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FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECTS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

by

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Introduction

Tertiary Institutions are those academic establishments that fall in the third order of our national educational ranking, usually preceded by the primary and secondary school levels. They include Colleges of Education and Agriculture with the provost as their Chief Executives; the polytechnics headed by Rectors; and the Universities with Vice- Chancellors as their Chief Executive and Academic Officer. The Colleges of Education or Agriculture and polytechnics are designed to produce middle level manpower (Diplomas) whereas the Universities are fashioned to:

1. Encourage the advancement of learning and to hold out to all persons without distinction to race, creed, sex or political conviction, the opportunity of acquiring higher education.
2. Develop and offer academic and offer academic and professional programmes leading to the award of Diplomas, First Degrees, postgraduate Research and higher degrees which emphasize planning, adaptive, technical, maintenance, developmental and productive skills in one or combination of s of areas of education, linguistic, science, agriculture, medicine, engineering and allied professional disciplines with the capability to understand, develop new knowledge or know- how for the benefit of mankind (Okereke, 1995:20)

As part of the Institutions' efforts to achieve the above the objective, they are involved in carrying out capital projects, among others. For example, construction of classrooms, libraries, etc. Most times some of these projects are initiated and abandoned midway. Sometimes the project idea die at the earliest stage of the project cycle. Again, few of the projects that survive the earliest stage up to the point of implementation are either mismanaged or neglected outright.

It has been a source of worry at the snail rate of infrastructural development especially in our tertiary institutions. Some two – decades- Universities cannot pose of basic infrastructures and facilities. The question now is: Is it that the money for such facilities are not forthcoming or we have incompetent hands to judiciously utilizes them. Unfortunately, one cannot mention in strong confidence of a particular project that has come out on budget. It is either not initiated or abandoned or poorly finished. At any time there is a reason (s) by Fund Managers (Chief Executive Officers or Principal Officers or Project Managers) on why projects are poorly finished or abandoned or not initiated at all. It has cost the nation in general and our tertiary institutions in particular Billions of naira. Precisely, Ani (1998) in one of his Budget briefing stated that the amount borrowed for 18 failed projects was equivalent to a wobbling sum of \$836. 7 million. The projects are either not seen on site but approved to have been completed or left uncompleted. This case is not far from our tertiary institutions. According to Ntamere (1995: 165) "Abandonment and failed projects which are predominant in the public sector litter every corner of the country including government quarters, University campuses and parastatals".

This paper will therefore investigate into the factors militating against the implementation of projects in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This is with a view to distilling lessons from our past mistakes and formulating strategies that will facilitate effective implementation of projects in Nigerian tertiary institutions in particular and other sectors in general.

The Concept of Project and Project Implementation

A plethora of definitions of project abound. According to Little and Myrtles (1977) project is defined as any scheme or part of scheme for investing resources which can reasonably be analyzed and evaluated as an independent unit. Okereke (1997:18) defined it as an economic activity involving the use of limited human and material resources with the aim of achieving higher economic or social benefit\ return. Ntamere (1995: 180) defined project as a combination of human and non- human resources pooled together in a temporary organization to achieve a specific purpose. It is defined as having a defined beginning and end (specified time to completion), a specific, pre- ordained goal or set of goals, a series of complex interrelated activities and a limited budget.

Be these as they are, we can define project in the context of this paper as a non-repetitive activity with the aim of achieving established goal(s). From this definition it is obvious that a project is characterized by:

(1) Activity (2) Time Dimension (3) Limited Resources (4) Set Goals

It follows therefore that a project is successfully implemented if it is able to meet these features outlined above.

Projects take different forms. It can come as a new project. In this type, no project exists ab initio and therefore requires undergoing the entire project life cycle which starts from idea initiation to project implementation and post audit. Project may also involve only expansion and will therefore involve some segment of the life cycle. Here there is an existing project, say classroom that requires to be expanded. Other types of project include Modernization, Renovation, Lease, etc. The choice of any of these types of project depends on the circumstance and of course the policy of the institution as well as the programme of the incumbent Chief Executive Officer at any point in time.

