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Influence of Conflicts on Project Performance in Government Institutions in Kenya: A Case of Selected Companies in the Energy Sector

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Abstract:
The general objective of this study was to establish the effects of conflicts on project performance in Government Institutions in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to establish the influence of role related, process, relationship and interdependence conflicts on project performance. This study was based on the realist theories anchored on variables under this study. This study made the following recommendations; project management should enhance resolution of role conflicts in projects by clearly defining roles of project team members and ensuring that each member understands how they influence and are influenced by other members, how to deal with interdependence conflicts, project teams should ensure effective coordination and communication among project team members and finally how to cultivate relationships conflicts when forming project teams.

Keywords: Role related, process, relationship and interdependence

1. Introduction

Conflict management is a major concern to many organizations (Senaratne& Udawatta, 2013). Wherever there are people who have differences in values, races, languages, and backgrounds and who share one goal which is working for the organization and making it profitable, conflicts are inevitable. Therefore, the management must envisage the existence of some conflicts and thus should come up with some conflict management methods to solve them whenever they occur, and as fast as possible so that they do not affect the individual's work(Liu, Chen, Chen& Sheu, 2011). This also benefits the individuals in knowing how to deal with each other, minimize conflicts, or even avoid them all together (Brookins,2014).

According to Meer (2013), there are three types of conflicts; task, relationship and process conflicts. Task conflict refers to the conflicts and disagreements among individuals related to a certain task, its content, direction, and goal. Different opinions, viewpoints, decisions, and proposed changes are some of the chief causes of task conflict. It is said to be advantageous because it stimulates creativity, healthy competition and provides the possibility of a better outcome through constant discussions and different perspectives (Ziek& Anderson, 2015). Relationship conflict focuses on interpersonal relationships and hostilities among individuals of an organization

1.1. Global Perspective of Project Performance

About 1.2 billion people live in countries affected by fragility, while about 800 million people live in developing countries with the highest homicides rates. Extreme violence is one of the major development challenges: conflict and violence either bar the door to development for many countries or strip years of development gains when conflict occurs. Secondly, poverty is increasingly concentrated in countries where fragility and conflict rob citizens of opportunity. A new World Bank Policy Research Paper indicates that the share of global poor living in fragile and conflict affected situations today will at least double by 2030. In addition, poor countries additionally burdened by conflict account for one third of HIV/AIDS deaths, one third of people with no access to clean water, one third of children who do not complete primary school and half of all child deaths in all poor countries (WB, 2015).

1.2. Regional Perspective of Project Performance

In South Africa, Prieto-Remón, Cobo-Benita, Ortiz-Marcos, &Uruburu (2015) indicates that conflicts affect performance of many projects and about 45% of projects are unable to meet the project scope specifications due to problems among the various stakeholders. Interpersonal, external and stakeholder conflicts and negative emotions all have inverse relationships with construction projects project performance. Additionally, negative emotions are noted to be influencing the relationship between project conflicts and project performance, and this indirect relationship is mitigated when team members have a high level of political skill. The

analysis of project performance and conflicts in Zimbabwe indicate that conflict has a detrimental influence on project performance and should attract broad attention for future empirical literature.

Profile of KenGen: According to (Sena, 2015), Kenya Electricity Generating Company Limited, KenGen is the leading electric power generation company in Kenya, producing about 80 percent of electricity consumed in the country. The company utilizes various sources to generate electricity ranging from hydro, geothermal, thermal and wind. Hydro is the leading source, with an installed capacity of 819.9MW, which is 51 per cent of the company installed capacity. Geothermal comes second with 463.1MW and another 55.6MW from the innovative wellheads technology raising geothermal capacity to about 32% of the total installed capacity. However with the commissioning of the 280MW geothermal project in Olkaria, geothermal now accounts for more than 50% of the electricity consumed by Kenyans.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The problem influencing conflict on the performance of project management in any government initiatives has been an issue for quite some time now. Zhang and Huo (2015 argues that a reported by Virginia Department of Human Resource Management, 60 to 80 percent of all workplace conflict stems from strained relationships between employees and supervisors (Holt, 2015). Jungst and Blumberg (2016) also noted that employees spent 2.8 hours per week dealing with conflcits in prokjects which causing USD 59 million in time wasted and also contributing toi around 30% of delays in projects. Conflicts are caused by several factors including intentional or unintentional acts, due to diversity of people, misunderstandings and cultural differences. Several theories offer managers models for stopping conflict before it happens but this can only happen if one is able to know the cause of the conflict before it has an impact on productivity of employees or their job satisfaction (Mullin, 2015).

In view of the foregoing, most of the studies available are from developed countries, hence the need to do a study in the Kenyan context to validate this finding with the existing literature. The findings from this study can be used to fill the existing gap. This research focused on the conflicts faced within projects using the different types of conflicts. The main purpose of this study was to find out how conflicts influence project performance in three energy sector institutions in Kenya.

