PAPERS

Cultural Patterns Influencing Project Team Behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Case Study in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing attention paid to the human element of project success found in the project management literature, empirical studies exploring cultural patterns influencing this particular human element continue to be far from satisfactory. To help further understand the influence of cultural patterns within Sub-Saharan Africa project environments, we draw on a case study conducted in Ethiopia's service sector. Apart from the well-perceived cultural values commonly referred to in the existing literature, we specifically investigated the deep-rooted underlying causes, which include Ethiopian cultural habits, as a principal factor in influencing project team behavior. The article concludes with implications and recommendations for future research.

KEYWORDS: cultural patterns; values; habits; project team behavior; project success; Ethiopia; Sub-Saharan Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The human element of project success has received increasing attention in the project management literature, and several studies have drawn attention to its growing importance in the successful completion of projects (Belout, 1998; Belout & Gauvreau, 2004; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Kliem & Ludin, 1992; Smyth & Morris, 2007).

Notwithstanding the contributions of research to date, empirical studies exploring the cultural patterns influencing this particular human element continue to be far from satisfactory. Significant gaps still exist in our understanding of how cultural patterns influence project team behavior in project team settings. In spite of the theoretical advancements in this area, empirical research has not developed at the same pace (Henrie & Sousa-Poza, 2005). Only a limited number of empirical studies exist, and these studies provide useful insight into the impact that culture has on projects (Bredillet, Yatim, & Ruiz, 2010; Camprieu, Renaud, & Feixue, 2007; Kendra & Taplin, 2004; Shore & Cross, 2005; Zewikael, Shimizu, & Globerson, 2005). In recent years, there have been encouraging signs that the topic is attracting greater attention (Henrie & Sousa-Poza, 2005; Kendra & Taplin, 2004; Rees, 2004; Soderlund, 2004). Researchers have continued to call for empirical work in areas, including (1) behavior of project organizations (Soderlund, 2004), (2) the different norms of behavior and decision-making patterns of people (Zewikael et al., 2005), and (3) the linkage of the cultural dimensions with respect to project management issues (Shore & Cross, 2005), among others.

In this context, we sought to explore the cultural and behavioral dimensions of project management that, to date, have not received sufficient attention. Henrie and Sousa-Poza (2005) indicate that the culture team members bring with them to a project work environment can considerably influence their contributions to project success. Baiden, Price, and Dainty (2006, p. 21) most notably argue that "the behavior of people needs to change in order to create an appropriate project culture for successful project delivery. A key challenge, therefore, is to replace traditional project drivers with outcomes related to behavioral and cultural improvement." Research needs to embrace and address this challenge, an area that continues to offer interesting avenues for future research. Empirical studies in this area can help practitioners, and project managers in particular, further understand the impacts of cultural and behavioral factors with regard to the human element of project success.

Cultural Patterns Influencing Project Team Behavior in Sub-Saharan Africa

This study has been designed to explore the cultural patterns influencing project team behavior within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)[1] project environments through case study research conducted in Ethiopia's service sector. Despite the diversity and lack of homogeneity, African countries share similar features and histories that transcend organizational boundaries (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Blunt & Jones, 1997; Jones, 1988). Beugre and Offodile (2001, p. 537) write: "Cultural patterns such as respect for elders, consensus decisions, respect for authority, family orientation, collectivism, etc., appear to characterize most African countries." A similar view is also shared by Muriithi and Crawford (2003). Generally, developing countries share similar cultural features owing to the similarities in their historical backgrounds, subsistence economic conditions, unstable political environment, and sociodemographic makeup (Aycan, 2002).

Studies that have discussed the cultural contexts of SSA are reasonably substantial, although their review is beyond the scope of this study. There are well-perceived cultural values commonly referred to in the existing literature that characterize project environments in SSA, and these include traditionalism (Adigun, 1995; Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Jones, 1988; Nzelibe, 1986), extended family orientation (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Hofstede, 1983; Muriithi & Crawford, 2003; Nzelibe, 1986; Seriki, 2007), weak institutional collectivism (Blunt & Jones, 1997), high-context communication (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Muriithi & Crawford, 2003), autocratic leadership, bureaucratic controls, and procedures (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Muriithi & Crawford, 2003; Seriki, 2007), among others. These prevailing cultural patterns are believed to largely inhibit productivity, undermine proper communication and transparency, restrain individual initiatives and commitment, and instead encourage shirking accountability and responsibility.

Only a few studies (Muriithi & Crawford, 2003; Seriki, 2007) have dealt with the specific cultural contexts influencing projects or innovative team performance across organizations in SSA; hence, further investigation into the specific cultural patterns influencing project team behavior is important in order to redefine the conventional practices underpinning project team management, particularly in Ethiopia, as well as in SSA in general.

To put the article in perspective and provide a theoretical framework for the study, we will start with the conceptual definitions of culture and project success. We will provide insight and summarize the study's background, introduce a case study project that was designed and conducted to provide empirical evidence in support of cultural patterns, and particularly cultural habits, influencing project team behavior in an Ethiopian context. Finally, we will conclude the study and highlight its implications and limitations and provide suggestions for pursuing future research.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous definitions of culture can be found in the body of literature. Javidan and House (2001, p. 292), for example, define culture as "a set of beliefs and values about what is desirable and undesirable in a community of people, and a set of formal or informal practices to support values." The definition by Hodgetts, Luthans, and Doh (2006, p. 583) provides a better understanding in the context of this study. These authors define culture as "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior. This knowledge forms values, creates attitudes, and influences behavior." Thus, differences in human attitudes and behavior can be explained based on the value priorities people hold and the relative importance they attach to such values (Schwartz, 2006). For Schwartz, culture explains the motivational basis of attitudes and behavior.

Beugre and Offodile (2001, p. 537) identify two elements of cultural patterns in a society: cultural values and cultural habits. The former are elements of a given society that people consider important, give credit to, and strive to achieve; the latter, however, are patterns of behaviors observed in a culture and that are not necessarily valued because they are not considered acceptable norms of behavior. Cultural values, which are espoused values viewed as the correct ways to perceive, think, and act, refer to what is desirable in a society, whereas cultural habits, which are practiced but not viewed as valid and acceptable norms of behavior, refer to what is undesirable (Javidan & House, 2001).

Cultural patterns are manifested in human behavior in three forms: activities, interactions, and sentiment (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). Activities are reflected in actions that are relevant to achieving goals, whereas interactions are expressed in terms of interrelations, communication, and influence processes involved among people. Moreover, sentiment is invisible and is influenced by both activities and interactions. At the team level, two types of behaviors pertaining to team members can be distinguished: task behavior and teamwork behavior (Rousseau, Aube, & Savoie, 2006). According to Rousseau et al., task behaviors are those that are inherent in the technical aspects of the task, whereas teamwork behaviors characterize work teams. The first is needed to contribute directly to task accomplishment, whereas the latter is needed to ensure shared understanding and the viability of working teams; hence, neither is very useful without the other in project team settings. Both behaviors can influence the outcome on a team level, so it is necessary to understand how cultural patterns influence project team behavior in a project team setting, which has a significant

[1]According to Beugre and Offodile (2001), SSA is a region that excludes the Arab countries of North Africa.

