DOES PERFORMANCE OF NGO PROJECTS LEVERAGE ON RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES?

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ABSTRACT

For many decades, Kenya's economic development has been promoted through various projects run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These include projects include complementary relief services, educational programmes, child welfare, and health services among others. Even though success has been experienced in many of the projects, there are several examples indicating failures thus showing that projects face many risks. Key among the touted problems leading to the poor performance has been the risks undertaken in running the projects. This article aims to link the performance of NGO projects to specific risk management strategies based in Nairobi County. Theoretical anchor focuses on the stakeholder theory, supported by the theory of resource-based view and agency theory. To accomplish the objectives, descriptive approach research design sufficed, and random stratified sampling aimed at 110 projects run by NGOs, as indicated in the 2018/2019 KNGOB report. Project officers at the NGOs acted as the key respondents while the unit of analysis was performance of the NGO projects. Data collection utilised a structured questionnaire administered mainly using online approach in the face of covid-19 health restrictions with a response rate of 84 out of the targeted 110 projects. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in finding field results. Through regression analysis with a linear model result showed a strong relationship between risk management strategies and project performance. The resulting value of regression coefficient at .000 (p<0.05) indicated existence of relationships that were relatively strong. The article concludes that performance success of projects is dependent on the careful choice or selection of risk management strategies. It is expected the results will benefit various stakeholders, including the government policy makers, NGO sector players, and academia. These article findings additionally boost the body of knowledge of NGOs, project performance, and risk management strategies with related theories. Further studies exploring more strategies to manage risks as well as projects in other entities including urban, rural and County sectors could be undertaken by other scholars.

Key words: **Risk Management, NGOs, Project management, Project performance, Kenya**

INTRODUCTION

The vital issue in project performance then becomes how risk management should be handled. As Schneicker (2018) pointed out in the USA, any NGO starting a project has to consider all factors, including its size, the expected impact on the community, and the project's cost, before undertaking it, because if the risks involved are high, they cause financial losses and in worst case scenario a failed NGO. Risks represent obstacles that can derail any set of plans leading to the termination or partial completion of the whole project (Franz & Messner, 2019). Through careful mitigation processes, it becomes possible to

offset the impending effects of such risks and this constitutes the risk management process as witnessed in projects across the global, regional and local scenes. As pointed out by Pratano (2018), the expected returns when measured against the inputs of a project constitute the performance of such project although this is viewed differently from the shareholders' view as well as stakeholders' view in which the former concerns financial benefits whereas the former is concerned with societal impact of the project as the key indicator of performance.

In a study on humanitarian NGOs across Europe and the United States of America, Schneiker (2018) seeks to establish the risk averse measures that ensure delivery of services during emergencies. The need to remain active under all circumstances means that such NGOs must have systems that mitigate against all forms of risks. Using a sample of 54 such humanitarian NGOs, Schneiker surveys these NGOs seeking to find out the risk management systems in place and proves that various barriers exist in implementing such risk management systems. In conclusion, Schneiker observes that processes, policies and structures require the success of risk management systems.

Similarly, Mojtahedi and Oo (2017) consider risk management and stakeholders in managing early detection of disasters in Hong Kong. The scholars hold that proactivity in management systems is the key to minimise those risks that cannot be avoided entirely or shared. They point towards power and management reactive as well as proactive measures that would minimise such disasters. In surveying disaster management organisations, Mojtahedi and Oo conclude that policy makers with disaster mitigation measures will balance resources to cater to all forms of risk.

In terms of social performance, Pratano (2018) postulates that it is more objective to use social project performance measures rather than financial measures such as: return on investment, actual cost, planned value, and earned value; these measures are difficult to determine when assessing projects in the NGO sector. Peral, Maté and Marco (2017) recommend using milestone completion on time, stakeholder perception of value, stakeholder participation and business performance impact of the project as the best measurements; strategy planning is recommended to plan and align project measures to organisations strategic (Nederhand & Klijn, 2019; Peral et al., 2017; Franz & Messner, 2019).

