Project Management in the Public Sector: Catalyst for Effective Service Delivery in Nigeria

Ijimakinwa Samuel O.
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences
OlabisiOnabanjo University
Ago- Iwoye, Ogun state, Nigeria
Email: ijimakinwa.samuel@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng
Phone: 08035700655

Adebowale Oshineye, A.
Department of Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences
Lagos State University, Ojo
Email: adebowale.oshineye@lasu.edu.ng

Abstract
The paper examined the project management in the public sector as a catalyst for effective service delivery in Nigeria. The paper is basically theoretical in nature, drawing its arguments from secondary sources, including existing legal frameworks and related policies, published textbooks, Journals, magazines, newspapers, and the internet. However, empirical evidence was also used. To improve the reliability and validity of the paper, multiple secondary sources were used to minimise the risk of error. The paper observed that many projects of the government have remained uncompleted or abandoned due to poor project management and the negative act of corruption in the public sector, thereby undermining the country's quest for national development. The paper noted that there is no doubt in the fact that project management in the Nigerian public sector often faces challenges like poor stakeholder participation and limited resources. A critical appraisal of project management in the Nigerian public sector has revealed that there is still a lot to be done as regards project management in the country. The paper recommended, among others, that there is urgent need to encourage meaningful project management and evaluation for government at all levels in the country to build capacity, especially within the public sector and this will make it possible for the relevant government agencies at all levels to be equipped with the requisite skills, tools and technologies to successfully deliver projects within an acceptable time frame and required specifications.

Keywords: Project management, public sector, service delivery, government agencies, development

Introduction

The New Public Management NPM created a need for structured project management approaches as the government sought efficiency, accountability and results through decentralisation, customer focus and private sector initiative in the growing demand of goods and services in competitive markets (Ogedengbe, 2024). The evolution of global competitive markets demands the production and consumption of goods and services (John & Sons, 2022). The Public Sector management has

been seen as the custodian of socio-economic development of any country: this is because of its significant role in the implementation of policies, programmes and projects (Fajonyomi et al., 2013; Ogedengbe, 2024). It plays a pivotal role for the growth of the nation's social, political and economies activities, because it is responsible for providing an appropriate and conducive environment in which all sectors of the economy can perform optimally, and it is this catalytic role of the public sector that propelled governments all over the world to search continuously for better ways to manage its projects for good delivery of services to the citizens (Kerzner, 2019).

In developing countries such as Nigeria, citizens are becoming more aware of the responsibility of the public sector to deliver quality services to the people (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2018). Accordingly, they are demanding that they be better served by a more responsive public service. In addition, public services are increasingly under considerable pressure to facilitate efforts aimed at achieving accelerated socio-economic development (Olateju et al., 2011). Projects represent an important aspect of the development plan; they play tremendous roles in the socio-economic development of developing countries like Nigeria. Not only that, projects represent a crucial element in both the formulation and the implementation of development plans and budgets. Projects are also means of translating development plans into action (Lawal & Onobaebi, 2010). They are therefore expected to be identified and defined within a larger development context.

Project management has long been a bane in the public sector of developing economies; in fact, many government projects have failed, been abandoned, or fallen apart soon after completion (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2018; Ogedengbe, 2024). For instance, in Nigeria, scarce resources were wasted with negative consequences on the utilisation and distribution of national wealth. Nigeria has set itself a national development target of the year 2026 to join the league of the twenty top-most developed countries of the world. This target is no doubt a tall order for the country, as it still faces enormous developmental and security challenges. Previous administrations had always promised plenty but delivered poorly (Adejuwon, 2014). It has been worrisome that it is fast receding in all aspects of national development, despite the huge resources and funds yearly budgeted to execute development projects and programmes. The consequences of the high incidence of project failure in Nigeria show clearly that there is a problem with its management (Fajonyomi et al., 2013).

