

PROJECT TEAM PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE OF FLORICULTURAL PROJECTS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Project team planning is considered an important component of project success. In the floricultural projects, it enables the farmers to overcome the many challenges which arise from the natural, economic and socio-political environments. In Kenya, project planning has embraced project team planning in order to make the sector more profitable for farmers. However, studies on the link between project team planning and performance of floricultural projects are still inadequate. This paper examined the influence of project team planning on the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. The paper is based on a study which was guided by the agency theory and employed correlation research design. The study targeted registered floricultural projects in Nakuru County. Census sampling was used to select a sample of 288 senior level managers in the flower projects

constituted the study sample size. Data was collected using questionnaire which was validated during pilot study to ensure it was reliable. The supervisors were consulted to help ascertain that the research instrument is valid. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics mainly percentages, frequencies and means and standard deviations and inferential statistics mainly the regression analysis. The descriptive results showed that project team planning influenced the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. The study concluded that 56.9% of the variance in the performance of floricultural projects was explained by project team planning. The influence of project team planning was statistically significant.

Key words: Floriculture, Project performance, Project planning, Project team planning.

INTRODUCTION

In project management, project team planning is essential because it increases the chances of success of a project (Deborah, 2018). Project planning requires that the team intended to be engaged possess sufficient technical knowledge and skills to perform the assigned duties. It is therefore, critical to ensure a combination of abilities, knowledge, attributes and traits during planning. Meanwhile performance is considered as an issue of concern in any project endeavors. Its indicators include time, budget, quality and overall client satisfaction (Kumaraswamy, 2015). Long (2018) concurs that the major indicators of project performance are time, budget, quality and stakeholder satisfaction. Ling (2015) believes that the most important aspect of project performance relate to quality control, cost, time, client satisfaction and effective communication. In floricultural projects, decision making, proper coordination, social condition, economical condition and climatic condition are determinants of project performance.

Although the growth in the floricultural sector has been on the rise in, the sector has encountered challenges among them low exportability due to post-harvest problems and price destabilization. The slow development of the sector has been associated with improper planning, limited investment and emphasis on other sectors of the economy. In Kenya, floricultural sector faces challenges such as high cost of inputs, weak farmers' institutions, limited extension services and inadequate credit facilities.

In Nakuru County the floriculture is an important foreign exchange earner making the sector a key driver of economic development. However, farmers need to plan well in order to adapt to increasing requirements of quality and compliance with the emerging standards. Instead, the sector is grappling with a myriad of challenges including fertilizer importation crisis, increase in input taxes, stringent phytosanitary requirements and new demands on fumigation by key markets. Proper financial planning is required in developing the floricultural projects for the sector to realize improved production and performance (Muchira, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The floricultural sector is considered as one of the promising agricultural sub-sectors. This has attracted both national and international investment interests. However, there are challenges confronting the sector and which have continued to reduce its revenue prospects. This is evident in the unprecedented closure of some of the flower farms and dwindling sales turnover for the existing flower farms. The impact of such outcome includes loss of revenue, missed job opportunities and wastage of resources. Viewed from the performance point of view, these poor outcomes have made the question of project team planning a critical issue in the floricultural sector not only globally but also in Kenya (Mogaka, 2016). Although studies have been conducted globally on project team planning, research attention focusing on the influence of project team planning in relation to the performance of floricultural projects is still inadequate (Wallace, 2020). Locally, the existing studies are still few and have not addressed the problem of performance with regard to project planning in the floricultural projects. This has left a knowledge gap in the area of project team planning in the floricultural projects. Given that many studies have ignored this attribute it was the aim of this paper to examine the influence of project team planning on the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya.

