

Communication in a multicultural project team management essay



This chapter is an introduction to the main theme of this thesis. It presents the background, aim and the objectives undertaken for this thesis. It also includes the methodology applied for the realisation of this study, the scope and limitations; significance of the research, and thesis structure.

1. 2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Nigeria is the most populated African nation with 1. 7 million inhabitants. Situated in West Africa, it borders Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. It was under the military regime for 16years before adopting new constitution in 1999 which saw the smooth transmission to a civilian government. It consists of more than 250 ethnic groups fraught with ethnic and religious tensions (Zagorsek et al, 2004). Out of these 250 ethnic groups, three of them remain the most largest and dominant; Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Smaller ethnic groups include the Fulani, Kanuri, Ijaw, Ibibio, Tiv and Edo.

Fig. 1. 1: An historical data chart of the Nigerian population (Source: Trading Economics, 2012).

English is recognised as the official and most common language of Nigeria which is used in schools and government relations. According to Curry (2006), ‘ pidgin’ is a mix of African Languages and English and common in the southern part of Nigeria. This mixture of languages evolved from British sailors who were trying to find a way to communicate with local merchants and it is being used today often in culturally mixed areas as a common form of communication within people lacking formal education in English.

Prior to the European take-over, these groups had their various independent histories and never considered themselves as part of the same culture. This

has resulted in severe internal ethnic conflicts greatly played by the lack of nationalism and often nature of national leadership, which is ethnically biased (Curry, 2006). The confrontations between these different ethnic groups still exist to date. This has created a great amount of concern on how these people from various ethnic groups cohabit and work together as teams from one project to another.

The increasing global nature of construction projects has given rise to the importance of multiculturalism and the new challenges it brings to project execution. Ochieng and Price (2009a) emphasized that contemporary international management literature has identified managing a multicultural team as a significant aspect of human resource management as multicultural project teams have become more common in recent years. The global business environment demands high professional expertise and understanding of cultural diversity. Organisational researchers who recognize the diverse nature of the workforce have increasingly focused on examination of work teams with multicultural members. (Jackson et al, 1995; Snow et al, 1996).

Understanding the use and management of languages has become a growing challenge in the world due to the increase in trend of globalization (Lauring and Selmer 2011). The effectiveness of a project team lies strongly in communication; hence this research examines how cultural factors (e. g., language, attitudes, roles, social organisation, and time) affect the communication process in multicultural project teams. It also investigates the role of cross cultural communication competence in project performance.

According to Elron (1997), the most common challenge multicultural teams' <https://assignbuster.com/communication-in-a-multicultural-project-team-management-essay/>

face is managing cultural differences and cross-cultural conflicts. Ochieng and Price (2009a) however stated that there has been limited research on "people issues" within multicultural teams in construction management literature.

Earley and Mosakowski (2000) assert that multi-cultural teams are used because they are perceived to out-perform mono-culture teams, especially when performance requires multiple skills and judgement. However, Ochieng and Price (2009a) indicated that there has been little research into construction-specific multicultural teams, and many construction organisations, although expanding into global operations do not fully appreciate the implications and are often unable to respond to cultural factors affecting their project teams. However, little or no empirical work is yet to be conducted that quantifies explicitly the extent to which communication determines the success of multicultural projects (Ochieng and Price, 2009a).

With the rapid growth of diverse cultural backgrounds seen globally in organisations, it is therefore pertinent to carry out a study of such, as to how important the role of communication is. This study examines cross cultural communication competence from the Nigeria background, as Matveev and Nelson (2004) described it as a vital component of managers' ability to address the common challenges faced by multicultural teams.

1. 3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Economist (2011) described Nigeria as one of the six fastest growing economies in the world. Being a developing country with impressive growth

rate has necessitated the erection of infrastructures and good access roads as a mark of development. There are lots of construction works going on in different areas of the Nation to meet these needs and this has led to foreign investors and partners trooping in to offer their expertise.

This has led to diverse cultural workforce in major international outfits like Shell, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Total, Julius Berger, Schlumberger to mention but a few across the nation. It has been a challenging problem for project managers and clients to integrate a project team that consists of people from different cultural background (Ochieng and Price 2009b, p. 529). Tijhuis and Fellows, 2012 as cited by Gajendran et al (2012) also stated that the inability to manage cultural conflicts has given rise to project failures hence it is imperative to understand cross-national cultural practices in construction at the international level.

Project failures in the multicultural environment as reported by Turner (1999) are high, which is attributable to the additional complexity of managing cultural differences among multicultural stakeholders. Biggs (2000) added that the bulk of project failures arise consequently because of inadequate communication.

