

Project Management in Southern Africa: Approaches, Experience, Trends¹

Strategic Project Governance in a Non-Projectized Environment: **A South African Perspective**²

By Sinaye Mgolombane

Introduction

The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture in South Africa recently released the third Report following the inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector Including Organs of State. The series of reports highlights how, despite having governance structures in place, several billion Rands of public funds were syphoned into individuals' pockets. Therefore, it is an apt time to reflect on this and consider the way forward for strategic project governance.

Project governance is an "oversight function that is aligned with the organization's governance model and encompasses the project life cycle," according to A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) – 7th Edition (Project Management Institute-2021.)

Project Governance provides a logical and authoritative framework for decision making in the projects of a company or organization. It depicts what activities the organization does, the responsible person/s and project timelines with clear beginning and end.

It also provides all necessary tools to the project manager to manage a project. Project Governance is an important and helpful element of a project as it brings all the different components of the project together putting in place clear governance measures for successful

¹Editor's note: This series of articles about project management in Southern Africa is by leaders of Project Management South Africa (PMSA) and other major stakeholders, including educators, experts and practicing professionals. It is intended to share their experience and knowledge that might be useful for professionals and organizations in other African countries and elsewhere in the world. Learn about the author in his profile at the end of this article.

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implementation of the project led by the project manager.

Good project governance is the secret weapon of effective project-based organizations. The key element of project governance addresses how decisions, rights and accountabilities are disseminated and assigned between the project team, executives and the other key stakeholders.

It can be extensive and "heavy," with lots of bureaucracy, or "light," with minimal oversight. Managers should aim for the right level of governance for their environment and culture. Making sure your governance policies fit the purpose of the project is a key factor in ensuring that they are effective.

Project governance starts at the top. In large companies, this should include a commitment to the project governance guidelines from the company board of directors. The attitude and standards that are expected by the board members will filter down to the project steering committees (Steerco's), project management committees (Manco's), and teams.

Benefits of Project Governance

There are many benefits to project governance, including:

- Improving the company /organization's return on investment and tracking those investments effectively.
- Gaining buy-in for projects.
- Avoiding common causes for project failure by creating more opportunities to recognize them early in the process.
- Communicating more effectively.
- Introducing standardization across projects, making it easier to compare the performance.
- Minimizing project risks.
- Developing and motivating staff in a structured environment, and,
- Contributing meaningfully to the overall strategic intent of the organization.

How Can Project Governance be developed?

The development of project governance starts with the project management life cycle that includes defined points for approval. These are points where the viability of the project is discussed, and a decision is made as to whether to continue with the work.

Projects should have a clear business case, and business cases should have enough information to enable management teams to make the right decisions. Those decisions must be adequately documented and communicated.

People working on projects must have defined roles and responsibilities. Individuals that make up the project team must be experienced and qualified in their relevant roles. Processes and procedures should further enable project teams to review their project and to ask for independent support if required.

There should be a culture of continuous learning that allows project teams to continuously improve and to discuss lessons learned in a blame-free environment.

Stakeholders must be engaged, and they should trust the process. The governance of a project is linked to the governance structures in the organization overall.

The main aim of project governance is to ensure that projects are carried out in the right way, which is intrinsically tied to the financial governance at a corporate level, corporate risk management, and more.

Project governance should fit seamlessly into your current organizational processes. In other words, don't create a brand-new management process when you already have one that works in other areas. Use what currently exists and tweak corporate processes to make them suitable to use in a project environment.

Key Focus Areas of Project Governance

Strategic project governance consists of various key focus areas, including:

- **Methodologies and processes:** These help you deliver work reliably and sustainably.
- **Knowledge management:** This is crucial for ensuring that the organization learns from project experience. Knowledge management is essential if you want to stop making the same mistakes multiple times.
- **Project management maturity:** As your organizational project management matures through experience, so will your ability to deliver successfully.
- **Senior-level buy-in:** The commitment to project governance starts at the top. If

you have management support, this will cascade down through all levels of the business and the approach to governance will be more sustainable.

- **Supportive culture:** A culture of support, not blame, will ensure project managers have the right environment in which to thrive. A supportive culture, led by the project management office or project director, will help project managers reach their goals and those of the project.

Conclusion

According to Elizabeth Harrin, Good Project Governance has eight major characteristics. They are **participatory; consensus oriented; accountable; transparent; responsive; effective and efficient; equitable and inclusive;** and follows the **Rule of law**.

While good strategic project governance may not have prevented what transpired in recent years based on the State Capture reports, it may have identified and alerted wrongdoing much earlier.

About the Author



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Sinaye Mgolombane is a seasoned Project Management Professional, Business Executive, Digital Transformation Champion and an Environmentalist with over 23 years multi-industry experience in the Rail Logistics, Financial, Construction and Defense industries.

He holds Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from Milpark Business School and he is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) through PMI. He has also attained other leadership and management qualifications such as Senior Management Programme (SMP) from University of Pretoria; Advanced Project Management Programme from the University of South Africa; and National Diploma in Horticulture from the Cape University of Technology.

Sinaye is currently serving as the Chairman of the Board Directors of the Project Management of South Africa (PMSA) and has also served as Branch President and PMSA National Vice President.

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