Research Article
Top Management Support, a Potential Moderator between Project Leadership and Project Success: A Theoretical Framework

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Abstract: Project success despite of being frequently discussed topic in the literature of project management, is rarely agreed upon by the recent researchers. Continuous efforts are being indulged by the researchers and organizations to find out those factors that contribute significantly toward project success, project leadership and top management support is also prominent among them. The recipe of this study is to theoretically support the fortification of top management support on relationship between project leadership and project success. The study addresses this theoretical gap by discussing the different aspects of project leadership with and without top management support on relationship with project success.

Keywords: Project leadership, project success, top management support

INTRODUCTION

Top management support is an essential factor in project success and has been examined in various studies as one of the critical success factors. Kandelousi *et al.* (2011) mentioned that top management support can be viewed in several forms, for example, helping teams in dealing with hurdles, exhibiting commitment to the work and encouraging the subordinates. Usually top management support results in availability of in time financial resources, allocation of human and other physical resources and also it refers to the delegation of necessary power to project leaders and project team for successful completion of projects. Moreover, top management support is important recommendation in achievement of project success (Belassi and Tukel, 1996; Chae and Poole, 2005; Lin, 2010).

In contrast, top management cannot provide even the due support to each and every project in the organization (Young and Jordan, 2008) therefore, they must realize the existence to project leaders who are directly involved in day to day activities of project. However, limited research has been conducted on the spirit of the top management support with combination of project leadership. The researchers have very less exposure that what practically top management support means. Though the concept is not new in project success factors and there is little literature available to find that why top management support certain projects and why not others.

In addition, scope of project leadership is wide as compared to traditional project management (Sumner *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, project managers' leadership has significant impact on project success (Geoghegan and Dulewicz, 2008). Moreover, leadership has been considered as influential source for achieving the organizational success but still in project management role of project managers as leaders need to be discussed in detail (Turner *et al.*, 2009). In addition, Young and Jordan (2008) discussed that top management support is oftenly, discussed as a paradigm which is related to the project success alone. Although some authors realized top management support with some desirable behaviors and attitudes (McComb *et al.*, 2008; Naranjo-Gil, 2009), but they ignored the existence of top management as supporting variable to project leadership in relation to project success. Therefore current study focused on improving the relationship of project leaders with project success by getting due support from top management. At the same time, this conceptualization puts light on the potential reasons for why project managers remain unsuccessful in getting support from top management? Priorities are main reasons, when priorities such as, provision of in time financial and human resources are different for project leaders and top management ultimately the projects suffer from failures (Dolfi and Andrews, 2007; Meredith and Mantel, 2010).

However, Mantel and Meredith (2010) argued that if external environment remains the same top management support enables the project leader to

execute project successfully. In case of non-support from top management, the project (s) may fail at any stage of project and usually it results in non-availability of in time resources. Furthermore, project leaders should also possess good relationship with top management in addition to required technical and administrative skills to make project successful (Morgan, 2012).

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge that top management support can be considered as moderator between project leadership and project success. This conceptualization, enabled researchers to develop a theoretical framework by exploring this new dimension of top management support and project leadership. Furthermore, this research will address the issues from a problematic perspective by offering the framework that how top management support can fortify the relationship of project managers' leadership and project success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Top managers play a crucial role in providing and creating the needed conditions for the project success (Staehr, 2010). Moreover, top management generally, play an important role in defining the scope of a project and selection of project team as well (Boonstra, 2013). In addition, they remain in a position to structure the context of the organizations and they also facilitate the provision of resources. Therefore, the literature of project management makes a strong sense for realizing and recognizing the importance of top management support (McComb *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, Green (1995) concluded after investigating the 213 R and D projects that the projects with top management support were less likely to be unsuccessful. In addition, Meredith and Mantel (2010) termed the project with top management support as "sacred cows" which means that these types of projects seldom fail.

Moreover, while studying IT projects, several researchers have reported various aspects of top management support (Boonstra, 2013). For example, Guimareas and Igbaria (1995) argued that top management interests, understandings and encouragements are much important elements for project success. While of the researchers suggested that for successful implementation of IT projects, top management should represent themselves as project champions (McComb *et al.*, 2008; Naranjo-Gil, 2009). Project championing is referred to communicating the vital importance of the project very clearly, in addition, resolving conflicts and supporting the project team (Beath, 1991; Morton, 1983). Similarly, other widely recognized aspect from top management support is provision of in time resources (Bruqué-Cámara *et al.*, 2004) Moreover, Kazanchi and Reigh (2008) highlight the importance of control and measurement activities in IT projects by top managers, likewise, others have included change management, resource provision and

sharing the vision of projects with project team as factors of top management support (Dong *et al.*, 2004).