Bruno (1995) in a study conducted on the cross cultural experience of expatriate managers in Indonesia, identified communication as a major factor in cross cultural interaction. Data from this study suggested that there was a definite influence of cultural backgrounds of participants in any cross cultural communication encountered. It is on this premise the need to

investigate the impact of cross cultural communication competence on project performance of multicultural teams.

1. 4 RESEARCH AIM

To develop a conceptual framework that demonstrates project success cognisant of cross cultural communication and multicultural team dynamics.

1. 5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1 To identify the cultural factors that affects multicultural project communication as seen by Nigerian project managers.
2. To analyse which of these cultures; host national culture, organisational culture and project culture have the most impact on project communication.
3. To investigate the effects of demographic variables on project managers' multicultural communication competence.
4. Develop a framework that accounts for cultural differences and communication competence of multicultural project teams.
5. Test and validate the framework with domain experts.

1. 6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Company directors, project managers and team members involved in construction engineering projects will be selected from Abuja and Lagos states, Nigeria to give a variation in the project environments to be examined. The rationale of this is to explore expert views from successful project managers with project teams on cultural complexity within the

Nigerian construction industry. This section is further explained in chapter five.

1. 7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this study is limited and bounded to the context of Nigeria (Abuja and Lagos), the areas chosen for the purpose of data collection. This study focuses on senior managing directors and project managers as they are the primary channels of communication for handling multicultural project teams and decision making within construction projects.

1. 8 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

Chapter One: Research Introduction

This chapter introduces the subject of communication with respect to cross cultural project teams. It gives an overview of the rationale behind the chosen dissertation topic and highlights the aims and objectives.

Furthermore, it breaks down the structure of the dissertation by giving a brief summary of each chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – Culture

Chapter two is a review of literature sources that extensively combines the summary and synthesis of previously published journals, scholarly articles and textbooks on the subject of culture. It defines key subject areas under culture that ostensibly covers cultural dimensions, organisational culture, cultural differences in project teams and the types of culture. The subjects raised in this review will serve as a basis for which this research is based upon.

Chapter Three: Literature Review – Communication

Chapter three is a review of literature that discusses the subject of cross cultural communication and multicultural project teams. It gives a review of cross cultural communication, project communication, cultural communication competence within a multicultural workforce as well as the responsibility of project managers in managing such teams and the position of an organisation in the global market working with multicultural project teams.

Chapter Four: Conceptual Framework Modelling

This chapter presents the research framework developed. It discusses each section of the framework and the variables attributed to the modelling.

Chapter Five: Research Methodology

This chapter succinctly defines the types of research methods available, research instruments for data collection, and justifies the use of the chosen method. It also presents a research design for this dissertation, the statistical tools used in analysing the collected data and the structure of the questionnaires used. Further discussed are the important procedures, methods and techniques that have been used to test for validity and reliability. This research methodology is presented in such a way that all the options available are at the researcher's disposal.

Chapter Six: Analysis and Findings

Chapter four is a presentation of the findings obtained and data analysis found from the research conducted. It shows how the data were collected and then processed in response to the problems posed in chapter one of this

dissertation. These results obtained will demonstrate the accomplishment of the stated aim and objectives.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter gives a precise evaluation of the work conducted, identifies the common and distinctive features of the objectives and demonstrate the results of this research. In addition, it proves to the reader that in the process of this research, a critical understanding of range of problems set in the dissertation was developed. Also stated in this chapter are limitations that should be taken into consideration when conducting such research in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: CULTURE

2. 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter synthesises core extent literature surrounding the research topic and focuses of significant knowledge areas that covers, sociology, psychology and management for the concepts investigated, which includes the following; culture, cultural dimensions, types of culture and cultural differences,. These concepts are the key target areas reviewed that discusses the relationship between project performance and cultural differences.

2. 2 CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

Pheng and Leong (2000) described culture as intricacies that include the following knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. For the purpose of this <https://assignbuster.com/communication-in-a-multicultural-project-team-management-essay/>

study, Lustig and Koester (2006, p. 25) says “ Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people”, this definition explains the link between culture and communication.

Schein, 1985 as cited by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), says “ Culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas”. Schein (2010) indicated three levels of culture that covers tangible manifestation to basic assumptions which include; Artefacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values, Basic underlying Assumptions.

