THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INITIATION AND CONCEPTUALIZATION IN PROJECTS MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:
AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT
The goal of this paper is to evaluate the extent to which project management in Nigeria can enhance sustainable development. By adopting the innovative management approach, the study was wholly based on secondary data. It addresses the shortcomings in project initiation which is a panacea of sustainable development. The paper suggests that the high rate of failure in projects in Nigeria undermines sustainable development which can be reduced through proper project planning based on the use of holistic and integrated principles.

Keywords: Project Management, sustainable development, Nigeria.
JEL Classifications: H43, O22, O32, M11, M12.

1. INTRODUCTION

A project is a temporary endeavour undertaken to produce a unique product or service. The fact that a project is temporary means it has a definite point at which it starts and another point at which it ends. Robert Heller (2001) defined Project as a series of activities designed to achieve a specific outcome within a set budget and timescale. The product or service that a project produces is in itself not temporary. Some examples of projects include building a house, arranging a wedding, holding an election, hosting the world cup of 2014, starting a new business, launching a new magazine, making a movie, writing a book, rolling out a new Information Technology (IT) application in a company, construction of a wave or wind farm for electricity generation or building a gas turbine, road construction etc.

In Nigeria, strict adherence to the principles enunciated in the project life circle is lacking. The problem is more compounded at the Local Government level. Projects are poorly initiated leading to poor planning, execution, control and closeout. For instance the assets of Public Investment in which Nigeria had invested over N53.0 billion in the last 41 years were worth N900 million in 1992 when they were prepared for privatization. The staggering gap between the amount invested and the value of the projects at the time of assessment was attributed to corruption and lack of strict adherence to the principles enunciated in the project life circle. The community where the project would be initiated were not contacted for input. This ultimately results to crises between community members and project team. Sometimes where crises do not exist and project was completed, post
closeout activities are not put in place, creating room for aggrieved people in the community or outsiders to steal and destroy product of the project.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Eskerod et al (2013) analyse various approaches to Stakeholders management, as well as sustainable development principles in internationally-used project management standards and consider the demands these approaches and principles place on project stakeholder management. The research findings suggest that stakeholder issues are treated superficially in the project management standards while putting stakeholder management in the context of sustainable development would ask for a paradigm shift in the underpinning values. The current stakeholder practices represent mainly a management- of -stakeholders approach, that is, making stakeholders comply to project needs, whereas a management -for -stakeholders approach was considered beneficial.

Hans M et al (1994) opine that improved project management for sustainable development will depend on broad reforms that take place in society’s institutions. Concerns for sustainability need to become a people’s way of life. Resources should be devoted at all levels to the principles of sustainability and that changes need to take place on both the consumption and production sides of project management and sustainable development equation. Specific policies needed to support the framework for guiding project activity will vary among countries and agencies. Policy focus the authors assert should be to encourage planners and implementers to adjust traditional approaches, and to treat project as a means to an end and to build the project approach into planning and management systems that are more sensitive to sustainability issues and conditions.

According to Mobey and Parker (2002) to increase the chances of a project succeeding, it is necessary for the organization to have an understanding of what are the success factors, to systematically and quantitatively assess these factors, anticipating possible causes and effects and then choose appropriate methods of dealing with them. Once identified, the success of the project can be achieved. Chua et al (1999), Bayliss (2002) in their respective studies on project success factors said that successful project delivery requires the concerted effort of the project team to carry out the various project activities, but it is the project manager who, at the centre of the project network, is responsible for orchestrating the whole construction process. Possessing the core project management competence would help to define the ability of project managers to deliver good performance towards the attainment of project success. Pinto and Slevin 1987, 1989, Balassi and Tukel 1999, Muller and Turner 2003, have studied extensively on factors that determine success in project management and came up with similar findings. The authors identified competent project team, authority of the project manager/leader, understanding of the project, adequate funding, realistic cost etc as critical success factors for project management.

Pinto and Mantel (1988) suggest the following as critical factors for project management: competent project team, authority of the project manager/leader, project understanding, Top management, support, client involvement, project, mission/common goal, adequate resources, Realistic cost and time estimation, information/ communication, project ownership, monitor performance and feedback, planning/ controlling, Risk management, adequate project control, problem solving abilities. These critical factors the authors opine could be generalized to a wide variety of project types and organizations. Their model is one of the most widely quoted list of critical success factors (Muller and Turner 2007).

