

Why do Projects fail?

The Nigerian Government insensitivity to project Failure

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Nigerian projects have been experiencing failure throughout the country's period of democratic exposure and something needs to be done about this mishap. One would argue that the military era gave no better options and environment for projects success; yet, it's very difficult to agree that project failure is the democratic dispensation and the 21st century when different countries are adopting best practices to improve the chance of project delivery towards meeting the social demands.

The country invests millions of dollars to projects, brings on board the services of international expatriates using local resources to meet the compelling demands of these projects, yet we have experienced over 80% project failure within the framework of governmental systems. Well, as a project management professional, I would bring to readers some perspective and key reasons why Nigerian projects fail.

One major recent project that comes to mind is the CCTV project; a part of the N76 billion National Public Security Communications Systems Project (NPSCSP), which was conceptualised by the President Umaru Yar'Adua administration to provide a multimedia communication system for the police and other security agencies in the country to fight off growing criminal activities in the country. Based on project functional and delivery evaluation, one would simply call this project a failure considering its inability to meet its business needs and demand.

From the October 1, 2010 Independence Day bombing to the June 16, 2011 Police headquarters bombing, and then the August 26, 2011 bombing of the United Nations headquarters, the CCTV cameras have not been used adequately to stop crime. Not even with the most recent bombing of Nyanya Bus Park has anything changed. It's simply a question of management integrity- what happened to the project and what led to the failure of this Project?

In project management context, a project fails not only when the project delivery refuses to meet the use or the needs of the project or when the project's product refuses to satisfy the end user, but when the project is not accomplished within the allowed time frame, project budget, scope defined for the project and even when the outcome of the project is rejected by the stakeholder.

Another very recent Project failure is the inability of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, to meet the structured scheduled for the distribution of the Permanent Voters Cards to Nigeria. It was the third phase of distribution of PVC and thirteen states of the 36 states were designed to be involved in the exercise, which began on Friday, 7th November and ended on Sunday, 9th November 2014. The state government of Lagos had earlier declared public holiday for this exercise, yet the

commission didn't work on the day the people were eased from work. That is an absolute demonstration of Project failure.

I can continue all day to highlight short and huge examples projects that have failed in Nigeria. Yet, it's important to look through the factors causing these failures and give short recommendations to how to control these organizational and institutional disasters. The following highlights basic factors causing project failures considering that the body of knowledge of project management is fully compelled to agree that project failure is unacceptable.

1. Institutional framework error

The project Management conference of Nigeria, PROMACON has advocated several times for the adoption of internationally proven best practices on Nigerian Projects. The organization has committed huge resources to running troubleshoots on the major causes of failure of Nigerian Projects and has agreed that top on the list of factors is Institutional framework error. The Nigerian agencies and ministries are void of departments focused on ensuring projects success.

The first insight that comes to play is acknowledging that the essence of a government is to achieve community projects reflecting the needs of the people. What the average Nigerian cares for is the dividends of democracy and the outcomes of the government efforts expressed in Tangibles. One must agree that people care less about the politics in the government but care more about the results of government efforts.

So to the people it is about Projects and Projects. With these insights, it's obvious to conclude that the most important focus of the government should be on Projects. Yet, the ministries are void of project management expressions. The understanding of project management within these departments and government instruments is low. The government needs to ensure that mini-projects within these departments are well accomplished, and one fast and sustainable way is to create project institutions around the already existing government establishments.

Recommendations: The government may create either a centralized project management office, cPMO or decentralized Project Management Office, dPMO. The cPMO is to fully control all the government projects. The cPMO is centrally coordinated department or core that focuses on the projects of the government. This is an option that gives the federal government and state government full and quick access to the Nigerian Project considering that a ministry is involved in project. The cPMO also helps to build a nationally acceptable project methodology and framework for Projects.

Another option is to create a dPMO which fully focuses on the small departments and ensure that there is a Project Management force in each department. This is a faster access to Project management knowledge compared to the cPMO; it also ensures that the standards and principles of PM is enforces at all level.

2. Less investment in business case analysis

Why do we start projects in Nigeria? Someone in the government feels something needs to be done and hence lobbies to get funding from the government to achieve it. That is bad project management. It's very important to subject every proposed project to a business justification from the beginning during conceptualization. The concept of business case analysis explains why a project is important to the business/ social demands and this transcends in depth to the government sponsored project.

The government always has a choice on what projects to invest in. Inadequate Project analysis always makes the government invest in projects with lesser business objectives and return on investment. With proper project business case, the government becomes effective on the return on investment to the people, subjective project advantages compared to other project.

Recommendation: The top management structure of the government needs to create a model for justifying projects with relation to the values they offer to tax payers.

3. Project Procurement Error

I had an opportunity to engage a government official some months ago on the major reasons projects fail in Nigeria. He was simply of the opinion that most of the capital projects are outsourced to external organizations and most often they deliver less on expectations. He was obviously trying to defend the government on their inefficiencies.

We need to agree that huge sponsoring organizations like the government do not always have the necessary competence and skills to achieve and run their projects. Most often because of the complexity and expertise involved. Yet, the body of knowledge of Project management allows for detailed knowledge in this regard. The reason project management is studied is to ensure that the world is free of excuses. Adopting procurement management helps to drastically cut down waste.

Good practices reduce costs and produce timely results; poor practices lead to waste and delays and are often the cause of allegations of corruption and government inefficiency. Procurement management helps the project team make a decision on either to make or buy the needed sub project, product or service. It ensures that there is a transparent system that gives birth to the contractor and most importantly analyzes the procurement relationship to advance the best form of contract.

Most often, the reason the project fails is the inability of the Nigerian government to separate the Political games from professional demands on Projects.

With more detailed analysis, these are just a few of the many reasons projects fail. Project Management needs to be adopted at all levels.

About the Author



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Eyitayo Ogunmola is the Founder and the Project Team Lead of PM Hub Nigeria, a human capital development brand focused on Project Management, Lean VI Sigma and Corporate Leadership training and enterprise solution deployment. Eyitayo's experience in the field of Project Management spans across various field with latest hands on a United States Government sponsored project in Lagos, Nigeria. He has special Interest in Governance and Human Capital Development. He is a Carrington fellow of the United States Consulate, Lagos and also a Consultant on Lean Enterprising. Eyitayo is a certified PMP Project Manager, a Green belt Lean VI Sigma Professional. He is also a Project Management Training Consultant to Chartered Institute of Project Management, Ghana.

Eyitayo just concluded business education from Columbus Business School. He is the Project Coordinator for ProMaCoN, an organization committed to institutionalizing project Management in Africa. He worked with a team of international participants in the just concluded IPMA Young Crew global e-collaboration Competition (a congregation of 64 young project managers from around the world) where his team came 2nd runner up. He is a trainer for Acceltage Consulting, Oak Interlinks among other project management consulting companies. He leads the faculty of project management of the College of Supply Chain and Material Warehousing Management. He is the Co-founder of TIENigeria.org and also a youth leader award winner with Crans Montana.

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