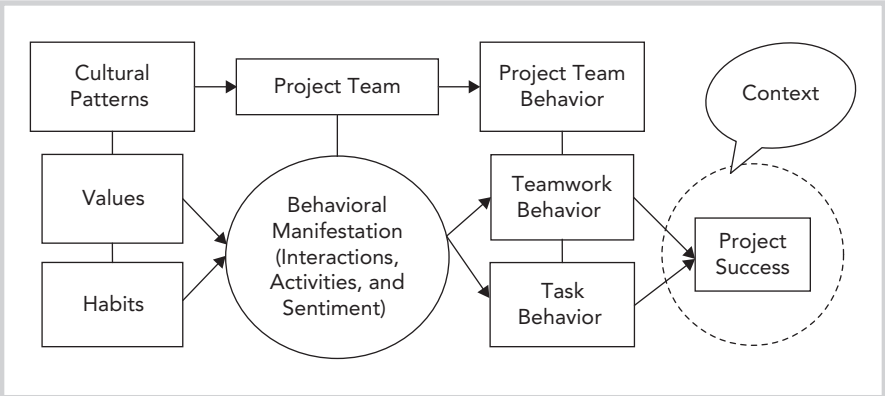

Figure 1: Theoretical framework.

and direct effect on project success. The topic merits more research attention, considering the potential to improve the functioning of project team behavior in the SSA region.

As indicated in the theoretical framework in this study (Figure 1), the relationships between cultural patterns and project team behavior are depicted with arrows, which indicate the presumed direction of influence. Figure 1 provides an overview of how cultural patterns influence project team behavior and is useful in understanding how project team behavior relates to project success. By and large, cultural patterns (i.e., cultural values and cultural habits) have a direct impact on project team behavior and tend to manifest themselves in both teamwork and task behavior, an understanding that is central to project success.

Apparently, project success is a well-established area of study in project management literature; nevertheless, its definition and measurement still remain nebulous and have been perceived differently by different participants (Jugdev & Müller, 2005; Shenhar, Tishler, Dvir, Lipovetsky, & Lechler, 2002). A universally accepted definition has not yet been established, although there seems to be a general consensus that typically views project success along two components: *project management success* and *product success* (Baccarini, 1999; Cooke-Davies, 2002). First, a project can be considered successful if the target values regarding performance (time, cost, and quality) are met. Second, a project can be considered successful if the effects of the project meet expectations (increased productivity, enhanced creativity and problem solving, employee satisfaction and commitment, quality services and customer satisfaction, and so forth).

Interestingly, the focus of project management research has been predominantly on performance; hence, the construct of soft measures has been less addressed. Given that our focus is on projects that relate to organizational improvement and change programs, we chose to limit our definition of project success to achieving expectations from business process reengineering (BPR) and information technology (IT) projects through developing and changing the project team's values, attitudes, and behavior that support the implementation of these projects (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Hammer & Champy, 1995). Although such changes are not sufficient on their own to meet the desired expectations, they are essential in helping project teams work in a more integrated manner to ensure lasting organizational improvement and change programs in Ethiopia in particular and SSA in general.

It needs to be stated that achieving project success, be it project management success or product success, is obviously a complex process, independent of success assessment. Several factors, such as political, economic, technological, competitive, and stakeholder interests, have influences on project success (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Camprieu et al., 2007; Fortune & White, 2006; Gray, 2001; Leybourne, 2007; Neal, 1995). Moreover, projects are not free from the influence of organizational climate and upper management style, which particularly affects project success (Gray, 2001).

A number of studies (Camprieu et al., 2007; Gray, 2001; Seriki, 2007) provide a conceptual framework with which to analyze the impact of exogenous and endogenous factors on project success. The framework by Camprieu et al. includes cultural, individual, socioeconomic, and situational factors. The framework by Seriki (2007), which examines the influence of societal contexts on innovative team performance within organizations in SSA, also includes demographic forces, cultural forces, and institutional forces. In essence, the factors influencing project success are quite diverse, ranging from project team behavior to global contexts within which project activities are bounded. This study acknowledges the difficulty in clearly delineating the influence of project team behavior, when in fact project success is typically the outcome of the dynamic interactions between and among these factors.

Because these factors are usually different in their nature and interrelated, an understanding of how these factors influence project success is relevant to both academicians and practitioners. It is important to note, however, that some of these factors are usually outside the control of project managers (e.g., global contexts); hence, project management has to focus on the types of factors that can be controlled, or at least influenced.

Background of the Study

After Nigeria, Ethiopia is the second most populated nation in Africa. The

country is home to many ethnic groups with different languages, cultures, and traditions, making it one of the most ethnically diverse nations in Africa. A centralized state system is a very recent historical development, which has been shaped over time and culminated close to the end of the nineteenth century (Levine, 2000). At present, the country is a federal republic, ruled under its 1994 constitution. The economy's mainstay is agriculture. Ethiopia is yet one of the world's poorest nations, with untapped resources and growth potential.

Since the introduction of a free market economy in 1991, the government has embarked on the initiation of different reform packages, such as commercialization of agriculture, industry and private-sector development, and the improvement of infrastructure and public services to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development in the country (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2006). The liberalization of the economy brought in its wake major changes to the structure and level of economic activities. Private sector organizations have expanded tremendously and, as a result, various spheres of the economy have enjoyed steady growth in private investment capital projects over the last 15 years. For example, from 1992 to 1993 through 2006 to 2007 alone, the sum of investment capital worth US $36.65 billion,[2] for a total of 25,835 projects, was approved by the government (National Bank of Ethiopia, 2006/2007).

Nevertheless, there remains a long way to go in order to reap the benefits of these reform packages as outlined by the government. For example, the *Ethiopian Herald* ("Business Process Re-engineering," 2009, p. 8) acknowledges that "the stunning successive growth in the economic sector has so far not been accompanied by *efficient and effective* service sectors. This reality has called for a reform program and re-engineering in the public sector" (italics added). Recognizing that the service sector, which has contributed about 43 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), in addition to agriculture over the last 15 years (Ethiopian Economic Association [EEA], 2007), is a critical success factor needed to support economic growth, so the government has taken successive measures to reform the sector.

Thus, organizationwide transformational programs targeting processes, structure, technology, and people (Hammer & Champy, 1995; Heeks, 2002) have come and gone under different names over the last 18 years: the civil service reform program initiated in 1993, the performance and service delivery improvement program piloted in 2001, and BPR launched in 2005 ("Business Process Re-engineering," 2009). Mengesha and Common (2006, p. 4), for example, indicated:

> With a view to realize comprehensive "state transformation" and "total system overhaul" and in line with recommendations forwarded by the World Bank, as in the case of African countries in general, the Ethiopian government has embarked on multiple public administration reforms since the early 1990s.

Recently, several organizations (both public and private) within the service sector have been moving toward BPR projects, with the goals of addressing and meeting new challenges as well as responding to customer-driven quality services. IT projects are usually considered part of a wider initiative to integrate technology solutions with organizational change projects and fundamentally change the state of service provisions—make great strides in terms of organizational efficiency and performance (Hammer & Champy, 1995).

Project teams (with diverse knowledge, skills, and experience) are routinely created in order to handle and implement these organizational change projects. Although the increased use of project teams is related to higher project success (Thamhain, 2004a; Webber, 2002), the expected change has not come fast enough, and insufficient progress has been made so far in most organizations, particularly in the public service sector. BPR is still in an experimental phase, and there are only a handful of success stories in some sections of government ministries ("Business Process Re-engineering,"2009). In order to assess the impact of BPR projects, Mengesha and Common (2006), for example, conducted small-scale surveys in two government ministries and proceeded to discover promising achievements in both performance and user satisfaction by implementing major improvements in the service delivery system.

From a cultural perspective, it is important to understand the reasons that have undermined project team efforts and hindered project success. These are of paramount significance and must be addressed or project teams will be unable to sustain and further bolster the positive developments attained thus far. This study is meant to provide the initial evidence and give some confidence in the validity of this claim. Studying cultural patterns and changing people's attitudes and behaviors are generally viewed as important components (antecedent and critical success factors) of organizational change projects (Beugre & Offodile, 2001; Hammer & Champy, 1995). This requires prior investigation and reflections on the nature of cultural patterns that have the greatest influence on project team behavior. More specifically, the cultural habits that influence project team behavior are worth exploring based on the personal experiences of project experts in the field. The following section presents empirical findings from a case study conducted in Ethiopia, which sought to find an explanation and shared understanding by project experts on the cultural habits influencing their behavior.