1.4. Specific Objectives of the Study

    i.   To establish the influence of role related conflicts on project performance in three energy sector institutions in Kenya.
    ii.   To assess the influence of process conflicts on performance of projects in three energy sector institutions in Kenya.
    iii.   To analyze the influence of relationship conflicts on project performance in three energy sector institutions in Kenya.
    iv.   To assess the influence of interdependence conflicts on project performance in three energy sector institutions in Kenya.

2. Role Related

Role related conflicts are conflicts that result from roles and responsibilities (Barki & Hartwick, 2014). They can emanate from role composition, role facilitation and work overload. The project manager is responsible for assigning tasks to each project team member. In addition, they often assume that team members understand what is being asked of them. This assumption can be incorrect, leading to team members being unclear on what needs to be accomplished (Zhang & Huo, 2015). A good project manager takes the time to explain the tasks, their expectations, and timeframes around completion (Francine, 2011). The responsibilities, skills required and resources required may cause conflicts. It can be caused by role facilitation where the resources required to carry out a task are not available. These resources may be money, people, or skill (Ammeter & Dukerich, 2012). Other people may have conflicting tasks which involve are not well specified, either the content or the goal. Work overload is another aspect where some people have complex roles which require a lot of creativity and time consuming, while others have simple tasks which are easy to execute.

2.1. Process

Process conflicts are conflicts that arise from the project activities, procedures and regulations. They can also emanate from channels of communication, set deadlines and performance reviews. Project managers must foster a clear line of communication between project team members (Leung et al., 2011). This is to minimize duplication of efforts. The project manager should communicate expectations to all team members and to be easily accessible to project team members at all times during the project(Huang, 2012). If team members cannot reach their project manager or other team members, they may spin in circles needlessly (Francine, 2011).

2.2. Relationship

Relationship conflicts are other forms of conflicts within the people in the project. Interpersonal skills are the main causes of these conflicts in ways like relating with others well and working together as a team (Meng, 2012). Among a project team, the team members may have many different personalities, roles, and senses of priorities (Chan& Kumaraswamy, 2014). The project manager must anticipate the types of conflicts among team members and work to resolve them for the good of the project. Balancing team members can be a challenge conflicts can arise from personal characteristics or from the project composition (Francine, 2011).

2.3. Interdependence Conflicts

Interdependence conflicts are the forms of conflicts which are caused and relies on someone else's co-operation, output or input in order for them to get their job done (Martins et al., 2013). They can arise due to poor delegation, having tasks that depend on other tasks and poor resource allocation among the different tasks in the project. Often, project team members work independently where they work remotely or in a different location from other project team members (Chen & Ayoko, 2012).

2.4. Project Performance
Project performance is the ability to accomplish ones responsibilities effectively and within the stipulated time (Senaratne & Udawatta, 2013). Project performance can be measured by; the planned time versus the actual time taken to complete the project. Performance also can be measured by the benefits achieved compared to the costs. Other measures of project performance include quality and social benefits. Project performance management is an ongoing review of the efficiency and importance of a given project. This important concept is used throughout the business and professional world as a means of understanding and improving company, department, and personnel performance. There are many ways to conduct these reviews, most geared toward analyzing practices and data in order to improve performance.

3. Research Methodology
The descriptive design was adopted for this study. In descriptive design, information is collected without changing the environment meaning there is no manipulation done. Descriptive design was also able to enable collection of quantitative as well as qualitative data. It enables answering the questions such as who, what, where and how and may have the researcher directly or indirectly interact with the participants. The descriptive design was appropriate for the present study as it was important to gauge the conflict management strategies in different conflicts (Kothari, 2004).

3.1. Pilot Testing
The draft questionnaire was pilot tested to assess its effectiveness in collecting data for the study. Before the final questionnaire to be used in the study was drafted, the draft questionnaire was pilot tested with 17 employees at KenGen who did not participate in the final study. The pilot test was done to ensure that the questionnaire was suitable for collection of data and also ensure that the data that was collected by the final questionnaire was useful and appropriate in the study.

3.2. Response Rate
Before the main study was conducted, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using 17 respondents. Cronbach alpha was used to test reliability and results are as presented in Table 1. The results indicate that all the items were reliable. The research questionnaire was sent to 3 energy companies; KENGEN, KETRACO and REA in Kenya to top management, middle level supervisors and operational employees. The total response received from the total sample is summarized and presented Table 4.2. Although all the companies had indicated their willingness to allow the researcher to distribute the questionnaires only 98 out of the expected people 165 filled the questionnaires. This was a response rate of 59% which was adequate.

