PPROPOSAL OF A FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS INTERNATIONAL AID PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION READNESSS: IMPORTANT FACTORS TO CONSIDER DURING THE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Project management is used as the main tool for administering aid in developing nations. Unfortunately, the success rate of development aid projects is relatively low. Several explanations have been given for these failures. Clarke (1999) emphasizes the necessity of using instruments and techniques to increase a project's chance of success. As current techniques do not always meet the specific needs of development aid projects, particularly in the African context, we identify some important factors that should be taken into account to assess the likelihood of success of these projects before they are implemented.

Keywords *: Aid projects, development, developing nations, success, sub-Saharan Africa, assess, readness*

1. Introduction

The continous economic crisis which has prevailed for several decades in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, represents a major challenge as much for researchers as for leaders. The gap between developed and developing nations has increasingly widened, and poverty in developing nations has reached an alarming level. In light of this disturbing news, the international community, and more specifically rich nations, has been giving enormous amounts of money each year to impoverished countries. Almost all of that aid is managed project by project.

Implementing development aid project is not easy. The encountered difficulties are always numerous and the conditions are very constraining. It is not uncommon to see projects end in enormous failures, in the downscaling or questioning of their goals, or even in their abandonment. The management of these projects plays an important role in the difculties encountered during their implementation (Kaba, 2000). This is particularly true in Africa because of the poor preparation of project teams, the diversity of stakeholders, and political and social influences. An IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) report issued in 1964 raised this problem. The report mentioned that there were too few well-conceived and well-prepared high-priority projects which could be financed. The lack of that kind of projects was so serious that there was no use in establishing generalized plans or in providing capital while the recipient nations lacked the appropriate resources and technologies to take on economically important projects.

Researchers from many nations have carried out studies abroad and gathered knowledge since the publication of the IBRD report. The situation has, therefore, improved somewhat since then. Nevertheless, the report's findings have led to the development of programs designed to bring technical assistance to compensate for the weaknesses of the recipient countries. Unfortunately, these new programs has brought new problems as an attentive examination of the budgets of projects formulated under these programs shows that 80 or even 90% of the funds allocated to projects were devoted to the salaries of technical personnel and overseas consultants (UN, 1998).

The literature yields a wealth of studies devoted to tools for the planning and evaluation of development projects, but by contrast very few reports analyze the state of preparedness or the aptitude of countries to carry out the projects with a maximum chance of success. Given this troublesome deficiency, we consider it appropriate in the current study to concentrate on this topic, since very little attention has been paid to it. The instigators of development aid projects (aid agencies, governmental agencies in charge of administering projects, non-governmental organizations) quite often have tools which allow them to consider and analyze technical and financial aspects when implementing these

projects. Unfortunately, they lack access to diagnostic tools which would take into account human, organizational, political, and tactical dimensions, which constitute potential sources of failure (Markus, 1983).

Our objective in this paper is therefore to point out some factors which could help one to conduct an examination and to pronounce a diagnosis of an organization's ability to guide a project and carry it out with a good chance of success, before investing important financial and material resources in that project. We will essentially perform a conceptual and descriptive analysis in the hope of identifying a diagnostic tool. We will also discuss the applicability of this instrument in achieving an improved style of management for development assistance projects in Africa.

Our study will proceed as follows: First we will review prior studies about criteria for project success and about evaluation methods currently used by major aid agencies. Next we will recommend a diagnostic tool, and lastly, we will conclude with a discussion where we suggest directions on how to operationalize the diagnostic tool.

2. Brief survey of criteria for success, evaluation methods, and project management

For several decades, project management has been making inroads into all organizational domains, in private enterprises as well as in the public sector. International aid organizations use project management as their main means of administering aid to developing countries. It is therefore crucial, in the formulation phase as well as in the evaluation phase, to analyze the social and economical impacts of proposed projects in order to assess how well they fit the stated goals. Numerous criteria for project success have been proposed. Several of these are shown in the following table:

Table 1
Criteria for projects' success

Authors	Criteria for project success
Avots (1969) and Gaddis (1959)	The project is achieved within the specified time frame; The project is achieved within the specified budget; The project has reached a sufficient level of performance.
Baker and Murphy (1974)	The project is achieved the three goals: time, cost, and performance. The project has satisfied the client. The project has satisfied the project team.
Cleland (1986)	The project has achieved the three goals: time, cost, and performance. The project has contributed to the enterprise's strategic mission.
Pinto and Slevin (1986)	The project has achieved the three goals: time, cost, and performance. The project is technically sound (there must be a solution and a problem which called for it). The project is valid for the organization (the organization must be able to use it). The project has improved the effectiveness of the organization.
Morris and Hough (1987)	The functionality of the project. The management of the project: time, cost, and performance. Short- and long-term performance.
Tuman (1986) ; Grandmont and O'Shaughnessy (1987)	Effectiveness (achieved its goals). Efficiency (adequate use of resources).