Olateju et al. (2011) observed that there had been colossal waste of scarce national resources and non-service delivery, especially in the public sector. Many government projects have remained uncompleted or abandoned in Nigeria due to poor project management (Adejuwon, 2014). He stressed further that the incidence of abandoned projects has caused the administration of President Bola Mohammed Tinubu to constitute a panel for the assessment of failed or non-performing federal government contracts, construction, supplies and services. The panel discovered that a total of thirty-four projects in research institutions, which were civil works, were listed as failed projects. They were abandoned at four varying stages of completion. Eighty per cent of them had been roofed, but all deteriorated to the extent that the roofs of forty-five per cent of them had either collapsed or been blown off. Most of the contractors could not be located at their addresses. They have either relocated, changed names or died. Twenty per cent of the projects were certified and paid to their completion levels. Seventy-five per cent were not fully paid to the certificated level. Five per cent were overpaid (Ogedengbe, 2024).

There is no doubt in the fact that project management in Nigeria is a confronting challenge with issues like poor planning, inadequate funding and lack of expertise (Ogedengbe, 2024). The major factors which have been identified for project failure and abandonment in Nigeria public sector include a lack of project managerial ability, improper planning and implementation, which culminated in ill-conceived projects, poor costing, inadequate project appraisal, and unrealistic

schedules of activities, poor monitoring and evaluation, spending meagre resources over many projects with little impact. In addition, corruption has always contributed to the poor management of projects in the public sector. The negative consequence of corruption and poor project management practices in the public sector has undermined the country's quest for national development.

This paper examines some key issues involved in project management in the public sector. The focus is on successful project planning and implementation, which culminated in the Nigerian context. For ease of reference, the paper is divided into five major sections. Section one is the introduction, and section two clarifies some conceptual and theoretical issues on the subject matter. Section three examines elements of project planning and process, with particular emphasis on project feasibility studies. Section four deals with project implementation with emphasis on progress monitoring, project operation and impact evaluation. Section five focuses on the conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

The paper is situated within the qualitative paradigm of social research, which is deemed appropriate for exploratory and explanatory studies (Babie, 2004). The paper is theoretical in nature and draws its arguments from secondary sources, including existing legal frameworks and other related policies, published textbooks, journals, magazines, the internet and newspapers.

Conceptual and Theoretical Orientation

The term project refers to a temporary activity or endeavour undertaken purposely to create a unique output (product or service) within budget, time and standards (Oju et al., 2019). A project is an organisation of human materials and financial resources in a novel way, to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives so as to achieve a beneficial change (Turner & Muller, 2003). Project management, on the other hand, is referred to as the art and science of planning, designing and managing work throughout all the phases of the project life cycle (Abbasi & Al-Mharmah, 2000). It is also regarded as a system or process of planning, designing, scheduling, managing and controlling interconnected project activities in order to achieve specific objectives or goals within a specific time, budget and standards (Lewis, 2007).

A project has also been described as a unique process of a set of coordinated and controlled activities with start and finish dates undertaken to achieve an objective conforming to specific requirements, including constraints of time, cost and resources (Ogedengbe, 2024).

In whatever way the project is defined, the following must be established:

i. a project is an interrelated set of non-repetitive activities that have definite starting and ending points, which result in a unique product.
ii. a project must be goal-oriented, has definite beginning and end, has particular set of constraints and a measurable output and also be able to convert one situation to another.
iii. the activities are one at a time, and they can be distinctly subdivided to have definite beginnings and ends with definite sequential relationships.
iv. determining activity time involves estimating durations and sequencing tasks efficiently using tools (Oju et al., 2019).
v. a project involves the commitment of resources with the expectation of deriving future benefits. The commitment of resources may be once-for-all or spread over time.
Vi. the benefits could also occur once or spread over time. Both the costs and the benefits are subject to a certain amount of uncertainties and risk

vii. a project has a definite beginning and a definite end and is constrained by limited resources.
vili. the end of a project is reached when the project objectives have been achieved or when it becomes clear that the objectives will not or cannot be realized and the project is terminated. In other words, a project is said to be temporary, unique and time-bound.
ix. the result of a project may be the creation of one or several units of a production service.

