



Everyone's Smart University

Project (Spring 2021)

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PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Relationship between Leadership Style and Project Success

The success of any project depends on how it is coordinated, organized, and supervised. While operational project management requires teamwork, they may perform differently, depending on the leadership style involved. Efficient project leaders motivate and inspire team members to increase their focus and determination towards project success. According to Kalu, Lew, and Sim (2013), leadership influences employee commitment, stress, teamwork success, and motivation. Democratic leadership promotes resonance in the team since all members are entitled to opinions, while autocratic leadership is commanding and can foster dissonance (Kalu et al., 2013). However, Liphadzi, Aigbavboa, and Thwala (2015) demonstrate a low relationship between democratic leadership style and project success, as these leaders leave teams to make their own decisions. Overall, leadership style influences project success, but soft skills are the most effective as they enhance the connection among project members as well as between them and their leader.

Statement of the problem

Project failure can cause substantial financial costs to an organization. When designing a project, some managers only consider schedule and plan as the critical success factors. However, project leaders are essential in the success as they organize teams and allocate assignments. Thus, it can be hypothesized that if a leader's style is ineffective, a project may not succeed as planned due to a poor relationship between team coordination and project goals.

Research Aims and Objectives

The primary goals of the study are to:

1. Understand the relationship between leadership style and project success.
2. Determine which leadership style is most effective for project success.

3. Show the relationship of the style of leadership to the type of the project and its sustainability.
4. Understand the importance of hard and soft skills in project management.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Leadership plays a vital role in organizational and project success. A study by Kariuki (2018) found a significant relationship between a project manager's leadership style and project completion time. However, the research did not find a meaningful relationship between leadership style and project cost performance. In a study cited by Kalu et al. (2013), the authors found that business literature proves relationship between leadership style and organizational effectiveness as well as employee commitment. Therefore, selecting the most efficient style can be crucial for the future of the project.

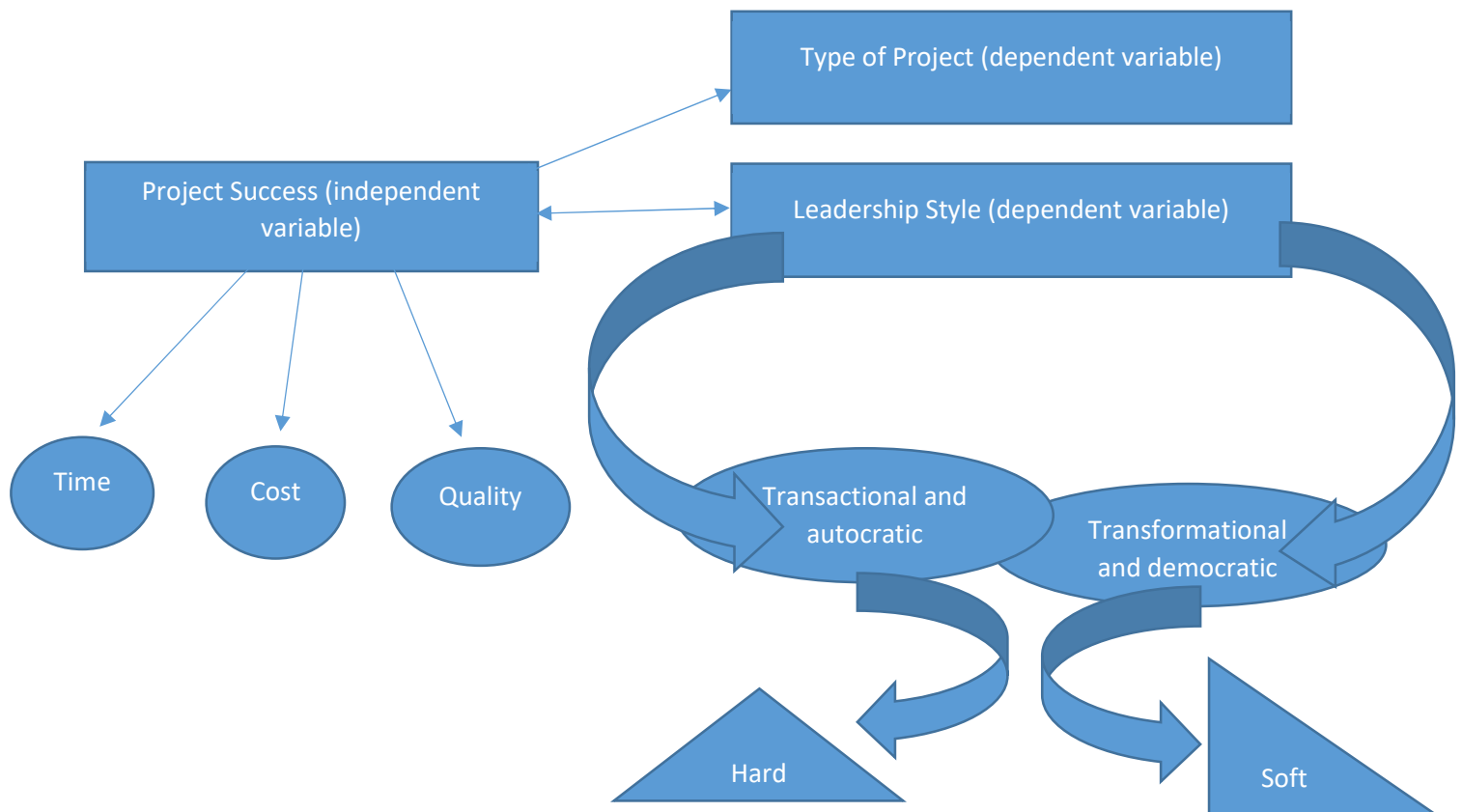
The type of project may influence the suitable leadership style. There are no performance criteria applicable to all projects; thus, various stakeholders may view project performance differently. A project that is successful to clients may be considered unsuccessful by contractors. Depending on how a team is coordinated, a project may experience cost overruns and delays. The leadership style influences team members' motivation, determination, and commitment to achieve the set project goals.