According to Dey (2002) current project management practices of organizations in the industry sector do not always ensure success. The main problems with project planning and implementation have been costs and time overrun and quality non achievement. He
asserts that the main contributing factors are: expansion of the scope and subsequent quality increase of input resources, Engineering and design changes, underestimation and incorrect estimation, unforeseen inflation, project size and complexity etc. Labuscharge and Brent (2006) argue that when considering sustainability in project management, the total life circle of the project should be taken into account. Silvius (2010) emphasizes that integrating the concept of sustainability in project management therefore stretches the system boundaries of project management. The relationship between sustainability and project management is still an emerging field of study (Gareis et al 2009), literature is scarce, but some studies and ideas were first published (Labuscharge and Brent 2006, Taylor 2008, Turner 2010).

John Bowers et al (2014) opine that while innovation has many similarities to other forms of project, it is characterised by a high failure rate and the need to stimulate creativity. Success in innovation project could be achieved through risk management. However the authors noted that lack of proper risk management might stifle the creativity that is core to innovation. Theoretical approach which combines the generic innovation process with project risk management was used. The framework analyse the current attitude to managing innovation, risk in a series of companies.

The decision points of the stage-gate innovation process model used in the analysis provide an effective interface for implementing project risk concepts. The general concept appears most relevant to innovation management though it is useful to customize them to emphasise the particular characteristics of innovation projects. The analysis of the case study companies suggested that risk management needs to be applied in different manner simple, unobtrusive techniques early in the innovation life circle with more substantial, quantitative methods, being considered for latter stages. The Economist 2014 is of the view that Developing countries are becoming hotbeds of business innovations in much the same as Japan did from the 1950’s onward. New products and services are emerging and comparatively cheaper than the western equivalent. They are reinventing systems of production and distribution from supply-chain management to recruitment and retention using new business models.

Evidently, from the works reviewed so far, no attempt has been made on community driven project management technique that embodies post closeout activity for project sustainability and as a panacea for sustainable development which the present study attempt to address. Previous studies centre on critical success factors in project management for sustainable development. This missing link provides the bases for the study.

3. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This is a theoretical paper in which the authors tried to stimulate general intellectual curiosity on the problems in project Initiation and conceptualization in Project management using an innovative approach as a panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria, which the authors identified as a missing link in the project life circle, hoping that new and innovative approach to attaining sustainable development will emerge at the end. The paper is fundamentally based on secondary data.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Project Triggers

Projects do not happen for any apparent reason, projects are initiated by need, a problem, an opportunity or a seriously bright idea. A Project may be born out of need. A need to build five star hotels may arise as a result of tourist attraction to a city and the possibility of a steady growth in international tourism. Building high class hotels would
solve accommodation problems of tourist and become a profitable investment. This also calls for expansion in international airports. The 2014 world cup in Brazil is another example of the expansion of the hospitality industry, airport, and high class hotels, erosion control in erosion affected area etc. are examples of project arising from need. The opportunity for a project may arise due to:

- Investing with the intention of capturing market share by introducing new products
- An increase in fossil fuel and the slowdown in the economy points to the opportunity to offer cheaper transport of goods by rail than by road.
- An increase in the demand for a commodity e.g. Shoes, cars, computers, may convince the management or board to invest in a new production line that will effectively increase production capacity, increasing the company turnover and earnings.

Finding solution to a problem would result to initiation of a project. The problem of inadequate power supply from public sources calls for the use of generators. This causes severe levels of carbon emission and poses danger to human existence. This problem can be minimized by the initiation of projects that reduces the rate of carbon emission. It could take the form of an idea culminating to the initiation of a project that increase the value of the product to satisfy both local and international demand e.g. the Coal in Nigeria and South Africa or training and retraining programmes organised by the Private and Public sectors to improve administrative efficiency of workers and hence increase their marginal productivity are bright ideas.

The Project Initiation Development sets forth the project outline, including key project data, risks and data. The PID serves as a guideline throughout the entire duration of the project in all of its phases. The PID should be announced and shared between the project manager, project team and stakeholders as well as approved and signed by the business sponsor.

The project initiation phase is the conceptual element or conceptualization of a Project and is the first phase in the project management life Cycle. The other phases include Planning, Execution, Control and Closeout. The initiation phase involves starting up a new Project. You can start a new project by defining its objectives, scope, purpose and deliverables to be produced. You will also hire your project team, set up the project office and review the project, to gain approval to begin the next phase. The project team conceptualises its project during project definition or initiation. This is when the team develops a “rough draft” of project plan such as scope, boundaries, budget, and what outcome can be expected project initiation phase is when the project team set the terms under which they will carry out the project. Professionals commonly agree that this stage is the first stage in a project, however, it can be said that it is the second stage after project definition. Depending on the project at hand, project definition can be combined into one stage.