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
Role conflicts	5	0.847
Relationship conflict	5	0.782
Process conflicts	5	0.906
Interdependence conflicts	5	0.861
Project performance	5	0.818

Table 1: Reliability Test

The result shown in Table 2 indicates that the specifications of the project quality were achieved (42%). However, respondents were neutral to all the other statements regarding project completion within the scheduled time, cost, scope and risk. This indicates that projects performance in relation to scheduled time, cost, scope and risk was average. Performance according to specification/ quality was good (1- Highly dissatisfied, 2- Dissatisfied, 3- Neutral, 4- Satisfied and 5- Highly satisfied)

Project Performance	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
The project is completed within the scheduled time	1	1	20	21	48	49	26	27	3	3
The project is completed within the budget	3	3	26	27	34	35	21	21	14	14
The project is completed as per the scope provided	1	1	18	18	47	48	24	25	8	8
The risks in the project have been dealt with effectively	8	8	10	10	48	49	22	23	10	10
The specifications of the project quality are achieved	1	1	10	10	36	37	41	42	10	10

Table 1: Project Performance

Results in Table 2 shows the model summary whereby the r and r squared are presented. The findings indicate that the model was able to explain 59.2 percent of project performance. This indicates that the four independent variables (Interdependence conflicts, relationship conflicts, role conflicts and process conflicts) applied in the model are able to explain 59.2 percent of project performance in Kenya's energy sector. This implies that 40.8 percent of the changes in project performance are explained by other factors that were not included in the model.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.769	0.592	0.486	.73745

Table 2: Model Summary and R squared

Table 3 presents the analysis of variance and the model fit. The results indicate that the model was a good fit for the data (F = 33.672; p < 0.05). This indicates that the multiple linear regression model was a good fit for the data and hence the four types of conflicts applied as independent variables could be used to linearly explain project performance.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.145	1	8.536	0.372	.000
Residual	6.576	97	.254		
Total	**10.721**	**98**			

Table 3: Analysis of Variance and Model Fit

Lastly, Table 4.11 presents the statistical significance of the independent variables in the model. The results indicate that role conflicts in projects have a significant negative effect on project performance (B = -0.251; t = -2.057; p < 0.05). These findings indicate that presence of role conflicts in a project reduces project performance. Specifically a unit increase in the level of role conflict would lead to a reduction in project performance by 0.251.

The study results also established that relationship conflicts did not have a significant effect on project performance in the energy sector (B = -0.010; t = -0.121; p > 0.05). This indicates that relationship conflicts are not very rampant in energy sector. Moreover, these conflicts do not significantly affect project performance.

Study results also determined that process conflicts have a significant negative effect on project performance in the energy sector (B = -0.376; t = -2.667; p <0.05). These results indicate that presence of process conflicts negatively affect project performance in the energy sector. The findings imply that a unit increase in the level of process conflicts would lead to reduction in project performance by 0.376.

Lastly, the study established that interdependence conflicts in the energy sector had significant negative effect on project performance in the energy sector (B = -0.319; t = -2.171; p < 0.05). These results indicate that a unit increase in the level of interdependence conflict would lead to a decrease in project performance by 0.319.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.264	.257		3.751	.000
Role conflicts	.351	.122	-.160	-2.057	.038
Relationship Conflicts	.410	.086	-.014	-.121	.904
Process conflicts	.143	.141	-.384	-2.667	.007
Interdependence conflicts	.119	.147	-.374	-2.171	.033

Table 4: Regression of all Independent Variables on Dependent Variable
Note: All the variable influences the dependent variable resulting to a Negativeresult, which is good

4. Conclusion
The study makes the following recommendations. First, project management should enhance resolution of role conflicts in projects by clearing defining roles of project team members and ensuring that each member understands how they influence and are influenced by other members. Further, project team members should familiarize themselves with the people related to the roles they are playing. Project team members should ensure that they come into terms with the limits of their strengths and weaknesses to understand where other members stand.

Secondly, to deal with interdependence conflicts, project teams should ensure effective coordination and communication among project team members. Each member understand how they affect others performance and hence understand the adjustments they need to make to ensure that they meet expectations of others in terms of delivery. Communication channels (upward, downward or lateral) should be maintained and made effective at all times since most of the interdependence conflicts that occur in project teams emanate from poor communication. The project manager should ensure that they are readily available and always issue clear guidelines and communication. Most importantly, they should have an open-door policy to enhance communication.

Third, on relationships conflicts, care should be taken when forming project teams. Consideration should be given to diversity and characteristics of the different team members to ensure that those members selected to form a team have an effective and good working relationship. Care should be taken to ensure that circumstances or combination of individuals who have high chances of conflict is avoided.

Additionally, processes in every project should be arranged logically to ensure that the possibility of risks are reduced. Moreover, project teams should ensure that there are documented stipulations and procedures that direct on how activities and processes should be conducted. Team members should also be trained on how to deliver according to procedures and policies stipulated in the project plan.

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