[2]The exchange rate applied was Birr 9.6081/US $ as of June 30, 2008.

The Case Study

Method

This case study, aimed at generating a greater understanding of the influence of cultural habits on project team behavior in real project team settings, lends itself more readily to a qualitative approach (Patton, 1990; Punch, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative methods are generally believed to contribute to "practical problem solving, decision making, action research, policy analysis, organizational and community development" (Patton, 1990, p. 94). These methods can help to reveal insights that might not otherwise be apparent through traditional means—the quantitative paradigm—by emphasizing the lived experiences of people in the field (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Drawing on elements from an exploratory case study (Punch, 2005; Yin, 2003), as well as the design and implementation of focus group interviews (Krueger, 1988), this study attempts to obtain multiple perspectives by learning more about the feelings, perceptions, viewpoints, and beliefs of project experts on the cultural habits influencing their behavior. A focus group interview is the most attractive data-gathering option when research is trying to probe, gain deeper insight, and develop explanations of the various aspects of human behavior (Punch, 2005). The goal is "not to infer but understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, and not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation." (Krueger, 1988, p. 96)

The insight and data provided by focus group interviews give us a basis with which to examine changing views and develop an understanding of existing cultural patterns, particularly cultural habits, as well as obtain a thorough picture of how they influence project team behavior in project team settings.

Sample and Sample Characteristic

As a whole, the study consists of two rounds of focus group interviews involving experts working on BPR and IT projects within the service sector.

First, we selected ten private and public organizations within the banking and utility subsectors. To obtain national-level insights, the selection of sample organizations focused on those that represent major institutional forms and provide services for profit. A preliminary survey was conducted within the chosen organizations to obtain data on total staff, capital, annual turnover, the number of staff working on BPR and IT projects, and the budgets allotted for these projects. The survey revealed that the number of employees in these organizations ranged from a minimum of 446 to a maximum of 12,688. The annual turnover ranged from a minimum of US $4.48 million to a maximum of US $957.42 million, whereas the total capital ranged from US $13.84 million to US $2.14 billion. The total number of staff members working on these projects within the selected organizations was 854. The budgets allotted for these projects ranged from US $0.57 million to US $117.19 million (Appendix A).

Second, to avoid sample bias and in consultation with the collaborating organizations, 30 people (three from each of the 10 organizations) working on these projects were formally invited to participate in an interview. In order to address reliability and validity issues, the selection process took into consideration participants with relevant and solid experience in project team assignments. Moreover, the sample in each organization consisted of project managers, coordinators/team leaders, and experts/officers—all members along the project hierarchy. In order to obtain diverse opinions, experiences, and achieve patterns of common understanding shared by the majority of members from the wider population, efforts were made to maintain a mix of participants in terms of age, gender, and educational background.

The participant's demographic information revealed that female participants accounted for 13%. In terms of age, participants ranged from 31 to 51 years. They had diversified qualifications, which included the fields of business/economics (50%), computer science/information technology (31%), statistics/mathematics (13%), and engineering (6%). Over 60% of the participants have earned a postgraduate degree, and their work experience ranges from 10 to 15 years and over. Almost all of the participants have been involved in various projects and are senior officials within their respective organizations. Approximately 50% of the participants have worked as project directors and managers in BPR and IT project works, whereas the remaining 50% have been involved mainly as project coordinators/team leaders and members. More than 50% of them have been involved in more than five project team assignments within their respective organizations (Appendix B).

Procedure

The focus group interview was conducted following the guidelines and procedures recommended by Krueger (1988). To allow for sufficient preparation and to help build the participants' confidence, each interviewee was given an outline of the interview program in advance (purpose, date, time, venue, and points of discussions) and informed of the expectations. To maintain maximum neutrality and objectivity, participants were assured of confidentiality before, during, and after the interview; they were also informed that they took part in the interview based on their expertise in the field, because the study was not focused on any current decision-making processes or any particular decision made in the past with regard to their respective organizations.

The interviews were conducted in two rounds, during a half-day time period, and each interview lasted four hours. As a rule of thumb, conducting more than two rounds of focus group interviews depends on the value of obtaining additional new insights (Krueger, 1988). Our initial assessment

of the data from the first and second rounds of interview discussions revealed stable and similar response trends and patterns to the respective questions. Hence, the potential value of conducting more than two rounds was considered too marginal for this study. Indeed, the diversity of participants (from different organizations) in both interview rounds provided checks and balances that allowed for an assessment of relatively consistent cultural habits that are frequently mentioned and discussed.

To encourage open and free discussions on issues of concern, the interviews and discussions were conducted in the country's official language. Upon the consent and willingness of the participants, the entire interview was both audio- and videotaped. Sixteen experts (eight experts in each round) from eight organizations participated in both rounds of the interview program, whereas others were unable to attend because of prior commitments. After full transcriptions of the interviews were prepared, they were sent to the participants for feedback on the content of the transcription before translation. This helped to review and validate that the viewpoints and ideas reflected by participants, along with the suggestions forwarded during the interview, were those of the experts and not of the researchers. Moreover, to avoid researcher bias, the transcripts were translated into English by an independent professional translator.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol consisted of semistructured questions designed to provide a step-by-step, in-depth interview process. In order to isolate key problems to be addressed later, the experts were asked the following questions in order. As a preamble, the first three peripheral questions asked the experts to define project success, its criteria/parameters, and the contribution of project teams to project success; this was done to understand how the experts define project success and its indicators based on their own project experience and at the same time to understand the value organizations attach to people in the successful delivery of projects. The experts were then asked whether or not they believed a relationship existed between the cultural patterns of project teams and project success, and if so, to indicate the strength of this relationship. As questions aimed to probe and explore deep-rooted behavioral problems underlying project activities in greater depth, the rest of the questioning was specifically related to the influence of cultural habits on: (1) team relationship, (2) team learning, and (3) team working. In conclusion, the questions also took into account the influence of sociodemographic factors and the suggestions offered to improve the problems.

A review of project management and the cultural management literature served to help us design and develop our own interview protocol (Appendix C). The protocol enabled us to develop a clear structure and ensure that all relevant issues were covered during the interview. To minimize possible moderator effects on the participants, the objective of the interview and the benefits thereof were thoroughly reflected on before the start of the interview. After having established rapport, all efforts were made to elicit active participation and candor during the discussion.

Analysis Approach

Several approaches exist in the analysis of qualitative data (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). In the analyses of transcripts from the interview, the concepts of selective coding and core category were used to systematically link subordinate and subcategories (Punch, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first author used open coding in sorting data into relevant categories and selective coding in assigning segments of text from codes to core categories. The second author reviewed the process to overcome the possibility of random assignment and discrepancies were resolved, and this enabled us to identify emergent patterns and relationships, as well as a set of generalizations about the nature of the influence (Bryman, 2004; Saunders et al., 2007).

The data analysis included the transcripts (nearly 70 pages of text derived from eight hours of audio and video records), in addition to notes taken during discussions from the two rounds of interviews. All of the important viewpoints raised and discussed by the experts were indicated in the forms of quotations in this study report; however, the report did not include each participant's mood (e.g., their tone of voice, nonverbal cues, and so forth). To protect the respondents' anonymity and make the results more accessible to the reader, all synopses and reports by the focus group experts were also assigned fictitious names (Experts 1 through 16). NVivo qualitative data analysis software (version 8) was used to structure and code the interviews' results.

Discussion Results

For brevity, only the key findings of the case study are presented, whereas more detailed results can be obtained from the authors; moreover, due to space constraints, our discussion of the results is confined to the cultural habits influencing project team behavior.