Additionally, top management support has been examined in various studies as one of the critical success factors. For instance, Belassi and Tukel (1996) and Young and Jordan (2008) argued that top management support is the most critical success factor in project success. While various authors have agreed upon the necessity of top management support as an independent variable for accomplishing the project successfully (Dong *et al.*, 2004; Jugdev, 2004; Jugdev and Müller, 2005; Morgan, 2012; Murray, 2001; O'Brochta, 2002, 2008; Shenhar *et al.*, 1997; Standish Group, 2001; Thamhain, 2004).

Furthermore, top management support can be viewed in several forms, for example, helping teams in dealing with hurdles, exhibiting commitment to the work and encouraging the subordinates (Kandelousi *et al.*, 2011). Usually top management support results in availability of financial resources, in-time allocation of human and other physical resources and also it refers to the delegation of necessary power to project leaders and project team for successful completion of projects (Kandelousi *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, Ofer (2007) argued top management support is the main ingredient in 'project success recipe'. In prior studies relationship between top management support and project success has been reported positive and significant (Ofer, 2007). In addition, top management should play positive helping role toward the project staffs by providing them due support. Moreover, top management must avoid biasness and realize the importance of project success, because it ultimately contributes to organizational success (Swink, 2000).

Effective top management support gives confidence to the project manager to direct project toward path of success by using effective leadership skills (Morgan, 2012). Likewise, Cowan-Sahadath (2010) argued that it is also the responsibility of project manager to enhance their performance to meet the expectations of top management.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Top management plays an influential role in the success of projects. Wui-Ge *et al.* (2010) stated that project mission, top management support and project time are those factors which should be identified in the start of the project to get the desired success. Moreover, O'Brochta (2008) argued that top management enhances the relationship between project manager and other stakeholders. Similarly, Zwikael (2008) argued that top management support and involvement significantly encourage project leader to execute the project successfully.

Moreover, project success is mainly determined by three factors, project manager, line manager and top management support (Kerzner, 2006). He further discussed that top management support provides
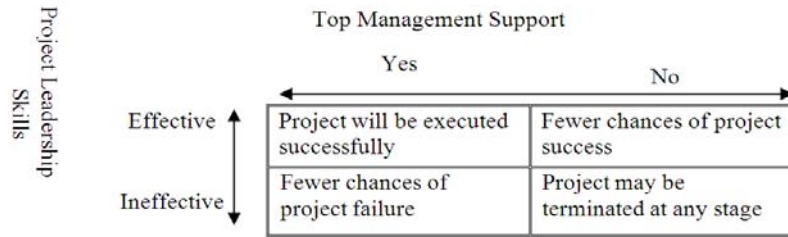
Fig. 1: Theoretical framework

guidance to the project managers to lead the project successfully. In addition, project leaders may turn failing projects into successful projects with subject to top management support.

In contrast, Smith (1999) argued that despite importance of top management support in project success, it should not be considered as solely responsible factor for project success or failure. He further added that for project success effective leadership skills are also important. However, Beck (1983) discussed that top management support is not only essential factor for the allocation of resources, but also for the implementation of project plans and achievement of project success. Moreover, top management support is essential in all phases of project life cycle and it also provides confidence to project leader to perform well even in crisis (Pinto and Slevin, 1988b) (Fig. 1).

The model offered in this study describes the combination of top management support with project leadership skills. In the light of extant literature, even if, leadership is not much effective, top management support can help in the successful execution of projects. Moreover, the project managers should focus on win-win situation for their personal and project success.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The importance of top management support is found as glue between project leadership behaviors and project success that can strengthen or weaken the proposed relations. In reality, top management sometime, cannot look after each and every project in the organization; therefore, they have to realize the importance of project leadership in project success. Despite comprehensive views of various scholars, the concept has been lacking in recent researches. In addition, paper can help the top management to improve their strategies and behaviors toward attainment of project success. Top management can lead a project toward failure or success, but this is better to rationally decide about the fate of a project. The authors conceptualized top management support as a potential moderator (long been considered as an independent construct) between project leadership and project success as it has ability and power to strengthen or weaken the said relationship. This present study

contributes to the early studies by developing a conceptual framework using integrative lens by discussing top management support as moderator. In prior literature, no one has discussed the top management support as a moderator between project leadership and project success either theoretically or empirically. The study is opening the new window of opportunity for further theorizing to complete inter-relatedness of proposed relations with the help of empirical studies. Finally the concept possesses the strong theoretical support and is making louder calls for further conceptual and empirical studies to discuss the concept more clearly. Interestingly, the literature showed that the concept keeps equal importance and can be discussed in developed or developing countries.

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