EXPLICIT

IMPLICIT

Fig. 2. 1: Trompenaars’ model of Culture (Source: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Schein (2010, p. 24) described artefacts as visible processes and observed behaviours which remains hard to decipher, the basic underlying assumptions he tags the ‘ taken for granted beliefs and values’, which determines behaviour, perception and feelings; Norms and values are the perceptions of good and bad which is less visible (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Hofstede is seen as one of the key writers and proponents of cultural theory, through his research in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s which was based on employees of the information technology company IBM. Hofstede performed an initial study of IBM employees in the 1960’s and continued the study for thirty years. This survey covers over 72 countries, and over 116, 000 survey

respondents from IBM. (<http://geert-hofstede.com/research.html>). The central premise to Hofstede's work is that culture and cultural identity are learned attributes developed over time Hofstede et al (2010, p. 6) defines culture as “ the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. The three layers of mental programming identified by Hofstede included individual, collective and universal. Based on these three layers, Hofstede constructed the culture triangle (See Fig 2. 1.) through the following areas;

The Individual level (personality) is focused on the mental programming exclusive to each person. Hofstede suggests that this level is at least partly inherited.

The Collective Level (culture) is focused on the mental programming that is learned from others, that is specific to a group of people.

The Universal level (human nature) is focused on all humans, and is likely inherited e. g. Instincts for survival.

Fig. 2. 1: The three levels of uniqueness in metal programming. (Source: Hofstede et al 2010, p. 6)

2. 3 CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

In studies conducted by Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1984, 1991, 1997, 2001) as cited by Jandt (2007), Hofstede based the four dimensions of culture on an extensive survey at IBM in which the investigation was conducted on the influence of national culture. These dimensions of culture Hofstede defined as a way of mapping and explaining differences in national cultures. Blodgett et al (2008, p. 762), after thoroughly investigating Hofstede's model argued <https://assignbuster.com/communication-in-a-multicultural-project-team-management-essay/>

that: “ Hofstede’s cultural instrument lacks sufficient validity when applied at the individual unit of analysis”. Also, McSweeney (2002, p. 94), went further to criticise and discredit Hofstede’s theories stating that “ The scale problem of Hofstede’s research is radially compounded by the narrowness of the population surveyed” and that Hofstede oversimplified the importance of organisational culture as a component and a relevant factor when matching samples across countries. However, St Claire-Ostwald (2007) pointed out that rejecting the totality of Hofstede’s model of national culture, before a more suitably model is developed would be discarding very important insight to the subject at hand. Hence, the four cultural dimensions are explained in detail in the next section.

2. 3. 1 Power Distance

It shows the amount of equality, or inequality, between people in a society. It is the amount to which the fewer powerful members of organisations and institutions believe that power is distributed unequally. This symbolizes inequality as defined from underneath, not from top. Javidan and House, 2001 as cited by Matveev and Nelson (2005), described the power distance as a dimension that controls each stratosphere an entity belong as regards material possessions, power, prestige, authority, wealth and status.

According to Matveev and Nelson (2005), Low power distance culture is distributed equally among members of that society as they are likened to participation, consultation, cooperation and practicality whereas the High distance power prefers hierarchical bureaucracies, strong leaders and a high regard for authority. Bantz, 1993 as cited by Matveev and Nelson (2005) stated that there are bound to be difficulties in putting together a suitable

pattern for communication and leadership that suits members of a multicultural team that exhibit significant difference in power distance.

Table 2. 1 gives a summary of the two types of power distance present in today's organisations and various workplaces.

TABLE 2. 1: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SMALL AND LARGE POWER DISTANCES SOCIETIES IN THE WORKPLACE. (Source: Hofstede, 2005, p. 59).

SMALL POWER DISTANCE

LARGE POWER DISTANCE

Hierarchy in Organisations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience.

Hierarchy in organisations reflects existential inequality between higher and lower levels.

Decentralisation is popular.

Centralisation is popular.

There are fewer supervisory personnel.

There are more supervisory personnel.

There is a narrow salary range between the top and bottom of the organisation.

There is a wide salary range between top and bottom of the organisation.

Managers rely on their own experience and on subordinates.

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Managers rely on superiors and on formal rules.

Subordinates expect to be consulted.

Subordinates expect to be told what to do.

The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat.

The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat, or “ good father”.

Subordinate-superior relations are pragmatic.

Subordinate-superior relations are emotional.

Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon.

Privileges and status symbols are normal and popular.

2. 3. 2. Individualism versus Collectivism

Hofstede, 2005 describes the ties between individuals in an individualist society as loose. In this society, individuals tend to look after their own self-interest (Jandt, 2007). Apparently they are comfortable with having the authority to make decisions based on what each individual believes is best. A collectivist society on the other hand is one in which there is a cohesive relationship between individuals as their bonds are a lot stronger (Hofstede, 2005). As succinctly put by (Jandt, 2007), the interest of such group or community supersedes the interest of the individual.