The experts agreed that their behavioral conditions reflected their cultural patterns, which also form the basis of everyday life; hence, culture is presented as the fabric of individual behaviors, including shaping the project team members' behavior: "Our culture suppresses openness, accepts male dominance, selfishness and reluctance to work and their effects are reflected at the office" (Expert 8). The experts felt that the influence of family background, schooling, and an attachment to the broader community play key roles in shaping their behavior. The cultural forces of these institutions are

interrelated and determine the behaviors of project team members—in other words, what they see, perceive, experience, and do in project team settings.

> Even our behaviors within the team depend on our exposure in life and the experiences we have already developed. Family is the main source of our behavioral learning and plays a greater role in shaping our behaviors. Then, there is school, where the discipline in the school we followed had its own role in shaping our behaviors. Our ties to the community also play a role. (Expert 6)

The potential impact of cultural patterns on project success has been underlined, for example, within cultures that work together (the *Debo, Jigae, Ikub,* and *Idir* cultures in Ethiopia). It was noted that people of the *Debo* and *Jigae* cultures help to finish a task rather quickly by working and cooperating with each other, whereas people of the *Ikub* culture play a major role in providing solutions to financial problems. People of the *Idir* culture also help others in times of grief and distress. These practices are clear manifestations of values, such as collectivism, cooperation, harmony, and sound interpersonal relationships. Moreover, it was indicated that Ethiopians are not only very hospitable people but they also maintain a culture that encourages arbitration and mediating conflicts through traditional ways before taking legal action, a practice that should be further encouraged. These views are compatible with Ethiopia's very high collective orientation, as mentioned in Hofstede's (1983) findings pertaining to East Africa and those of House et al. (2004), which pertain to SSA. These are the positive aspects in a cultural context that characterize project teams, and carrying these positive cultural values over to project work will contribute to project success.

Yet, there are concerns among the experts as to why these types of cultural values are not shared and practiced in order to successfully attain project objectives within a project team setting. As one expert stated:

> In our culture, the kind of cooperation we show in projects, marriage, or grieving is highly different. In social gatherings, such as marriage and funerals, the people actively cooperate and participate. They share both their sorrow and happiness. However, when it comes to projects, we do not do the same. We challenge ourselves to participate and cooperate even after we have joined the project, being attracted to its vision. (Expert 2)

The experts acknowledged the difficulties in breaking cultural barriers in order to bring people into a collective state of mind that would enhance project success.

Table 1 illustrates the cultural habits that have negative influences on project team behavior.

Team Relationship Cultural Habits

The experts acknowledge that relationship-related cultural habits have the greatest influence on project team behavior. A common cause is the prevalence of networking, which includes hidden motives and/or agendas among members, tends to quickly dissipate the initial boost of energy and enthusiasm within a project team, and hinders attaining the project's objectives. Instilling positive team spirit to encourage the team in the right direction toward the goal becomes a daunting task as team members with the same private interests and objectives create a united front.

When asked how networking influences teamwork behavior, the experts pointed out a tendency to look for loopholes and rely on individuals in order to advance their own interest and focus more on personal gain and advantages. In this sense, personal contacts and networking seem to be both the source and the driving force behind an individual's confidence. The following statements reflect this growing phenomenon:

> In our culture, instead of working, we look for individuals on whom we can depend on as a ladder to ascend to a higher position or power. (Expert 16)

> Running to satisfy private interest by relying on individuals who have the power and using them as a shield is now becoming a familiar practice. (Expert 1)

Another key issue emerging from this study is the prevalence of skepticism and cynicism regarding project objectives as well as distrust among members. The experts agree that the nature of communication, seemingly fueled by skepticism and cynicism, has a powerful suppressive influence on the communicative and cooperative behaviors of members in project team settings. They attribute this partly to the cultural patterns within the family/society, which are largely reflected in the individual attitudes and behaviors in a project team setting. The experts believe that an individual raised in a closed family environment is more reluctant to speak out, despite having a good idea in mind and despite a willingness to cooperate in support of a mutual interest. These individuals tend to lack self-confidence and do not have the tenacity to bargain or persuade others, neither in a work environment nor outside the office. For example, one respondent explained that:

> I do not dare to speak, even in occasions when I expect others will speak too much. This is probably because I come from a society that encourages silence. Unless I believe the issue was not raised by anybody else or it should not be missed, I think about speaking but remain silent. Even after speaking out as much as I can, I cannot express

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Question Areas	Cultural Habits	Project Team Behaviors (Specific Manifestations)
Team Relationship	Networking	• Relying on others for personal advantage or benefits • Setting one's confidence in terms of personal contacts and networks • Having hidden group motives/agenda
	Skepticism/Cynicism	• Being skeptical/cynical of what is being communicated • Lack of positive thinking/feeling toward others • Problems with personal courtesy in communication
Team Learning	Rigidness	• Tendency to magnify one's own ideas • Diehard attitude (not likely to be won) • Lack of willingness to learn from others and learn from mistakes • Indifference toward others
	Self-centeredness	• Problems of valuing other's ideas and learning together • Withholding information rather than sharing • Problems of showing courtesy and respect toward other ideas • Feeling of indispensability • Focusing on individual achievement
	Defensiveness	• Fear of the unknown (fear of losing a job or position) • Fear of objection to ideas and being challenged • Feelings of jealousy to better ideas (fear of being outshined) • A "know-it-all" attitude • Not wanting to appear uninformed • Doubting the ideas of others
Team Working	Externalization	• Gossiping/backstabbing and limited face-to-face debating or discussing problems • Blaming others for problems that are team problems/scapegoating • Reluctance to accept facts and face the truth • Complaining and magnifying problems
	Opportunism	• Putting self-interest before the project's objectives • Using projects for self-presentation and selling
	Conformism	• Behaving in a more rule- and procedure-driven way • Waiting for work orders or instructions
	Superficiality	• Having no plan and failing to make decisions that include risks • Not willing to clearly speak one's mind and state a position (pretension) • Inability to openly challenge problems and ideas (passiveness)
	Mediocrity	• Inefficient use of time and lack of a positive attitude toward work • Trying to benefit from the work of others • Enforcing lower performance norms by assigning degrading nicknames to performing individuals
	Risk Aversion	• Indecisiveness (hesitation regarding actions and decisions) • Shifting responsibility and accountability • Limited initiative, effort, and commitment
Sociodemographic Factors		• Endurance problem • Stability problem • Commitment problem

Table 1: Cultural habits influencing project team behavior.

> myself as sufficiently as I want. This often surprises me. (Expert 15)

Emphasis is also placed on the courtesy of communication (manner of presentation) in project team settings.

> A man may speak furiously in a big tone. His ideas could be good, yet the way he expressed them may demoralize the team as a whole or offend team members. Our way of presentation is also very important. (Expert 9)

Successful communication depends on how well the message comes across; however, the manner of presentation, coupled with a pessimistic view of what has been communicated, can lead to widespread skepticism, cynicism, and intimidation within a project team setting and could ultimately affect project success.