There are several other ways of classifying projects, depending on the purpose of the analyst. In the public sector, projects are classified according to the sectors of the economy, such as economic, social, and administrative and private sectors. Economic sector projects include those in agriculture and rural development, irrigation and water resources, livestock, forestry, mining, quarrying, manufacturing, power or energy, commerce and finance, science and technology, etc. (Akpobakah & Obioma 2002:1).

A distinction can also be made between directly productive projects, i.e., those projects whose immediate costs and benefits accrue to a single organisation, and indirectly productive projects, which do not accrue only to the organisation incurring the costs, e.g. most infrastructural projects such as roads and public utilities whose costs are met by the government but the benefits accrue to all. The benefits of indirectly productive projects are more difficult to estimate when compared to directly productive projects (Piciotto, 2020).

Classifications of Projects

Projects can also be classified into conventional and non-conventional projects. A project is considered conventional if it has one or more periods of cost outlays followed by periods of cash revenues (Oju et al., 2019). The non-conventional project, on the other hand, has its cost outlays featured intermittently among the cash flows during the life of the project.

Projects can also be classified as mutually exclusive and non-mutually exclusive. Mutually exclusive projects are such that if one or more projects are undertaken, others must be rejected (Lockyer & Gordon, 1996).

Project management includes planning, organising, directing and controlling activities in addition to motivation (Mesa et al., 2019). Planning involves deciding what has to be done, when and by whom. The resources need to be organised through activities such as procurement and recruitment. Directing their activities towards a coherent objective is a major management role. The activities also need controlling to ensure that they fit within the limits (e.g. financial) set for them. The standard project management methodology for government information technology department SPMM (Tereso et al, 2019), defines a project in terms of its products. These are categorised as:

a. Management - the planning, documentation and control actions of management;
b. Technical - the planning, documentation and review of technical aspects of the project;
c. Quality - the planning, documentation and review of the quality control of the project system.

Another important concept that is also germane to project management is PRINCE (Project in Controlled Environments). It is a project management shell or structure within which plans can be formulated and actions controlled throughout the project life-cycle (Idoro & Patimola, 2009). Its major benefit is providing a degree of methodology standardisation between projects.
This allows managers to concentrate on the details of their specific project, confident in a recognised and proven method (Arnabold et al., 2004).

Lewis (2007) identifies three phases of project management that emphasise quality rather than quantity of output. His original work was centred on the operational aspects of quality management, in particular the use of statistical data in controlling processes. This work was adopted with far greater vigour in Japan than in his native America. But later, it has been given more prominence in Western management studies. He is famous for producing his 14 management points. The fifth of these points is to improve constantly and forever every activity in the company in order to improve quality and productivity and thus constantly decrease costs. The means by which this constant improvement is achieved is by the approach shown below:

i. the planning state involves the formulation and revision of statements of intended activity, whether formalised or otherwise.
ii. the doing is the time when the project is carried out (the direct value adding phase)
iii. the check/study phase involves a critical appraisal of both the project output (was a good result achieved? as well as the process (was it carried out as well as it could have been?). The act stage is that phase when the project process is considered to see how the lessons learned and gleaned from the review could be channelled back to the people involved in the process.

Applied to the project environment, the three Ds of project management, which describe the three phases according to Abbasi & Al-Mharmah (2000), are:

Design it: identify the need that the project will serve, construct models to show how the needs will be developed, evaluate these to determine the optimum process for the task and minimise risk

Do it: carry out the project in line with the models or plans generated above;

Develop it: improve the models and processes in light of the experience gained from the project, incorporating the check/Study and act parts of the Deming cycle.

There is no most important phase of the three phases of project management identified above; rather, they represent a chain of activities. Lewis (2007) argued further that there are a number of tasks and issues to be addressed in each phase. This provides a degree of complexity for the project manager and is one reason that there are few truly excellent examples of project management available in the public sector.

An analysis of each of the phases mentioned above indicates that under the design stage, key issues such as project and organisational strategy, goal definition, resource analysis, conflict resolution and justification are paramount. However, the fundamental questions to be addressed at this stage include what is to be done? Why is it to be done? Who will be involved in each part? And where can it start and finish? The key issues central to the next stage is organization, control, leadership, decision-making and problem-solving. Here, the fundamental question that is relevant is how the project can be managed on a day-to-day basis. Finally, the 'develop it' phase deals with issues like the assessment of process and outcomes of the project, evaluation and changes for the future. This phase of project management is concerned with questions like how the management process can be continually improved.