Any leadership style can be effective depending on the type of project. According to Kariuki (2018), transformational leaders motivate team members and address their self-esteem and values. They also help followers to achieve objectives by raising their level of awareness. Influential leaders act as role models to their followers, have a compelling future vision, and create an image of success. They also question assumptions, seek and listen to differing opinions, and encourage creativity and innovation (Kariuki, 2018). Besides, a transformational leader has a

positive-change mindset, can envision the future, and anticipates variations in the environment. Such leaders can transcend in any setting and excel in any project. Transformational leaders enhance project success by creating a sense of project ownership by every member and molding change to the direction that best suits the task at hand. On the contrary, transactional leadership takes more of an autocratic role by focusing on tangible rewards. Liphadzi et al. (2015) also show a positive relationship between transactional leadership style and project success. The transactional approach involves exchanges between leaders and their followers, where the former attain their goals, and the latter receive rewards. Thus, all leadership styles can be considered equally important in project success depending on the type of assignment or the goals set.

Proper management of projects requires the application of both soft and hard skills. The latter include background knowledge, technological know-how, work experience, and domain expertise. The soft skills include risk management, planning, monitoring, evaluation, communication, and scheduling (Awan, Ahmed, & Zulqarnain, 2015). The soft skills enable a manager to work with people of different backgrounds and skills and develop a good connection with team members. No project can succeed if the manager does not coordinate the team efforts. According to Awan et al. (2015), soft skills contribute to approximately 85% of project success, while hard skills are responsible for around 15% of success rates. Therefore, while hard skills enable a manager to understand the technical details for better planning and scheduling, soft skills are most critical in ensuring teamwork and coordination of project members.

The key variables from the literature review include project success (independent variable), leadership style (dependent variable), and type of project (dependent variable). The resultant conceptual framework is as shown below.



Methodology

The study will adopt a qualitative methodology; the required information cannot be determined quantitatively. Open-ended questionnaires will be submitted to members of project teams in different organizations. Apart from the demographic and professional data, participants will be required to answer questions regarding their preferred leadership style in project management. The questions will be asked based on different projects to determine if the project type influences the leadership approach. The study will also collect data from project managers to understand if they are likely to adopt a different leadership style depending on the assignment at hand. The methodology does not require many participants, but the questionnaire is detailed enough to cover all the themes.

Results and Discussion

The studies reviewed depict a direct relationship between leadership style and project success. Every project manager aims to complete the assigned task within the allocated timeline and budget. The success depends on the relationship between the manager and team members and that among individual participants. Some projects may require autocratic leadership, while others may only succeed under a democratic environment. For instance, if the goal is to collect ideas from customers to develop a new product, an autocratic style may limit opinions of some members, which may be most crucial in developing conclusions. Besides, a project manager with a specific goal to be accomplished within a specified duration may be successful with an autocratic style. In the latter case, team members are ready to follow the directions given by their manager. Thus, it is true that project management depends on leadership style, but no style is better than the other.

The most critical factor in project success, regardless of the type of leadership involved or the type of assignment, is the application of soft and hard skills. The latter enables a project manager to be in control since they understand all the technical details of the tasks at hand. However, Awan et al. (2015) emphasize soft skills as most crucial to project success as they enable better chemistry between members and the project manager. In some cases, a manager may not be well trained in the technical area that the project covers, but their ability to bring experts on board and coordinate members who understand the technical aspects, lead to project success. The studies reviewed did not show the relationship between the leadership style and soft or hard skills. Future studies should establish this relationship by determining if soft skills are more aligned to autocratic or democratic styles.

Conclusion

Project failure may cost significant financial losses to an organization. The leadership style adopted by a project manager may be based on the type of project and is a crucial determinant for project success. Effective project managers possess relevant soft skills to ensure team coordination and communication.

References

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