The importance of open and transparent communication is a key factor in creating a sense of belonging and mutual understanding, as well as acquiring commitment and support from all members to ensure the project's sustainability. The following statements made by the experts demonstrate the importance of effective communication:

> To move the team in one direction, there are lots of steps to be crossed . . . and such a move needs to be transparent both internally and externally. (Expert 14)

> If the project team members have a common understanding about the project, then we can say they are a step ahead in their goals. (Expert 5)

> If there is no good communication, good participation, and transparency, then the project will be a total failure. (Expert 8)

> If studies and their decisions were made behind closed doors . . . it will have an impact on the perception of the employee—the one who executes the reform . . . Therefore, there has to be communication in every stage of any project, and the communication has to be from the top down and between peers. (Expert 4)

According to the experts, skepticism and cynicism occur when project team members believe that information has not only been withheld but also when it has been shared only with members from a particular interest group. They agree that a lack of openness during discussions regarding the project's vision and objectives naturally has the greatest impact in terms of the differences in expectations during the project's execution or at the project's conclusion. An expert notes that "if the team has a common vision, assisted by communication, speaking the same language through participation, communicating the progress of the project to stakeholders, and believing in the project, then these are successes" (Expert 1). Information sharing and continual communication efforts made on an ongoing basis give project team members a sense of project ownership and control over the project's content. Moreover, another way to reduce similar problems is to build trusting relationships. It is therefore necessary to improve both the prevalence of networking and address the skeptical and cynical relationships dominating project team settings, which significantly influence project team behavior in Ethiopia.

Team Learning Cultural Habits

The experts also observed a strong influence from learning-related cultural habits. The main problems associated with team learning seem to be rigidity, self-centeredness, and defensiveness. For example, the experts indicated the prevalence of a dominant view in the magnification of one's own idea, which deters the emergence of constructive ideas and suggestions in project team settings.

> . . . showing courtesy, and respecting and capitalizing on better ideas from others are still challenging . . . . If I give an opinion after concluding my idea is the best, it means that I am not ready to accept another, perhaps better idea. (Expert 2)

According to the experts, diehard attitudes and a lack of willingness to learn from others, or learn from mistakes, not only take up too much project time, but they also steer the team in an unnecessary direction. If a handful of members dominate the discussions or remain inflexible in their positions, balancing member contributions in terms of views and ideas to support the decision-making process is hardly attainable.

> If I am rigid or stiff, then the project time could be wasted through unnecessary debate and discussion. Thus, it has influence on the completion of the project by its deadline. (Expert 2)

The discussions by the experts revealed that self-centered learning behavior tends to dominate project environments within the investigated organizations. Everyone seemed to agree that the most challenging aspect of team learning is the willingness of each member to learn from each other and value each other's ideas, as well as transfer knowledge within the project system. An expert commented that "we need to know that team members who have the knowledge are willing to transfer it and that the other members who lack the knowledge are willing to receive or learn it" (Expert 9). If the effort that members exert to learn from each other is weak, the possibility of synergistic solutions will remain at stake. The viewpoint that team learning needs to be perceived as a natural process in project team settings was emphasized.

There is a common belief that the practice of acquiring and sharing knowledge is limited, because members tend to retain information rather than share it and they tend to focus on

individual success and achievement rather than collective achievement. The discussions revealed that there are many indications to show how prevalent these problems are:

> . . . unwillingness of certain individuals to share their knowledge and information in work, which has a common benefit except in situations assumed to have special benefit for them . . . Unless I am paid or promised something, I might not speak my mind. (Expert 4)

> There are people who are selfish and do not like learning naturally. There are people who like to appear as the only knowledgeable person. If such attitudes are not broken, then they will definitely contribute to team failure. (Expert 15)

Moreover, the issue of failure to respect and be courteous to others was emphasized. Experts noted the absence of positive thinking toward members, particularly if their ideas affect the undertaking of project activities and the morale of others. Furthermore, learning from each other is considered a waste of time, because there is a feeling of indispensability, particularly by project managers/team leaders who want to handle project activities by themselves.

Despite the opportunity for team learning, the practice is even more constrained by the defensive stance taken by members.

> As we often cast doubt on how someone has better knowledge than us and we often only promote our own idea, we are not ready to learn from others. (Expert 3)

An expert points out how a sense of insecurity can affect the learning process between the teacher—a team member with the knowledge—and the learner—a team member with no knowledge.

> The teacher thinks that sharing knowledge and experience threatens or puts his or her position in jeopardy or of being taken over by others. If he or she is economically insecure, he or she tends to hide his or her skill and knowledge. On the other hand, the learner does not want to appear uninformed and pretends as if he or she knows everything. (Expert 5)

Moreover, the team learning process can be demarcated by position, age, or gender. The experts acknowledge that those in higher positions are uncomfortable learning from colleagues in lower positions, because there are those in lower positions who believe knowledge can only come from those in higher positions or it may seem as though elders are knowledgeable in everything. The two sides of the problem seem to create the tendency to support and pursue unconstructive ideas simply by taking sides against superiors, elders, or even colleagues, because challenging bosses and elders is discouraged.

> There is a problem of openly and positively forwarding ideas and opinions with regard to individuals and positions. (Expert 1)

All these behavioral manifestations have a negative influence on the progress and realization of project objectives, because they not only undermine the strong motivation needed for constantly learning within project team settings, but they also inhibit knowledge and prevent experience-sharing practices.

A better understanding of these cultural habits (such as rigidness/stiffness, self-centeredness, and defensiveness), which affect the entire team's learning process within the project team is crucial to further developing and implementing new project ideas and solutions, thereby improving overall project performance. In this sense, the following statements by experts better indicate the significance of team learning.

> People need to share their knowledge in order to speak a common language. If there is sharing of knowledge, they can easily achieve project goals without friction and sacrifice. (Expert 11)

> When we work in a team, we plan, identify problems and seek solutions together. We together develop a sense of ownership, which fosters commitment and initiation. The learning process will pave the way for the team to continuously improve and remain successful. (Expert 7)

> When the understanding in team work is developed, one team member identifies the strong and weak sides of the other team member and then is able to appreciate the stronger side. This will help to identify the best quality of the team to share and carry out the project activity based on their full willingness and capacity. (Expert 4)

The challenges on record need to improve in order to pave the road for enhanced team learning in project team settings, and it is imperative that team members share and use their knowledge, skills, and expertise in the name of attaining the project's objectives.

Team Working Cultural Habits

The experts also acknowledge the influence of teamwork-related cultural habits on the integration of individual thoughts and actions to achieve project objectives.

One of the greatest challenges is externalizing project problems. The experts underscore the fact that people prefer to externalize project problems and disseminate these challenges in the form of gossip, which has its own impact on the progress and realization of projects. The experts who spoke about these excessive influences indicated that:

> We grew up in closed society and often like to back-stab when we can comment and speak openly. Sometimes this develops gradually

> on its own or through a member into internal politics and influences project team success. It may start as a simple matter, but one of the team members slowly turns it into a form of communal gossip, spreading throughout the organization and then into the community that expects the results of the project. We have lots of cultural and behavioral influences. (Expert 15)

> Externalizing, blaming, and complaining are our common negative attitudes. There is purity of thinking. (Expert 1)

In other words, if things go wrong, people are inclined to blame or point fingers at other individuals and blame them for team problems, try to save face, or lessen the facts for fear of upsetting a third party. There is a problem with hiding facts and not facing the truth.

> We say team spirit exists when the project's aim is owned without pushing work on others or pointing fingers at others . . . . When people regard and respect each other, they interrelate, and this in turn makes the team successful. (Expert 11)

Moreover, there is a very clear sense by the experts that the domination of self-interest (opportunism) is emerging as a key barrier to project success.

> We respond quickly if it is a private matter. But if it is beyond that, we look for somebody else to do it. In offices, if the duty is assigned to an individual capacity, we commit ourselves and finish it soon. If it is assigned to a team, we show reluctance to work on it. (Expert 8)

This even includes projects that are used as an opportunity for self-presentation and selling. These behavioral patterns keep members from moving quickly and committing and dedicating themselves solely to the project's vision. The experts unanimously agree that when self-interest is dominant or overshadows the project's objective, it is extremely challenging to achieve a high level of team integration and commitment.

The other problem involves superficiality in cases in which members simply pretend something is their position or responsibility when in fact it is not. The problem of unwillingness to clearly speak one's mind or state one's position is underscored.