Theoretical Review

The paper was guided by the agency theory. The agency theory was first introduced by Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick in 1973. The theory addresses the problems that surface in firms due to the separation of owners and managers and seeks to reduce this problem (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Ross, 1973). The theory is directed at the ubiquitous agency relationship, in which one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent). In this regard, the day to day running of an enterprise is carried out by managers as agents who have been engaged by the owners or principals or shareholders. The theory states that both the agents and the principals often act on their own best interests, but with different expectations (Brahmadev & Leepsa, 2017). The owners assign the task to the agents to manage the firm with a hope that

the agents will work for the benefit of the owners. However, the agents are more interested in the maximization of their benefits (Brahmadev & Leepsa, 2017). This is due to the information asymmetry, the misalignment of interest between the principal and agent and the lack of proper monitoring due to diffused ownership structure. This leads to the principal-agent conflict. As a result, the agents deliberately take advantage of information asymmetry to redistribute the profits to themselves at the detriment of the principals. This paper was guided by this theory on the basis that the floricultural project managers or planned teams may fail to abide by the stipulated planning guidelines or just serve their own interest in the execution of the given plan thus undermining the performance of the floricultural projects.

Empirical Review

Project team planning is focused on ensuring that the projects are implemented by qualified professionals (Chow, 2019). Mert (2019) suggested that the professionals implementing a project should possess sufficient technical knowledge and skill to perform their planned duties. This is vital in the floricultural sector due to its complex nature. In this context the implementers are required to possess adequate technical skills. With appropriate technical skills, it is easier to deal with the complex issues that persist in the life cycle of floricultural projects. In particular leadership skills encompassing a combination of technical expertise, problem-solving, innovation, self-development, personal initiatives, effective communication and effective interpersonal skills are critically relevant (Schilder, 2019). This is because project leaders often influence project performance (Jiang, 2019). Leaders who demonstrate ability to combine multiple competencies are most effective in achieving project objectives. In this regard, project team planning is acutely related to project performance. Traditionally projects are perceived to be successful when they meet time, budget, performance goals, customer expectations and quality standards as well as time, quality and customer satisfaction (Shenhar, 2019; Kloppenborg & Opfer, 2015). In other words, a project is often considered successful if it is completed within its budget estimate and scheduled time frame to the satisfaction of the owners (Scott-Young & Samson, 2008; Walsham, 1993). According to Burke (2015) the key components of performance that may be applicable in the flower sector include actors' satisfaction and economic value.

Studies focusing on the relationships between project team planning and performance have featured in many scholarly journals (Batt, 2020). For instance, Posner (2017) revealed that successful project managers should have relevant experience or knowledge about the technology required by the project. Zhang and Fearman (2015) found out that 80% of projects failed due to poor leadership reflecting limited or no teamwork, inadequate communication and inability to resolve conflicts and other human related inefficiencies. Kumar (2018) found that project failure was primarily linked to lack of integration and commitment by senior management. Kerzner (2018) observed that a manager who skillfully combined both human and technological resources in a more dynamic way in a contemporary organization will no doubt deliver requisite results. Neuhauser (2015) avers that project managers basically have to fulfill dual responsibility of managing both the technical and human components of the project in such a way to motivate the team to successfully realize the intended aim and complete the

project goals. Hoegl and Parboteeah (2016) reported that good coordination and open exchange of pertinent information promoted team effectiveness. Belout and Gauvreau (2016) found a positive association between planning of the human resources and the project performance. Wright (2019) confirmed that there is a direct relationship between selection, training, leadership and management styles with motivation of employees under highly participative systems. Huang (2019) found that a company's human resource management practices contributed to increased performance. Werner and De Simone (2016) that planning of human resource helps organizations to predict how changes in their strategy would affect human resource needs. Olateju (2011) showed a lack of core knowledge of project management tools such as Gantt charts among project professionals. Taylor (2015) and Melton (2015) have emphasized the need for a sound project team planning to ensure that key project activities are carried out as planned. From the reviewed studies, it was apparent that there was clear conceptualization of the influence of project team planning on the performance of projects. However, the studies did not address the problem in the context of the floricultural projects. This paper examined project team planning and its influence on the performance of horticultural projects in Kenya.

