

Project Management Profession: A Critical Competency for Delivery of Infrastructure Projects in Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

As Zimbabwe's political dispensation has entered into a new season, there is a great expectation of economic growth spearheaded by massive investments in infrastructure development. In the past one and a half decades, Zimbabwe's economy has gone through systematic degradation which saw it plunge from being the 'bread basket of Africa' to be the 'basket case of Africa.' Anticipating that the newly appointed President, His Excellency E. D. Munangagwa, will be development oriented and that his cabinet will be driven by the desire to perform, there is need for the Government of Zimbabwe to create an enabling environment for the successful execution of infrastructure projects. The President's sentiments are reflected in the recent Budget Speech by the Honourable P. A. Chinamasa, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, who spelt out the need to instill proper project governance and project management standards within the Public Sector projects. Furthermore the strategy for economic revival in Zimbabwe is spelt out in the Zim Asset policy document (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). However, the current Zim Asset policy expires in 2018 and the Minister of Finance has alluded to the Zim Asset second Phase from 2019-2023. The current Zim Asset document itself is sound but the execution of it is found wanting due to dearth of financial resources.

The envisaged recovery will be spearheaded by massive infrastructure projects carried out at Public Sector level, Private Sector level, and collaborative Public-Private-Partnership level. The availability and capability of the subject matter experts to carry out the infrastructure projects is essential. However, this is not adequate for successful implementation of projects. Subject matter experts are often given the task of managing complex projects. This they attempt to do without the appropriate project management training and therefore lack the rigors of the discipline. The subject matter experts are deemed 'accidental' project managers within the project management profession (Darrell, V. 2010). The risk of using an 'accidental' project manager in a high cost capital project results in a litany of problems which may deem the project a failure, or a highly stressed project. The litany of problems can range from, among others, scope creep, schedule overruns, cost overruns, quality challenges, unrealized benefits and in extreme cases loss of multiple lives.

In order to institute proper project management practices in the implementation of infrastructure projects, this paper puts forward the critical need for developing the project management profession to buttress the competencies of subject matter experts within the public sector. There is need to increase the number of trained/skilled/certified project management professionals within the public sector and also within the contracted private sector service providers.

Furthermore this paper advocates for the implementation of project governance framework to enable the appropriate oversight of public sector projects. This is in line with the budget enunciation of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

Key words: project governance, project management, talent development

1. Introduction

In order to appreciate the magnitude of the infrastructure development work anticipated in Zimbabwe, it is best to use as proxy, the current policy formulated by the Zimbabwe Government under the former President, R. G. Mugabe, the ZIM ASSET programme (*Government of Zimbabwe 2013*). The Zim Asset intentions are to role out a number of key infrastructure development project, chief of which are, *inter alia*:-

- Water and Sanitation Infrastructure
- Public amenities,
- Information and Communication Technology,
- Energy and power supplies,
- Transport (road, rail, marine and air).

A number of implementation strategies are put forward. Chief among the strategies is the Integrated Results Based Management (IRBM) system, which is based on generating a number of key performance metrics and monitoring and reporting on their progress. The overseeing and coordinating organization is given as the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). The ZIM ASSET strategies are moot on the need for proper project management practice and governance. Reliance on processes and methodology such as IRBM without the requisite project management skills and project governance can result in a high rate of project failure.

It is envisaged that the new government will review this policy and come up with new formulation as asserted by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development in the budget speech. The work to be done is not likely to differ much from the Zim Asset policy. The availability of resources, the *modus operandi*, and the *celeritas operandi* (*speed of execution*) will make the difference.

2. Causes of Public Sector Project Failure

Lack of project management skills features in many research papers of the reasons why public sector projects fail. A number of issues which affect the delivery of public sector projects in the African context are cited as, *inter alia* (Chima 2016):-

- Corruption: ineffective governance and haphazard control of a given project by the government.
- Lack of skills, absence of training and ignorance of project management knowledge.

- Lack of resources, failure to include the local community in planning, project implementation, operations and no arrangement for maintenance and operation of the project deliverables.

A study of large infrastructural departments in South Africa (Rwelamila, 2007) found out that there are many public sector project-oriented organisations (POO) who were performing poorly in terms of project delivery mainly due to employment of untrained ‘accidental’ project managers. The study recommended the adoption of project management as a core competence, which entails overhaul of the POO management structures and cultures, and establishing project manager’s development programme.

