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Stakeholders, ethics and time: Three key challenges of contemporary integration management in Mauritian megaprojects

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Abstract

This research paper identifies three key issues of integration management namely stakeholders, ethics and time as applicable to Mauritius, an island nation in the Indian Ocean. In the present economic context, these concepts are important in ensuring effective integration management. Stakeholders coming from different backgrounds like investors, government and the population at large become a more dominant force over the years and have greater control of project management. In line with stakeholder's perception comes ethics that aims at ensuring that projects are undertaken in the most acceptable and transparent manner. To make projects efficient, time management could be another important variable as it is usually seen that time wastage contributes to turning useful projects into white elephants. This research posits that integration management needs to be highly focused on these key variables to ensure that contemporary projects are managed according to the expectation and satisfaction of the community. Based on case references in the Mauritian context with an unbiased view, this research focusing on three mega State projects—namely the Metro Express, the Heritage City and Nine-Year Schooling—states that due emphasis made on each of the three variables; stakeholders, ethics and time, contributes to addressing today's challenge and response to integration management.

Keywords: Integration management, stakeholders, ethics, time, challenge, response

Introduction: The Concept of Integration Management

According to Warner (2011), Integration management is the project management knowledge area that includes processes that are required to ensure that all the project components are co-ordinated correctly to achieve the project goals. In her work, she states that there are four keys to effectively co-ordinate and manage projects namely: getting a buy-in, creating a plan of attack, making trade-offs and learning from mistakes (Warner, 2011). Open Campus (2017) states that performing integration management is to keep the complete interconnected project as a unified set of activities. The critical success factor for the project manager is the effective execution of the tasks. The same source explains the need for project integration management to maintain equilibrium in all areas of a project like time, scope, cost, human resource, risk, procurement, stakeholder, among others. To ensure that the project is undertaken in the best way, there is a need to detail business goals, create linkage with project goals and carve out the problem statement, scope statement and cost-benefit analysis. Biafore (2016) adds that project integration management is a start-to-finish project to get things done successfully. It is a set of techniques that applies in the achievement of goals and projects.

Conceptual Framework of Contemporary Integration Management

Although there are various variables that can influence project integration management, there are three elements that could be of importance to the Mauritian situation. In Mauritius, megaprojects refer to large-scale projects that are undertaken either by the government, the private sector or both parties conjunctively. There are many such projects that are disclosed every year which firstly create a positive mindset from the public given that these 'projets d'envergure'¹ will help placing Mauritius to a high level of development in the years to come. The megaprojects are highly appreciated at the moment they are being presented but

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¹ Projet d'envergure: French term for megaprojects widely used in Mauritius.

are immediately under scrutiny of stakeholders like investors, government, public authorities, the press and the public. Large-scale projects engulf colossal sums and become a focal point for society members who want to know what is being made of public money as they are tax payers.

Wastage is a major concern for project integration management and this causes a high level of negativity to the Mauritian economy. People are wary of projects that end up as 'white elephants' and make the country lose a lot of money. This aligns with the ethical considerations of integration management whereby the right follow-up of projects, a high level of accountability and traceability are needed. The argument is often to ask how well transparency is met in integration management.

When projects exceed the deadline, their costs rise dramatically. A project worth \$10 million thirty years back in Mauritius could be evaluated up to \$1 billion and over in the actual context. When projects linger or are taken back again on board, they incur higher costs but these do challenge customers or end-users' expectations of project efficiency.

As stated above, there are many other variables that could be discussed but this research limits itself to three key concerns that actually directly impact the Mauritian situation and remain as the most plausible concerns and challenges regarding integration management. The next heading provides a brief literature review of the three concerns: stakeholders, ethics and time related to integration management.

Brief Literature Review

According to Tutorial Point (2017), stakeholder management involves taking into consideration the different interests and values stakeholders have and addressing them during the duration of the project to ensure that all stakeholders are happy at the end.

Stakeholder management is also important because it helps identify positive existing relationships with stakeholders. These relationships can be converted to coalitions and partnerships, which go on to build trust and encourage collaboration among the stakeholders (Tutorial Point, 2017).

Beringer et al (2013) consider stakeholder behaviour and stakeholder management as key success factors of project portfolio management. In their study of 197 project portfolios, they found out that the effect of stakeholders on project portfolios were phase-specific and that their role clarity as a measure of project maturity affected the nature of the relationship between stakeholders and portfolio success. Davis (2014) used an inductive thematic analysis to investigate which factors stakeholders, involved in projects, perceived as key to project success. The research analysed the perception of three groups namely senior management, project core team and recipient stakeholder groups. The research mentioned that the lack of agreement between the groups might lead to the failure of projects.