4.2 Duties of Project Team and Owner

The project owner is responsible for checking the PID, once complete, against the project objectives and scope as seen by the business sponsor(s). The project owner reviews and confirms the details of the project, as well as assign an overall project manager and team. The Project Manager is responsible for achieving the project’s overall objectives and leading the project team. The project team assists the project manager and provides the breadth of knowledge needed. The team members- full or part time persons have the action of carrying out the project plan. The project team communicates with all stakeholders, sponsors and others who have interest vested in the project. They conduct research,
interviews, brainstorming sessions and meeting for the sake of the project. They create important documents as necessary to the projects, such as the project concept statements, project character and project feasibility document.

- A properly planned project is essential to successful execution and completion. The initiation stage of a project is perhaps the most important phase of a project. After the definition stage of a project, in which planners determine project goals, objectives, scope and so forth, the initiation stage follows.

- The initiation stage establishes boundaries for the project. It determines the scope of work and primary budget for the overall project. This step is critical and serves as the foundation for the rest of the project. Poor planning during the initiation stage could bring the whole project crumbling down. It is essential for the project manager to understand the business needs and goals for the project. He needs to be fully aware of the budgeting requirements and deadlines. Meetings will take place with the management to help set these guidelines.

- Insightful conceptualization involves identifying the opportunities, developing a micro and macro perspectives, analysing their feasibility from various perspectives and assessing their financial viability. The most experienced team with adequate understanding in the industry, location of projects is involved in project conceptualization.

4.3 Steps for Project Initiation/ Conceptualization

Overall, there are six key steps you need, to properly initiate a new project. These project initiation steps and their corresponding templates are shown below.

(a) Development of a business case

A business case justifies the start up of a project. It includes a description of the business problem or opportunity, the cost and benefits of each alternative solution and the recommended solution for approval. A business template is used whenever the expenditure on a project has to be justified. Completing a business template is usually the first step in the project life cycle. Once the template has been completed, it is presented to the sponsor for approval. The business template includes:

- Research the business problem or opportunity. Projects are triggered by identifying a problem and solving it or an opportunity open to sponsors to may be a revolutionary turnaround of a new product/service so as to capture market share or improve the welfare of the citizens.

- Identify the alternative solutions available. Here the project management team identifies several alternative solutions to the problem, and be able to choose the one that is feasible considering the cost implications.

- Quantify the benefits and cost of each solution. The benefit to society and project sponsor and cost are determined here. This is academically and professionally demanding and must be objectively done.

- Recommend a preferred solution to your problem. The most preferred of the alternative solution to the project is then recommended to project sponsor for approval.

- Identify any risks and issues with implementation. Projects fail due to lack of incorporating the risk variable in the project model building. The risk could be accident at work site.

- Present the solution for funding approval. The recommendations must be convincing in satisfying the objectives of the project for fund approval by the project sponsor.
• Real life examples in each section. All the preceding sections must have practical examples.
  Detailed procedures guiding you step by step must be initiated so as to guide against defiant behaviour.
• Tables to help you quantify the benefits and cost. The use of tables and graphs is essential as this simplify reality.
• Guidance on the methods of choosing a preferred solution. The preferred solution to a problem is arrived through strict adherence to guidelines.
• A best practice approach to ensure your success. A well established code of conduct by all stakeholders involve in the project is specified and complied with accordingly.

(b) Undertake a feasibility study

The determination of Project Feasibility plays an important part in the development of Initiation and Planning Phase Documentation. The determination can also be an abstract planning document without a formal template; however, its importance should not be overlooked. The purpose of this effort is to identify project constraints, alternatives, and related assumptions as they apply to the product/service to be developed. It involves the following steps: Research the business problem or opportunities; Document the business requirement for a solution; Identify all of the alternative solutions available; Review each solution to determine its feasibility; List any risks and issues with each solution; Choose a preferred solution for implementation; and, document the results in a feasibility report.

(c) Establish the project charter

The Project Charter is created to formally communicate the existence of a project. The project Charter is issued at the end of the Initiation phase and is a beginning to the planning phase of a project. The project Charter is used as the basis to create the project plan. Inputs to develop it include the project concept document, the Business case, and other documents that identify a need and establish a senior management/sponsor commitment. The steps for developing a project charter include: Identify the project vision and objectives; Define the complete scope of the project; List all of the critical project deliverables; State the customers and project stakeholders; List the key roles and their responsibilities; Create an organisational structure for the project; and, document the overall implementation plan.