Essentially, projects are important ingredient for any meaningful development and it is successful to the extent that it is well planned. It is commonly said that articulated development plan requires good projects just as good projects require sound planning, in which implementation is embedded. Planning is the process of identifying, classifying and selecting goals or objectives and establishment of set of action (s) for achieving these objectives within the limits of a given constraint (s). The action (s) may come in form of policies, programmes, procedures, methods; and the constraints may come in form of time, resources, environment and performance. Sound planning provides a clear focus of where one is going, how to get there and when to get there and what resources will facilitate the getting there. It is a blueprint for action and a point of reference for monitoring activities and measuring performance based on established objective(s). project implementation is embedded in the entire planning process. Ntamere (1995; 83) identified the following steps in the planning process as follows:

Analysis of current status and
forecasting of the future
environment and the
determination of the
organization's strengths and

weaknesses and possible environmental opportunities and threats.

Establishment of goals and objectives which spell out what to do.

Selection of alternative ways of achieving objectives in light of the problems and opportunities likely to be encountered in the future.

Selection of the best alternative for achieving the objective.

Plan implementation.

From here, it is clear that implementation is the process of changing plans into real actions. Implementation makes plans tangible. It brings out the soundness of a plan. It involves DOING using approved procedures, methods, processes, policies and programmes and guided by established objectives. Pre-investment studies provide the basis for the activities of the implementation stage. Specifically, project implementation stage involves heavy financial commitments as it consists of negotiation, approvals, contracting, designs, construction, training and project commissioning. During the implementation stage a series of simultaneous and interacting investment activities take place with different financial implications. According to UNIDO (1986:141) the data and activities in project implementation are: State fundamental data for project implementation. Elaborate implementation programme and time schedule and show alternatives, considering:

Establishment of project implementation management

Arrangements for technology supply.

Detailed planning of civil works, tendering, evaluation of bids, awards of contracts. Arrangements for finance. Construction period: purchase of land. Supervision, co-ordination, testing and takeover of equipment and civil works.

Build-up of administration, recruitment and training of staff and labour.

Arrangements of contracts with public authorities for timely approval of licenses, contracts, etc.

Preliminary and capital expenses.

Essentially, project abandonment and failure in Nigerian tertiary institutions in Nigeria have been attributed to poor implementation. Consequently, most tertiary institutions in Nigeria have remained undeveloped in spite of the huge federal and / or state government's allocations for their development. Therefore, the remaining part of this paper will x-ray the factors militating against effective implementation of projects in Nigerian tertiary institutions and possible ways of improvement.

Factors Affecting Project Implementation

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria have not fared well in terms of infrastructure facilities and amenities especially in the 90s. The rate of infrastructural development has been sluggish, going at less than snail's speed. This has affected the teaching, non-teaching staff as well as students themselves. Consequently, products (graduates) are reflection of this ugly trend. The unfortunate thing is that funds are released to these institutions without commensurate projects (infrastructures, amenities, and other facilities) to show. The few projects initiated face poor implementation syndrome. A number of factors has been identified as being responsible for this phenomena. A survey showed that more than 85% of the factors are man-made while the remaining 15% or less are natural factors. The man-made factors are those factors created by the workforce consciously or unconsciously. This demarcation will not be observed in this paper.

The following factors have been identified as:

Project Objective(s)

Sometimes, project objectives are not properly identified and well stated. Even at that, some Project Implementation Team/Managers lack knowledge and understanding of the project(s). When this happens, the team will automatically lack focus. Consequently, the entire project comes out poorly implemented.

Leadership Factor

Appointment of project implementation team as well as Head of the team has been an issue of politics. Ordinarily one would expect objectivity in the appointment especially when one considers the irreversibility characteristic of projects. But the case is different as most of the appointments are based on the 'Nigerian Factor' of ethnicity, federal character, favoritism, etc. Project implementation

is very dynamic and requires dynamic leadership to take care of the changes that may arise. In fact, no matter the extent of project planning, problems abound which can only be surmounted by a purposeful leadership. Emphatically, the poor implementation of a project starts with the unfair appointment of Project manager(s) or Team.

Project Cost

Some projects face the problem of inappropriate costing. Some are highly inflated while others are over deflated. The reason for this costing is not mainly to achieve the project objective but to meet the 'needs' of the parties to the contract. Take for instance, a Contractor who quotes # 1m for a project of #1.2m has other reason than to buy some margin of safety in getting the contract awarded to him. Again, a contractor who quotes far above the project cost may have the Contract - Awarding Officer to part with 10% of the parties and the implication is poor implementation. The project is either abandoned mid way or poorly finished.