Customer satisfaction is another measure of project performance that has proved very useful for many firms (Um & Kim, 2018). Every project has to satisfy its intended customers with systems put in place for reporting such satisfaction. Accordingly, many projects have designed monitoring and evaluation systems to gauge project owners' feedback (Oufkir & Kassou, 2018). Similarly, Unterhitzenberger and Bryde (2019) have explored the possibility of surveying with the intended project customers before the project commencement as a means of establishing what exactly constitutes their real satisfaction. However, the problem with such an approach different customer group could differ on what satisfaction means to them. Such a project would be deemed a success by the new set of customers and a complete failure by the original customers or beneficiaries (Vanhanen, Lehtinen & Lassenius, 2018).

Risk avoidance strategies are calculated measures meant to deflect off as much risk as possible in case of occurrence (Ahmadi, Behzadian, Ardeshir & Kapelan, 2017). As is commonly referred to in daily lives, avoiding risk is being aware of where risks exist and taking the best steps to take out the chance of encountering the risks.

Risk reduction is another risk management strategy, as pointed out by Srivanas (2019). Otherwise known as mitigation strategy, this is a measure undertaken to reduce the value loss, such as the financial losses incurred. The strategy works to minimise the number of losses if that hazard occurs in the future. Risk sharing on its part is also referred to as the spread of risks in a pre-calculated formula amongst various parties but normally between a firm and its insurance partners (Ghadge, Dani, Ojha & Caldwell, 2017). The common measures or indicators of risk sharing include transfer, outsourcing and most likely insuring. Risk retention is the calculated strategy of reserving funds to offset a risk when and if it occurs, a saving fund in the form of self-insurance with the possibility of covering many forecast risks for the entity. The risk is not transferred to second parties nor fund hedging (Aiyer, Panigrahi & Das 2018).

THE PROBLEM

The fact that projects involve heavy funding is an indication that risks are involved in whatever project is undertaken (Zhu & Mostafavi,2017). Risks need to be factored in any project planning as this could be the surest way of avoiding total loss in case of failure or that risk coming to pass (Gruden & Stare, 2018). Initial project risk management strategies, including avoidance and reduction strategies, can be interchanged but require strict calculations with forecasts to aid in mitigation processes. These two strategies have been tested successfully on various NGOs' specific projects (Naeem, Khanzada, Mubashir & Sohail, 2018). NGOs have struggled to have well-performing projects even though they have always shown tremendous or colourful initiation or commencement (Njeri & Were, 2017).

OBJECTIVE

This article had a main objective of establishing the relationship between risk management strategies and NGOs' project performance in the City of Nairobi County

LITERATURE REVIEW

This article has adopted three main theories, including Stakeholder theory, Resource-based view theory and Agency theory

The Stakeholder Theory

Proposed by Freeman (1994) and later supported by scholars including Miles (2017), Jones, Wicks and Freeman (2017) as well as Berman and Johnson-Cramer (2019) stakeholder theory envisages the equal sharing of costs while having the agency principle in transparency such

that all players in the entity know and respect their position. The theory assumes that mainly an entity is viable only if it produces value to the stakeholders. In other words, stakeholders do not need remaining as stakeholders if their entity does not add value to them as stakeholders. The key criticism of stakeholder theory is that it has no basis to involve the stakeholders since stakeholders have no obligation to participate in the entity's activities. Another criticism of the stakeholder theory is that it tends to weaken the entity management team's responsibility by appearing to create another silent force of power in the stakeholders. This means the top management could connive with stakeholders to undermine the entity project for selfish means (Freeman, Phillips & Sisodia, 2020). It is important that stakeholders are well informed of such strategies in order to avoid audit queries in case of a project not performing to its maximum potential thus avoiding losses.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

Theory of Resource-Based View (RBV) as proposed in 1991 by Barney states that the exploitation of well-designed internal resources can be directed towards a sustained competitive advantage by a firm or organization. The key assumptions in applying the RBV theory are that resources are heterogeneous and that these resources for every entity are immobile. When estimating the risks in a project, the decision to retain or share the risk is most likely made regarding the entity resources (Clarke & MacDonald, 2019).

