

15356- Project Performance Improvement

Individual Assignment 50%

Prepare an individual written reflection in the form of an academic paper which will be submitted to an online journal 'Project Manager' (see: <http://projectmanager.com.au/>) addressing one of the lecture topics applied to a project. Describe the project, the approach that was taken at the time and the lessons learnt through reflective practice. Refer to specific reflective tools and techniques. Demonstrate a focus on the reflective aspect of how the project was managed and using the chosen topic material, be able to demonstrate an improved outcome if this approach had been applied to the project selected. Also see additional paper "Writing on Project Management" supplied by the Editor of the Project Manager for additional requirements.



Lecturers: Dr. Chivonne Algeo and Dr. Amela Peric

Student Name: Mohammad Rahim Sidiqi

Student Number: 98030113

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Project performance improvement

Abstract

Project performance improvement is the concept of enhancing the effectiveness and effectiveness of a project. It is a gradual process, which should be undertaken by all the stakeholders within a project. There are various techniques, which are adopted and implemented in the project performance improvement. These include performance drivers, learning to perform, the project context, performance techniques, practice improvement, and performance improvement.

This paper addresses the concept of performance techniques as they are applied in the completion of a particular project. The project, in this case, is the construction of a residential 12 apartments building. The contractor responsible for undertaking the project was Afghan Reconstruction and Development Unit (ARDU) under the management and leadership of Mr. Zia, the project manager. The project team applied various performance techniques. These include the reflection, reflection strategies, collective reflection, reflective journal and reflective assessment. They included reflecting on the previous experiences and recorded knowledge and used it as a basis on improving the current performance. These performance techniques significantly improved the outcome of the project. However, the company needs to implement more effective strategies. The reason is that it failed in time management and operation within the budget.

Key Words

Performance strategies, reflection, the project, reflective assessment, performance improvement.

Introduction

Project performance improvement is quite a significant concept, in the overall implementation of a project. Improving the performance of a project increases the chances of success of the project being undertaken. The success is realised because project performance improvement helps in stepping out of the theoretical performance of activities, into a bold and new arena of the advanced performance of practical activities and experiences, as well as lessons in the project management. The performance of a project entails a broader concept, more than just a formulaic approach, which incorporates a description of what should be done, and how it should be done. In this case, the project performance improvement plays a significant part in outlining what and how the project management should be carried out, giving emphasis on why some action's matters, and the overall intention of individual formulae applied. Additionally, it specifies the strengths and weaknesses of various tools and techniques, which are applied in the project management.

In relation to this, the present paper presents a comprehensive reflection on the performance techniques, as they were applied in the construction and completion of 12 apartment building, by the (ARDU). The paper will present the particular project, the approach, which was adopted, time as well as the lesson learnt in reflective practice.

Performance Techniques

As mentioned above, the application of the performance technique is one of strategies, which could be applied to achieve the project performance improvement. As illustrated by Yang, Chen & Wang (2015), “performance techniques involve adoption and application of effective practices, which are aimed at the improvement of the performance activities of a particular project. It involves undertaking the activities, which are aimed at ensuring that the process of undertaking and performance of a project is improved”. In this case, it incorporates enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of undertaking a particular project. Tenera & Pinto (2014) suggested that “when undertaking several project, the project manager should ensure that he or she observes effective performance techniques, to ensure a continuous project performance improvement”. As suggested by Swart & Duncan (2013), “there are several project performance techniques, which could be applied to enhance the project performance improvement”. In the implementation of 12 apartment building project, I engage as construction engineer during the whole construction process, which took approximately two years. The detailed 12 apartment building construction procedure is illustrated in the following section.

The residential 12 apartment building project

The project was undertaken by the (ARDU) a private construction project that operated in Afghanistan. A deep overview of company history indicated that the company was incorporated in the year 1995, approximately twenty years ago. From then, the company has experienced significant and continuous growth, as it has undertaken various construction projects in government institutions, United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as well as in the private sector.