Various authors in the literature have supported the use of project management tools or techniques in order to increase the chances of a project's success. For instance, Clarke (1999) maintains that a better use of project management techniques can be a very useful means of increasing the chances of projects' success in a constantly changing and increasingly constraining environment. The author goes even further, stating that project management tools are reliable means of managing change and achieving preset goals.

In their study, Fox and Wayne (1998) identify project management tools, the level of use and the usage domain of these tools, as well as the satisfaction of project managers regarding those tools. They conclude that Microsoft Project is the tool most often used by project managers, and also that project managers are in general satisfied with their experiences in using this software. The authors also focus on the fit between the tool and the requirements of the task for which it is used. In this regard, their results show that MS Project is not the first-ranked tool.

Gelbard et al. (2002) point out that planning is a critical phase in project management, since carrying out a faulty plan most often ends in a mediocre result. After having singled out the project manager as the person responsible for this important step, these authors conclude that the quality management, risk management, and communication are more likely to fail than other dimensions of project management. These three dimensions, however, are considered the most critical and the most prominent in the context of the management of development aid projects in other studies such as the one undertaken by Youker (1999).

To make a success of his or her mission, the project manager should have adequate tools in his or her provision. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the identified tools have been designed to address the technical aspect rather than the strictly managerial dimensions of project management (Muriithi and Crawford 2003). However, these magenerial dimensions are critical in the context of managing bilateral and multilateral aids granted to developing nations. Technical tools, such as project management software, respond more easily to the demands for standardization and formalism which frequently appear as two norms in productive projects, and, in fact, in project management pedagogy. According to Muriithi and Crawford (2003), in certain cases a discrepancy has appeared between recommendations in the literature and the political, social, and cultural realities of the African context. One could also call into question whether project evaluation methods currently used by international organizations are really adapted to the nature of development aid projects.

When it comes to evaluation tools, each organization has its own method. For example, the directives of the ODA (Overseas Development Administration) recommend as their watchword an assessment of inputs and ouputs in terms of opportunity costs. The World Bank uses the internal profitability rate. USAID (the United States Agency for International Development) performs a classical financial analysis.The CFD (Caisse française de développement) applies the effects method.

These methods have their limits. They mainly target the assessment of directly productive projects, and as such, they don't allow for a quantitative evaluation of these projects' contributions to any objectives outside of those strictly related to economic growth. The methods used by aid organizations respond to strictly economical concerns. Difficulties thus rise when it comes time to assess projects which are not directly productive in an economic sense (development of infrastructure, transportation, public services, education, health or telecommunications) and whose goals are not easily quantifiable. In reality, such projects usually make up a significant portion of bilateral and multilateral public assistance, It is therefore advisable, in such conditions, to turn to a diagnostic tool in order to determine the likelihood of a project's success before implementing it.

3. Introduction of a diagnostic tool for the state of preparedness to manage successfully projects

The management of a project can be perceived as an activity which leads to scrutinize in depth the design of the project as well as the organization of its implementation, that is, the definition of roles; the clarification of needs, objectives, and outcomes; and the implementation of plans of actions (O'Shaughnessy, 1992). Saunders and

Barkers (2001) propose a three-dimensional tool called PDM (Performance Drivers Model) to evaluate an organization's state of preparedness to bring a project to a successful conclusion. Here we introduce this tool and we adapt it to the dynamics of development aid project management.