RBV theory has suffered from criticism of limited strict application since only a few entities can qualify as having unique and heterogeneous resources especially in the modern world in which many resources are shared across the specific sector (Schneiker 2018). Another criticism of RBV theory is that it has no managerial implication as the focus is solely on resources yet in the practical world, resources cannot be of any value if they are not well-managed (Fontana, 2018). The theory supports risk retention strategy objective as resources are key in NGOs' capability to have retained risks. Projects require lots of resources and hence the need to consolidate as much resources as possible for the success of a project calls for a risk retention strategy.

Agency Theory

Agency theory (Meckling & Jennings, 1976) central tenant is the key linkage of principals of a firm and the people selected or chosen to run the businesses for them in terms of managers or executives of the business. The agent is the management (or an employee) that performs tasks on behalf of the principal. However, there are criticisms since the theory assumes an inherent conflict between the interests of a firm's owners and its management as first observed by Fama and Jensen (1983) and by later scholars, including Dagnino, Giachetti, La Rocca and Picone (2019). Furthermore, the theory mainly focuses on the agent, yet the principal may be the key problem by not supplying adequate resources or motivation for a specific project yet still expecting productivity from that set project (Panda & Leepsa, 2017). Finally, Mitnick (2019) observes in modern times; agency theory might just not be focusing on the presumption that agents have a get-rich attitude. The agency theory prescribes that

people or employees are held accountable in their tasks and responsibilities, but this might be not possible in many NGOs (Ning, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This current study sought to link performance of projects to the strategies of risk management at NGOs.

Research Design

The most suitable research design, for the current study was, descriptive design. A descriptive research design consists of collecting measurable data classified or compared to each other while being analysed for interpretation (Creswell, 2014).

Target Population

Specifically, projects at the NGOs registered in Nairobi County formed population for research. KNGOB (2019) records indicated 1252 projects in Nairobi County. The project officers at the NGOs were the respondents and the unit of analysis was performance of projects at the NGOs. The population was based on the most proactive NGOs in pursuit of projects in terms of funding as provided by the KNGOB report in 2019.

Sample and Data Collection

Through a stratified random selection from 1252 active projects registered in Nairobi County, a sample was selected. The sample stratification came from Health, HIV/AIDS, Education, Relief/Disaster and Children subsectors. These NGO subsectors with the five strata reported the largest funding in running projects and have the largest percentage of resources committed to projects (KNGOB, 2019). The data was collected in hybrid method of physical reach and online access due to the covid-19 health protocols.

Sampling Technique

Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate sample sizes. A 95% confidence level and margin error of 10% are assumed for Equation (i)
The Formula for sample size:
(i)   With: n = Size of study sample
(ii)   N= Size of Population
(iii)   e = error margin
n = 1252/ (1+1252(0.05)2)
n = 110

Pilot Study for Reliability and Validity

The study tested its instrument through a pilot study establish both validity and reliability.

Analysis

The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to arrive at conclusions. Specifically, the demographics of the respondents were enumerated and a liner regression equation of the form $Y = a + bx + c$ was used to derive analysis of variance (ANOVA). It is from this that a summary of the model representing interrelationships between the study variables was made for project performance and risk management strategies.

Validity Test Results

To establish the validity of instrument a face validity approach was applied in which university supervisors had a thorough check of every section of the instrument to ascertain that all variables were correctly covered. Further, the study established the validity of the constructs using content validity applying Average Variance Extracted (AVE) obtaining a measurement of $=>.5$ as shown in Table 1. This was an indication that the measurement scales revealed a satisfactory measurement of content validity.

Table 1: Validity of the Study Instrument

Constructs	No. of items	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Risk Avoidance	3	0.613
Risk Reduction	2	0.619
Risk Sharing	3	0.541
Risk Retention	2	0.711
Project Performance	4	0.606

Reliability Test Results

From the field results as presented in Table 2, the analysis on reliability is presented. The results indicate, Cronbach's alpha (α) as $>.7$ which is a statistical proof that all the five constructs were reliable.

Table 2: Reliability of the Study Instrument

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Risk Avoidance	3	0.717

Risk Reduction	2	0.658
Risk Sharing	3	0.812
Risk Retention	2	0.734
Project Performance	4	0.827

RESULTS

The study used SPSS version 22 to produce all results. The statistical tests conducted were descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to establish the effect of risk management strategies on the performance of projects at selected NGOs in city of Nairobi County.

