the sense that it should reveal how action contributes to the organisational set objectives. Generally, there are three possible actions, the design of the systems employed in designing and making; control of those systems to realize the intended production, and improvement of those systems. Project management and production processes consist of three kinds of goals, which are to obtain intended products in general, and internal goals, such as cost reduction and level of utilization. Third, there are external goals that are related to the needs of the customer, such as quality, dependability, and flexibility.

An explicit theory of project management would serve various functions. In prior research, the following roles of a theory have been pinpointed:

- A theory makes provisions for observed behaviour and makes contribution towards comprehension. Furthermore, a theory contributes towards a prediction of future behaviour.
- Design and control as well as tools for analysis can be constructed from a theory.
- A shared theory contributes towards a common language, or a framework necessitates collaboration of people in collective initiatives such as projects
- A theory provides direction for identifying the sources of future progress.
- The clear testing of the validity of the theory leads to learning.
- Creative trends can be changed to other settings by summarising a theory from that norm and then implementing it to the target conditions.
- A theory can be perceived as a consolidated aspect of knowledge: it strengthens novices to execute tasks that historically only experts could perform. It is thus instrumental in teaching.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 CHALLENGES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Blixt and Kirytopoulos (2017) assert that the public sector is challenged with inadequate competencies for public sector managers, especially in relation to the private sector environment. The literature has been examined to identify competencies that are common to all project management environments, assessment of variations, specifications, or additional technical, contextual, or behavioral competencies relevant to the successful delivery of projects in a public setting. Conveying norms from the private sector to the public sector was accepted by the public sector post the New Public Management (NPM) during the mid-1990s. The theorists against the NPM

initiatives perceive that there is no common ground between the private sector and the public sector, and therefore there is no synergy between the two sectors and no business could be successfully transferred between them. Furthermore, research pertaining to the organizational differences and objectives between the private and public sectors were often inadequately explored, infrequent, or inconsistent. The private sector and the public sector environment are not inherently different. However, they are distinguished by values and ethics, approaches to human resources management, and decision-making processes. The professional project management proponents embraces the view that private projects must be embedded and operational in government.

Emelander (2014) accentuates that many projects involve risk factors. Projects contribute towards important services and tailor-made products, distinguishing them from traditional ways of doing things. This makes the role of project managers (PMs) particularly complex because sound outputs require sound inputs and processes. Various projects traverse a new landscape, and uncertainty and risk are embedded within the environment of project conceptualization. Public officials who work in the project management environment are always faced with increased complexities in their mission. Lack of departmental backup is one of the fundamental problems within project management-related issues. Project management is a discipline with accepted attributes, processes, and mechanisms. The elements connected with successful projects are the headquarters of the entity's support for project management standards. Reductions obtruded by government red-tape project management methods are very complex. Established organisations, excluding small-medium enterprises formulate sound methods and policies, and even sizeable entities consist of unique approaches to executing their plans. Policies have the most significant benefits, helping to modernize operations, helping to avoid errors, and establishing the company's integrity in the industry at large. Project managers who contravene company policies and procedures may face consequences, but they can always motivate their conduct and carry on with important aspects of business. The situation differs with the public sector environment, where regulations are not just business practices but often carry the authority of law.

Tzanakakis (2019) emphasized that there are complexities in building effective project management capabilities. Progressively, global governments are not supposed to only manage the routine operations of ongoing project programs, but also to execute large, complex new projects and services and to adapt and refine continuing projects in a quickly growing environment. The public sector is under greater pressure than ever to make reasonable and responsible decisions about the appropriate investments. Project management has been embraced by the private sector, with demonstrated success across a range of industry sectors worldwide. However, the adoption of project management in governments has been inadequate due to the dearth of project management skills. With some exceptions, project management expertise in the public sector is generally weak. The increasing scope and complexity of programs funded by the government have made the need for Project Management more important than ever. Although the government plans to spend billions on operational investments, it has had difficulty providing adequate oversight of these investments. Public officials are expected to be efficient and must continuously justify the funds they request for both new and existing investments.

Mabelebele (2006) outlines additional project management challenges in the public sector as follows:

- Power, Authority, and Political Environment

The implementation of projects and programs in the public sector takes place in the context of power, authority, and an unpredictable political environment. It takes place in a very fluid environment compared to other sectors. It involves political principals with the authority to make political decisions, which may not always be compatible with classical project management approaches.

