Cultural Impacts on Managing Social Projects

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Abstract

Culture is one of the most important factors in all projects. Social projects are special projects about cultural views and beliefs of people and their environment. Human factor has the most important effect in projects about socialization. It also is affected by cultural views of participants.

Cultural beliefs are very sensitive and have special effect on social projects. It can cause success or failure of projects dealing with social affairs. Cultural views are critical points in planning social projects, the participants of which are people from different cultures. Therefore, management in the implementation of such projects is very critical.

Key Words:

Social projects, cultural views, change of behaviors, cultural diversity, level of knowledge, project integrity.

Introduction

Culture is one of the most important factors in all projects. Social projects are special projects about interaction cultural views and beliefs of people and environment.

Social projects directly depend on cultural phenomenon. Cultural beliefs are very sensitive; therefore, attentiveness and keen observation are required in dealing with cultural views of people participating in projects about socialization.

One of the most important factors in social projects is the human factor. Every single person participating in a social project will have its own humanity effect for his (her) cultural beliefs.

Cultural views of each person have mutual effects on other's view, and ideas with stronger cultural beliefs dominate subcultures. Managing projects with social subjects needs a strong view on cultural beliefs of stakeholders.

This article is to introduce some of the points experienced in a project about social subjects. Engineering such projects require especial analysis of cultural views to achieve the defined goal(s) and objectives.
1-Social projects deal with information affecting individuals

Social projects are connected closely to culture, either social culture or individual culture.

Culture is information that affects an individual’s way of thinking and behavior. Social projects look after changes in behaviors. Goals and objectives of social projects rely on the changes of people’s attitudes. For social projects to be successful, changes should appear in the information that is driving the habits.

Information comes either by "teaching or imitation"; therefore, social projects should carefully watch the changes in both. Any changes in behavior will affect the behavior of the mutual environment. The changes on behavior communicate to new "culture building" (Boyd and Richerson in Culture and the Evolutionary Process (1985)). Some factors affect the information and individual behavior for the implementation of social projects that are critical to be considered. These are as follows:

1-1 Effects of subcultures

As explained, social projects are affected by culture of people participating in a project as stakeholders. Stakeholders may believe in difference in their culture surrounded by a dominated culture. Those under dominated cultures are subcultures that will have their effects on social projects.

Subcultures can be helpful in the success, or failure, of social projects. The project manager (PM) and participants should consider subcultures in implementing a social project. Subcultures are information and beliefs of stakeholders of a project and are therefore critical in planning of social projects. This is an important fact to be considered and should not be neglected.

When facing different people in a workshop of social projects, the facilitator needs to consider diversity of cultures. By considering the different attitudes of participants, the facilitator can succeed in bringing their beliefs and behaviors to change-change in the main factors of social projects to be achieved.

1-2 level of knowledge

Level of knowledge has a special effect on social projects. As knowledge depends directly on information, culture will be affected by the level of knowledge. In changing the behavior of people as one of the goals of social projects, level of knowledge helps to achieve this.

As level of knowledge becomes higher, the receiving information differs. Those with better and more information that participated in a project are more enthusiastic on the changing process in their behavior. Also, people with higher level of knowledge show more enthusiasm to receive
new information. They try to find out more about new subjects and show more eagerness to alter or change their beliefs.

Level of knowledge is one of the critical subjects of planning social projects. People with different level of knowledge will participate in a project; therefore, planning is very sensitive for communicating with all of them. The PM responsibility is very critical in this issue for the implementation plan of social projects.

1-3 Different stages of aging

Age of participants is another important factor in reaching the goals of social projects. Elder people show less eagerness to receive information than the younger ones and prefer to preserve the status quo, but the young ones are after changes.

Transferring information to elder people needs much more interpretation than transferring information to young ones. When implementing social projects, the people who participate belong to different age groups; there should be careful consideration regarding the age of participants.