Figure 1
Diagnostic tool from Saunders and Barkers (2001)

2. People – Who does it ?

1. What are we doing?

3. Enablers – How are we organized?
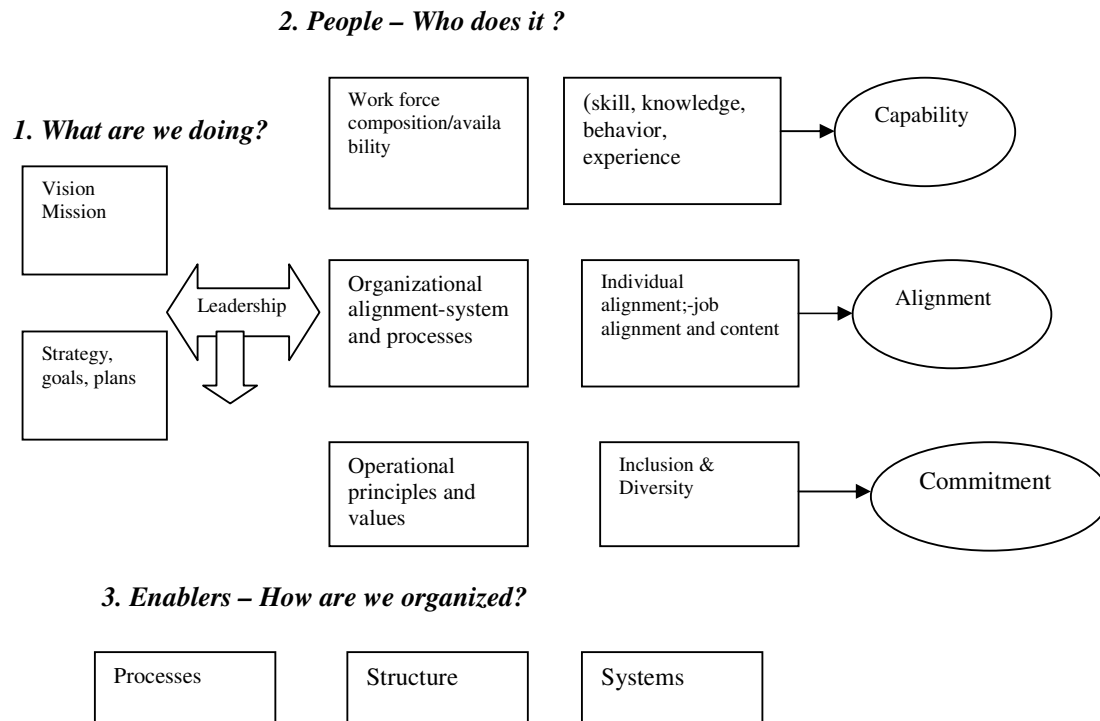
This diagnostic tool makes it possible to set goals and to formulate plans, objectives, and strategies, and to align or integrate them with available competences and processes. More specifically, it permits to become aware of the vision, the strategic directions, the availability of personnel to carry out these objectives, the processes, and the structures required to achieve the stated goals. The three main questions which allow understanding these elements are: **What should be done? Who should do it? How should it be done?** We describe the tool in greater detail below.

3.1 Vision

The first element in PMD is *Vision*. This dimension has to do with the goals and the mission of the organization which intends to implement the project. It is the set of activities which must be completed in order to satisfy the demands of the project's various stakeholders. Examples of demands are the strengthening of institutional capabilities or the improvement of the educational system, narrow the digital divide.

On the one hand, every project exists within an internal social and cultural environment, as well as within a national or international economic and political environment. On the other hand, a project also exists under the pressure of spatial and temporal forces which impel it toward success or failure. Consequently, a project should not be regarded as taking place within an isolated environment, but rather as interacting with a set of elements which is often difficult to define, complex, and multidimensional. We identify five major stakeholders affecting a development aid project: *The government and its authorities in the host country, international aid agencies, various informal groups, and the recipients.*

The analysis of a project must therefore take into account this network of relationships between the project and its environment in order to discover the constraints or critical conditions which could result from it, and also to determine the scope of management methods which need to be established in order to manage this set of interfaces. Before the implementation of the project, one should make sure that the organization of its project team already has in place a management plan which includes the following elements:

- A description of the project.
- A definition of its scale.
- A description of outputs in terms of general characteristics and key deadlines.
- A description of general methodology, of processes, and of the main technological choices.
- A preliminary estimate of the cost of each of the outputs.
- The identification of the interfaces.
- The analyses of the interfaces.
- The definition of an appropriate integration mechanism.
- The implentation of the mechanism.
- The technological or methodological strategy.
- The Strategy of organization.
- The supply strategy.
- The risk management plan.
- The management strategy.
- The documentation.
- The follow-up, evaluation, and adaptation.