The Chief Executive Officer of the (ARDU), Mr. Zia, who is also the owner of the company, had studied Master of Construction Engineer and then specialised in the project management in his post-graduate program. Therefore, Mr. Zia seemed to have a deep knowledge of project management, both from his academic background, as well as his field experiences. Throughout the implementation of the construction project, Mr. Zia seemed to be applying significant project management knowledge and more emphasis on the project performance improvement. From the analysis of the construction of the company’s archive, it was found out that the company had won several awards, particularly from the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of their construction projects.

The private sector issued a tender for the construction of 12 apartment building. The reason for the issue of the tender was a private sector benefit which in turn increased the demand of homeless people in the region. The (ARDU) placed a bid on the tender that was issued by the private sector that later submitted the proposal for the project. 12 apartment building project had a significantly and effectively organised team, as well as the necessary equipment for the construction of the twelve apartment building project. Based on the proposal which was submitted by the (ARDU), it was awarded the project.

Project Scope

(ARDU) elected an established consulting company, Ali Baba Consultant Company, for the designing the structural and architectural drawings as well as designing the structure of the twelve apartment building. The Ali Baba Consultant Company helped in designing the company, and made all the necessary specifications, in the whole process of complete delivery

of the building. Further, the consultant company appointed an engineer who is responsible for checking the status at each stage of its completion. As illustrated in the records, the total area covered by the project was 36,000 Sq. As a result, Ali Baba Consultant Company concentrated on the instruction's requirement and specifications.

Project Objectives

The objectives of implementation of the project, as stated in the (ARDU) documents was to provide a flawless, tolerant and safe construction so that the end product of the project could be delivered according to the stated requirements of the client. Additionally, (ARDU) intended to complete the project within the approved budget and time, as well as with the involvement of the project team. Overall, the main objective was to provide a satisfactory product, according to the requirements and the specifications.

The schedule of the project was to be completed within two years from the date of signing the contract. The budget is sponsored by the private sector from the starting date to the end of the project. In this case, the building approved \$3 million. The organisation responsibilities were the efficient and well-organised project team. The roles and responsibilities were determined and mentioned by the Human Resource plan (Locke and Latham 2004).

Risk Assessment illustrated by project documentation, there were several challenges and risks associated with the project. These include unstable market condition, the shortage of materials, over costing of the construction project, strict and changing law regulations concerning the constructions and project is not being completed within the scheduled time. The Subcontractor was carried out by (ARDU) on its own, without hiring any subcontractors. Stakeholder's parties had significant stakes in the completion of the project which includes the project team (ARDU), the contractor, suppliers and private sector (the client). Deliverable the twelve apartment building presented in the project plan.

Achievements

(ARDU) has a good and outstanding reputation in most of the previously completed projects. The previous project completed by the company demonstrated that the company has managed to perform the project without compromising on the quality and quantity and has made an effort to deliver all its previous projects according to the expectations of the client. More importantly, the performance of the project is quite significant for the completion of the project. Mr. Zia, the project manager has made significant effort to incorporate the project performance improvement strategies, both in the previous projects, as well as in the completion of this project. This could effectively be understood by looking at the project plan presented below.

Project Plan

The scope of the project, as stipulated in the project documentation was to identify the requirements for the construction of the building, the building as well as the external works. The core working hours during the implementation of the project was from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm, from Saturday to Thursday. For the achievement of strategic construction operations, some employees were working outside the core working hours. This was also necessary in the case of emergencies. Additionally, the strategic operation sometimes necessitated some work to be done during the night period. The total project time from the date of receipt of the letter of acceptance, the project was planned to take six hundred and twenty- six calendar days.

Critical Path Method

The project scheduling was immediately drawn after the receipt of the acceptance letter. The schedule was prepared using the critical path method, which stipulated the various activities of work to be performed within the entire project. Including the above plan there are some other factors to be implemented in the project such as soil test, clearing and grubbing, excavation, ground leveling, structured works, architectural works, finishing work, electrical, plumbing and the external works.