Theoretical Orientation

This paper is anchored on the theory of Governance and Accountability. According to Biesan & Simiths (1970), the theory focuses on project governance in government parastatals. In government parastatals, project governance is often subject to bureaucratic procedures, political considerations, and public scrutiny. Government projects require extensive reporting and

accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency and compliance with regulatory frameworks (Gasemagha & Kowang, 2021). Regular reporting to government bodies, audits, and public disclosures are common practices to ensure accountability. Decision-making processes are often centralised, and project oversight is conducted by multiple layers of authority.

Performance management is often focused on meeting public expectations, ensuring transparency and accountability, and measuring societal impact (John & Sons, 2019). Also, characteristic of government entities is their hierarchical governance structure. Multiple layers of management are involved in projects' oversight, and various committees or departments frequently share decision-making responsibility (Lawal & Onobaebi, 2010). Government policies, laws, and regulations may all establish governance frameworks. Due to the open nature of their activities, government entities also have built-in accountability systems. They are the focus of internal and external bodies' audits, inspections, and evaluations. Accountability is essential at all levels, including financial management, following rules, and completing projects in accordance with government goals. In a similar vein, due to public accountability, government institutions are frequently expected to maintain a high level of transparency and reporting. They must provide regular updates, reports, and financial statements to various oversight bodies, auditors, and the public. Transparency is crucial to maintain public trust and confidence.

Project Planning and Implementation in the Public Sector

The various stages of the project cycle can conveniently be classified into two broad phases: project planning and project implementation phases. This classification is adopted in this paper.

Project Planning Phase

There is an extensive literature on project planning. Some scholars and writers concerned with the strategic aspects of planning are focused on the choice of projects that are consistent with the organisation's goals (Adejuwon, 2014; John & Sons, 2022). Others, such as Aborisade & Aransi (2006); Lehitinen & Aitonen (2020), are works aimed at the process of planning individual projects, given that they have been chosen as strategically acceptable. It is instructive to note that most fields have their own accepted set of project planning processes, though they are all similar.

Generally, the purpose of project planning is to facilitate the accomplishment of the project (Fatile & Adejuwo, 2018). The world is full of plans that never become deeds. The planning techniques covered here are intended to smooth the path from idea to accomplishment. It is a complicated process to manage a project, and plans act as a map of this process. The map must have sufficient detail to determine what must be done next, but be simple enough that workers are not lost in a welter of uninitiated.

As pointed out by Biygautane et al. (2019), any endeavour should be planned, and the larger or more complex or uncertain it is, the more essential a plan becomes. This is particularly true of projects, given their uniqueness and the uncertainties and risks often associated with them. An ill-conceived and poorly prepared project poses a serious problem at its implementation stage (Miller et al., 2019). Thus, except for very small projects, planning is essential for the success of a project. But it should be realised that even the small projects can be complex and require careful planning to resolve the interactions between the various jobs or activities which make up the project work. The concept of opportunity cost is vital in project planning. The concept, according to Fanjoyomi et al. (2013), refers to that which is sacrificed by choosing or failing to adopt a different course of action from that which is currently planned to be taken. Thus, Project Planning covers the whole gamut of activities from project idea conception, identification, preparation and appraisal to the time the project is approved for implementation (Boyne, 2002).

Process of Project Planning

There are five stages/process of project planning: pre-identification; identification stage; preparation stage; appraisal and selection stage. These are explained below:

Pre-Identification

The pre-identification stage represents the idea or opportunity study stage. It serves as a prelude to project identification. The activities involved include surveying and analysing national resource data and reviewing existing policies. Such data (which can be obtained from government agencies or survey wok include natural resource data, human resource data, and socio-economic data. The analysis of the data can identify gaps and throw up ideas for possible projects (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002).

