

**FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PERFORMANCE OF MULTICULTURAL PROJECTS MANAGEMENT
TEAMS IN ARUSHA, TANZANIA**

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to analyzed factors enhancing the performance of multicultural projects in Arusha. Communication, leadership style, and conflict resolution management remain unique instruments in managing multicultural project constructions effectively. The study used descriptive statistics as a way of data analysis. A pilot study was carried out to determine the reliability of the study using the Cronbach Alfa Coefficient. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 was obtained which proved that the questionnaire items were reliable. The study comprised a population of 120 contractors and the number of selected respondents to the questionnaire survey was determined at 55. To attain this objective, the study was guided by the following specific objective; how does effective communication enhance the performance of multicultural project teams in the construction industry? The questions were coded and analyzed using an SPSS program version 20. The study concluded that one of the reasons why most construction projects fail to finish on time is due to a lack of communication skills between workers and their supervisors. According to these findings, largely, employees appreciate the influence of communication skills when performing their duties but lack badly that component of language interaction, which hinders a lot of progress. Such scenarios of language barriers, mostly, have impinged the development of the projects in many places. The study recommends that induction on language skills must be made a priority for both local and international employees and also working procedures must be put to the open for every worker to read and understand what is required of them in the workplace.

Keywords: *effective communication, multicultural projects.*

1.0 Introduction

It has been widely recognized that multicultural project management has been common in recent years (Earley and Mosakowski, 2000). Running a project in a multicultural setting has always never been easy (Brett et al., 2007; Weatherley, 2006). The trend is likely to continue and the future of business will increasingly depend on doing projects effectively in different cultural environments (Earley, 2000, Ochieng, 2008; Weatherley, 2006). Current literature in international management has identified the management of multicultural projects as an important subject in human resource management. Earley and Mosakowski (2000) state that multicultural projects are used because of a belief that they outperform monoculture project management, especially when performance requires multiple skills and judgment. Multicultural team integration is a particular problem for clients and project managers (Egan, 2002).

Multicultural teams are perceived to outperform mono-cultural teams, in areas such as problem identification and resolution, by the sheer strength of their diversity (Marquardt and Hovarth, 2001). The basic values, concepts, and assumptions differ with each culture, understanding these and enabling the “settling-in” by recognizing the cultural complexity is a required skill of a manager (Kang et al., 2006). Project managers of multi-national organizations often make the common assumption that cultural differences are unimportant when individual members, belonging to different divisions, of the same organization are brought together as a team. The original research (Hofstede, 1980) suggested that 80 percent of the differences in employees’ attitudes and behaviors are influenced by a national culture that still has resonance today. Cultural differences reflect different expectations about the purpose of the team and its method of operation, which can be categorized into tasks and processes. The task area relates to the structure of the task, role responsibilities, and decision-making. The processes related to team building, language, participation, conflict management, and team evaluation. Culture is an issue with many different dimensions. Both Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) discussed different levels of culture. The former mentions gender, generation, and social class, regional and national, and organizational levels. The latter presents national, corporate, and professional levels of culture. The level that is important in this study is that of national and organizational culture.

To work as a team efficiently, it is essential to have some degree of cohesion in organizational culture. It has been widely recognized that organizational culture is important in construction project management (Barthorpe et al., 2000). For example, contractors are usually drawn from several organizations, each with its own organizational culture. Most construction organizations have a cultural history and set ways of getting things done that can help or, in some cases, hinder a project (Dainty et al., 2007). It is essential therefore to institute the organizational background and culture of all the contractors involved in the project from the outset. Typically, leadership in construction projects is complex and critical to success in multicultural team environments. For example, Weatherley (2006) affirmed that if management is getting the team to do what is required, project leadership involves motivating the project team in such a way that they want to do what is required.

Most recently, the industry’s “Strategic Forum” laid down challenging targets for the improvement of its people management practices within its “Accelerating Change” report (Strategic Forum for

Construction, 2002). As Dainty et al. (2007) confirmed, the industry needs to address its poor performance in people management by focusing on cultural issues. Within the general trend of globalization, the construction industry has been under pressure to evolve into a sector that is constantly changing to fit the needs of the broader context in which the operations are executed.

Attitudes toward working have changed dramatically in recent years and there is currently much more emphasis on multicultural teamwork (Weatherley, 2006). The demand for multicultural teamwork grows and there is increasing interest in reforming the project delivery process. Based on this demand and the previously cited challenges of improving people management, this study focuses on examining the factors influencing multicultural teamwork and exploring how team integration can be made effective for a multicultural project environment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Running multicultural project management in Tanzania has never been easy to date especially when locals and international experts are now working as a team to accomplish construction projects in the country (The Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications, 2010) even though managing cultural differences and cross-cultural conflicts in a multicultural project setting is generally the most common challenge to multicultural teams (Elron, 1997).