Using Ghana as a proxy to project management policies on the African continent, a research study (Amponsah 2012) found out that only 46% of public sector interviewees involved in project implementation had some form of knowledge of project management techniques whilst a whopping 54% had no knowledge in project management).

3. Current Project Governance in the Public Sector in Zimbabwe

Current public sector governance for project implementation is implied in, *inter alia*:-

- The *Procurement Act* [Chapter 22:14], establishes the State Procurement Board (SPB) mandated to regulate and manage the public procurement process in all government ministries, public entities and local authorities in line with public procurement law.
- The *Prevention of Corruption Act* [Chapter 9:16], which focuses on prevention of corruption by prescribing a code of conduct, policing thereof and criminalization for non-compliance.
- The *Public Finance Management Act* [Chapter 22:19], which seeks to secure accountability, transparency and sound management of public resources.
- The *Joint venture Act* – governing and enabling Public-Private Partnerships

The Zimbabwean legislation, as amended, emphasize ‘procurement’ procedures, prevention of corruption, and sound management of public resources, but are mute on execution, monitoring and controlling and project closure (Chaza 2016). There seems to be no enacted guideline or procedure on project management and project governance for public sector in the laws of Zimbabwe which, this paper considers to be a fundamental problem in the delivery of state capital projects.

A good indication of the state of project execution in Zimbabwe is shown in the The Comptroller and Auditor Report (2011) on the Zimbabwe National Water Authority’s (ZINWA), which attributes poor project performance to a litany of shortcomings, which are:-

- delays (schedule overruns) in the completion of projects leading to unnecessary increase in costs (cost overruns) because of failure to prioritize projects,
- selection of incompetent contractors,
- awarding too many contracts to one company,
- delays in payment of certificates of contractors,
- failure to adequately monitor and supervise projects,
- delays in the release of counterpart funding by Government ,
- delays in approving design changes,
- lack of adequate technicians and engineers and unavailability of equipment for the projects.

These shortcomings are considered indicative of weaknesses in project management skills and project governance in government bodies.

4. Project Management Practices Within The Public Sector – Best Practice Examples

Governments worldwide undertake some of the largest projects and hence the need for robust project management governance in order to increase the probability of success and hence save millions/billions in taxpayers money. In the developing countries governments take an active role in project management advocacy. Examples of these are debated below:-

The United Kingdom

The UK Government set up a central Major Projects Authority (MPA) in 2011, by way of a Prime Ministerial Mandate (University of Oxford (2012-2015): *Major Projects Leadership Academy MPLA Handbook*).

Canada

The Government of Canada made a policy directive to set up the Major Projects Management Office (MPMO) in 2007 (Government of Canada MPMO, (2007): *Cabinet Directive on Improving the Performance of the Regulatory System for Major Resource Projects*).

European Union

The PMI issued a press release commending the European Union (EU) Council for adopting the Common Provisions Regulation for EU Cohesion and Structural Funds for 2014-2020. Embedded in the provisions are specific recommendations regarding project management (Project Management Institute, Press Release - *New Legislation: EU Member States to Develop Project Management Capabilities – (26 February 2014)*)

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Chief Minister's Project Management Initiative (CMPMI) mandated the creation of the Project Management Unit (PMU) to oversee government projects (Khan 2006).

United States of America

In 2016, the outgoing President Barack Obama signed into law S.1550, the Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act of 2015 (PMIAA). The purpose of this bill is to enhance accountability and best practices in project and program management throughout the federal government. Among the key objectives of the bill is the institution of best practice project management within the public sector. (Project Management Institute, Press Release - *President Barack Obama Signs the Program Management Improvement and Accountability Act. (16 december, 2016)*)

5. The Minister of Finance's Pronouncements on Project Management Practices within the Zimbabwean Public Sector

The Minister of Finance and Economic Development gives pointers as to the intended policy direction with regards to Project Management of Public Sector projects and programs. The policy direction is in line with global best practice as it has all the necessary. Below is an extract from the Minister of Finance's 2018 Budget Speech under Chapter 4: EXPENDITURE MANAGEMENT:-

Public Investment Management Guidelines

164 Going forward, all new projects will be subject to governance procedures, as provided for in the Public Investment Management Guidelines and Manuals.