Sometimes, Principal Officers involved in the contract award cut down the overall project requirement as quoted by the contractor believing that the estimated cost and time are highly inflated. This will automatically distort the entire project cost. The implication is the same as described above.

Lack of Proper Project Monitoring and Feedback

Project Implementation in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions lack proper monitoring and feedback. The monitoring and feedback gives the project manager the opportunity to anticipate problems, source corrective measures and to ensure that defective areas are not taken for granted or overlooked. The monitoring helps to get feedback on how projects are comparing favourably with initial project estimates. Monitoring and feedback helps in accessing the performance of the Project Team. A situation where Project Managers or designated Officers get to the project site once a month is functionally very unhealthy for any meaningful project implementation. At least twice a month is most ideal, depending on the timing of the project.

Lack of Top Management Support

Top management is very relevant in any project implementation in terms of release of funds, project timing, etc. It has been observed that top management are sometimes in disagreement with

contractors especially where such contracts are not awarded under their regime. It has continued to affect negatively the implementation of project.

Lack of Adequate Funding

Funding is a critical factor for any project initiation, implementation and completion. Unfortunately, most tertiary institutions, if not all, complain of inadequate funding with the result that most projects are either not initiated or abandoned.

Inflationary Trend

Inflation rate in Nigeria has been growing at a geometric trend. Such rate has affected the prices of inputs and services upwards to the point that the estimated prices of material inputs, equipment and machinery for the project became unrealistic and inadequate. This has caused a lot of damage to project implementation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Consequently, smooth implementation of projects are hindered

Political Instability.

Nigeria is characterized by incessant military coup and counter-coups since the past thirty-eight (38) years. This has caused continuous instability in government except since 1999 when we embraced democratization of the Nigerian polity. This instability in government has caused distortion in policies and programmes of each government that comes into power. Consequently, most projects initiated by one government are abandoned by another government. Projects in Nigerian tertiary institutions are victim of this circumstance. Thus projects are either not implemented or poorly implemented.

Strategies for Survival

Project objective(s) must be clearly identified and stated to the knowledge and understanding of the parties to project implementation. This will help to avoid molded thinking and lack of focus among the project implementation team.

The entire project life cycle must be properly managed, *ab initio*. This is because the outcome of the various stages in the life cycle significantly affect the implementation stage. Proper understanding and effective co-ordination of the network of activities is in itself a successful project implementation in particular and project management in general.

The choice and selection of project(s) must be done with high level of objectivity. This involves the identification of project need and the evaluation of the project using some scientific evaluation techniques. By this arrangement biases are removed. Again, the project must not be politicised.

The project should be properly monitored by the project manager on one hand and by an independent body (appointed by the institution) on the other hand. This will ensure that targets are met and deviations are fine-tuned early enough to allow project to be on course.

There must be established line of communication between the contractors, institutions and the entire workforce. Relevant information must be communicated effectively between and within the project team, the institution and other interested parties. This will help to avoid communication block or gap which is more dangerous than inadequate funding.

Apart from the general project plan, implementation plan must be drawn by both parties to the project. On the part of the institution (investor) a project implementation management team should be set up. Authority should be delegated to such a team to act as a counterpart to contractors and consultants. The efficient implementation of a project may depend considerably on the support services the counterpart team is able to furnish. On the part of the contractors and consultants, a plan is necessary to meet the terms of the agreement in the contract. Generally, project implementation planning is considered in order to draw the attention of project planners to the financial implications of project scheduling (the relative advantages of equity and loan financing, working capital requirements etc) and to the possibilities of the early detection of implementation delays and their financial impacts (UNIDO, 1986: 145-6).

Inter and intra personal relationship should be established and pursued with vigor among the institutions, contractors and consultants to the project.

Ndugbu (1998:30-1) identified nine(9) success factors for effective corporate investment project implementation as Project Mission, Top Management Support, Project Scheduling, Plans, Client Consultation, personnel Issues: Recruitment, Selection, and Timing; Technical Tasks, Client Acceptance, Monitoring and feedback, and Communication.

Conclusion

The need for effective project implementation in Nigerian tertiary institutions cannot be overemphasized especially in a cash trapped economy and development-conscious society like ours. It requires and articulated Project Manager with the relevant skill and experience as a Chief Executive Officer (Vice Chancellor, Provost or Rector) with a strong vision to succeed in terms of infrastructural development and quality of products (Graduates). The strategies proffered in this paper will go a long way in reducing, if not eliminating the problems inherent in project implementation in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

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