This first element of PDM, the vision, is extremely critical in the administration of the aid. In a World Bank study (1990), it is clearly shown that in order to be effective, the management of development aid projects must require from the organization of supervision a clear definition of its objectives, its powers, and the functions which it is expected to fulfill and for which it is responsible.

3.2 People

The second element of the PDM is *People*. It examines the presence within the organization or the project team, of competencies and abilities necessary to meet the stated objectives. This element allows knowing whether a favorable environment exists which can support flexibility necessary to any change. It also helps to determine if there are enough qualified people (in terms of personal qualities, expertise, etc.) who

can form the critical mass to guide the project. In this second element, one can also examine the compatibility between the contributions likely to be offered and personal characteristics of those involved. The need for training of qualified personnel is one of the problems confronting developing countries in general in spite of the all efforts being deployed. Broisin-Doutaz (1999) stated that some donors give up financing projects mainly because of the lack of qualified partners in the host country to take charge of these projects. In order to face this shortage of expertise, international organizations rely on technical assistance programmes. Current findings show that, although assistance programmes have existed for more than forty years, 90% of the 12 billions of dollars spent each year in this sector still go toward the importation of expertise, in spite of the fact that experts in numerous domains are locally available (ONU, 1998). In some cases, the goal has been achieved. But one wonders today if technical assistance still retains its full importance or if it does not instead contribute to holding back national capabilities rather than unleashing them. An assessment would be useful. The way technical assistance is provided should also be the object of a critical examination.

3.3 Enablers

Enablers constitute the last component of PDM. This element aims at finding out whether adequate structures and processes are available to undertake the project. Here, it is a question of making sure that the mechanisms put in place meet the needs of the two preceding elements. It is strongly advised to implement strategies which reflect the goals to be met and the available competencies. For example, supply occupies a central role in the administration of development aid projects because of the predominance of infrastructure. The project team has to turn to external sources to secure the necessary inputs. The risks are therefore high in terms of delivery timing and in terms of delivering products matching the ones that were ordered. The implementation of an adequate supply procedure is one way of controlling for these risks. It is also a means to plan for seeking non-objections from the donor (to decisions made locally), which permits the release of necessary funds to perform the work. Quite often, very little importance is paid to this aspect. The lack of adequate

procedures is among the main causes of projects' failure in developing nations (Youker, 1999).

Saunders and Barkers (2001) state that in order to benefit from the PDM tool, it is necessary to consider the three main elements simultaneously. Adopting a systemic vision is therefore very useful during the diagnostic activities. In the following section we present some suggestions which will help better understand how to use PDM in the context of development aid projects management.

4. Suggestions for determining the state of preparedness to carry out the project effectively

First, let us recall the question which should precede the assessment: How can one know that the project to be undertaken has some chance of being realized successfully, before throwing enormous financial resources in its implementation?

Hafsi and Demers (1997) try to answer this question by point out five key factors that must be the focus of a particular attention during the assessment. These factors are: the environment, the culture, the structure, the goals of the organization, and the characteristics of the managers.

Indeed, most aid projects are initiated in order to meet a development need. Examples would include creating infrastructures to support economic growth, improving institutional capacities to offer better public services, and putting in place methods for good governance as dictated by donors or aid organizations in order to guarantee rights and liberties.

In order to implement these projects successfully, it is necessary to create a common vision and to have a champion who is able to lead individuals toward a common goal, to create a sense of urgency, to bring people together, and to build a new culture around the tangible benefits which can result from the changes. All the above actions are required at the very beginning of the project. Failure to set this common vision or to establish a channel for communication creates obstacles which can ultimately lead to a project's failure.

Before going further in our analysis, it is important to point out the distinction between a traditional manager and a leader (champion). This difference is related to both the function and personal characteristics. A manager is concerned with carrying out strategic and operational planning. He or she sets up the necessary structures and regulations to realize these plans. In addition, the manager determines roles, responsibilities, and procedures to serve as a guide to personnel, constantly making sure that each employee plays his or her role. A manager most often produces short-term results to satisfy shareholders (in accordance with the budget) and clients (conforming to required deadlines and specifications), etc. As for the leader, he or she establishes the direction to follow. It is the leader who develops the vision to guide the organization toward the far future. The leader also puts into place the necessary strategies and means to realize that vision. By contrast to the manager, who establishes a budget and other resources planning through orders, incentives and punishments, the leader brings people together by means of communication, persuasion, and motivation in order to establish a coalition. The leader, rather than using punishment, inspires and energizes people in order deal with political, bureaucratic, and material obstacles, as well as to implement change while creating as many winners as possible. Traditional managers are often frustrated when their effort is not recognized by their superiors and by other members of the organization. On the other hand, leaders, in the vast majority of cases, draw their energy from their vision and from the long-term impact of their actions, taking (insofar as possible) less account of the financial advantages associated with such actions. Then the skills/aptitudes of a leader and a manager may be complementary.