Handing over the project

After completion, the project was handed over to the private sector, who were the clients. According to the plan of the project, it was to take two years. However, the project took two years and four months to be completed. Further, the project budget was significantly exceeded with approximately \$120,000. This implies that despite the much effort to implement effective project management strategies, there were some issues that were not suitably addressed, which resulted in the increase in completion time, and functioning out of the budget. However, it is significant to note that Mr. Zia, who functioned as the project manager played a significant role in the adoption and implementation of the project performance improvement techniques. In particular, the project that is applied included various project performance techniques.

Application of Performance Techniques in the project

As a mechanism for effecting the project performance improvement. Most of the performance techniques application is based on the previous experiences of the project manager, from the various construction projects completed in the earlier years. Therefore, it is clear that the project manager applied reflection techniques, as a mechanism for acquiring knowledge through experience and dispatching the knowledge and technicality to the project team. Specifically, performance techniques applied during the project included reflection, reflection strategies, collection reflections, reflection on journal, reflection assessments and performance improving. Their practical application is discussed below in details (Miklosik, 2015). The diverse cultural is important in every organisation as it causes failure and known as frictions that prevent the transfer of knowledge. Mr. Zia not only focused on culture but also leadership and most importantly on people because knowledge lives in and is applied by them. Mr. Zia considered building relationship and trust through face to face meetings that foster dialogue and collaboration. As well as, established ground, the use of education, discussion, publications. Indeed, accepted and rewarded those who made use of lessons learned and supported creative problem (Project Management Institute 2015).

Reflection

As, reflection associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding and developing the problem- solving with others. However, lack of reflection causes anger, frustration and failure and become blind in our own situation. Reflection in the context of project management involves the process of working under the consideration of events, observations, movements, and thoughts, in a strategic manner that keeps an effective record of previous learning. The previous learning then allows an individual to adjust the behavior and responses in a manner that can effectively improve the performance of current and future projects (Cottrell, S 2010).Mr. Zia, the project manager significantly applied this tool

throughout the project. The reason is that most of the current activities were done with references to the previous projects. For instance, the suppliers of building materials were selected on the basis of trust, quality and reliability gained in the past. As an improvement tool, the reflection was used to avoid similar failure and ineffectiveness cases which were experienced in the past. In this manner, as suggested by Julian (2010), the reflection skills helped in improving the skills of the project manager, and better performance of the project. Some of the reflective activities adopted by the project manager, and cultivated among the overall project team. They also applied strategic narrative by referring to the previous performances, failures and success records, to guide in the performance of the current construction project (Yardley, D 2002).

Reflection strategies

The most applied project performance improvement technique in the (ARDU) was the reflection strategies, as explained by Checkland & Poulter (2006), involve selecting a particular event or task, and analysing what happened and how it was done. For instance during, the construction of the project the team referred to a case where the project was not on time and the budget was exceeded. The reason was the suppliers and shortage of materials. So, they cautioned in this project case and taking responsibility for others and using different techniques and develop skills. There are many reflection strategies that each type may be useful for the different task. The most useful types of reflection include the question-based reflection that guides through the reflective process. Furthermore, Open reflection goes with flow rather than control the process tightly. Synthetic reflection brings different aspect which is useful for giving shape to a series of reflections in earlier stages. Development reflection can assist the process of personal development and focus specifically on understanding and improving performance. In addition, evaluative reflection is starting with useful self-evaluation questionnaires and points for self-evaluation (Cottrell, S 2010).

Collective Reflection

This was also another significant project performance improvement technique applied by (ARDU) in the construction of the residential 12 apartment building project. Boud (2001) illustrated that involves gathering collective knowledge and experiences when sorting out how to perform a particular task or activity. Some of the practices that were applied by (ARDU) include the practitioner involvement. In this case, they applied the competencies of experienced individuals such as the architecture, masonry and project management consultants. Additionally, they engaged in dialogue consultations and comparisons. In the case of difficult situations, the project manager involved other team members in consultative dialogues, in order to establish the most effective strategy for handling the situation (Yang, Chen & Wang, 2015). It also incorporated taking a practice and actions, based on the existing knowledge within the organisation, and the past learning outcomes.

