

Perspective on the personal and professional needs of the project leader in construction industry in Libya: a case study

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Abstract: The quality of leadership is one of the most important factors in determining the success and survival of groups and organizations. The purpose of this paper is to examine the leadership needs of the project manager in the Libyan construction companies. The objective was identified the most important and crucial personal and professional needs of the project manager. This study attempted to identify the needs of the project managers in the construction industry in Libya. The finding has shown that all managers surveyed basically agreed that adherence to law/legality, specific, concise and rational, followed by intuitive and open minded are ranked as the most crucial personal needs that should be acquired to become an effective project manager in the construction industry. On the other hand, attention to details, project focus, adherence to construction industries/ professional codes, time conscious / constraints, problem solving were ranked as the crucial professional needs that required the respondents.

Keywords: Leadership needs, personal, professional, Project leader, Construction Industry, Libya.

1. Introduction

Every role, performed at excellence, requires talent, whether excellence is celebrated or anonymous; great managers know that excellence is impossible without talent (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Companies

everywhere are struggling to attract, develop and retain top applicants and employees. In addition, quality talent is always scarce and having the right talent in the right place at the right time is a make-or-break factor for entities of all types and sizes (Rueff & Stringer, 2006). Collins (2001) claimed that the right

people are an organization's primary assets. With the aging workforce, changing technologies and global demand, companies simply need to capitalize on all members of their skilled workforce. The quality of leadership is one of the most important factor in determining the success and survival of groups and organizations. Although technologies play an overriding part under some conditions, effective leadership has often compensated for lack of equipment and resources. It would be difficult to imagine a world without leader (Fiedler, 1987). There can be little doubt that the well being and success of any nation or organization is heavily dependent on good and effective leadership. History has shown that great nations and organizations are often the result of great leadership. Nations or civilizations have been known to fall or disappear completely due to leadership failure or the lack of a strong leader. The way in which people co-operate with each other, with the leadership and with the community, and the extent of their commitment to their organization, depend very much on the style of management. As such, one must be aware of interacting with others: in the workplace, with friends, at home; any interaction between two or more different project managers contains opportunities for growth and improved communication. It also may contain opportunities to understand differences in style of expression and action which may lead to destructive relationships. Evaluation of the ability of managers to understand others especially their counterparts who have different culture and tradition is very important so that it will help them build good interaction with their counterparts. Realizing the importance of understanding leadership

of others, this study is carried out in order to investigate the differences between effective manager and ineffective managers. Since the early pioneering study by Carlson (1989), researchers have used descriptive methods such as direct observation, diaries, and interviews to discover what managers do and how they spend their time. These researches on managerial activities only attempted to find answers to question such as how much time should managers spend alone or interacting with different people to accomplish group objectives. In the 80's, management researches became very interested in the emotional and symbolic aspects of management leadership influence. These processes help us to understand how leaders influence followers to make self-sacrifices and put the need of the mission or organization above their materialistic self-interests. There are managers in every organization. A good and perfect one is the manager who possesses good qualities. Barry (2000) proposes ten qualities that make a manager effective; these qualities include, inspiring a shared vision, good communicating skills, enthusiasm, team building skills, problem solving skills, empathy, and competence cool under pressure. Ability to delegate tasks among subordinates. It was further explained that these qualities ought to be practiced altogether before significant results can be seen. Gates (2004) also provided 10 top qualities that managers need to consider. Amongst these qualities are choosing a field thoughtfully, hiring carefully and having the will to fire lazy workers, creating a productive environment, defining success, liking people and being a good communicator, developing workers to do their jobs better, building moral, taking projects your

self not making the same decision twice and letting people know whom to please. Gates explanations though differ from Barry's are all qualities that are expected to be carried out by managers in order to be effective. Effective manager or leader must be able to lead as he is regarded as the leader of the project team. Without firm leadership, he would not be able to gain respect from the other consultants. Furthermore, without good leadership qualities, he would not be able to motivate his team to work towards the common goals of the project. Strong leadership is therefore a very important criterion for the manager. This paper, however is trying to identify several personal and professional factors that project leader should have to him/her as an effective one in the construction industry in Libya.

