Benefits of a Project Management Methodology

Most books, guidelines and manuals on development projects are either focused on the design and identification of solutions to reduce poverty, or on the monitoring and evaluation aspects of development. Few books, if any, incorporate the basic tools methods and processes that are commonly used in the project management profession, widely used in the private and government sectors. Additionally, the current literature focuses on the donor concerns and requirements rather than the needs of the development agency or beneficiaries the project aims to serve.

For most organizations, project management has been reduced to the management of technical activities designed during the project proposal and little effort is done to plan the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. Project management is more than just implementing the activities identified in a log frame, it includes managing all the components that make up a project; from its resources, risks and changes to ensure the project meets its objectives within the expected quality, timeframe, budget and at the same time meeting the expectations of the many stakeholders.

Development projects face many challenges; from extreme working conditions to volatile environments, where human or natural events can put the project at risk of not meeting its goals. Development projects face constant demands to do more with less, project managers have to deal with the numerous request of the large number of different stakeholders. Project managers are responsible to deliver outcomes in conditions were security risks are high and goods and services are limited.

This complex project environment requires appropriate project management skills. Development projects need to be carefully designed taking in consideration the input from different stakeholders, project budgets need to be managed, schedules monitored, and outcomes evaluated. The effective use of a project management methodology ensures a cost effective use of limited resources such as people and funds. Development workers assigned to manage development projects are often not equipped with the project management skills necessary to carry out successful project management. Their interest is usually on the immediate tangible outputs of the project and not on the less tangible processes required to ensure the project is managed effectively.

There is not a widely defined standard for managing a development project; each organization and each project manager, eventually define its own approach to managing a project. The only significant advance in this area has been the institutionalization of the project log frame, but as good as this tool is, it is not enough to ensure project success. Many project managers fail to understand the critical operational components of a project and focus excessively on the technical components of the project and, with the exception of the budget, and ignore the processes that facilitate the management of a project.

Project management is often seen as an unnecessary element and something that can be achieved just by monitoring the project budget. Yet the success of development organizations requires that projects are successful in all aspects.

While many development organizations can claim to do good project management, few can provide evidence for the use of a formal project management methodology; used in a consistent, predictable and reliable manner. Most organizations run projects relying on the technical skills of its project managers and it's no surprise that most project managers have little or no formal training in project management. The impact to organizations is that projects are at best able to accomplish the planned technical goals but fail in meeting the ultimate objectives.

Additionally, the lack of a consistent project management methodology result in duplication of efforts that impact the bottom line of the organi-

zation's development goals; this causes additional costs, increases risks and reduces the trusts donors and stakeholders have on the organization. Many development projects fail to deliver the expected outcomes or fail to create the desired impact in the community they serve. The causes are various but a review of project evaluations leads to the following factors:

- Discrepancy in understanding the objectives of a project by project team, donors and beneficiaries
- Incomplete, unrealistic and outdated project plan
- Weak project leadership
- Vague lines of responsibility and authority which leads to lack of accountability
- Poor commitment to the project by the team, the organization, and beneficiaries
- Inadequate resources
- Weak control processes and feedback mechanisms to detected problems early
- Lack of committed of the development organization to a structured methodology for project management
- Lack of analysis of major risk factors

Additionally, project management can help development organizations meet their strategies by standardizing processes, reducing risks and duplication of efforts and increase the impact of its interventions. An organization that systematically employs project management methodologies, ensures that available resources are used in the most efficient and effective manner, which increases the chances that the needs of the beneficiaries are met.

In this type of environment, organizations need a methodology that allows a great degree of flexibility to accommodate the constantly changing environment of the project; a methodology that promotes optimal standards of performance, and reinforces the organizational capacity to deliver its services in a transparent and effective manner. Without a project management methodology organizations risk losing the knowledge and skills they gain from completed projects; however, due to the high staff turnover in development organizations, it is hard to build institutional memory to improve the efficiency of development projects and to implement lessons learned in future projects.

Development organizations need to quickly adapt to new challenges and focus its limited resources to achieve repetitive successes. In order to achieve this, a proven yet flexible project management methodology must become part of the organizational culture. The effective utilization of this methodology depends upon the integration of key knowledge

areas with project management processes. It is though a common methodology, a common language that project managers in development organizations can increase their knowledge and build their skills upon each other.

A methodology is a method to capture the best practices around project management and disseminate them in the organization. It is a system of principles, practices, and procedures. It's the collection of practical ideas and proven practices. It's a way to manage projects by setting out every phase, activity and task in the Project Management Life Cycle. Managers and teams around the world use it as their framework for delivering projects, as it tells everyone in their team exactly what they have to do, how to do it and by when to do it.

A methodology is a documented approach for performing activities in a coherent, consistent, predictable, and repeatable manner. It includes the methods, procedures, and techniques employed to accomplish the objectives and the goals of the project.

The best methodologies are the ones that are built based on the experience of its practitioners; organizations that build a learning cycle in its methodologies will benefit by incorporating the knowledge of its project managers and thus will have a methodology that reflects its current best practices. With this approach, organizations will have a comprehensive knowledge organization methodology for successful project management.

Defining and implementing a good methodology is essential for development organizations to document a project management approach for performing project activities in a coherent, consistent, accountable, and repeatable manner.

These series of articles focuses on concepts and practices related to development projects. It is our hope that the ideas and methodologies presented here prove useful to anyone who is engaged in managing projects in the broader development community, and helps bring sustainable benefits to the communities and beneficiaries who need it the most.

The Millennium Development Goals aim by 2015 to reverse the grinding poverty, hunger and disease affecting billions of people.

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