Reflective Journal

A reflective journal is another project performance improvement technique, which is quite significant for a continuous improvement of a project. It incorporates the daily reflection of what the project team has learned, the implications that resulted from the daily work, and how that could be applied to enhance the future performance. Under this strategy, (ARDU) was quite effective in maintaining the daily learned experiences. However, it managed the project manager kept a constant reflection and record of what was learned, from the perspective of the

organisation. In order to create our special experience, we write a reflective journal to sort out thoughts, feelings, plan and explore our problems. Therefore, writing promotes the personal confidence, strength, development and enables to feel humanness. Thus, Journal enables us to be more aware of our present circumstances and observe our reaction. So, question such as how, when, where, who, and why to guide the journalist's inquiry. Writing about our lives is documenting how we adapt to the pressures and identifies patterns in our behavior. In addition, reflective writing is therapeutic and it is a way of thinking of objectifying an act that becomes useful tool for planning (Holly, M. L. 1989).

Reflection Assessment

It is a project performance improvement technique, which involves assessing the previous performance, and comparing them against each other. It is useful for training, appraisals and improvement activities. So, it is done by the use of assessment methods such as maturity modeling. It is structured with a collection of practices that proven by experience to be effective and this technique applied by (ARDU) to measure improvement in completing projects and compare its performance with the set of a benchmark. In the benchmark, it was guided by setting the measurement scale, as well as the KRAs measures. So, the assessment led by an authorised assessor in the project to assess their maturity level and then form a specific plan to get to the next level. In addition, systems thinking and system theory are the biggest breakthroughs to understand and guide change in organisations. It required to know explicit in order to use systems thinking and systems tools in the organisation (Changedo, T 2015).

Improving Performance

Improving performance is another technique which widely applied throughout the project. The improving performance incorporates the application of self-direction, after assessing the performance. (ARDU) Improved its performance by working towards the reduction of performance deficiencies. The deficiency or contingency gap was the difference between the intended best performance and the reflected assessment. However, (ARDU) should be considered applying the affinity diagram, as a performance improvement technique. In this case, the team could contribute data and ideas on performance improvement. On the other hand, Analyse the learning and impact of the current study can be applied to a new area of learning. The learning outcome offers to create personal records, make a profile of current skills and plan your personal competencies require for jobs (Cottrell, S 2010).

Lessons Learnt from Reflective Practice

Organisation chose flexible and reliable structures for their services and development of the project. Debriefing practice is a necessity to document and reuse project experience to reflect regarding codification of experiences in the project. Understanding from project control, analysis and evaluation are effective for the derivation of experiences such as project review or project audits. (Schindler, M & Eppler, M 2003). I have learned about different aspects of the project because there was the adequate level of reflection in the areas related to the project being performed. My personal involvement in tasks such as construction engineering has made me busy and I have also realised that I need to focus more towards the areas for better performance. As a result, my attention is mainly towards utilising my strength point which is to get synergy from different resources that are applied in performing such huge construction project. Overall, the analysis suggests that the reflective practice has been proved to be significant to me in terms of identifying the positive and negative aspects associated with it (Buller and McEvoy 2011).

Conclusion

From the above analysis of the project performance procedure and performance techniques, it is evident that the project manager and his team made a significant effort in project performance improvement. The most notable project performance improvement techniques applied in the (ARDU) included the reflection, reflection strategies, collective reflection as well as reflective journal. However, the project failure in the delay of completion time increase the cost of construction beyond the budget is an indication that there was a significant failure. Therefore, it is quite significant for the (ARDU) to enhance the performance project strategies. One of the techniques they should implement is adopting the technique and acquiring new collective knowledge on how to complete the project within the stipulated time and budget. They should also enhance their practical activities, so as to keep in line with the project schedule.

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