2. Leadership versus management

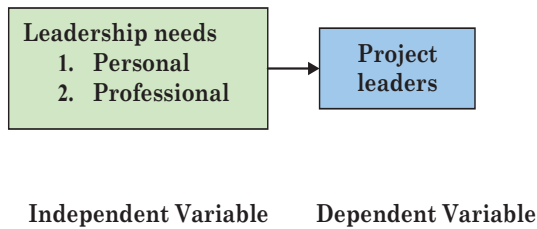
There has been a lot of discussion whether project managers must focus on leadership or management in their companies. Leadership in itself provides a picture of authoritative characteristics. This is because, project managers will see themselves as power holders who will not like to participate in other works. However a project manager who is as a management based will like to be participative, this is one of the reasons why Brugger, Gerrits and Pruitt (2000) identify some tools that will help differentiate between project managers who are leaders and those who are managers. One of the tools included intense site reconnaissance. By this project managers who wish to be effective must be more conscious on the current developments on the site. This is because

any inconvenience, problem or unexpected circumstances can be responded to accordingly. Another tool is to plan / execute. They explain that project managers must not only focus on planning issues in an organization but also they must focus on effective execution of the planning activities. This will differentiate them from being leaders or managers. The third tool, which is managing sub consultants, is one of the difficult ones amongst them. This is because, sub consultants can sometimes be stubborn and might delay some processes in project execution. Therefore effective project managers must know how to deal with them.

The last tool proposed by Brugger et al., (2000) is quality control. Controlling the quality of projects is one of the characteristics that a project manager should exhibit if he/she wants to be truly effective. Rimualdo (2003) proposes that knowledge ability to stimulate interest and delivery of quality results are factors used to distinguish between leadership and management. He explains further that a project manager must have the knowledge to show enthusiasm and convey to the staff important information and also be able to organize the methods that follow systematically. This will make him/her an effective leader. Further more, an effective leader is differentiated from management if he/she has the ability to bring out the interest of people and to deliver quality results. Unearthing the potential in worker would also make the project manager achieve his/her results. The delivery of quality results is also another area explained by Rimualdo. This takes into consideration the ability to plan and carry out a good job; they would trust him and give him credibility.

3. Theoretical framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the relationships between leadership needs and the effective project leader.



4. Research methodology

Data for this study was obtained through structured questionnaire. All the leadership needs factors were rated on a five-point Likert scale, 1 to 5 representing Not Very Important, Not Important, Moderately Important, Important, Very Important, respectively. These Likert scales are used in the questionnaire survey because it provides

Table 1. Presents the respondents' characteristics

Factor	Frequency
Designation in the company	
Director	38 (27.5%)
Manager	25 (18.1%)
Executive	39 (28.3%)
Non-executive	36 (26.1%)
Company legal status	
Sole proprietor	66 (47.8%)
Private limited	19 (13.8%)
Public limited	31 (22.5%)
Government link company	22 (15.9%)
Experiences	
1-5 years	66 (47.8%)
6-10 years	46 (33.3%)
11-15 years	16 (11.6%)
More than 20 years	10 (7.2%)
Quality or strategy management system	
ISO 9000	9 (6.5%)
TQM (total quality management)	10 (7.2%)
TPM (total project management)	22 (15.9%)
Conventional system	97 (70.3%)
Education	
Bachelor's	66 (47.8%)
Master's	22 (15.9%)
Doctor's	2 (1.4%)
Others	48 (34.8%)

a wider choice of alternatives for the respondents (Cooper and Schindler, 2005).

The questionnaire was carried out by getting feedback from various ranged construction projects and companies in Libya. The target respondents were Company Directors, Project Managers, Executives and Non-executives. Of 145 distributed questionnaires, a hundred and thirty eight (138) useable questionnaires (95% response rate) were received and analyzed. The feedback was obtained in a week time which started 12 January 2010 and ended on 26 January 2010. After all the raw data obtained, the data were then used as input and analyzed with the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 17). The respondents characteristics involved in this study, can be shown in Table 1. Analysis was conducted to rank the Factors based on the average score. Finally, Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to determine the personal and professional leadership needs for the project leader. The most important factors influencing leadership needs was further analyzed using the 'relative importance index' as adopted by (Kometa et al., 1994). The 5-point Likert scale was converted to relative importance index for each factor, which made it possible to cross-compare the relative importance of each of the factors as perceived by the respondents. The relative importance index was formulated using the following statistical expression (Lim & Alum, 1995):

Relative importance index (RII):

$$RII = (4n_1 + 3n_2 + 2n_3 + 1n_4 + 0n_5) / 4N$$

(0 < RII < 1)

Where:

N=Total number of respondent

4=highest weighted score (0, 1, 2, 3, 4) on scale of agreement.