> There is a problem in taking one's own position or sticking to the decision that our conscience may oblige us is a reliable one. There is a problem of going with the wind or simply following others by retreating from a former position and siding with the other. (Expert 1)

Superficiality is becoming the norm in Ethiopia, which may also hold true in other countries in SSA, because it seems that open and sober-minded people are often labeled or attacked in one way or another. The following statements by the experts better reflect the reality of this situation:

> In our culture, openness has its price. It may cause many losses. An open person often has no acceptance. For this and other reasons, pretension is now becoming a familiar practice. There is no honest and heartfelt relationship. (Expert 6)

> In a society that is overwhelmed by excessive passiveness, openness could be difficult. If there is no openness, then we may lose even our contributions completely. (Expert 11)

Moreover, because most people fail to make plans and decide against taking risks, projects will fail to meet their goals. Such behavior is partly the manifestation of risk aversion and partly due to uncertainty avoidance.

> Given the risky nature of projects that require timely decisions and swift action . . . if ideas are shared and no one makes the final decision, then that is dangerous. (Expert 9)

Experts expressed how the tendency to risk aversion disproportionately affects team spirit and the success of projects.

Moreover, the practice of working under specific work instructions or by order (conformism) was reported to be high: "If there is no order to work, it will be considered as if there is no work" (Expert 4). The experts silently agreed that people behave in a more rule- and procedure-driven way due to lack of interest in work and lack of self-confidence, with the intention of benefitting from the work of others (mediocrity), or even to avoid risks, which, in turn, increases project control and the coordination of effort and time. This also includes enforcing lower performance norms by undermining or assigning discouraging nicknames to more committed and high-performing individuals. There is a mutual feeling that determination and persistence by members in sacrificing to achieve the project's objectives and goals are not balanced.

In conclusion, the efforts to improve these cultural habits have been profound if the goal is for project teams to stay on course with regard to the project, exhibit practical commitment to the project's objectives, and share responsibility and accountability in regard to results.

Sociodemographic Factors

Finally, a discussion ensued after asking the experts to share their views on how sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender, age, education, salary, marital status, family size, and occupational status) influence project success. The objective is to discover if and how these factors influence project success.

The participants agreed that these factors both positively and negatively affect project success; however, their influences varied, depending on a project's type and nature, and the time required to complete the project. If the

nature of the project is considered time-intensive, there will be age implications. For example, if the project requires the physical demands of sitting and working for longer periods of time, these imply a direct correlation to age. If the project is considered too complex, there will be implications regarding experience, qualifications, training, expertise, and team composition. Marital status can also impact the project. Single individuals are more likely to commit their time and focus more intently on the project, whereas those who are married may have to divide their time and attention between the project and family commitments, resulting in an inability to commit to and focus on the project. A common belief is that younger people are more energetic and passionate; however, young people and single individuals also tend to be less stable. If older individuals are parts of the team, they can share life experiences, but this does not necessarily mean they know everything. If the team size increases, a diversity of project ideas is enhanced, but the larger the team size, the less team members listen to what the others are saying. Thus, there should be a way to balance these factors in order to create a positive environment in which team members can work productively.

Conclusion

Research focusing on the cultural and behavioral factors within the body of project management literature has made progress in recent years, and the field is ripe for further research and development. Perhaps discovering just how cultural patterns, particularly cultural habits found in a project team environment, might influence project team behavior could provide a unique insight into the cultural and behavioral dimensions of project management.

This empirical study, apart from the perceived cultural values that are commonly known and pronounced in the body of literature, reveals a deep-rooted underlying cause embedded in cultural habits and is among the many principal factors influencing project team behavior in Ethiopia. The findings focus on the growing influence of cultural habits as displayed in project team behavior, which we believe require special attention in the project management literature, particularly within project environments in SSA. The experts themselves recognize many problems with regard to project team behavior, which may be explained in reference to some of the above-mentioned cultural habits identified in this study. The common patterns of responses and understanding provided by the experts' insight suggest that cultural habits related to team relationship, team learning, and team working have the most influence on project team behavior, and this has a significant and direct effect on project success.

Considerable emphasis is placed on team relationship cultural habits (networking, skepticism/cynicism), team learning cultural habits (rigidness, self-centeredness, and defensiveness), and team working cultural habits (externalization, opportunism, conformism, superficiality, mediocrity, and risk aversion). Moreover, the influence of sociodemographic factors (e.g., problems of stability, endurance, and commitment) was noted. They acknowledge that these problems are predominantly rooted in societal traditions, such as family, school, and community. These findings are also broadly consistent with observations in the literature (Hodgetts et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1983; House et al., 2004; Seriki, 2007).

Figure 2 provides insight into the cultural habits that must improve and be overcome if project teams in particular, and projects in general, are to be successful. Societal cultures have an influence on the cultural habits found within project teams, which, in turn, have a direct impact on project team behaviors that affect project success. The sociodemographic makeup of a project team directly influences project success and indirectly influences and shapes team members' behaviors. For example, age, education, gender, salary, years of service, and occupational status influence cultural habits, and these are reflected in project team behavior. Moreover, organizational culture is extremely important in mediating the influence of societal culture on project team behaviors. For example, studies indicate the existence of an interface between organizational culture and societal culture, and the mediating role of organizational culture in facilitating or hindering project success (Seriki, 2007). Naturally, organizations are embedded in a particular national culture, although this does not necessarily mean that they share the same organizational culture. Yet, many scholars argue that the cultural patterns of organizational members at work are likely to reflect the values and behaviors held more broadly in society in general (Hodgetts et al., 2006; Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004; Seriki, 2007); this is because they are embedded within larger social systems that influence how they behave and perform. For example, Hofstede (2001) indicates the degree of difficulty organizations face in order to change national cultural values that people bring to the workplace. Although organizational culture continues to have some degree of importance, the influences of one's national culture are stronger (Shahin & Wright, 2004). Thus, the society in which individuals are born constitutes the primary social environment in which people learn and draw from the dominant cultural patterns that represent their collective identity (Hodgetts et al., 2006).

Indeed, there are numerous cultural habits that impact project team behavior other than those explored in this study; moreover, the factors that influence project success are also not limited to the issues that exist with regard to the team's cultural habits. The project context, including external factors beyond the team's control and other factors such as technology, tasks, and products associated with the project team's functioning, can also affect project success.