The project charter template includes: All of the sections within a project charter document; Detailed instructions which help you to complete each section; Tables and real life examples, etc.

(d) Appointing the project team

The project team conducts fact-finding interviews and holds research and brainstorming sessions to generate the information necessary for the project concept development. The project team defines the real purpose of the role; list the key responsibilities of the role; define who the role will be reporting to; Create a detailed organisational chart List the skills and experience needed. Define any relevant qualification, Set out the key performance criteria, Identify the salary and working conditions.
(e) **Set up the project office**

The project office checklist will help to: Identify the right location for your project management office (PMO) team, Ensure that you have the correct infrastructure, Procure the right project management office (PMO) equipment and tools, Define the project management office roles and responsibilities Put in place suitable standards and processes, Implement relevant project management templates, Offer project management office services to projects.

(f) **Perform a phase review**

The project review form is completed at the end of the initiation project phase to tell the sponsor whether the project has achieved its objectives to date. A project management review is conducted to measure the deliverables produced by the project, then the results of the reviews are documented on the project Review form which is presented to the sponsor for approval. The forms help to state whether the project is currently delivering to schedule. Budget allocation was sufficient at this point. Deliverables have been produced and approved, Risks have been controlled and mitigated, Issues were identified and restored, Changes were properly managed, Project is on track.

The project definition Report is not only used to provide detailed information on the project, but is also the basis on which the project sponsor assesses whether the project should proceed or not. In this report, the project manager must be able to identify what is known as ‘Key success factors’ and these are the objectives that are key to the success or failure of the project—even if other objectives are met. These success factors vary from project to project. Once the project has been given the go ahead, the project sponsor uses the document as the basis of the formal agreement to fund the project and for the project to begin. The initiation phase is then considered to be completed.

4.4 **Innovations in Project Initiation/Conceptualization**

An integrated approach to Project Initiation is an innovation. The inputs for Project initiation also come from the local community or the environment in which the project is initiated. In other words the project initiation team includes members from the Project environment. A methodology in Project Initiation that makes use of appreciative inquiry in which experts work with local people to identify Community problems and then develop Project is an Innovation. This approach is logical and efficient and makes local people to have a sense of responsibility and belonging. Local people can describe their value system, pictures taken for project initiation can be shown to local community members, since their input in Project Initiation is important. De-empowerment of Local people in Project Initiation as is practiced in most developing countries where needs, opportunities, problems and bright ideas as project triggers are done outside the project environment without local content will be avoided. The use of local content in all phases of the project life circle is necessary. This will enhance post closeout activities of the project and ensure its safety and durability.

Appreciative inquiry as an innovative approach in Project Initiation seeks to locate, highlight and illuminate the life giving force in a community. It aims to generate knowledge by focusing on community strengths, as community members are among the Project Initiation team to first visualize and then implement a collective desired future for the Project. In this approach Video is used as a channel of communication among the Project team members and other stakeholders, thus overcoming problems associated with language and illiteracy as barriers to effective communication.
4.5 Problems during the Initiation Phase

The initiation phase is beset by the several problems as follows:

(a) Scarcity of Resources

A project Initiation team is made up of professionals and experienced people with diverse areas of specializations related to the Project area. Locating the right people can be difficult, and this difficulty is compounded by more complex projects. Baccarini, D. (2003) asserts that the failure rate of projects is attributed to the scarcity of resources, both human and financial resources. Thus the authors regard as one critical success factor in project management.

(b) Lack of coordinated Leadership

Qualified team members are in short supply, while individuals serving as leaders may be numerous. Sometimes, the initiation phase is led by too many people with diverse responsibilities. Such environments create an atmosphere of bad or disjointed decision making. Belassi et al (1996) uses a new framework for defining the critical success factors for project management to include lack of coordinated leadership. Project to fail because leaders are not properly coordinated with the activities of the project life circle.

(c) Lack of Consensus on project objectives

According to Belassi et al (1996) it is not uncommon to find that there are many different ideas as to what the project should be and what the project should produce. Different objectives of a project from individual team members may conflict, and this delay decision making. Concepts integration is often easier when the team is considered something concrete. Lack of consensus on objectives can kill a project before it starts.

