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***Recording Lessons Learned!  
 The Forgotten Dimension in Ethiopian Public Sector Projects***

*There is an Amharic proverb which says “bekale yale yersale betsihufe yale yeweresale” which could literally be translated as “ in speech it could be forgotten, but if written it will last long”. The proverb could vividly show how much critical is to record information so as to share it with another body without deteriorating its original value. Recording the how, when, what, and by whom of a project activity and decision is vital in sharing experience within an organization benefiting future planning, implementation and decision making. Furthermore, it would help to ensure the continuity of organizational value with out being affected by the rapid organizational restructuring and personnel shift typical of the public sector.*

*Nevertheless, it seems that it is being left aside in the Ethiopian public sector projects creating considerable hitch in benchmarking successful projects, drawing attention to potential failure points, and looking after probable management puzzles. As a result, causes for project delays, cost overruns, and scope deviations in most of the public sector projects are seen to be mostly the same.*

After the fall of the previous government of Ethiopia in 1990, the Ethiopian public sector has passed through a lot of quick win reforms, which aimed at minimizing the bureaucratic red tape that had locked it up for along time, and transforming the ideology of the public servant from a bossy nature to serving the people. These quick win reforms have achieved a lot though not as they should have done. One of the major elements of the reforms was rapid institutional restructuring which has created gaps in establishing sustainable knowledge base, passing institutional experience to succeeding units, undertaking taughtfull decision making, learning from past failures, and benchmarking successful projects. With the realization of stable economy, the reform endeavors has become more of fundamental, long-sighted, and participatory. Yet, the issues of ill-implemented lessons learned recording and intra-institutional experience sharing have come along unsolved.

At the very moment of planning a project, many things should be taken into account, amongst which is how to record daily undertakings and decisions in relation to their implication on time, cost and scope of the project (as part of the *communication plan*). Whatever is the name of such a format, its aim is to create a full-fledged history book for the project. Within it, it shall comprise the actual performance of the project from financial, physical, social, legal, human resource and other points of view, the constraints that have been faced in the due process, the root cause of the constraint, what decisions have been taken to overcome the constraints, and what is learned from the overall undertakings in that given day.

Creating a robust communication plan will help to prevent conflict of interests which are typical in public sector projects of Ethiopia where many stakeholders ranging from the implementing agency, the design agency, the contracting company, the consulting company, the project sponsor, the controlling federal body, the local government to the local community, do have their own agenda. Though the communication plan will try to answer the type of information that will be provided to each of the project stakeholders, the level of detail it shall cover, the medium through which it would be delivered, the time at which it will be delivered, and the frequency of doing so, the basis of it is recording information on daily basis in a systematic way. Thus, a systematic recording of project information should be the underlying factor in the communication plan of the project, as it will, at the end of the day, be used as an input for compiling monitoring and evaluation reports, and enrich the lessons learned knowledge base.

As mentioned above infrastructure projects in the public sector of Ethiopia do have many stakeholders, which have a variety of information requirement (with regard to type, level of detail, format, medium, timing and frequency). Hence designing strong but flexible information recording mechanism should be given due attention at the planning stage of the project. But, this dimension of the project planning is overlooked in most of the public sector infrastructure projects in Ethiopia. Establishing an integrated information recording system is observed as an imposition, mainly from the project sponsor, that do have a little to do for the project implementer.

This fact of externalizing the internality has resulted a delay in reporting, there by a delayed remedial measure for problems in the project. As a delay in the project deliverable is associated with costs, it has also resulted in cost overruns, mainly in the form of claims. Though rare, there could also be cases where inefficient communication has resulted in project failures. One other fact, which is common in Ethiopian public sector infrastructure projects, is the failure to learn from previous projects. Cognizant of the fact that there is no integrated project information recording, learning from previous projects could not hold water as either there will not be full-fledged information about them, some of the critical information could be missing, there would not be centralized information retrieval point making it difficult to get it, or personnel who were once in the project team have assigned elsewhere, or even don't know about it.

This has created snags in planning infrastructure projects since every planner should have to follow his heart in confronting uncertain happenings, overcoming risks, treating linkage effects, solving human-related problems and making thoughtful decisions. Had there been an integrated information-recording trend, the planner would have to look into them to tap important lessons. Those lessons would have a paramount importance in planning for a better project that could deliver its products on time, on budget and in accordance with specified quality standards.

In order to create a meaning for the millions of Birr that is being invested on infrastructure projects, recording the day-to-day performance of the project is essential. Aside from informing the project stakeholders, who do have a range of expectations from the project, this activity will have immense value in sharing institutional experience, enhancing the quality of future projects, ensuring public accountability, and enriching the project knowledge base. Thus, planners of public infrastructures projects in Ethiopia shall provide due accord to it both in the planning and execution phases of projects.



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