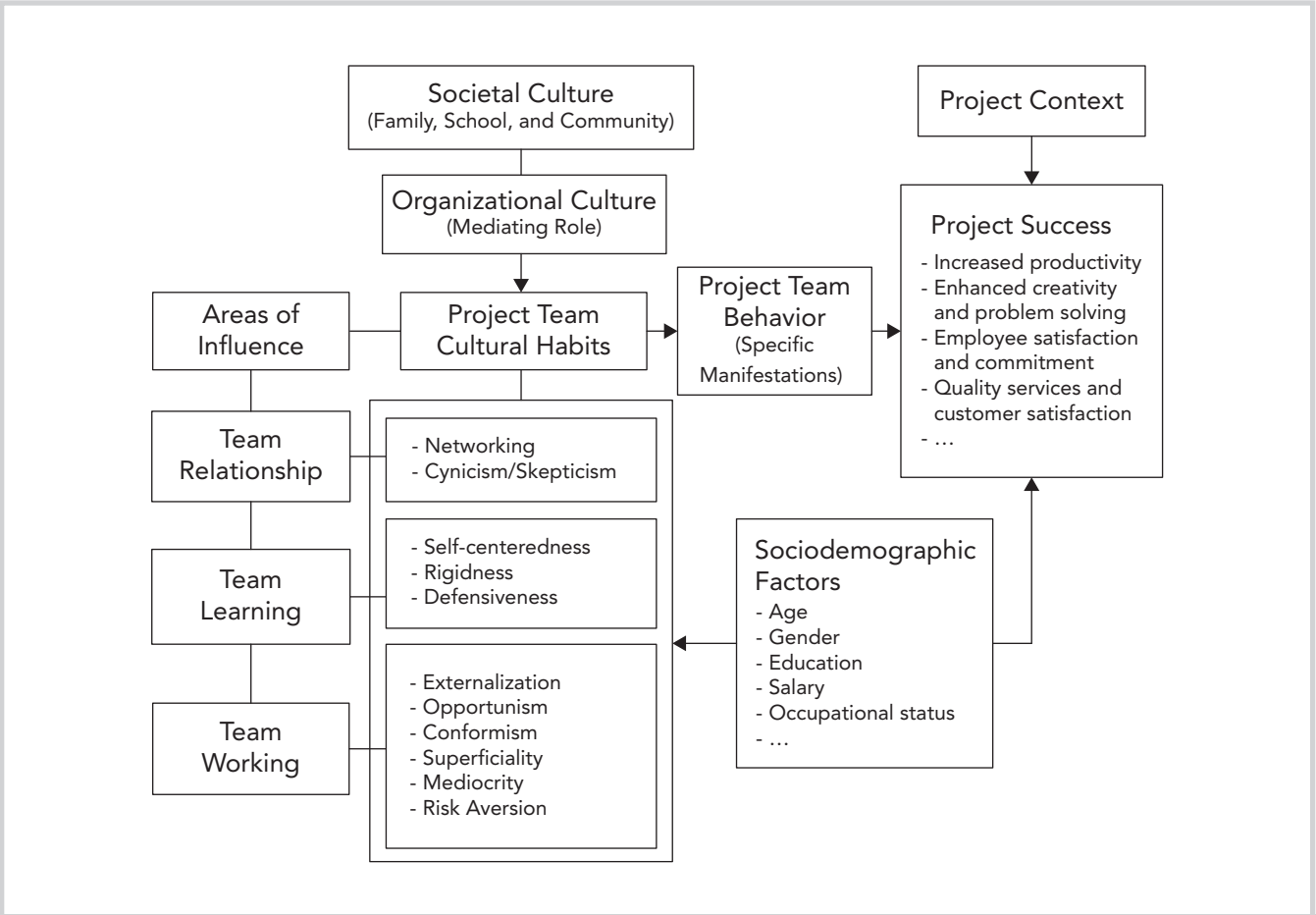

Figure 2: Cultural habits influencing project team behavior and project success.

Hence, as indicated from the outset, the validity of inference and the conclusion derived from this study are affected by a number of other factors that have not been considered here. Despite this fact, in an environment that largely lacks awareness about the influence of cultural habits, this study provides insight (input) into the project team's interventional strategy to address and improve problems. In this regard, the following section highlights the study's implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Implications

This study reveals the need for change regarding the traditional assumptions underpinning people management within a project environment in SSA. The findings strongly suggest that conducting BPR or implementing the latest technological advances (IT projects) in SSA will often fall short of expectations, unless the cultural patterns (especially the cultural habits influencing project team behavior) of the people participating in such projects are changed. The cultural patterns embedded within project teams have a determining impact on an organization's drive for process, structural, and technological changes.

Therefore, organizational improvement and change projects are likely to generate the expected benefits through changing the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the people involved in the implementation of these changes. The project's social and cultural setting is a key factor in understanding and addressing many of the problems, as well as contemplating the kinds of values and beliefs that could improve the project team's cultural habits are very important. Also, encouraging these values and beliefs among team members is important in order to enhance project success. Organizations can only attain final results from BPR and IT projects when these convictions are instilled in the minds of people. Hence, influencing the team's thoughts, perceptions, and directions is possible when empirical studies such as this one offer both practitioners and project managers critical thought on the nature of the cultural habits influencing project team behavior.

To improve the implementation of BPR and IT projects, we suggest that the design and plan of project teams need to address three important interrelated questions, which are perceived to be weak or void within the organizations under consideration: (1) What are the project team management activities that need to be integrated into the major stages of BPR and IT projects? (2) What forms of project team intervention strategies are the most useful to support the change management effort over the life cycles of these projects? and (3) What specific set of project team values, attitudes, and behaviors are important to bring about change development over the courses of these projects?

Sustaining project team efforts beyond the project start-up phase becomes challenging when there is weak take-off in BPR and IT projects. The important part of project team management starts with adequate project team planning (Thamhain, 2004b). The planning phase needs to outline important team management activities and determine how the project team should be functioning as BPR and IT projects evolve through different stages. McDonough III (2000), for example, emphasizes the consideration of appropriate project goals, human resource assignment, empowerment, and the creation of a productive climate as the stage setters in enhancing the likelihood of project team success. Proper project team planning could assist organizations in the implementation of BPR and IT projects in four areas: (1) clarification of project team goals, functions, and boundaries; (2) project team recruitment and selection; (3) development and alignment of a compensation and reward system for team efforts; and (4) identification, design, and delivery of programs geared to members' training and development needs.

Aligned with project team management activities, different project team intervention strategies are also needed to identify the specific actions to build and develop project teams while implementing these projects. Jackson and Klobas (2008, p. 329) note, "Projects are collective, purposeful activities based upon the development of common understandings and interpretations of means and ends." Pre-involvement, shaping, and changing pre-implementation attitudes lay the foundation for communicating and reducing anxieties and concerns over organizational change projects and reducing communication barriers and misconceptions, conflicting views, and expectations that may shift the attention and efforts of project teams in the successful delivery of these projects (Bishop, 1999; Clarke, 1999; Thamhain, 2004b). Through sensitization or awareness creation programs, an intervention strategy at the start-up phase of a project needs to aim at enhancing mutual understanding among members about the rationale of the project and how it works, benefits, or impacts their work (Clarke, 1999; McDonough III, 2000; Thamhain, 2004b). Exerting more efforts in involving members, embracing their ideas and concerns, and getting them on board in the start-up phase are recommended to ensure the successful implementation of BPR and IT projects. As projects progress, practitioners and project managers must recognize the negative impacts of cultural habits on project team behavior and the importance of building a climate of mutual trust and respect to ultimately improve the overall performance of these projects. Mutual trust is needed for quick and coordinated project team actions, when value differences are widely prevalent due to functional diversity, time allocation heterogeneity, and differences in reporting structures (Webber, 2002). Intervention strategies may draw on team-building, support, knowledge management, motivational, or decision-making solutions to improve the individual and collective contributions of members. For example, a team-building strategy may target role clarification, goal setting and planning, problem solving and decision making, communication, interpersonal relations, project-specific norms and rules to provide members with a sense of self-competence and confidence, greater clarity on project work requirements and demands, accountability and responsibility for results, mutual performance, and a supportive attitude in the implementation of these projects. The advancement in performance, thoughts, and behavior within project teams is also likely when team leadership provides the adequate platform and support, whereby members can build a common understanding of, trust in, and respect for each other; exhibit high levels of acceptance, involvement, and commitment; and establish conflict resolution strategies (Cleland, 1995; Thamhain, 2004a).

The relevant values, attitudes, and behaviors that support and encourage acceptance and effective implementation of these projects need to be identified, nurtured, and developed. Hence, the choice and design of any intervention strategy should take into account the specific set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are important to bringing about change development over the courses of these projects. Kloppenborg and Petrick (1999), for example, identify important team characteristics that are needed to perform and facilitate the completion of projects as they progress through their life cycles. They indicate that the completion of the first stage (project initiation) demands intellectual virtues to set goals and priorities; identify final deliverables, potential roadblocks; and risks; and determine overall feasibility of the project, whereas the second (project planning) needs both social virtues and emotional virtues to detail activities, cost schedules, and human resource requirements. Moreover, project implementation requires moral virtues to make decisions, solve problems, take actions, and get the project done, whereas the last

(project evaluation) demands political virtues to objectively assess performance and fairly recognize contributions to project objectives. As project teams have increasingly accumulated and developed distinct sets of values, attitudes, and behaviors that have supported their success, they positively influence organizations' abilities to implement lasting organizational improvement and change programs through BPR and IT projects.