Alliance between locals and international communities in construction has seen several obstacles such as the language of communication and cultural shocks to stakeholders. With the good intention of the government to engage locals and international experts in construction projects, a lot more is needed to help sail smoothly ashore. This study, therefore, concentrated on managers who work for Multicultural projects operating in Tanzania since they are more likely to work with people from diverse cultures and confront challenges stemming from these differences that are common in multicultural teams. Comprehending these challenges from the standpoint of managers is what the researcher aimed to accomplish.

1.3 Research Questions

This study endeavored to address the following questions:

How does effective communication enhance the performance of multicultural project teams in the construction industry?

2.0 Review of Literature

Communication as a metaphorical pipeline along which information is transformed from one person to another Communication is the lifeblood of society and the business world (Khemesh, 2019; Ochieng and Price, 2010). Thomason (1988) defined communication as “the lifeblood of any system of human interaction without which, no meaningful or coherent activity can take place”. Axley (1984) defined. Nevertheless, communication is an elusive and obscure concept since it is a multi-dimensional and imprecise concept. R.W. Griffin defines effective communication as the process of transmitting a message in such a manner that, the received meaning is as close to the intended one. According to American Management Association (AMA), effective communication is defined based on ten points which are; a clear idea of the topic and

receiver, determination of purpose, the content of the message, planning of communication, creating awareness to the receiver about the communication and feedback from the receiver. Concerning this study, effective communication refers to well-transmitted information with a precise, coherent, clear, and understandable message by the receiver.

Study conducted by Ochieng and Price (2010) on in Kenya on analyzing the importance of multiculturalism and the new challenges it causes in project execution found revealed effective communication can lead to the performance of the project. There are limited studies assessing how effective communication leads to the performance of multicultural project teams. The study explored how Kenya and UK project teams communicate effectively. The study focused on cultural factors that lead to communication and result in the performance of multicultural teams. The study used 20 interviewees composed of 10 Kenyans and 10 from the UK communication enhances project achievement. It was noted that effective communication is enhanced by the ability of the managers to demonstrate an understanding of cultural variations.

It was also stated that creating effective cross-cultural collectivism, empathy in leadership, trust, and communication are important for project performance in a multicultural environment. The study-applied interview only, which might be a limitation to the achievement of the study objective, triangulation of the method could gather more in-depth data. Emmitt and Gorse (2007) found further that risks in communication and risks emerging from misunderstandings and misinterpretation are much greater. There is also a danger of the expatriate project team “going native” and becoming isolated from the project and pursuing their own project goals rather than focusing on the overall project aim and objectives.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a survey research design. In this design, descriptive was applied to respond to different research questions accordingly. The research was conducted in the Arusha region, Tanzania. The target population of the study was 120 contractors from three construction firms. Out of the 120 contractors, a sample of 55 respondents was randomly selected to respond to the study. Out of 55 sampled respondents, males were 36 and females were 19. A self-constructed questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Descriptive statistics involved the calculation of means and standard deviation, which was used to address research questions one, two and three.

Sampling Techniques

The study used simple random sampling techniques in selected respondents. Simple random technique was used to obtain respondents of the study. Simple random sampling technique was used because each individual in the sample carries out an equal probability of being selected Saunders et al, (2015). Each and every respondent from target population in this study had an equal chance to be included in this study.

Data collection tool

At the year (1997), Ericksson and Wiedersheim, defined that there are two sources of data: primary sources and secondary sources. The assortment of a suitable technique of data collection depends on the research problem, design and classes of data requirements. The study used primary and

secondary data. Secondary data refers to information that is previously presented for use by the authors for an unlike use other than the researcher’s current inquiries. Secondary data was use in this research to create a basic knowledge on the problem which is under investigation; the sources included reports, academic literature and text books, they are being subjected to triangulation so as to maintain high quality and reliability, (Bryman and Bell, 2013). Primary sources that were used in this research are publications in which researchers have reported the results of their studies, mostly in the form of journals which are published monthly, quarterly, or annually. The primary data in this research will be consists of observations, administering questionnaires to collect information

Processing and Analysis

Data analysis involves computation of certain measures along with searching for patterns of relationships that exist between the dependent variable and independent variables. The data were analyzed according to variables and objectives of the study. According to Wambura, (2011) Data analysis is a procedure of assembling or reconstructing the data in a meaningful or comprehensive fashion. It is the process of examining the collected raw data and detects errors and corrects them. In this study data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation helped the researcher to describe the data in terms of the variability of responses. It also involved editing, tabulation and coding of data, the purpose of editing is to correct and inspect each questionnaire to ensure completeness and consistency of data collected.