Identification Stage

The identification stage involves identifying projects that have high priority and appear suitable for consideration by the government and other interested parties. The identified projects must also meet a prima facie test of feasibility (Adejuwon, 2014). That is, technical and institutional solutions are likely to be found at costs commensurate with expected benefits. This is not an easy task, as the knowledge required for reaching sound judgment may be lacking. There may be a difficult choice regarding the scope of the project. Should it start with a pilot/experimental phase or with a larger but possibly more risky investment? Project ideas originate from a multiplicity of sources for various reasons. In the public sector, project ideas can come from planning and budgeting processes. Irrespective of the sources, projects have to meet certain standards before they are considered as identified (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002).

Preparation Stage

Once a project has been identified to have met the pre-feasibility test, the next stage is the preparation stage, which involves preparation of a "project-brief" for each project, describing its objectives and targets, identifying principal issues, analysing its various aspects and establishing the timetable for its further processing. Since the various aspects of a project analysed during the preparation stage are the same as those considered during the appraisal stage, we would leave their discussion till the appraisal stage. It is difficult to generalise about the preparation phase because of the variables that abound (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002): the nature of the project, the source and availability of financing for preparation, and the nature of the relationships between the government, co-financiers, donors and other stakeholders that may be involved in the project.

The major activities in project preparation are feasibility studies and detailed design. The feasibility study must cover the full range of technical, institutional, economic, commercial, social and financial conditions necessary to achieve the project's objectives (Piciotto, 2020). It provides a base by placing money, values on anticipated costs and benefits for rational decision on alternative lines of investment. In doing this, the time value of money is taken into account. This is done by discounting the anticipated streams of benefits and costs by an appropriate discount (interest) rate or opportunity cost of capital.

Appraisal and Selection Stage

Appraisal entails a careful review of all aspects of the project vis-à-vis the project's objectives. The aspects of a project that are appraised are the same as those analysed during the preparation stage. According to Akpobakah & Obioma (2002), the major aspects of the project, such as the technical,

institutional, economic, financial, social, commercial and environmental feasibilities are briefly discussed hereunder.

i. Technical Appraisal: According to Adejuwon (2014), technical appraisal looks into issues such as the location of the project, choice of technology, package, physical scale layout, types of equipment and their relevance to local conditions. Technical appraisal should review the project cost estimates, provision for recurrent costs, procedure for obtaining technical or engineering services and procurement arrangements, among other issues.

ii. **Institutional Appraisal:** This is critical for the success of any project. The inadequate attention often paid to institutional factors is a major cause of project failures. Institutional appraisal considers the whole array of government and its policies that condition the environment in which the project operates, e.g., organisation, management, staffing and procedures. In other words, it seeks to assess the quality of the institutional, legal, policy and administrative frameworks within which projects get implemented (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002). Some of the major issues that are addressed during institutional appraisal include: the organisational setting of the unit undertaking the project, adequacy of local capabilities for the various tasks, policy and institutional changes outside the unit of the project, organisational scheduling, etc.

iii. Financial Appraisal: The major concern of financial appraisal is to ensure enough funds to complete the project. This is relevant only for a revenue-yielding project. The appraisal takes into account the arrangements for:

- Recovery of operating cost for other types of projects, financial appraisal can be viewed from the perspective of:

• Project Beneficiaries - What are the likely financial effects of the project on the beneficiaries (e.g. poor farmers)? Can they be induced to adopt new methods?

• The Project - Necessary to ensure that in all years of the project life, cash flow will at least equal cash outflow (cash flow may include government grants, loans, subsidies, cost recovery provisions, etc., while cash outflow may include project investment, recurrent costs, maintenance loan repayments, etc.)

• The Government - It is Necessary to draw up a cash flow statement for the government to justify any grants or subsidies to be provided.