The national differences in individualism was obtained using the individualism index , in which high scores were found in the United kingdom,

America and Australia, as they value autonomy and self-interest while the lowest individualism index scores were found in nations like Panama, Ecuador, Guatemala, Japan, Sweden and Russia, in which they value group harmony, cooperation and satisfaction. (Anbari et al 2008; Matveev and Nelson, 2007).

Hofstede et al (2010) assert that countries in which the individualist middle class culture is domineering, some rural subculture display a strong collectivist element in them. Further pointed out was the notion that this setting is applicable to minority migrant workers who become part of the majorities in a workforce in some countries and thus is a likely cause for culture conflict between managers and their workforce.

Bantz, 1993 op cit Matveev and Nelson (2005) also emphasised that multicultural teams with the individualist and collectivist nature such as the Russians and Americans will exhibit different opinions when it comes to organisational and individual responsibilities, as they are likely to encounter difficulties in developing team roles. See Table 2. 2 for a summary of the differences between the collectivist and individualist in workplaces.

TABLE 2. 2: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COLLECTIVIST AND INDIVIDUALIST SOCIETIES IN THE WORKPLACE. (SOURCE: Hofstede, 2005, p. 104)

COLLECTIVIST

INDIVIDUALIST

Diplomas provide entry to higher status groups.

Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.

Occupational mobility is lower.

Occupational mobility is higher.

Employees are members of the in-groups who will pursue their in-group's interest.

Employees are “ economic men” who will pursue the employer's interest if it coincides with their self- interest.

Hiring and promotion decisions take an employee's in-group account.

Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.

The employer-employee relationship is moral, like a family link.

The employer-employee relationship is a contract between two parties on a labour market.

Management is management of groups.

Management is management of individuals.

Direct appraisal of subordinates spoils harmony.

Management training teaches the honest sharing of feelings.

In-group customers get better treatment (particularism)

Every customer should get the same treatment (Universalism).

Relationship prevails over task.

Task prevails over relationship.

2. 3. 3 Masculinity versus Femininity

This dimension deals with the issue of work roles between gender roles in a society. Pheng and Yuqan (2002) based on Hofstede's work, described this dimension as division in gender roles in which society lays emphasis on work goals and assertiveness disparate to personal goals and discipline. The characteristics of a masculine culture include;

Performance-driven society, rewards and recognition for performance, innovations as outcome of financial rewards, prestige and a sense of accomplishment.

Competitive, ambitious, and assertive in order to achieve their goals. This type of culture tends to give the utmost respect and admiration to the successful achiever who fulfils his or her ambition and demonstrates assertiveness and willingness to take risks in order to achieve goals.

The characteristic of a feminine culture include;

Emphasis on the quality of the life rather than money, success and social status, which are easier to quantify.

Organisations with a feminine culture are not as competitive as those with a masculine culture, because the former places higher priority on concern for

others and little distinction is made between men and women in the same position. (Hofstede et al, 2010).

This suggests that cultures with masculine dimension are likely business oriented while those from feminine dimension prefer to first develop relationships.

2. 3. 4 Uncertainty Avoidance

People feel comfortable when exposed to ambiguity or uncertainty to this limit. Anbari et al (2008) describes this as the extent which culture has programmed its member to be comfortable or uncomfortable in unknown situations different from the usual and the degree to which society controls the uncontrollable. This implies that people in low uncertainty avoidance society are willing to take risks and be informal as opposed to those in high uncertainty avoidance society. In addition, the awareness of this dimension would give help in operational strategies a project manager uses in the project environment.

2. 4. TYPES OF CULTURE

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) distinguished cultural patterns on three different levels; national, organisational and professional level.

However Eberlein (2008) argues that this classification does not reflect the fact that organisational cultures of multi-national organisations covers the boundaries of national or professional cultures in its entirety. For the purpose of this study, the four types of culture being analyse includes; organisational culture, project culture, individual cultural and national culture.

2. 4. 1 Organisational Culture

Reference for business (2010) describes organisational (also known as corporate culture) as “ shared values, attitudes, standards, codes, and behaviours of a company’s management and its employees” Tichy 1982 as cited by Ojo (2009) says organisational culture is the ‘ normative glue’ that binds an organisation. Jaspal (2010) describes organisational culture as the totality of attitudes and psychology that are exchanged between the leadership team and its employees in which the values and norms are adapted for work to be executed. Lok and Crawford (2004) in a study conducted on job satisfaction and commitment stated that organisational culture was a driving force in achieving that. Martins and Terblanche (2003) stated that the organisational structure and operational systems of an establishment is being influenced by the degree of creativity and innovation. A good example of the role of organisational culture in an establishment as pointed out by is the mission, vision and objectives statement (Martins and Terblanche, 2003). Recent research on organisational cultures indicates the presence of sub-cultures present in an organisation that influences organisational performance in a positive or negative way . The four types of organisational culture recognised in present day organisations includes; control (hierarchy) organisational culture, compete (market) organisational culture, collaborate (group/clan) organisational culture, create (adhocracy) organisational culture (Tharp, 2009; Duygulu and Ozeren, 2009).