RESEACH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the correlation research design which sought to reflect the strength and the direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. A correlational research design was adopted to examine the relationship between project team planning and performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. This design allowed the researcher to generate both numerical and descriptive data to determine the relationship between project team planning and the performance of floricultural projects. The design was chosen owing to the complexity that exists in the planning phase of floricultural projects. The study targeted 110 registered flower farms in Kenya. The target population comprised of 75 registered flower projects in Nakuru County. A census sampling was chosen to select 288 study participants from whom data was collected using closed ended items in the questionnaires. The descriptive statistics which included mean and standard deviation were adopted to analyze the quantitative data while the inferential statistics were adopted to make inferences. Pearson's product moment correlation analysis was used to show the direction of the relationship between the study variables. Standard multiple regression analysis was used to provide the estimates of net effects owing to its explanatory power. F-tests were computed for the individual variable coefficients to determine their significance in the derived models.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The paper examined the influence of project team planning on the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. The constructs that were adopted in examining project team planning include capacity building, staff competency, human resource development and technical skills and knowledge. The descriptive results pertaining to these constructs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Project Team Planning

| Statements | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Adequate experience and skills among project managers contribute to the success of the project | 286 | 2.7517 | .66326 |
| Human resource training ensures that the project quality is upheld | 286 | 4.0979 | .90855 |
| Developing staff competency enables the project to meet the expectations of the actors | 286 | 4.1517 | .66326 |
| Open communications and mutual support leads to timely completion of the assigned tasks | 286 | 4.1783 | .63772 |
| Holding regular meetings ensures that the project activities are completed in the stipulated time | 286 | 4.2378 | .68526 |
| Orientation for new team members helps to minimize errors that compromise quality production | 286 | 4.1923 | .86739 |
| Benchmarking is organized to promote quality production | 286 | 2.7517 | .66326 |
| Project team development contributes to timely completion of project activities | 286 | 4.1329 | .74681 |
| Staff competency development contributes to timeliness in the execution of the floricultural products | 286 | 3.9825 | .83543 |
| Having technical skill helps the project implementers to timely complete project | 286 | 2.7517 | .66326 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 286 | | |

As shown in figure 1, majority of the respondents were noncommittal that adequate experience and skills among the project managers contributed to the success of the projects as revealed by a mean response of 2.7517 with a standard deviation of 0.66326. This is consistent with Posner (2017) who averred that successful project implementation did not always depend on the acquisition of relevant experience, knowledge and skills. However, majority of the respondents agreed that human resource training ensured that the project quality was upheld (M=4.1783; SD=.63772) while developing staff competency enabled the flower projects to meet the expectations of the actors (M=4.1517; SD=0.66326). A focus on staff competency coheres with Huang (2019) who found that the organizational human resource management practices often contributed to increased performance.

The study also established that majority of the respondents agreed that open communications and mutual support led to timely completion of the assigned tasks (M=4.1783; SD=0.63772)

while holding regular meetings ensured that the project activities were completed within the stipulated time (M=4.2378, SD=0.68526). This is supported by Zhang and Fearman (2015) who established that many projects failed because of poor leadership which was reflected in limited teamwork and inadequate communication. Also majority of the respondents agreed that orientation for new team members helped to minimize errors that could compromise quality production (M=4.1923, SD=0.86739) with the bench-markings not being organized to promote quality production of the flower projects (M=2.7517; SD=0.66326). Furthermore, majority of the respondents seemed to concur that project team development contributed to timely completion of project activities (M=4.1329; SD=0.74681). This was also postulated by Neuhauser (2015) who averred that project managers basically have to fulfill dual responsibility of managing both the technical and human components of the project in such a way to motivate the team to successfully realize the intended aim and complete the project goals. As a result, staff competency development consequently contributed to timeliness in the execution of the floricultural products (M=3.9825; SD=0.83543). Examining the results further, it was evident that majority of the respondents were noncommittal that having technical skill helped the project implementers to complete the project in time (M=2.7517; SD=0.66326). As already alluded to, this is inconsistent with Posner (2017) who averred that successful project implementation depended on the acquisition of relevant experience, knowledge and skills. The performance of floricultural projects as the dependent variable was measured in terms of the number of projects completed, timeliness, cost/budget compliance and customer satisfaction. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Performance of Floricultural Projects