•The Donors and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) - Emphasis is more on the sustainability of a project.

iv. Economic Appraisal - This looks at the net benefits of a project from the point of view of the nation. Efficiency in the use of scarce resources, which constitute the fundamental economic problem, is therefore imperative in economic appraisal of projects. Economic appraisal addresses the question of whether the project makes the most efficient use of resources to be employed (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002), in this case, the value of resources. Market prices are distorted by indirect taxes and subsidies as well as by monopolistic practices and other market imperfections, uncertainties, and rigidities. The concept of opportunity cost is employed to value the resources expressed in a common unit or accounting prices. For example, the economic appraisal of a transport project will consider the transport system as a whole and its contribution to the nation's economic development. As much as possible, a project should be appraised using cost-benefit analysis, and results expressed in terms of economic rate of return. Project benefits and costs are defined in relation to their effect on the fundamental national objectives.

v. Social Appraisal: Financial and economic appraisals assume that the Naira has the same value for both rich and poor people. They also assume that Naira used for consumption has the same value as a Naira saved, or a Naira in the hands of the government. This necessarily entails the same

value judgment. Social appraisal tries to remove such assumptions. It reviews the possible impact of a project on such vulnerable groups as women, minorities' children and the poor.

vi. Commercial Appraisal: In commercial appraisal, various arrangements for marketing the output of the product, and those for the supply of inputs needed to complete and operate the project are reviewed. Although commercial appraisal is crucially important in project planning, it has often been taken for granted.

vii. Environmental Appraisal: This is a new dimension in project appraisal. It deals specifically with the effects of a project on the environment. The effects could either be positive, negative or neutral. In most cases, it has been found that projects have more negative impacts than positive impacts on the environment. The task of environmental appraisal is therefore to ascertain the extent and methods in which the negative impacts could be minimised, reduced or eliminated.

Project Negotiation and Approval

This stage involves discussions with the tenders. or providers of funds or assistance on the measures needed to ensure the success of a project. The agreement reached at this stage is embodied in the project agreement. The proposed project is then presented to the policymakers or government for approval. The procedures for approval vary depending on the size of the project and the existing processes (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002). After the necessary approval, the agreement is signed, and the proposed project is incorporated into the development plan/programme for implementation. Once a project is approved for implementation, the necessary plans should be made for successful project implementation.

a. **Project Implementation Phase**

For a project to be effectively implemented, its formulation must be right. But it is not enough to have proper formulation; there has to be efficient execution (Maylor, 1990). In order to properly embark on the implementation of a project, John & Sons (2019) identified the following preconditions must be met:

i. The project officers must ensure that there is indeed a project to be executed, not just a project idea or concept.
ii. If there is an identified project with a feasibility study, the project must be further appraised, or the appraisal study revalidated, depending on how long ago the study was conducted.
iii. The project must be ranked with other projects competing for resources and found to scale the hurdle.
iv. The project must be included in the national rolling plan, unless it is an emergency or political project conceived outside the planning exercise.
v. The project must be included in the year's budget, unless it falls into the category of emergency/political projects.

However, according to John & Sons (2022), project implementation can either be by direct labour or through a contract.

Execution by Direct Labour - This is often limited to non-complex projects defined by project scope, which include technical scope, skills requirement, supervision capacity, project cost, procurement magnitude and others. Before deciding to execute any project by direct labour, these issues must be well considered, including extant financial regulations and administrative guidelines.

According to Adejuwon (2014), a project to be executed by direct labour must have its accounting and supervisory framework well defined, especially procurement, stores management,

transportation arrangement, labour remuneration and supervision, etc. The guidelines for the execution must be well-spelt out to avoid pitfalls that may land executing officials in trouble. The other method of execution is by contract, and it must follow certain steps for it to be successful. These steps include:
Step 1: A detailed project feasibility and design must be undertaken. This may be beyond in-house capacity; hence, it may be contracted out as well.
Step 2: The evaluation of step 1 by in-house staff. Any wrong choice or decision must rest squarely on the shoulders of in-house project staff, unless they can prove that they were misled by the technical data supplied by consultants.
Step 3: preparing documents for tender and deciding on the method of tendering. These could be selective tendering or open tendering; the choice of which must be guided by the financial regulations and the anti-corruption law.
Step 4: Specify the modality for tendering, stating the participation fee, and where to obtain tender documents, how and when tenders must be submitted, the modality for opening and analysing tenders and when as well as where tenders will be opened, etc. To provide for a level playing ground, open tendering is often preferred and the choice of means of publicity should be such that it would reach the target audience.