- Project management skills shortage

There is inadequate skills in South Africa with specific reference to information technology, project management and engineering disciplines. The government is severely affected because most experienced project managers resigned from the public service because of the implementation of government policies such as affirmative action and employment diversity. The situation is exerting tremendous pressures on various municipalities to resolve this project management skills dilemma. It is a very complex process to get experienced and qualified project managers in the public sector. The South African Public Sector is facing a huge backlog in terms of project management skills.

4.2 PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Mabelebele (2006) accentuates that, having outlined the complexities of project management in government, it is now important to outline proposals that can enhance project management government. The propositions are discussed in detail below as follows:

- Policy propositions that are formulated in government, emanating from projects, should practically depict some manifestation of the implementation process by the political office bearers. The initiative will ascertain that

when policy propositions are suggested and the cabinet ratifies them, they are fully informed of the envisaged implementation plans. There may be a possibility of the political principals memo template to be supported with relevant annexures as a matter of policy. In this way, a more disciplined and generic approach will bring about the conduct of public officials as project managers.

- The structure of departments, with specific reference to those vested with the authority to major projects, must be evaluated and capacitated with Project Management Offices. The departments are centralized coordinating organs in the organization to manage resource allocation, monitor slow projects, and ensure officials in government are fully informed about the progress of the projects.

- The compliance with the budget cycle is very important because it will necessitate better planning and implementation of multi-year. It is very important to complete the allocation of budgets within the agreed timelines because it makes it easier for the department to clearly detail its planned budget flow which can be approved as the master plan for the project.

- Harmonization of interdepartmental projects should be empowered and disseminated in departments to ensure an increase in return on investment (ROI) for projects that span the activities of various departments.

- A meticulous approach to the enhancement of project management skills in the public sector is required. One is humbled by the fact that the government is prioritizing skills development initiatives in areas such as project management. This is demonstrated by the attempts to introduce foreign experts into the public sector.

Alrajhi and Khayyat (2020) state that the role of project management policy is to provide guidelines to ensure project efficiency and to complete it in time. It helps companies manage project hurdles and guarantee the quality of business operations. Public policy is important in project management because of many reasons as it protects the company through a proactive policy; defines the rules of behaviour for the user and any other information technology personnel; identifies and approves consequences of the violation, establishes a fundamental position on security to reduce the risk of the company and to ensure proper compliance with regulations. There are attributes of the project management policy that are to determine project needs and identify resources, send reports to the project sponsor, evaluate the project, and ensure that they are on the right track. In addition to that, there are two basic things in a policy, which are the framework of the policy and the implementation of the policy. The framework of policy documents consists of a set of procedures to provide a comprehensive set of policies and offer a continuing evaluation of the policies of an organization. On the other hand, implementing a project management policy entails essential things to consider when it comes to implementing a project management policy.

The application of online tools and templates assists in the reduction of time and energy and determines the development of policies because the internal policies of the operational projects differ from the outside. It chooses a policy that makes provision for a consolidated guideline to follow without causing misunderstanding and policy implementation.

4.3 BENEFITS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Pandey (2022) outlines the relevant benefits of excellent project management, and they are discussed in detail below as follows:

4.3.1 Increased productivity and reduction of costs and workload

The goal of project management and planning is efficiency and effectiveness. You want to do as much as possible in as little time as possible. Project management plays an important role in establishing an optimized methodology. As soon as the process is created and templates and procedures are available, it will be easier to reuse them with every project. This will automatically alleviate risks and improve the efficiency of the project. The process of improving efficiency with project management consists of creating a project plan that contains information received from clients and other stakeholders, resources, a work breakdown structure, and a milestone-based deadline. The project requires to be broken down into tasks and clearly define task owners, task dependencies, due dates, and resources. The process also includes the use of Gantt charts to monitor, evaluate, and report the workloads of individual team members and ascertain that no one is allocated more workload that outweighs his or his capabilities. It is of utmost importance to keep clients and management updated and to agree on check-in points where they will progressively be updated. Furthermore, it is essential to establish a transformation policy before starting the project. If the project grows in scope or clients want to make changes, ensure that you reference the policy to assess if it is viable and if there is a risk of exceeding the allocated budget. It is also very important to receive feedback from the project team on the project and the task plans. Most importantly, it is of the utmost importance to verify that the project team has access to the project plan.