We have identified four specific factors we recommend to be used in assessing the state of preparedness of a development aid project to be carried out: Personal characteristics of the project manager; experience of people involved in the project; structural characteristic of the project organization to adopt; and communication means and work environment.

Personal characteristics of the manager

The success of a project depends largely on the competencies of the person in charge of it. These

competencies include the person's experience, not only in carrying out the project, but also the person's technical expertise as well as his or her aptitude for understanding the characteristics of the various stakeholders in addition to the project's domain. A good flow of communication between the stakeholders is a sign of a major step toward the success of the development aid project. Moreover, in view of the increasingly apparent complexity of the field, some project management specialists note that tools such as WBS (Work Breakdown Structure), PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique), and Gantt chart are no longer a guarantee of project success only by themselves. Therefore, project managers need to be flexible and demonstrate some capability of adaptation. In other words, it is important for project managers to show a pragmatic spirit during the implementation of development aid projects. This spirit of pragmatism, coupled with a good communication climate, is absolutely necessary in the field of project management since the "know how" is yet to be determined, and responsibilities are extensive with constantly fluctuating scope. For a project seeking to contribute to the development of a country, it is suitable that the manager *who will lead it has the essential qualities of a leader as described above.*

Past experience of people involved in the project

The project team's experience is also a good indicator of its degree of readiness. Organizations or teams which have already successfully carried out projects are more ready to undertake new projects as compared to those with less experience. However, the remembering of past failures can also be a major obstacle to realize future projects. It is important to note that past successes can in addition lead to the paradox of Icarus and can constitute a handicap, preventing those in charge of the project from realizing that each project is unique and calls for specific skills and competencies. In short, the analysis of the past record is essential before initiating new projects.

Structural characteristic of the project organization to adopt

The structural characteristics of the organization which will take charge of the project also constitute an aspect which should be taken into account during the examination of the state of preparedness to carry out the project. Among the existing types of organizational structures, it has been shown that organizations with less centralized decision-making, less formality, and less vertical differentiation, are more inclined to be open to new ideas than those which are bureaucratic, with centralized procedures and a vertical line of authority. Inertia is more likely to emerge in the latter structures than in the former.

Communication means and work environment

The work environment as well as the features of communication means also play a role in project management. Projects led by managers who are receptive to new ideas are more likely to succeed. In many projects, the employees often trust the attitude of their hierarchical superiors. Very often, when those superiors are not in favor of changes, dissatisfaction will emerge more readily. The work environment will show whether there are a great number of specialists, and whether there exists a culture of receptivity. The organizational culture and the organization's system of communication are also good indicators of the state of preparedness. Thus, project teams in which a constant effort is deployed to maintain a network for the distribution of information have a better chance of achieving the stated goals.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of a development aid project is an extremely complex phenomenon, which comprises a number of facets including technical, organizational, political, cultural, and psychological aspects. In order to increase the chances of success of such an endeavor, from the framework proposed by Saunders and Barkers (2001), we have identified four factors that we recommend the use when assessing the readiness of such a project to be satisfactorily carried out.

The factors we suggest take into account the existence of a need or an opportunity for a project which is often dictated by an identified problem

or requirement. There are also clear objectives established according to which the project can be considered a success or a failure. Adequate strategies will be necessary to achieve these goals with the necessary support structures. It is important that the organization possess qualified personnel to carry out the tasks involved. The adoption of a systemic vision is necessary in order to use PDM.

The main limitation of the conceptual analysis carried out in this analysis relates to the fact that the factors we have identified still need to be operationalized and transformed into a diagnostic tool that can be easily used. Future research should focus on derivating measures for each of the factors descrbed above, and empirically testing these measures in order to make them suitable for practical applications.

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