Selection of Contractor
Selecting a contractor is so crucial to the success or failure of a project. The most competent contractor must be selected. The best way to ensure that is to assess those applying based on technical and financial competence before examining their quotations or prices. Of course, this carries a risk; that of leaving the cheapest renderer and appointing the high cost one based on competence. Often, there are margins for trade-offs. The essential requirement is that one should go for the most competent contractor at a fair price to protect officers involved in the selection. There has to be transparency such that most people will understand the procedure and the confederation behind any choice. There must be no compromise on these: political association, friendship, community club, etc., considerations must be avoided.

Approving Authority
The contract must go through the prescribed approving authority. Before seeking final approval, there should be agreement on whether the contract will be based on fixed or variable costs. Sometimes the project is broken into parts to enable units of it to be awarded separately by lower authorities; this amounts to contract splitting.

Budgeting
Budgeting is very crucial in project execution, be it in the public or private sector, but despite its crucial roles, there continue to be significant lapses in preparing and implementing plans and budgets due to problems partly traceable to the way some ministries and Agencies perceive or approach the exercises (Musawir et al., 2020). The plan and budget exercises are often perceived as battles to cut as much slice of the national cake as possible, regardless of the national objectives. The quality of projects and programmes and the prescribed ceilings, often the National Commission or the budget office receives ten times the size of what the plan or the budget can accommodate. With inadequate supporting data, the coordinating agencies are left with the choice to undertake serious pruning by themselves, using their own set of criteria (Oju et al., 2019). The executing agencies are sometimes allowed to re-prioritise/reorder their programmes depending on the time available, but what comes out is quite often sub-optimal.

Selecting Projects for the Plan and Budget

Officials must insist that only projects that are backed by feasibility studies, appraised and viable are submitted for the plan or the budget; otherwise, they should request funds with which to carry out necessary studies (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2018). A good plan or budget must begin at the level of the department, the parastatal or ministry. The selection of concrete projects and programmes must be guided by the following considerations:

i. What or how the projects would contribute to the achievement of national and sectoral objectives, goals and targets.

ii. Whether the project has a feasibility study. If so, how viable is using objective criteria for project selection? How competitive is the project with other ongoing projects or new projects competing for resources? Ongoing projects could be assessed on a sunk cost basis to bring them in line with new projects. Other considerations that are relevant regarding the feasibility or wisdom of abandoning an ongoing project may be brought to bear on the choice. The admonition over the year is to give priority to ongoing projects.

iii. Whether other resources required for effective implementation are available to ensure successful execution.

Project Monitoring in the Public Sector

Monitoring by relevant bodies is essential and of greatest benefit because of the improved insight they provide concerning project completion status. The best-laid project can go away if not properly monitored (Lawal & Onohaebi, 2010). Through proper monitoring, delays can be readily identified. Periodic reports that are made are also very helpful. There must be professionally qualified personnel appointed to monitor the progress of the project. Monitoring may be done by the following: project consultants who monitor and sign certificates of performance, as well as certificates of completion. Such certificates provide the basis for payments.; Ministry officials other than the technical staff; monitoring by the national planning commission; monitoring by the Ministry of Finance; monitoring by the national assembly; value for money checks by the office of the auditor general, etc. (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2018).

Project Completion/Commissioning

This should be the happiest part of the project cycle. Before accepting a project as completed, there must be a test run to ensure effective performance as per the agreement. There must also be appropriate guarantees and performance agreements in place. The agency supervising commissioning has to decide whether there will be tape-cutting ceremonies or not. The scale of the ceremony must be guided by the need to minimise expenditures (Bruce, 1982).