Demographic and Descriptive of the Study Constructs

In all studies, there is need to have demographic characteristics of the study field respondents and some of the key factors include gender, work experience and education. In terms of gender, 56% of the respondents were male while 44% were female. The study also considered respondents' education in which, 4% were PhD holders, with majority 44% holding a Bachelor's degree and a minority 17% being non-degree holders. Also considered was the demographic of work experience as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Demographic data of respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Demographic Category	Male Percentage	Female Percentage
Work Experience	Below 1 year	8	3
	2-5 years	10	15
	6-10 years	27	21
	Over 10 years	11	5
Level of Education	Non-Degree holder	10	7
	Bachelors	24	20
	Masters	20	15
	PhD	2	2

Percentage Total per group		56	44

Regression Analysis Results

Table 4 gives results of Regression ANOVA with outputs for strategies of risk management indicating significant effects on performance of projects $F (1, 83) = 26.568$, $p<.05$). The result indicate that the regression model suitably predicted the outcome variable relating strategies of risk management to the performance of projects at NGOs in City of Nairobi County.

Table 4: Regression ANOVA of Risk Management on Project Performance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	4.389	1	4.389	26.568	.000[b]
1	Residual	40.475	83	.165		
	Total	44.864	84			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of projects

b. Predictors: (Constant), Risk Management Strategies

Model Summary of Risk Strategies and Project Performance

Individual strategies were tested with respect to the dependent variable, which is project performance as indicated in Table 5. From the coefficients it can be fitted that

$Y=\mu_o+ \mu_1R_1+\mu_2R_2+\mu_3R_3 + \mu_4R_4+\varepsilon$ translates into

$Y=7.204+ .981R_1+2.227R_2+.663R_3 + .408R_4+1.423$

This has the implication that if there was no strategy applied, a performance product of 7.204 units would result for every effort in implementing the project performance. Otherwise, for every perceived unit of performance, there is an input of .981 of risk avoidance, 2.222 of risk reduction, .663 of risk sharing and .408 of risk retention strategies with an error value of 1.423thought to be the NGO noise or uncertainties that cannot be controlled by any of the NGOs. From the results, there is indication that strategies of risk directly and positively influential in determining the performance of projects not just in NGOs at the City of Nairobi County but generally across the sector in running projects. All the T values are positive and large enough implying that the results are strongly correlating to each variable. However, the

strategies have shown various strengths of significance with the strongest at .002 (p<.05) being Risk reduction strategy while the weakest at .043 (p<.05) being Risk Retention.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients for Risk Management and Project Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	7.204	1.423		1.113	.087
Risk Avoidance	0.981	0.231	0.302	2.014	.011
Risk Reduction	2.227	0.108	0.219	1.102	.002
Risk Sharing	0.663	0.406	0.119	2.109	.013
Risk Retention	0.408	0.117	0.401	1.122	.043

When the strategies are treated one entity against the project performance, the linear regression model used $Y=\mu o+ \mu 1R1+\mu 2R2+\mu 3R3 + \mu 4R4+\varepsilon$, is summarized. From the results, output indicates that the influence of risk strategies on the project performance is statistically significant, $R^2 = 0.176$, $F (1, 83) =52.32$, p-value <.05. This shows that 17.6% of the project performance in NGOs is attributed to risk management strategies adopted while the remaining 82.4% can be attributed to other factors not included in the study and the error term.

Y= Project Performance

R =Risk Strategies

μ = coefficient of correlation, where **μₒ** is the constant

ε = Error term.

Model: **Y** = 0.792 + .419R + .097

In summary, risk strategies statistically influence the performance of projects at NGOs. The research concluded that risk strategies influence project performance.

