RULES AND VIOLATIONS IN BUYING AND SELLING: RETHINKING BENEFITS MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL PRACTICES

Ifepade Adekoya¹, Obuks A Ejohwomu and Peter Fenn

The University of Manchester, School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, Sackville Street, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK

Companies tend invest a lot of funds in strategic change yearly with the hope of realising benefits that includes continuous improvement and heightened stakeholders’ satisfaction. As the rate of change accelerates, these companies tend to gain competitive advantage by way of effectively adapting and managing change that breeds biased routines in processes. In so doing, benefits management has arguably become a trigger for understanding the rules and violations of buying and selling in the Management of Project (MOP). This research effort was aimed to understand the strength and weakness of formal and informal ties using a dramaturgical approach. Preliminary findings from mapping up and down the supply chain of a single case study revealed evidences of confirmatory bias and over reliance on established and widely accepted change control tools like earned value management (EVM). The full implication of this on-going PhD study points at serious tension at change control interfaces that require the rethinking of benefits realisation.

Keywords: Management of Projects (MOP), benefits realisation, change control, governance

INTRODUCTION

The practice of benefit management according to Jenner (2010) is a process synonymous with portfolio, programmes, and projects that deliver value. This practice is suggested to reduce the failure rates in management of projects from a strategic perspective by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance structure (Serra and Kunc 2015). Zwikael and Smyrk (2011) further emphasised the importance of establishing a governance structure and monitoring process to maintain the focus of projects on achieving the expected benefits. However, according to Cooke-Davis (2002), these validations are yet to be widely engaged or are engaged as subset to other project management processes and there's very limited evidence to show its impact on benefit realisation.

There has been significant recognition of the importance of benefit management since 1995 with different processes and tools been developed to help organisations to identify, monitor and realise benefits such as (Active Benefits Management by Leyton 1995; The Cranfield process model of Benefits Management by Ward et al., 1996; Active Benefit Realisation by Remenyi and Sherwood-Smith 1998; Towards best practice to Benefits Management by Ashurst and Doherty 2003; Benefit Management in the handbook of programme management by Reiss et al., 2006 and Earned Value Management APM guidelines 2008). A commonality to all these processes is that they are merely for

¹ ifepade.adekoya@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
monitoring and evaluations used at the end of the project with lack of drive for benefits realisation pre-contract award and execution stage. More so, the most important aspects are the intangible impacts (such as behavioural and cultural) because it is necessary for organisations to heavily rely on the beneficence of employees; the strong relationships and communications with stakeholders as well as performance of multiple contractors, consultants, and specialists to realise benefits (Mir and Pinnington 2014, p.209).

This research therefore seeks to understand the strength and weakness of formal and informal ties of the project governance and its effect on managing and realising benefits. Granovetter (1973) in his work on the neglected social network distinguished the functions between strong and weak ties. He demonstrated the connection point between a group of individuals and their leaders thus resulting in trust, participation and rapid spread of information. Raising the need to further understand how the governance structure interrelate to the social and behavioural aspects of individuals in a project environment and its actual contribution to intended collaboration in the delivery of benefit realisation (Levina and Vaast 2008). Simply put - where and when is benefit management infused into the governance process to ensure performance remains aligned with expected benefits? What the true role of existing change control processes and tools are; and whether they are used as intended by various individuals in the project environment?

The dramaturgical approach adopted in this paper has not been extensively used in management research, it is adopted to reveal the unspoken behavioural and social norms surrounding project management teams which are directly and indirectly contributing to the rules and violations of buying and selling. Burke (1945) in his methodological approach of dramatism argued that social action is inherently dramatic in that human beings express themselves and relate to one another in much the same way as actors do when playing roles on a stage. Goffman (1959) introduced the concept of dramaturgical metaphor in his search to understand everyday social life and social intercourse in terms of the crafting of theatrical performances. He emphasised on two basic notions of: performances must be addressed to an audience, and that the part played by the audience is critical; and any performance is comprised of two regions - a 'front-stage' and a 'back-stage'. This concept of Goffman helps raise the questions of the real actors and audience in project environment and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities both in the front and back stages. Though more recently, Mangham (1978) argued that 'The dramaturgical model of man is based upon the idea that man improvises his performance within the often very broad limits set by the scripts his society makes available to him.' His distinguished three scripts model has been adhered to provide greater insight into the nature of the challenges surrounding tangible and intangible aspects of benefit realisations.