By integrating project team management activities, project team intervention strategies, and the desired project team values, attitudes, and behaviors into the stages of BPR and IT projects, practitioners and project managers can avoid or mitigate the negative impacts of cultural habits, thereby improving the performance of these projects.

Limitations

As with any other qualitative research, there are limitations unique to this research approach. One of the basic problems is an inability to fully capture the intended meanings of the words and statements made by the experts as they were being colloquially expressed during the interview sessions. Moreover, as the interviews were held in the participants' native languages, the words and statements expressed by the experts may have taken on different meanings during translation, although there a great effort was made to maintain the originality of the experts' views. Similarly, although the researcher had the opportunity to observe the tones and interactions (nonverbal communications) that occurred between the experts during the interviews, it was also difficult to encapsulate the experts' motives—there was the potential to overlook important facts (Krueger, 1988) or there might have been a response bias (Yin, 2003). The researcher had little control over the interactions between the participants that one would find in an experimental design (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, this study was based on findings by experts in one particular country, and the sample size is considered small even if the procedures employed were consistent with theoretical considerations. In spite of this fact, the organizations considered are involved in many projects, with a large number of employees providing a broad range of services. Moreover, the diversity of participants (project managers, coordinators/team leaders, and experts/members) and organizations (small and large, private and public) not only ensures the adequacy as well as the representativeness of the sample, but also contributes to a broad application of the findings. Thus, the sample could be understood as representative for Ethiopia.

The limitations impose the conclusions that may be drawn from this case study; hence, the findings depicted in the study should be considered as indicative rather than definitive and as a foundation for further research. It should also be mentioned that this study does not come to the conclusion or give the impression that Ethiopia necessarily shares the same cultural context with countries in SSA that influence project team behavior. There may be differences in the degree to which cultural habits influence project team behavior in SSA. Yet, as facts from the literature and this case study suggest, the identified cultural habits are typical of those seen in a variety of organizations in SSA; thus, the analyses and conclusions from this case study could be reasonably applied in a broad sense to projects in organizations throughout SSA.

Future Research

Further research will bring about new insight and changes that can improve project team behavior to make organizational change projects real and durable. An interesting area for future research would be religion. It has a greater role in shaping the Ethiopian culture in particular and SSA culture in general. It is part of everyday life, and people's values are partly conditioned by their religion; hence, its influence on project team behavior is worth investigating. Another area to consider is the contextual realities of BPR and IT projects that influence project team behavior. Examples include organizational policies, procedures, practices, and routines that define daily life in organizations.

The interaction between traditional and modern values (traditionalism and modernism) in SSA society, and the relative advantages and disadvantages of both in modern project team settings, are also other important areas. For example, studies can provide empirical evidence on how the traditional drivers of African values, such as group solidarity, cooperation, harmony, and sound interpersonal relationships (which are presumably dominant in the normal course of social interaction in SSA but less practiced or limited in project team settings) are further capitalized to foment and sustain the momentum of project success in SSA. Project success depends on the type of the project and the cultural context within which it is conducted, among others. Hence, a study of how traditional SSA values compete with modern project management practices encompassing more sectors and countries could help to uncover an array of attitudinal and behavioral problems influencing the success of organizational change projects. In general, an in-depth understanding of the design and plan of BPR and IT projects is worthy of future research in light of the cultural contexts of SSA. Hence, more empirical studies are needed to dissect and understand the cultural patterns, especially the cultural habits, influencing project team behavior to develop project management models or approaches suitable and applicable within the project environments of Ethiopia, in particular, and throughout SSA in general. ■

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Appendix A: Participants' Demographic Information

	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	2	13
Male	14	87
Total	**16**	**100**
Age		
31–35	4	25
36–40	4	25
41–45	4	25
46–51	4	25
Total	**16**	**100**
Occupational Status		
Directors and Managers	9	56
Heads and Coordinators	4	25
Officers/Experts	3	19
Total	**16**	**100**
Educational Achievement		
Bachelor Degree	6	37
Postgraduate Degree	10	63
Total	**16**	**100**
Educational Background		
Computer Science/Information Technology	5	31
Business/Economics	8	50
Statistics/Mathematics	2	13
Engineering	1	6
Total	**16**	**100**
Tenure (Years of Service)		
10–15 Years	4	25
More Than 15 Years	12	75
Total	**16**	**100**
Position in Currently Assigned Projects		
Project Manager/Process Owner	8	50
Project Coordinator/Team Leader	4	25
Project Team Member	4	25
Total	**16**	**100**
Average Number of Project Team Assignments Within the Current Organization		
2–4	7	45
5–7	7	45
More Than 7	2	10
Total	**16**	**100**

Appendix B: Background Information on Sample Organizations

Subsectors	Total Staff	Total Project Staff Working on BPR and IT Projects	Capital (in Millions—US $)	Annual Turnover (in Millions—US $)	BPR and IT Projects' Budgets (in Millions—US $)
Banking	**14,812**	**219**	**821.18**	**483.56**	**50.50**
1. Commercial Bank of Ethiopia	8,033	56	474.18	309.32	24.28
2. Development Bank of Ethiopia	939	33	198.79	40.90	8.05
3. Construction and Business Bank	900	38	18.21	22.90	12.49
4. Awash International Bank S.C	1,329	17	38.41	44.03	2.66
5. United Bank S.C	1,963	24	34.35	29.04	1.15
6. Nib International Bank S.C	1,202	27	43.40	32.89	1.30
7. Cooperative Bank of Oromia S.C.	446	24	13.84	4.48	0.57
Utility	**29,548**	**635**	**3,023.49**	**1,725.00**	**183.59**
1. Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation	12,260	371	572.43	586.07	117.19
2. Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation	12,688	144	2,144.03	181.51	8.92
3. Ethiopian Air Lines	4,600	120	307.03	957.42	57.48
Total	**44,360**	**854**	**3,844.67**	**2,208.56**	**234.09**

Note. The figures were based on a company report and information as of June 30, 2008. The exchange rate applied was Birr 9.6081/US $ as of June 30, 2008.

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Date	Two rounds (August 27 and 28, 2009, respectively)
Place	Video Conference Room, College of Telecommunications & Information Technology, Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Interview/Discussion Time	Four hours (8:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.)
Expected Number of Participants	10–15
Interview/Discussion Questions	10 semistructured questions
1. How do you define and explain project success in relation to your project experience and knowledge?	
2. What do you think are the special indicators/parameters of project success?	
3. How do you understand project teams and their contributions to the successful realization of projects (like BPR and IT projects) in your respective organizations?	
4. Do you think there is a relationship between project success and the cultural patterns of project teams? If so, how do you see and evaluate the strength of this relationship?	
5. How do you think cultural habits influence your relationship—collective belonging and shared purpose as a project team? • What are their manifestations in a project team setting? • How do they impact your relationship and project success?	
6. How do you think cultural habits influence project team learning—your ability to acquire, share, and apply knowledge as a project team? • What are their manifestations in a project team setting? • How do they impact project team learning and project success?	
7. How do you think cultural habits influence project team working—successful integration of your thoughts and actions to achieve project objectives? • What are their manifestations in a project team setting? • How do they impact project teamwork and project success?	
8. How do you think sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender, age, education, salary, marital status, family size, occupational status, years of service, training, team number and composition, and so forth) influence project success?	
9. Based on the discussion and in relation to the above questions, what do you think should be done to improve the project team's behavior to enhance project success?	
10. Any comment or suggestions related to the questions or interview/discussion?	