| Statements | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| All project activities are completed as scheduled | 286 | 2.7483 | .65393 |
| At the end of the project the interest of the customers and clients are satisfactorily served | 286 | 4.0979 | .90855 |
| Quality deliverables are achieved at the end of the project cycle | 286 | 2.6517 | .76326 |
| The cost of productivity is lower than the cost of input for the floricultural projects | 286 | 4.1783 | .63772 |
| The employees are satisfied with their role of project implementation | 286 | 4.2378 | .68526 |
| The execution of the project procures adheres to the stipulated quality standards | 286 | 4.1923 | .86739 |
| The production costs are recovered upon project completion | 286 | 4.3042 | .76442 |
| The project activities are aligned to with strategic business goals | 286 | 4.1329 | .74681 |
| The project activities are aligned with the goals of the floricultural projects | 286 | 2.7483 | .65393 |

| | | | |
|---|------------|--------|--------|
| The project activities are completed on time | 286 | 2.8252 | .74282 |
| The project adheres to cost estimates for the project | 286 | 4.2343 | .81500 |
| The projects are completed to the satisfaction of the actors | 286 | 4.1713 | .71231 |
| The projects outcomes benefit all the interested parties | 286 | 4.0245 | .78322 |
| There is return on investment upon project completion | 286 | 4.0524 | .76826 |
| Timely completion of the projects ensures that it meets the actors expectations | 286 | 2.7517 | .66326 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 286 | | |

From the results presented in table 2, project performance was measured using fifteen statements. The results showed that majority of the respondents were noncommittal that all the project activities were completed as scheduled ($M=2.7483$; $SD=0.65393$); however, majority believed that at the end of the project the interests of the customers and clients were generally satisfactorily served ($M=4.0979$; $SD=0.90855$). This has been supported by Kumaraswamy (2015) who conceptualized project performance in terms of timely completion and meeting clients' satisfaction.

Moreover, majority of the respondents disagreed that quality deliverables were achieved at the end of the project cycle ($M=2.6517$; $SD=0.76326$) with a significant number of the respondents concurring that the cost of productivity was lower than the cost of input for the floricultural projects ($M=4.1783$; $SD=0.63772$). This is in harmony with Thomas (2015) who conceptualized project completion in terms of cost considerations. Also majority of the respondents agreed that the employees were satisfied with their role of project implementation ($M=4.2378$; $SD=0.68526$).

Similarly, majority of the respondents agreed that the execution of the project procures adhered to the stipulated quality standards ($M=4.1923$; $SD=0.86739$). This concurs with Pheng and Chuan (2015) who averred that quality considerations as playing an important role in determining the performance of a project. Similar sentiments were observed by Ling (2015) who believed that the most important aspect of planning relates to quality control. With regard to recovering production costs upon project completion, majority of the respondents agreed ($M=4.3042$; $SD=0.76442$). Also majority of the respondents agreed that the project activities were aligned with the strategic business goals ($M=4.1329$; $SD=0.74681$). This concurs with Pheng and Chuan (2015) who averred that human factors play an important role in determining the performance of a project.

Moreover, majority of the respondents were neutral that the project activities were aligned with the goals of the floricultural projects ($M=2.7483$; $SD=0.65393$) which ensured that the projects

activities were completed on time (M=2.8252; SD=0.74282). However, majority of the respondents agreed that the project adheres to cost estimates for the project (M=4.2343; SD=0.81500). This was also observed by Ling (2015) who believes that the most important aspect of the performance of projects relates to quality control and appropriate response to perceived variations and changes in the project. Majority of the respondents agreed that the projects were completed to the satisfaction of the actors (M=4.1713; SD=0.71231). It is also evident that majority of the respondents agreed that the projects outcomes benefited all the interested parties (M=4.0245; SD=0.78322) and majority of the respondents agreed that there was return on investment upon project completion (M=4.0524; SD=0.76826). Finally, majority of the respondents expressed neutral points of view that timely completion of the projects ensured that it meets the actors expectations (M=2.7517; SD=0.66326). This has contradicted the observations by Long (2018) who conceptualized project performance in terms of time, budget, quality, specifications and stakeholder satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to explore the relationship between the study variable. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients Matrix

| | | Perf. | PTP |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Performance | Coefficient | 1.000 | .801** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | N | 286 | 286 |
| PTP | Coefficient | .801** | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | N | 286 | 286 |