Depending on the project, the PM should decide what to do. Sometimes, it is suitable to divide and bring one age range under one roof. However, there are times that it is better to bring a mix of ages under one roof. In some social projects in the past, mixed ages produced better answer. It really depends on the type of project, and this should be analyzed before planning.

1-4 Living in different parts of a country

Another subject to be considered in social projects deals with the collection of participants from different areas of a country. People from different parts of a territory bring native ideas. These ideas come from their native beliefs showing diversity in culture.

When planning social projects, it is important to consider different ideas coming from different areas. People living in different parts of the country may participate in the implementation of projects. To succeed in social projects, integrity of cultural beliefs is a must. The PM should direct the project in a way that people with diversity in beliefs can participate in the implementation and be able to change their ideas and behaviors.

2 - Success of social projects relies on project manager’s communication

Communication is the most important factor for all projects to succeed, but it plays a vital role in social projects. The PM needs to communicate in the best way with all the stakeholders to bring the project to a succeeding state. Social projects require more attention to
communication for they are very sensitive in dealing with human emotions. The PM must be very careful of his (her) communication with participants on different stages of project implementation. Participants for project implementation have different attitudes to the number of participants; therefore, the PM must centralize his (her) activities at least on two subjects, which are as follows:

2-1 Cultural information of PM

The PM should have enough information about the culture of the area where a project will be implemented. The PM must consider the cultural environment of all activities that are designed to make the project successful.

Social projects require the analysis of cultural points to find out how to come across the problems that should be solved or to be changed. In these issues, the PM and the people who implement the activities must have enough information about the cultural view of participants. Of course, the PM is the important member of the project to know about the culture of the participants.

In social projects, participants may have different cultural views. It is the task of the PM to analyze the notions of the culture of participants and plan to bring all the ideas of stakeholders under one accepting umbrella. Stakeholders are those participants and facilitators of the project. The PM should be very precise on the environment where the project is going to be implemented. Culture is very sensitive, and even a small mistake may cause the project to fail.

The PM and facilitators should identify the culture(s) he or she is associated with (Communication and Project Leadership: The 2009 Model) and then try to manage the workshop.

2-2 Team management of project

Social projects are activities that require teamwork. Like any other project, social projects require a very deep and acceptable teamwork. Any activity or exchange of ideas should be considered in before. If an unexpected or wrong idea changes among the participants, then goal(s) and objectives will be hard to achieve or even fail.

Integrity of teamwork is a must when it comes to exchange of ideas or activities that take place within a project term. Social projects need a solid teamwork for the sensitivities that cultural notions possess. It may not work in projects dealing with social subjects but may be considered as flexibility in those dealing with nonsocial subjects.
Social projects need very close relations of all stakeholders, and this cannot happen unless a good teamwork is planned. Team management is very important in any project but is more vital in projects that are going to change the ideas and behaviors of people.

3- State of risks in social projects

Social projects connect very closely to culture; therefore, it is very risky in the implementation phase. Diversity of beliefs and behaviors of project beneficiaries causes communication problems between facilitators and participants in the implementation of project goal(s) and objectives.

When communicating with the participants, facilitators should consider people with different cultures and be aware of their beliefs. This helps the facilitator to bring all the differences under one roof and try to exchange ideas very carefully with all the participants.

Integrity is very important in a project because the lack of it causes failure. If facilitators cannot bring all the different ideas to a point that every participant accepts the planning subjects of a project, the goals and objectives will not be achieved. To produce integrity in ideas and beliefs of participants is a must for changing the behaviors of participants as aimed by the project.

Conclusion

Human factor is one of the most important factors in all projects. However, it is more valuable in projects about social subjects. Social projects are very sensitive to cultural views and beliefs. Social projects are planned to change behaviors, so they should communicate very much to culture.

In planning projects with social subjects, different attitudes and behaviors must be considered. Lack of attention to cultural view of participants will certainly cause the failure of a project. Good communication of project stakeholders is a must for the success of a project.

Social projects are very risky in implementation phase because of their sensitivity toward cultural notions. Managing social projects is a very delicate task; therefore, it needs special attention in planning every single activity.

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