4.3.2 Project Management Improves Collaboration

Projects are easy to manage if all the project aspects are well structured and the project team as well as other stakeholders know exactly what needs to be done at any given time. The process of improving collaboration with project management involves the application of project management principles to achieve the organizational set objectives. The use of project management software packages plays a notable role, and this will capacitate the entire project team to access project tasks and task details and there will be no time wasted looking at the project information. Transparent and unerring definitions of roles strengthen collaboration with project management. An in-depth understanding of project stakeholders and the establishment of communication channels and plans will refine collaboration. It is a prerequisite for the project manager to know and understand the project team. Client analysis and top management play a crucial role in improving collaboration with project management.

4.3.3 Project Management Improves Customer Satisfaction

The process of enhancing customer satisfaction requires an in-depth understanding of customer expectations and clear communication. During the initiation phase of the project, it is very important to ensure that those clients are clear about the project objectives and expectations. It is mandatory for the project manager and the project team to embrace customer-centricity by being professional and responsive. Furthermore, the preparation of relevant reports such as the project initiation report, project business case, project charter, and change policy is very important. The monitoring, evaluation, reporting of risks, and preparation for risk reduction are very important in enhancing in ameliorating customer satisfaction with project management.

4.3.4 Project management helps improve the performance of the project team

It is very significant to use a central tool for tracking and reporting project and task management. Data must be centralized in a central location where the entire project team can access and analyse them. The creation of a post-completion process is very important, and it is also recommended that stakeholders provide feedback. It is very important for the project manager to be capable of formulating a document that entails all the learnings from both the data and hands-on experience. The implementation of changes assists in the enhancement of performance. Once there is an understanding of the problematic areas, it is very important to craft an improvement plan.

4.3.5 Project management helps solve problems

The problem resolution process consists of the establishment of risk management processes. It is very significant to outline every change and problem in the change or issue log. The creation of communication plans for every stakeholder group is essential. Regular updates of the task and project plans including newly accepted initiatives will add value in solving project-related problems.

4.4 MECHANISMS FOR PROJECT APPLICATIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Van der Waldt (2011) asserts that increasingly government institutions in South Africa use projects as channels to operationalize policy programs and strategic objectives for service delivery. In response to this trend, increased formal training programs and qualifications in public administration, management, and governance must be encouraged, including Project Management. Vand der Waldt (2011) further encapsulates the mechanisms for project applications in the public sector, and they are discussed in detail as follows:

4.4.1 Action of the Government Program

The program of action outlines the main government plans for the next financial year. These plans are presented by the State President during the opening of Parliament in February annually. A set of priorities called 'Apex Priorities are identified by the government which implies that all projects embedded in all three spheres of government should concentrate on the implementation of existing policies. Are identified by the government. This implies that the government focuses on expediting the implementation of existing policies of existing policies, programs, and macro-strategies.

4.4.2 Governance Groups and Committees

The South African Government is categorized into a series of various groups and segments to ameliorate and coordinate collaborative governance and relationships within the three tiers of government. Categories in both national and provincial governments are empowered by the five ministerial cabinet categories. The champion of the governance and Administration category and all the associated programs is the Department of Public Service and Administration,

4.4.3 Cabinet Lekgotla (Committee)

The planning of the government cycle is managed and led by the Cabinet Lekgotla) Committee. The main objective of the committee (held yearly in July) is to evaluate the deliverables of the plans and expectations of the government. Furthermore, the objectives are to prioritize, and prepare for the new planning cycle and budget estimates as outlined in the Programme of Action, to prioritize if necessary, and to establish the foundation for the new planning cycle and budget adjustment estimates.

4.4.4 Integrated Development Planning for Municipalities (IDP) and Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIP)

It is legally mandatory for the local government in South Africa to craft IDPs in their areas of jurisdiction in terms of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000. The integrated development plans include the methodology, responsibilities, timelines, and cost structure. As soon as the integrated development plan is formulated all the projects and municipal plans must be aligned with the IDP. The third phase of the IDP process includes the design and content of the projects. The details of all the projects must be aligned according to the beneficiaries' costs and agreed deadlines. It is very important to establish clear targets and indicators developed to evaluate performance and the effects of each project. indicators developed to measure performance, as well as the impact of individual projects.

The municipality 's five-year IDP contract between the municipal administration, the Council, and the community which is the municipality 's primary stakeholder is interpreted by the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIP) emphasizing set organizational objectives set by the Council as reasonable and achievable outcomes to be implemented by municipality 's Administration. The responsibilities of all senior managers in the municipality 's senior management team must be indicated by the SDBIP. It is very important for the SDBIP to factor in the roles and responsibilities of each senior manager in the senior management team, the tasks to be utilized, and the deadlines for each activity. The general scenario regarding areas of delivery, allocated budgets, and monitoring and evaluation must be provisioned.