According to Muller R. et al (2003) Lack of Management Support/Sponsor is a problem during the initiation phase: Unfortunately, sometimes there is a recognized need for a project to be initiated, but there is no one to champion the effort from an executive level. People may not support a project for a variety of reasons. This can be a huge issue should problems result later in the project. If additional funding or resources are needed and the management executives who control the funding are either not aware of or not interested in the project, then a project may fail. Top-level management buy-in must happen at the project inception and be visible throughout the life of the project.

(d) Lack of Business Strategy and Expectation Outcomes

Occasionally an organization will take on a project that does not have a clearly defined relationship to its business. To keep this from happening, the agency’s business strategy needs to be visible and understood so that the results of a project effort can be considered as a part of the agency’s strategic goals and business strategy. Using the agency’s business strategy and strategic objectives as a baseline for consideration for project initiation will save time and effort later. Baghebo (2012) stressed that dynamic leaders are innovation driven. Leaders who have exceptional qualities to make a difference in the business world or in the public sector. Such leaders allow team work and individual creative intelligence to make a significant difference. Success is rewarded as a motivational technique.
4.6 Project Initiation and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a process of economic activities which leaves the environment quality unchanged with the policy directives corresponding to the notion being the maximization of net benefits of economic development for the present and future generations, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources over time (Olauyi, 2004).

Baghebo (2013) defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs. What is significant in the definition is the concern for the welfare of the future as much as the present generation. In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which exploration of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

Conditions necessary for sustainable development as opined by Baghebo (2013) includes: Continuous capacity of the various development institution to bring about growth both in the economic, social, and political sectors; a continuous quantitative rise in Gross National Product (GNP); a continuous structural transformation of the economy; political capacity to implement development programs; high rates of social and ideological transformation and radical changes in institutional, social, administrative, and economic structure to be able to cope with the new globalize competition.

Project initiation is a prelude to sustainable development and a critical aspect of the project life circle. Resources committed to the project should be prudently utilized. Poor project initiation, planning, execution, control, closeout, and post closeout activities will not sustain development, because it amounts to resource wastage which negatively impact on the welfare of the present as well as future generations. Economic growth and development will slow down. Attitudinal change in project management among the Nigerian public, so that scarce resources obtained from exhaustible or non renewable resources which Nigeria is comparatively better off will be utilized for investing in long term sustainable development. In the event of exhaustion of these resources, the economy will not be in too much danger.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In project initiation, cost benefit analysis is crucial. This involves specifying the costs and benefits of a project on which funds are to be spent and comparing them to determine whether or not the project is worthwhile. This means that for every project that is to be initiated, the decision maker (project sponsor) should attempt to identify the costs and benefits to the society as a whole and base his decisions on how the benefits compared with the costs. He should carry out the project if the benefits are greater than the costs, he should reject the project if the costs exceed benefits. In this way, the decision maker will be able to avoid unproductive expenditure. Cost-benefit analysis is a difficult activity. It has its own limitations. No excuse for not trying it. With clear thinking, attention to details and a commitment to duty, it can be successfully applied. Consultants are employed to do it if the required manpower is lacking. Project initiative brings good result if there is improved human resources- improved knowledge and skills by those initiating the project, which is also required in tackling economic, social and political problems. More importantly an integrated and innovative approach to project Initiation which we referred to as holistic, community based and embodies post closeout activities of the project life circle is necessary for project sustainability and also for sustainable development.

The following are the recommendations emanating from the study and will be useful to policy makers and the general public.
A community driven project management techniques will enhance the sustainability of projects in the community in which the project is sited. Community members should be part of the project team to identify community needs, provide a forum to present the identified needs of community to the general assembly of the community for approval or otherwise. In this model, it is projects approved by the community assembly that are “worthwhile”. This model also emphasize the financial empowerment of the community members by engaging them in most of the menial jobs or where a quality manpower for the project exist, contract for the project should be awarded to such persons. This will make the community members have a sense of responsibility in the project sited.

Post closeout activity should be strengthened. When projects are completed, the Government or project sponsor should hand over the management of the project to the community government in a general assembly of the community. The community will set up a monitoring team to ensure that nobody tamper with the product of the project. This will enhance the longevity of projects.

The use of Video tapes, to show to community members and project sponsors actual work done on the site and subsequent verifcation is desirable. An effective means of communication to community members on local languages will facilitate easy understanding of progress on the project among community members.

An integrated and holistic approach to project management with inputs from all stakeholders involve in project management will ensure project sustainability.

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