Project Failures

Any project that is not properly managed will result in project failure (Akpobakah & Obioma, 2002). Some factors that can cause project failure include:

1. Plan/Budget indiscipline, meaning implementation of projects not included in the plan or the budget, while neglecting, under-funding or abandoning those in the plan/budget. Under current arrangements, this has been minimised as the national assembly frowns at it. The anti-corruption act also provides that if you award a contract for which no funds have been duly appropriated, you could go to jail
2. Implementing too many projects at the same time - lack of proper prioritisation.
3. There is also the problem of an unstable economic and political environment. Projects are abandoned when revenue shortfalls occur or the sources of funding dry up. They also get

abandoned when new helmsmen decide to embark on new projects rather than complete ongoing ones
4. An appropriate timing of budget releases - untimely payment of performance certificates.
5. Community and labour problems
6. Contractor's default.
7. Inaccurate assessment of the project environment, such as soil, topography, and seasonal factors. etc.
8. Non-Involvement of beneficiaries and other stakeholders - In formulating certain projects, adequate consultation must be made with intended beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders. Their buying-in and becoming part-owners of the project/programme can enhance proper formulation and implementation. It is usually advisable to employ local labour around the location of major projects. The federal guidelines provide for this in terms of employment by agencies operating within a locality, the same rule should, as much as possible, be advocated at project execution stages.

Conclusion

Projects are destined to achieve goals. Thus, all projects, no matter the size, must be planned. Deliberate efforts should therefore be made to ensure that only people who have professional expertise and experience are saddled with planning, costing and execution of the project so as to prevent project failure in the public sector. The importance of efficient and effective project planning and implementation in the achievement of the designed development goals in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Projects must therefore be initiated for objective reasons, and transparency in the procurement process must be the key to project management success in the country.

Recommendations

For Nigeria to get into the club of the 20 topmost developed economies of the world, the private and public sectors of the economy must learn and implement the skills of project management to stem the current level of project collapse or failure to replace it with high standards project delivery process that can enhance the national quest for sustainable development (Sapru, 2006:112). A critical appraisal of project management in the Nigerian public sector has revealed that there is still a lot to be done as regards project management in the country. Thus, there is an urgent need to encourage meaningful project management and evaluation for government at all levels, to build capacity, especially within the public sector, and this will make it possible for the relevant government agencies at all levels to be equipped with the requisite skills, tools and technologies to successfully deliver projects within an acceptable time frame and required specifications.

To reduce the incidence of project failures and abandonment, the government must accept the fact that there are professionals who have been trained and adequately equipped to handle projects. They must therefore be involved at every stage of the project. The government must make a budget plan and be committed to its implementation to avoid future cost variation, which quite often leads to project abandonment. Funds must be promptly released to offset approved completion certificates. All stakeholders must adequately understand the description of the project to avoid unrest and vandalism. They must be made to see the project as part of their property. An environmental impact assessment is a must to avoid delays that may stall or extend the project completion time. Maintenance plans, cost of training, project supervision and monitoring must be built into projects. Nigerians must be trained in readiness for the takeover of the project, and they must be involved at all stages of the project. Plans should be realistic.

There must be in place a performance reporting system that would guarantee effective control, with adequate, accurate and timely information on the project (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2018). Also, the government should use effective project management as a benchmark for service delivery and should encourage the establishment of an in-house project management department in the public sector in order to realise the benefits of project management in the economy (Fajonyomi et al., 2013). Again, there is a need for the institutionalisation of project management best practices in the country, and this will lead to the urgent need to create networking outlets for project managers to brainstorm on innovative project management ideals and ideas. The government must ensure that the indispensability of project management is recognised as the only solution to poor planning and implementation culture in Nigeria. Project execution in the public sector must be done in line with the initially projected goals for great successes to be recorded.

In addition, a public-private partnership (PPP) should be adopted for most development projects in the country. Ogedegbe (2024) advocates that the private sector should provide the much-needed expertise, while the public sector should provide the legal framework and, if necessary, long-term financing for project execution. Legislations are also needed in the public sector to set standards for all professionals in the building industry to guarantee project quality, safety and return on investment. Furthermore, the enabling environment for project management must be provided by the government for project management practitioners to manage tasks, and when they fail, they should be held accountable. They should have the final say in project scope (Aborishade & Aransi 2006: 217). Besides, a corporate governance structure must be put in place to ensure that a change of government in the country does not affect ongoing projects or programmes.

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