4.4.5 Outsourcing and Public-Private Partnerships

The supply chain management within the South African Government structures is dependent on private entities for the delivery of services. The reduction in employment in many public sector departments has resulted in economic shortages of some forms of skilled labour. Hence, the process of resorting to outsourcing the delivery of services of the public sector projects to the private sector. The government is very serious about making public-private partnerships (PPPs) work in South Africa because the government endeavours to forge synergies pertaining to the goods and services, project management capacity, ICT, and expertise aligned with the private sector, in pursuit of refined provision of services. The South African government established the 'Strategic Framework for Delivering Public Services through Public-Private Partnership' to intensify the relations between the private sector and the public sector. The government 's option of outsourcing does not relieve the public sector from its responsibilities for the provision of service projects. The project teams within the public sector environment responsible for development initiatives be creative and clarify the quality importance that all projects would be expected to depict in situations where these government projects are managed by external stakeholders.

The public-private partnerships are contractual relationships between the public and private sectors and should always involve a competitive tendering process. The process is crafted in detail in two comprehensive documents provided by the South African National Treasury PPP Unit which are the "Public Private Partnership Manual" and the "Standardised Public Private Partnership Provisions.

4.5 PROJECT GOVERNANCE; ELEMENTS, ROLES, AND PRINCIPLES

A business plan specifying the objectives of the project and stating the in-scope and out-scope aspects as well as a mechanism to analyse the compliance of the finished project with its original set objectives are important specific elements of good project governance. Furthermore, another element includes the realization of all stakeholders who are interested in the project, as well as the relevant project manager with a clear understanding of the principles of project management which is an additional governance element. The project manager and the project team must be capable of monitoring and evaluating the project status and reporting to the key decision-makers. The initiative enables the project manager and the project team to get expedited approvals for proposals and requisitions, resource allocations and amendments to the original plans should a need arise to make changes. It is very significant to get timely approval for proposals and requisitions, resource allocations, and amendments to the original plan and to resolve issues that arise during the duration of the project. Clearly outlined protocols and reporting lines play a significant role in quality and performance reviews of the project 's deliverables.

The requirements of governance and project management discipline, identify the following principles. The application of these principles would help avoid common causes of program and project failure, such as those noted below.

- The general responsibility for the governance of projects is vested in the committee or the board.
- The roles, responsibilities, and performance criteria for The governance of project management should clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and performance criteria of all the participating stakeholders.
- Good governance processes, strengthened by relevant mechanisms and control measures, should be implemented during the project life cycle.

- It is of vital importance for all the projects to have an approved plan that contains authorization or decision points at which the schedule and resources allow them to make relevant decisions.
- There should be clearly defined criteria for reporting project status and for escalation of risks and issues to the levels required by the organization.
- The project stakeholders should be involved at a level that is based on their importance to the organization and in a manner that fosters trust.

One of the most difficult and overlooked aspects of introducing project governance is the cultural implications. The organizational culture must be aligned with a project mindset and make provision for project team members with the authority and assistance they need to acquaint themselves with to the new ways of executing and managing projects (Van der Waldt,2008:735-736).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The above exposition reveals that for public project management to be successful in South Africa, there is a need to have competent public project managers. It is evident that public project managers need to have the ability and capabilities to address difficult collaboration challenges, the ability to assess difficult levels of authority and unauthorized power relations, and political interference. Furthermore, there is a need to be patient and understand that there is a dearth of project management skills in the public sector, and they should be capacitated to implement government projects with many untrained and inadequate project team members. Despite significant investment during the post-apartheid era, public projects have not achieved the set governmental objectives, and the dearth of significant project management experience and skills in the public sector has been identified as a major challenge. The rapid evolution of project management practices necessitates the government realize the benefits associated with their application to render services within the agreed timelines, within budget, and according to community specifications. The paper has demonstrated that the integration of Project Management mechanisms within the public sector which is the borrowed concept from the private sector will refine and enhance project management. The implementation of project management expertise in government will result in a new implementation "toolkit" for public service officials and service providers. From this study, it is evident that the incorporation of project management mechanisms into the public sector will yield efficiency and effectiveness benefits for government departments. The South African Government has sought to address these gaps and improve future outcomes by engaging the services of the private sector to increase project management competency in the South African Public Service.