165 The Zimbabwe Public Investment Management Guidelines, which Treasury is unveiling, will enhance the quality of public investment preparation, appraisal, and selection, as well as provide line Ministries and implementing Agencies with best practices in project implementation.

166 Key among the requirements are the following:

- Projects submitted for funding through the Budget should have prior rigorous detailed appraisal and formal approval by Treasury, and should be aligned to National/Ministry strategic objectives;
- Sustainable funding options should have been clearly determined, including detailed costing of works to be undertaken, which should be validated by Treasury prior to commencement of works;

- Establishment of formal Project Committees within Ministries and implementing agencies, to ensure that all key steps in the project management process are followed, comprising of strategic guidance and appraisal, project selection and budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as audit;
- Commitment management for each project will be strengthened to ensure we avoid accruing liabilities that are not covered by the available Budget; and
- Any variations to scope and cost of above 10% of the total project cost shall not be effected without prior approval of the responsible authority and Treasury.

167 The above measures will be complemented by measures to capacitate implementing agencies through training of technical staff for effective project management.

168 The Zimbabwe Public Investment Management Guidelines will apply to projects implemented by central Government Ministries, Local Authorities, State Enterprises and Parastatals, as well as Development Partner funded projects that impose a cost on the Budget.

169 In support of the utilisation of the Guidelines by stakeholders, training sessions will be conducted for all implementing agencies across the various sectors of Government.

170 The Guidelines will be effective starting 1 January 2018, and in preparation for their dissemination and engagement with stakeholders, Treasury is availing copies of the Guidelines, as well as uploading the same on the Treasury website www.zimtreasury.gov.zw from December 8, 2017.

The Public Investment Management Guidelines document is not yet available at the time of publishing this article. It is eagerly waited for.

6. Project Management Talent Development Project Governance Framework

In order for successful implementation of infrastructure projects in Zimbabwe, there is need to develop policies which seek to emulate the best practices as seen in other countries. The following practices, if adopted, will further strengthen the Government's bid to improve on project execution:

- Talent development in Project Management: public sector subject matter experts and their private sector partners and consultants to train and acquire internationally recognized Project Management certifications.
- Public Sector Bid Conditionality: the bidder for public sector infrastructure projects must have proof of project management capabilities such as Project Management certification

from internationally recognized certifying institution.

- A Public Sector Project Governance Framework: to enable the formation of centralized or decentralized public sector Project Management Offices (PMOs).
- Funding Conditionality: infrastructure project funding to be tied to the proof of implementation of the Project Governance Framework and the use of trained and certified resources rather than ‘accidental’ project managers.

7. Conclusion

Governments in various parts of the developed and developing world are putting in place policies that enhance success in delivery of public projects by the instituting project management capabilities and project governance within the public sector. Implementation of such policies in Zimbabwe will result in hundreds of millions of dollars being saved in infrastructure project implementation. Without such, the failure rate of projects will be high. This will be accompanied by opportunistic corruption. A welcome development in Zimbabwe is the enunciation by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development on the need to institute proper Project Management framework and training. The Project Management professionals in Zimbabwe are urged to participate in the development of such a framework, and the Private sector is urged to follow suite and incorporate Project Management as an essential management skill, thus making Zimbabwe great again.

Further studies are required in Zimbabwe in order to establish project management metrics for success and to ascertain the current level of public sector failure or success. Policy formulation has to be tailored to suit the local environment.

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About the Author



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Eng. Tororiro Chaza is one of the handful of PMPs in Zimbabwe. He has over 30 years of experience on projects in the Telecommunications industry, having worked for General Electric Company in the UK, then for the Zimbabwe Posts and Telecommunications Company, and top Cellular Company Econet Wireless. Tororiro was the General Manager of the Project Management Office (PMO) at Econet Zimbabwe for the last 5 years in charge of managing a large portfolio of banking, construction and telecommunications projects of varying complexities. Tororiro is now a full-time project management trainer and consultant. He is also Vice President for Professional Development and Education - PMI Zimbabwe Chapter and Vice Chairman of the ZICT, the Zimbabwe Institution of Engineers, ICT Division.

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