DISCUSSION

Study findings indicated conformity as well as in contrast to other scholars previously studying projects and risk management strategies. Mares (2019) indicated in study findings that stakeholders experience failure to know the risks involved in projects. This is attributed to the management not fully involving the stakeholders. This contravenes the stakeholder theory but at the same time can save a project from having too many differing voices that could derail the implementation of project plans. Similarly, studies by Nturanu and Mundia (2019) found out that there is need to apply avoidance strategy especially when the costs are very high. This plays well into agency theory in which the managers of a project have the leeway of choosing what is right and what is wrong in the project life cycle. On the contrary, Johnson et al., (2019) findings indicate that risk avoidance is counterproductive and could lead to underperforming projects as the management is focused on specific paths away from

the natural flow. This also augurs well for stakeholder theory which embraces the full involvement of all stakeholders

Crispim et al., (2019) point to the present methods of project management in which exact estimates of the risks involved can lead to good measures to reduce risks along the way in the project life cycle. However, other scholars including Barquet and Cumiskey (2018) had different results indicating that risk reduction reduces the optimization of the project performance arguing that managers should be total risk takers. Additionally, the scholar's reason that risk reduction can be a conduit of diverting project funds and has to be carefully applied calling for application of agency theory together with stakeholder theory.

A study by Dandage et al., (2018) had findings pointing that sharing of risks was paramount in the success of projects with emphasis of the stakeholder theory in place. In so far as sharing is risky from management point of view, these scholars provide a list of advantages including less time in completion, costs reduction and fall-back plans. However, other scholars produced different results indicating that risk sharing could be a negative to the optimum conclusion of a project. Njagi (2018) found that the sharing of risks is in itself a risk that some managers always avoid as it could jeopardize project activities. Results by Njagi identified failure to have common interests by all stakeholders as one of the key reasons why risk sharing is unhealthy for project performance. The application of this risk sharing strategy is therefore fraud with yet more risks as the scholar found out.

Oliva (2016) found out that there was need to retain as much risk as possible as this minimizes the chances of losses with a closed group of management. In other words, the organization optimizes the resources they have to complete the project life cycle while fully utilizing the resourced based view tenets. On the contrary, some scholars have critically opposed the use of retention of cost strategy arguing that it fails to observe the stakeholder theory and overstrains organization resources. These observations are supported by Ali et al., (2018) as well as Njeri and Were (2017). In their conclusion, they noted that such a strategy fails to observe the tenets of stakeholder theory and was the cause of many failed projects.

On performance findings Fernando et al., (2018) highlighted the proper balancing strategic mix in achieving set project goals. However, other scholars including Hasan et al., (2018) are of the conclusion that project performance can be derailed by too many risk management strategies. The scholars recommended limited application of such strategies with openness to face risks while pulling all efforts in the organization to achieve project goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study suggests that NGOs should widely consult whenerver they are setting up a project with all risks considered. There should be adequate feasibility studies to bring out all the risks involved in any given project meaning that NGOs should go flat out to give reports thatr show all mitigations for all forecast risks. Once such a mitigation plan is identified, the risk management strategies can then be applied. It is the belief by this study that this recommendations arising from field findings will play some role in adding positive

contributions to the body of knowledge in many fields. The idea that theories including Agency, stakeholder and RBV need reforming to have clauses stating when they should be used and when they should not be applied. Similarly, there is need to recognize that not all strategies work in risk management and that there is need to have a blend of their application while carefully looking into new facts from project performance that could help generate a project based theory for success. Since there is no single study that can claim to have all facts and findings, the current study recommends further exploration on what other strategies are best suited to make project performance a success.

CONCLUSIONS

The study results indicating positive effect implies that the managers of these projects could improve the performance by carefully inculcating the risk avoidance strategies with the proper application of stakeholder theory. Specifically, risk avoidance with a Pearson correlation coefficient of .008 had a strong significance indicating that it is a positively adopted strategy at the NGOs. However, the Pearson correlation coefficient of .752 was an indication risk reduction strategy might not be as influential as the results suggests. This means that projects that have been successful have dealt in one way or the other in reducing the risks involved in the project cycle. Similarly, the summarized study model indicated that a high significance level of 0.013 ($p < .05$) was show that risk sharing was indeed highly related and positively so to the project performance. The study also concluded that some NGOs have derived their success from using this risk sharing strategy as stakeholders feel responsible in their sharing thus acting in all manner to protect what has been made to be theirs as well as responsibly taking care of the shared risk. In the final analysis, the study concluded that some strategies work best when as few stakeholders as possible are involved as it also acts as a risk reduction or avoidance exercise.

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