Control (hierarchy) Organisational Culture: A structured work environment with guidelines and techniques that governs the behaviour of its individuals.

Significant interest in running smoothly and dependable delivery within its budget constraints.

Compete (market) Organisational Culture: is a demanding culture that is result driven while achieving a high market share. Leadership style in such organisation is focusing on long term targets.

Collaborate (clan) Organisational Culture: An organisation said to be the most effective as it is built on teamwork, participation and consensus. Here everyone is given an opportunity to contribute to the decision making process.

Create (adhocracy) Organisational Culture: All about innovation and risk taking when entering new areas with emphasis on gaining new resources and growth. Employees are charged to think differently and experiment in the dynamic environment created. Carpenter et al (2010) stated that such organisations are characterised by the non- existence of hierarchy as status tend to be on a low profile

Carpenter et al (2010) characterised organisational cultures by values which are profiled to compare and assess an organisation fit, hence aiding in managing culture more effectively. The values are seen in Fig. 2. 3 below known as the OCP (Organisation Culture Profile), and the profiles are innovative culture, aggressive culture, outcome oriented culture, stable culture, people oriented culture, team oriented culture and detail oriented culture. These values are all similar to the four types of organisational culture discusses above in section 2. 4. 1. The innovative culture would easily fall under the adhocracy as it is all about experimenting new ideas and <https://assignbuster.com/communication-in-a-multicultural-project-team-management-essay/>

taking risk. . Deutschman (2004) also corroborated that in such organisations, employees hardly have bosses hence risk taking is highly encouraged no matter the outcome of success or failure.

Fig. 2. 3: An organisation culture profile. (Source: O'Reilly 1991)

Aggressive organisation profile is all about competitiveness where an organisation is out to beat the performance of other companies and falls under the Compete category as discussed earlier. Outcome-oriented cultures focuses on results achieved and this serves as the core values for such organisations. Probst and Raisch (2005) further argued based on such culture that rewards are tied to performance indicators rather than loyalty.

In a research conducted by Nohria, Joyce and Roberson (2003), it was discovered that organisations that is based on performance-oriented culture has a likelihood of outpacing other organisations without such culture. People-oriented culture organisation has it focus on the people, their rights, respect and dignity (Erdogan, Liden and Kramer, 2006). Team-oriented culture can be found in organisations that encourages cooperation amongst its employees (Bolino and Turnley, 2003). Such culture should be encouraged in multicultural teams as it makes individuals better team players. Gareis (2004) stated that the idea of organisational culture in its entirety is not limited to permanent organisations but also temporary organisations e. g. projects.

2. 4. 2 Project Culture

Project culture according to Laufer (2012) is what binds and organisation together in as much as the project members share the same values, behaviours and adhere strictly to the rules binding the project. Gareis (2004) also emphasised that development of team spirit within a project and the orientation of team members is because of the project culture which can be perceived by the way project members behave and the modes of communication used during the project. Furthermore, Ajmal and Koskinen (2009) added that having the same vision and shared values are vital for projects due to the energy it provides for creating knowledge. However Agile anarchy (2012) argued that since project culture is where people serve projects by time, values and beliefs within a project cycle, it could serve as a detriment to honing or developing new skills.

Gareis (2004) listed the elements of project culture as project name, project specific values, project slogans, project related artefacts, project infrastructure and project events.

Project name: Contains all project information that relates to the project which can be easily recognised, identified and promote the objectives of the project. This element includes the project logo and project colour.

Project Specific Values: This project mission statement serves as a benchmark to the desired outcomes it intends to achieve. It gives orientation the actions of the team members and further controls the conduct of the members in the project organisation. This project values can be determined by asking key questions like specifics of the project outcome, ' what is

significant and not significant to the project teams’ and ‘ what distinguishes a project to other projects’? These questions can help shape the project value and in turn the project culture as this can have implications for project performance (Laufer, 2012).

Project Slogans and Project related anecdotes: This is used to give direction to project teams as it communicates the important factors in the project. It could be done for the entire project or given at each phase of the project. The anecdotes are also used to convey the image of project to the customer.

Project related artefacts, Project language and Project room: This include the project documents like project plan, project organisation chart. The contents of these documents f