Regarding ethics, Sims and Kramer (2015) refer to the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct does specify the specific moral obligations to stakeholders. One of these specific moral obligations is the importance of fairness. "Fairness is our duty to make decisions and act impartially and objectively. Our project managers conduct must be free from competing self-interest, prejudice, and favouritism

"(Code of Ethics, 2013, p. 3). The researchers further purport that Fairness theory and the theory of the common good both offer convincing ethical theoretical justification for considering stakeholder needs and concerns in project manager decision making. While they come from differing ethical perspectives, they are not actually contradictory (Sims and Kramer, 2015).

Concerning time as a key factor of integrated management, Richman (2002) states that time management is crucial to the success of the project as it ensures when the project should and will be completed. Jainendrakumar (2015) rightly considers time within the parameters of project management by stating that in the Integration management, project is initiated with a project charter. Stakeholders are identified and a project management plan is developed considering all planning processes of other project knowledge areas such as scope, time, cost among others.

A useful contribution of time management in Project Integration management could come from the AMA Handbook of Project Management attributes the peculiarity of projects to the following characteristic: (a) Projects are unique undertakings-once executed, projects are not likely to be repeated often. (b) Projects are composed of interdependent activities-as in all activities, there is a specific beginning and end and projects may be composed interrelated, simultaneous or successive activities (Dinsmore and Brewin, 2006).

The Literature Gap

The various literature contributions explain the need of the three chosen factors that are essential in Project Integration Management. In the Mauritian situation, there should be technical papers available on the subject area but the actual situation of the country makes the research compelling on the factors cited. Corruption issues are highly exposed to the eyes of the public in the same way as wastage of time and money. Very often, the blame for failure might be directly attributable to the company directors or top management of the organisations involved while the public, through civil society and the free Mauritian press, might be key actors involved in whistleblowing in Project Integration Management in the country. From this standpoint, the researcher has found it right to objectively discuss the key issues while stating how they affect the business concept locally.

Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher used case samples from the Mauritian situation to highlight the relevance of stakeholders, ethics and time. To warrant the consistency and validity of the arguments, a case analysis is undertaken by selecting information from the Mauritian press and analysing them. Since there have been several cases concerned with integration management, the researcher found it right to select just a few ones that marked the Mauritian society in recent times. His point of view was that there is sufficient factual data to support the arguments and the cases considered are highly contextual at the present time. The precaution taken was to side-step points of view of opinion leaders like journalists and political onlookers that might be subjective or biased. There was more an analytical focus on the issues with balanced vision.

A case analysis regarding three selected Mauritian megaprojects

The analysis focused on three megaprojects currently undertaken in Mauritius. Although there are still several projects linked with integration management, some being associated with scandals and adverse criticisms, three projects of national importance have been considered. These give better manoeuvre to analyse the projects which are very well-known in the country and where a lot of papers and opinion articles have been written and continue to incite debate. To ascertain objectivity and rationality in judgment, only State projects are considered. These are dealt as follows: The Metro Express, The Heritage City and the Nine-Year Schooling. The first cited is still under heavy contest, the Heritage project has been abandoned and the Nine-Year Schooling has just been initiated in 2017. The megaprojects are analysed in distinct case studies.

The Metro Express

The Metro Express is considered as the most important transport project for Mauritius. It aims at developing an alternate transport system in the urban areas of the country. The project is estimated around 17m to 20m MUR from an initial evaluation of 24m by the former government. The three concerns of integrated management are briefly analysed below.

Stakeholders

For such a megaproject, the major stakeholder is the Government of Mauritius. This project has been on the agenda of several governments but was each time rebuked by successive governments regarding the initial high cost of investment. There have been a lot of debate through various media including social media regarding the role of stakeholders. It is generally feared that the high investment (18bn MUR taken as loan from the Indian government) can be a spell for long-term and accrued economic deficit of the Mauritian economy. Government stays as the proponent of the project and the public remains divided on the issue. Specialists have generally shown their scepticism regarding the financial burden while they seem to accept the project from the perspective of innovation and transport modernisation.

Ethics

From the ethical point of view, the source of financing is known but there are concerns regarding the clauses of the contract. Given that financing is provided under the assistance of the Indian government, there are doubts regarding the tender or bid that might be passed on to Indian companies already having experience in the project. Opposition parties suggested that this could be also considered by European companies that are as good as their Indian counterparts in rail transport. Another important issue here is the real figure concerning the Metro megaproject. Once again, some preliminary figures are given without proper timeframe and this might add to speculation about project cost by the public as a stakeholder.

Time

Since the project will be executed over the next four years, there are apprehensions regarding time management. This project was first initiated in the 1980s after some

consultants proposed light rail as an alternative mode of transport. According to Juddoo (2017), the costing was around 330 m MUR at that time. Costs rose to 6 bn MUR in the 1990s when the project was again considered. As at 2017, the costing is preliminarily posited at 20 bn MUR which shows that the longer the time frame, the higher is the cost of developing and integrating the project to Mauritius.

