

COVID 19: PROJECT CHALLENGER AND DEFENDER

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Abstract— This study examines how projects are managed in this era of Covid-19. The study evaluates the implication of the competition that could arise between the project defender (old technology) and project challenger (new technology) occasioned by the modalities put in place by Government and Institutions to stop or reduce the spread of Covid-19. To assess the situation, forty-seven (47) project managers of Optix Nigeria Limited were interviewed using purposive sampling technique. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data using frequency of opinions. The result showed that projects are remotely managed. Project managers adhere to clear communication, efficient monitoring of projects and collaboration. This is done through the use of existing current technology to manage projects. The study concluded that an innovative technology should not be introduced based on either intuitive recommendation from a member of management or a vendor without proper analysis. The study therefore recommended that project managers should develop their internet skills, obtain additional information on information technology and also adopt the strategy of being both a project defender and challenger.

Index Terms— Project, Covid-19, Project Defender, Project Challenger

1 INTRODUCTION

It is no more news that the coronavirus outbreak had created a new order on the activities of humans in the world. To prevent the spread of this virus government at different levels came up with different strategies on how to combat the spread of the virus. This includes lockdown of businesses and restriction on movements of people. This current scenario had led to panic buying stocking of household's items, asking workers to work from home. Before COVID -19 so many projects were on going and are about to kick start.

The outbreak of coronavirus which started in Wuhan, China had spill over effects on management of projects across the world. The fear of the effect of this virus on economic activities led to the development of so many ideas on how to manage ongoing projects and projects that are about to kick-start. These ideas were developed in response to the rules and guidelines developed by NCDC on how to stop and reduce the contraction of the virus. These ideas were developed into new innovations in the way projects are managed. The question that demand answers are that what are the implications of these changes on project delivery, efficiency and effectiveness? What are the implications of these changes on the project management knowledge areas? Since the advent of the pandemic, so many studies have been put forward to assess the effect of the virus on various economies. Current studies on this subject matter focused on the effect of the pandemic on economic crises. One of such study is the paper on Covid-19 and economic crises. The Nigerian experience and structural cases [3]. The paper focused on the weaknesses in the Nigeria's infrastructure and how it has helped to hinder effective management of project.

This paper deviates from this line of discussion by looking at activities involved in project operations during this pandemic. The current approaches may not be effective to deliver key projects. Most organizations may have constraints of having

the most skilled resources to deliver current projects. To cope with the situation, there may be need to develop new ideas, new line of thought on project delivery. This development has led to serious competition between two aspects of innovation which are the defender [Old technology] and new technology [the Challengers].

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the implication of the competition between the project defender and challenger occasioned by Covid-19.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Project

Project has been viewed as an activity that is temporary with a defined period of executing targeted specific goals [1]. [6] see project as a series of tasks that is planned, time bounded and involves utilization of resources. [7] in his own view states that project involves concentrated efforts targeted at pre-planned objective.

From the above different of opinions, the key words that define projects are uniqueness, temporary, resource utilization and goals. These are the key variables that differentiate a project from operations. Projects are discrete and time bounded targeted at some specific goals.

Project Management: Project management has been in existence since early civilization. It involves the utilization of tools, techniques in the implementation of project activities (P.M.I, 2017). In the opinion of [6], project management activities are executed in a process. These processes include initiation, planning, execution and monitoring or controlling. From the ongoing discussion, the act of project or project management are affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has introduced a new order of executing pro-

jects. This new order has implication of project scope, project schedule, network analysis of logical sequence and work breakdown structure identification.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 originated from Wuhan in China. The virus is tagged "SARS-COV-2. There has been over a million reported cases all over the world. The impact of the virus has affected global economy. In the mix of these chaos project execution is no exemption. The spread of the virus and the various activities put in place by various institutions and government to combat the spread of the virus has heightened uncertainty in the process of project execution [3]. One of the major implications of this pandemic is having to work remotely. Current literatures capture the fact that virtual teams are now developed, no more regular physical meetings, video conferencing total live zoom, skype are now frequently in use. These activities are executed based on clear communication and collaboration, data centralization, and efficient monitoring. The effect of this new action in the project execution is that some projects will be cancelled while some would require scope realignment [1].

2.2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Transaction costs perspective

[2] model examines the circumstances under which cooperation agreements are the most efficient form of organisation. In this theoretical approach, industrial innovative linkages can be explained by the increasing vertical disintegration (as adopted in Nigeria power sector to reduce the bureaucracy that has hindered private participation), the necessity of exchange processes increase and the number of required transactions. This is because differentiation, technological complexity and interdependence led to the increase in costs of activity coordination within organisation especially public entity, so that the pressure to search for external arrangements (private participation) rises as well. Hence the most cost-effective variant should be sought. In this interpretation, transaction cost efficiency can be regarded as a motivation for public private partnerships. For example, the level of efficiency expected by the Nigeria government can be determined by the investment in collaborative and R&D efforts between the Nigeria power sector MDAs and its environment.