Whereas :

n1=number of respondents for Not Very important

n2=respondents for Not Important

n3=respondents for moderately important

n4=respondents for Important

n5=respondents for Very important.

5. Results & discussion

This section presents the findings of the study and is divided into two parts. The first one describes the personal needs for the project leader. The second part analyzes the findings of the professional needs.

5.1. Personal needs

Table 2 presents the results for personal needs of project leader. As can be seen, the majority of respondents ranked the factor Adherence to law/legality as number one factor (RII=0.877). Specific was chosen as the factor (RII=0.868). The next factor was concise and rational as one the personal factors needed by the project leader (RII=0.844) and it was ranked as third factor. The rest of the factors of the personal needs for the project leader are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Ranking of the personal items of the Leadership needs

Personal Items	RII	Rank
Adherence to law/legality	0.877	1
Specific	0.868	2
Concise and rational	0.844	3
Intuitive	0.813	4
Open minded	0.810	5
Dyanmic	0.806	6
Adherence to eprsonal moral code	0.799	7
Diplomatic / discreet	0.770	8
Integrity	0.755	9
Maturity	0.721	10
Impartiality	0.717	11
Team player	0.692	12
Socail/ moral sensitivity	0.681	13
Creative	0.678	14
Courteous	0.498	15
Ethnocentrism	0.446	16
Parochialism	0.344	17

5.2. Professional needs

The results presented in Table 3 make it pretty clear that, the vast majority of the respondents specifically indicated that attention to details is the first professional need that the project leader should have (RII=0.955), followed by project focus ranked as the second need (RII=0.864). The next ranked factor was Adherence to construction industries/ professional codes, it was ranked as the third one. Time concise or constraints

has been ranked as the factor number four and The next factor that considered as important professional factor in construction projects in Libya was "Problem solving" and ranked as factor number fifth. Regardless of carefully a project is planned, it is impossible to foresee every problem that could arise. It is vital that the project team is responsive and capable of taking appropriate action when problems develop (Jiangand, 1996, Pinto, 1989).

Table 3: Ranking of the professional needs of the project leader

Items Personal	RII	Rank
Attention to details	0.955	1
Project focus	0.864	2
Adherence to construction industries/ professional codes	0.850	3
Time concious / constraints	0.828	4
Problem solving	0.817	5
Procedural	0.812	6
Self-regulation	0.810	7
Prioritize	0.810	7
Const concious	0.806	8
Client centredness	0.801	9
Firm	0.790	10
Safety awareness & quality	0.790	10
Receptive to alternative solutions / suggestions	0.783	11
Predictive	0.779	12
Broad base visualization	0.772	13
Elicit approval	0.763	14
Conversant	0.761	15
Motivation	0.752	16
Health concious	0.741	17

6. Conclusions

Leadership is one of the key interpersonal roles managers play in their organizations. This study confirmed that project leader with specific personal and professional needs, will lead to effective management; as such project leaders should put effort to acquire these needs to discharge their responsibilities and tasks effectively. The research finding has shown that all project leaders surveyed basically agreed that adherence to law/legality is one of the most crucial personal needs that should be acquired to become an effective project leader in the construction industry. On the other hand, attention to details was

found to be the most important professional needs for an effective project leader. These indicate that project leaders need to perform under a structural boundary as against to the unstructured, self-actualization kind of environment. Thus it is important that project leader in the construction industry tries to acquire the relevant personal and professional needs to face the challenges in the industry. The challenge is then for project leader to take a serious approach and some in-depth study on their organizational strength and weakness in the area of human resource and processes in order for their employees to flourish. The most effective approach is goal-setting, as it is based on the premise

that intentions shape actions. If work goals are specific, and even though it is difficult, if they are accompanied by feedback on how

well one is doing, project leader's performance is usually enhanced.

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