The correlation analysis results revealed that there was a moderate positive and a significant relationship between project team planning (PTP) and performance of floricultural projects (r=0.801, p=0.000). It is important to note that the correlation coefficient between the predictor variable and the criterion variable was less than 0.7 thresholds.

Regression Analysis of Variables

The regression analysis considered the performance of floricultural projects and project team planning. Table 4 present the model summary that was generated to explain the relationship between project team planning and performance of floricultural projects.

Table 4: Model Summary for Project Team Planning

| R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| .801 ^a | .642 | .641 | .14130 |

The results in table 4 show that the coefficient of determination also known as the R-square has a value of 0.642, which means that project team planning explained 64.2% of the variance observed in the performance of floricultural projects. The ANOVA results for project team planning and performance of floricultural projects are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

| Model | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Regression | 10.165 | 1 | 10.165 | 509.157 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 5.670 | 284 | .020 | | |
| Total | 15.835 | 285 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Project Team Planning

Table 5 presents the results on the analysis of the variance (ANOVA) for project team planning. The results of F statistic was 30.816 which implied that the model was statistically significant and with goodness of fit of the model. This was also supported by the reported $p=0.00$ which was less than 0.05 significance level. The results of the beta coefficients for project team planning and performance of floricultural projects are presented in table 5.

Table 6: Beta Coefficients for Project Team Planning

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | | t | Sig. |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| (Constant) | 1.658 | .091 | | 18.270 | .000 |
| PTP | .569 | .025 | .801 | 22.565 | .000 |

Dependent Variable: Performance of floricultural projects

The finding in table 6 on beta coefficients indicate that without project team planning, the performance of floricultural projects was fixed at a constant of 3.026 units. However, a significant unit adjustment in project team planning led to an increase of 0.569 in the

performance of floricultural projects. This implied that 56.9% change in the performance of the floricultural projects was influenced by project team planning. This relationship was found to be significant as the p was 0.000. It was also hypothesized that project team planning statistically and significantly influenced the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. Since the p -value of 0.000 was less than 0.05, it suggested that the research hypothesis was accepted leading to the inference that project team planning statistically and significantly influenced the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. This is consistent with Zhang and Fearman (2015) who contended that projects would succeed if the planned leadership embraces teamwork and effective communication. Neuhauser (2015) further averred that in successful projects, managers often attempt to fulfill dual responsibility of managing both the technical and human resource components. Through this endeavor the project team is motivated to work towards the realization of the intended aims and goals of the project.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The paper sought to examine the concept of project team planning and its influence on the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. The paper considered capacity building, staff competency development, human resource development and technical skills and knowledge as the constructs of project team planning. The results showed that human resource training, staff competency building, open communication channels and mutual support led to timely completion of the assigned tasks, holding regular meetings, orientation for new team members, bench-markings, project team development, staff competency development adequate technical skills contributed to the success of the projects. From the results, the study concluded that there was a significant and positive relationship between project team planning and the performance of floricultural projects in Kenya. Hence 56.9% of the variance observed in the performance of floricultural projects was explained by project team planning.

Recommendations

Given that project team planning was found to be an antecedent of the performance of floricultural projects, the study recommends that staff development should be carried regularly to ensure that the personnel involved in project implementation always displayed high level of skills. The study also recommends that project managers should be identified early and sufficiently equipped to undertake their assigned and aligned roles within the entire spectrum of the overall project team planning.

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