The Heritage City

Government of Mauritius claimed to launch the Heritage City Project in the region of Ebene with the assistance of Saudi Arabia. The project was estimated at \$820 m. The expectation was that the project would generate an internal rate of return on investment (ROI) between 14 and 16% and a Return on Equity of 32% (Allafrica.com, 2016).

Stakeholders

The main stakeholder was once again the Government of Mauritius which searched for a loan from Saudi Government, another major stakeholder to the project. Under Build-Operate-Transfer, the project was handed to a local authority. Little could be said of the nature of the funding and the terms and conditions imposed. The public as a stakeholder had apparently little role to play or could be merely a user of the facility provided. Villas were to be constructed and government buildings were to be accommodated. The project was frozen due to lack of transparency from stakeholders.

Ethics

A lot of questions were raised regarding the sustainability of the Heritage City. Press people and onlookers might have considered this as a megaproject with little participation from society. A major issue arose in this case whereby the existence of the Bagatelle Dam was questioned concerning the safety of the place. With due discussion on the issue, this ethical aspect of security was given high consideration and after expert evaluation, the danger was anticipated.

Time

Sewpaul (2016) states that if a sensitivity analysis were carried out to produce the results of 14% and 16% respectively, there were only two values are given instead of one for each of the three scenarios. Scenarios are alternative views of the future. They provide judgments to determine how investment would be affected in different circumstances. For instance, what happens if the economy of Mauritius does not perform as well as in the past few years? These are the matters that will impact on the rental income growth and the future viability of the investment. Discounting technique such as Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) usually used to determine Internal Rate of Return (IRR) and Net Present Value (NPV) is tedious and prone to error according to Andrew Baum and Neil Crosby. Once again, the time concept in planning and completing the project might place heavy burden on its viability.

Nine-Year Schooling

The Nine-Year Schooling concept is an innovative learning strategy for Mauritius where it englobes both primary and secondary education up to fifteen years of age. The reform project is in line with the UN Sustainable Development

Goal 4 on Education which is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (Draft Policy, 2015). The innovation here is that it blends both primary and secondary education. The pressure of a final primary level examination is relieved because students will have to sit for a new primary level examination which is not competitive for college seats. Article 65 from the Government programme stated that Government will introduce a nine-year basic continuous schooling and the Certificate of Primary Education will be replaced by an end-of-primary cycle assessment (Government Programme, 2015).

Stakeholders

The main stakeholder was the Government of Mauritius which aimed at improving the primary education system in the country where the primary final year examination was a 'rat race' with high input on competition. There was also major interest from authorities representing public and private institutions like State Secondary Schools, the Bureau d'Education Catholique, representatives of educators' unions public and primary. Another important stakeholder was the public that represented parents of children admitted to the educational system.

Ethics

The Nine-Year Schooling was firstly a government initiative that lined up with its political agenda. Questions were raised regarding the programme within the educational reform. For example, was the end of the year examination known as the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) a real and true reform compared to the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE)? Would the PSAC remove the spectre of private tuition in the final year of primary examinations (Grade 6)? Did the curriculum take into consideration the concerns of parents, students and educators? If yes, to what extent?

Time

The time factor of the Nine-Year Schooling is important as the real outcome might be measured at around 2022 at the end of the first cycle. The budget incurred in the reform should justify the cost and benefits. There might be apprehensions as to whether this programme might be discontinued, revamped or changed substantially if there is a change in government. The most important argument could be whether this educational reform could be justified or not over time.

Conclusion

This research identified three out of several factors that address today's challenges of integration management in Mauritius. It principally addressed three major governmental projects that were in the limelight for quite a long time in the country. These projects have garnered great interest from various stakeholders with massive financial investment from the government. The objective was to see how the three factors namely stakeholders, ethics and time influenced these projects. Being national megaprojects, there have been and are still hot questions and foresight on such projects given that they have a national impact and they are of key importance both to the country and the future of the Mauritian economy. The research stated that the success of integration management

in these megaprojects depended on the focus that should be given to stakeholders which could be the government, the investors and the public. This was important because the follow-up of by stakeholders might either determine support or discontinuity of such projects. Ethics was another key determinant because megaprojects incur huge financial investments and these need to be respected. In some projects, even the nature of security and environment hazard needed to be considered. Finally, the time factor was an accompanying variable given that the longer the time spent on undertaken a megaproject, the more financially indebted a country like Mauritius might be. To ensure integration, proper coordination of the projects within the three parameters would lead to better accountability, transparency and their success. This could also address the challenge of integration management in Mauritius today.

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