Findings and discussions

4.1 Data Analysis in Relation to Specific Objectives

The study analyzed descriptive statistics based on the following observed variables:

The following scale was used to ascertain the findings of this study.

Mean Range	Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.50 – 3.25	Agree
1.75 – 2.50	Disagree
1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree

Q1. How does effective communication enhance the performance of multicultural project teams in the construction industry?

The researcher attempted to find out how effective communication enhances the performance of multicultural project teams in the construction industry in Arusha City, Tanzania. The summary

of the results has been presented in Table 1 based on the respondents' feedback. The analysis was done using descriptive statistics by applying average Mean and Standard deviation.

Table 1: The Influence of Communication Skills on Performance

SN	Items in the questionnaire	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	I find it easy to communicate with my supervisor at work	53	2.19	.71	Disagree
2	Interpretation access is available at the workplace	53	2.30	.69	Disagree
3	I am free to talk to my supervisor in a foreign language	53	1.85	.75	Disagree
4	I have the communication skills needed for this job	53	2.41	.69	Disagree
5	Many times communication barriers put me off	53	3.20	.88	Agree
6	Effective communication improves my work performance	53	3.49	.71	Strongly Agree
7	I am confident to speak to my supervisor verbally	53	2.02	.66	Disagree
8	I am satisfied with the communication going on at work	53	2.23	.79	Disagree
9	Many times I'm left out of the conversation while working	53	3.13	.62	Agree
10	Effective communication enhances job performance	53	3.42	.77	Strongly Agree
	Valid N (listwise)	53			
	Average Mean & SD		2.62	.72	Agree

Source: Field data, 2022

From Table 1 workers largely “strongly agreed” that communication skills at the workplace influence the effectiveness of job performance as it is indicated in items 6 and 10 of the questionnaire (M =3.49; SD =.71 and M = 3.42; SD = .77 respectively). However, most of the items that were responded to fell way below the average Mean (M = 2.62; SD = .72). I find it easy to communicate with my supervisor (M = 2.19; SD = .71); No interpretation access (M = 2.30; SD = .69); Freedom to speak to a supervisor (M = 1.85; SD =.75); possessing communication skills (M = 2.41; SD = .69); having the confidence to speak with the supervisors verbally (M = 2.02; SD = .66); satisfaction with the communication going on at work (M = 2.23; SD = .79). They further agreed that they are being left out during conversation (M = 3.13; SD = .62); and communication barriers put them off sometimes (M =3.20; SD = .88). It is important to point out that most of the

standard deviations lie above its average ($SD = .72$), which means that there were some disparities in opinions and slight dispersion among the respondents deviating from the mean.

According to these findings, by and large, employees appreciate the influence of communication skills when performing their duties only but they lack badly that component of language interaction. Pointing out such language disparities, Brett et al., (2007) note that trouble with accents and fluency; direct versus indirect communication; differing attitudes toward hierarchy; and conflicting decision-making norms can cause destructive conflicts in a team. The trouble with accents and fluency can occur when individuals who are not fluent in the team's dominant language may have difficulty sharing their knowledge. Direct versus indirect communication can transpire when some project workers use direct, explicit communication while others are indirect, for example, asking questions instead of highlighting problems with a project leader. Brett et al. (2007) further argued that team members from hierarchical cultures expect to be treated differently according to their status in the organization. With conflicting decision-making norms, project team members vary in how quickly they make decisions and in how much analysis they may require beforehand.

Findings by Ochieng and Price (2010) in a study carried on in Kenya on analyzing the importance of multiculturalism and the new challenges it causes in project execution found revealed effective communication can lead to the performance of the project. There are limited studies assessing how effective communication leads to the performance of multicultural project teams but the study explored how Kenya and UK project teams communicate effectively. The study focused on cultural factors that lead to communication and result in the performance of multicultural teams. The study used 20 interviewees composed of 10 Kenyans and 10 from the UK communication enhances project achievement. It was noted that effective communication is enhanced by the ability of the managers to demonstrate an understanding of cultural variations. Such scenarios of language barriers, largely, have impinged the development of the projects in many places.

7.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that one of the reasons why most construction projects fail to finish on time is due to a lack of communication skills between workers and their supervisors. According to these findings, largely, employees appreciate the influence of communication skills when performing their duties but lack badly that component of language interaction, which hinders a lot of progress. Such scenarios of language barriers, mostly, have impinged the development of the projects in many places.

8.0 Recommendations

The study recommended that the department concerned should ensure that their employees are well-inducted with the language skills to help them manage the work efficiently. Companies must also ensure that they have a contingency fund that serves to help with language orientation.

Second, companies should see to it that employees are well-treated and that different styles of leadership must be employed for the sake of maximizing productivity. Leaders must avoid taking

things for granted at all costs. Leaders must ensure there are checks and balances in their daily endeavors.

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