Innovation Economics

[4] opine that innovation creates novelties. These novelties (inventions) become an innovation via its commercialisation as a result of value added which can be technological or non-technological. A major difference to traditional interpretations of the innovation concept (e.g. as identified by the push and pull model) is that nowadays innovation is regarded as a non-linear and cumulative process which is influenced by socio-cultural factors and which is characterised by interactivity between many stages and many agents contributing to the realisation of an innovation. As a matter of fact, innovation can also be interpreted as a distributed knowledge sourcing and combining process between different agents. Both tangible and intangible (social) interactions with firms, research institutes, intermediaries, clusters, linkages, networks and others play a prominent role in the transfer of information, implicit and explicit knowledge to new technological, so-

cial and organisational solutions to add value to the system (Oluwale, et al., 2013).

Hence, taking a clue from the concept of performance identified earlier, innovation economies provide the bases necessary to believe technological linkage capabilities will provide necessary resource for performing operations at the minimum cost and invariably improving the per capital electricity consumption.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

To assess the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on management of project. An exploratory opinion of how project managers are coping with the situation was examined using the project manager's initiative from current literatures. An empirical study on how project managers are executing their tasks was also carried out. This was done at Optix limited. This is an IT company deploying IT infrastructure project for their clients. This is done through structural interview of project managers that are currently at work during this COVID-19 holiday.

Fifty-Six (56) project managers were interviewed. Forty-Seven (47) of them respondent to the question adequately. Out of the forty-seven, thirty-four were males (72.3%) while thirteen were females (27.7%). The average age of the respondents in years was 32 – 2 (SD = 0.9) with a range of 22 to 51years of age.

4 OUTCOME/DISSCUSION

At this period of COVID-19 pandemic, management of project is a real challenge. The general consensus is that project would have to be managed remotely. The implication of this is that we have to be working from home as project managers. The key issue here is that program managers should be on top of everything. It would be difficult to perform up to optimum, because of the physical barrier. For effective remote project management, project managers now adhere to clear communication, data, centralization and efficient monitoring and collaboration.

Regular status meetings are now avoided, other means of communication are used. The number of emails per day are also reduced, so as not to frustrate the teams. The idea is to build a connected virtual team. Video conferencing tool like zoom, skype, goggle hangout is recommended. Informal meetings with small groups over coffee or tea are encouraged. The information system is centralised. Project manager are now able to log in and track the progress of work done. This would also ensure efficient monitoring.

The findings on Optix Limited showed that the company is employing technology to remotely manage projects. They have increase site meetings using video call apps such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, etc. Real time project works are monitored by using surveillance cameras installed on site to cover all the areas where project work is to be done. These cameras are then connected to the office network with restricted access only granted to the project team and the stakeholders. Regular delivery updates are streamed live and physical quality work can also be ascertained from the camera footage being recorded. The system is designed for continuous recording and archiving for easy footage retrieval when necessary.

Project managers sit in their homes or offices and closely manage project works and report adequately with artifacts to all stakeholders as may be required. An example of a project that is currently being managed using this strategy is the installation of Access control system in MainOne super POP which is currently implemented by Optix limited. The client is MainOne Limited.

However, for effective result, stakeholders must be conscious of the use of engineering economy tools that identify two aspects in project innovation, these are the defender (the present technology) and the challenger (the assumed improved technology).

COVID-19 has created a high level of competition in the evolution of technological innovation. Innovation could be a challenger or a defender. The defender optimizes every opportunity to grow revenue from existing customer base while the challenger creates business models with incentives that enhances gains in competition. The challenger can come up in form of new startups; these are fast-moving rivals. This is a game changing growth linked with innovation.

Companies would now challenge established markets and competitions with innovations that would reinvent an entire industry. New standards are set for customer's satisfaction.

An improved product line or service based on technological development could render the main product obsolete. At this point the defender would be considering either to rapidly emulate what the new entrant is doing or to double down on existing products or services. The thinking is that there must be continuous line of thought that every situation can be improved upon. The competition would be stiffened with the introduction of the 5G network.

In most organisations, especially, in public enterprise like LASU, an analysis that determines if the challenger has a better worth (in terms of benefit or profit) than the defender must be carried out. An innovative technology should not be introduced based on either intuitive recommendation from a member of the management or a vendor without proper analysis. For illustration using LASU as a case study, students were paying through the Quick-teller platform (the defender) and later, Remita platform (the challenger) was introduced. The question that could be raised is that was there a proper analysis to show that the challenger has a better worth than the defender in terms of user-friendliness?

5 CONCLUDING REMARK

COVID -19 is likely to be around for the next one and the half years. The measures put in place by various institutions to stop or reduce the spread of the virus will still be enforced for a long time. Some project will be difficult to execute because the project environment will no more accommodate the management style that was in place before COVID -19. People will stop buying what they don't need. Project that requires congregation before execution will no more be in place. Entertainment, parties will now take a different scenario. There will be no more travel influence and no more group tours. To cope with the situation project managers will have to develop their internet skills, obtain additional information communication technology degrees, if they want to be relevant in the scheme of teams. The project firms and project management experts must be defenders and challengers. This is a new world order.

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