The remainder of this paper is divided into three sections. In the next section, the literature review was carried out followed by the description and justification of the dramaturgical approach. This is followed by the methodology and presentation of a scoping study. In final section, discussion of the results and conclusions are reported.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of benefit realisation is not new according to Simon (2003), it has become an important area since late 1980s and early 1990s, with organisation focusing on delivery of expected business benefits rather than the traditional focus on project’s time and cost (Farbey et al., 1999). Though this traditional paradigm shifts according to Truax (1997), necessitate the need for change from a passively managed benefit to proactive management. In order to maintain a proactive management, Musawir et al., (2018)
proposed a strong governance climate that would encourage the development and leadership of a benefit management process in projects. Effective project governance therefore creates the necessary roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities that are a prerequisite for effective benefit management (Musawir et al., 2018). It is also designed to predict and ensure consistent delivery of projects within a set limitation of the contract (Muller 2009).

However, this is not always the case according to Fernie and Thorpe (2007), a strong governance structure that emphasises on the partial success criteria of time, cost and quality will not necessarily develop the process of benefit management thus detriment to the process. Sanderson (2012) also explained three problem statements associated with strict governance structure: The first is to do with the underperformance caused by the misinterpretation of costs by the project team from a strategic perspective and optimism bias. The second is the project governance arrangements which often lead to the perception of performance being the result of misaligned or underdeveloped governance mechanisms, and the inability of the project team to provide a flexible and robust response to unavoidable challenges in the project environments. And the third is cultural and behavioural (which is the focus of this research) where performance problems are perceived as unavoidable outcome of the complexity, ambiguity, and conflict faced by project team with diverse and competing project cultures and behaviours.

It is therefore critically important to shift the focus away from too rigid governance structure and stringent use of existing change control tools and processes of managing benefits. Refocusing the attention towards effective use of benefit management tools and strategic alignment of benefit realisation in management of project, necessitate an imperative utilisation of the interests of those who established the project i.e. the stakeholders and what they hoped to achieve through the project benefits. It is unavoidable that different individuals of the project team would have different perspectives of the constituent of benefit realisation and different approaches of benefit management. The understanding of these perspectives and the coordination of these relationships is very vital to management and realisation of benefits. Failure to monitor these social and human aspects of projects is believed to be a significant shortcoming in the body of knowledge and may at least help to explain the exceptionally high ‘failure’ rate of projects given that human and financial outcomes are closely interconnected (Badewi and Shehab 2016).

It is to these contexts, this paper reflected on the strength and weakness of formal and informal ties in project governance drawing on a selection of concept from Mangham's dramaturgical analysis. According to Mangham (1978), we improvise our performance within the broad limits set by the scripts the society makes available for us. He explains that improvising is critical to the achievement of any performance as a script is a set of instructions for performing. It is the task of the performer to bring the text to full realisation by giving it the finishing and concrete form that can be felt by the audience. In order to fully appreciate how performances are achieved, structured and realised, we must take into account the types of script in use and the way the actors improvise within a broad set of script heading. In so doing, Mangham highlighted the active role of the audience in the creation and achievement of any social performance.

It is on this backdrop of human behaviour and social network on a single case study in the rail industry that this research is focused on. It is tentatively posited that for too long attempts to impose tidy financial measurements on benefit realisation have largely ignored social costs. The costs of such a narrow focus are already being witnessed in the
ongoing challenges of this case study, illustrating that there is a need to consider the problem of benefit management and control from an alternative perspective of human behaviour and social network.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research utilises a single case study research methodology adopted with Mangham’s (1978) three script types’ dramaturgical approach. A single case study research has been used to provide a holistic and in-depth explanation and analysis of the behavioural and social aspects of project team in the management, controlling and realising benefit.

The main strength of the dramaturgical method used is that it emphasises the nature of client-consultant interaction which in this case refers to the project stakeholders i.e. the supplier - buyer or project team - sponsors’ interaction. It accentuates the fact and the ways in which, this interaction can be manipulated by the project team or supplier in order to convey an impression of quality and value to buyers or sponsors. The most purposive means of viewing the work of consultants (supplier / project team) is therefore one that centres on the supplier / project team’s attempts to create and manage meaning with the buyer / sponsors relationship which then captures how the supplier / project team explore the demonstration of their expertise, value and quality to buyers / sponsors.

The data collection was carried out in three chronological phases using Mangham’s three script model. The initial phase was observation of the actors (project team) using the situational script, followed by an unstructured interview using the personal script. The final phase comprised the monitoring of the actors’ behaviours from strategic script perspective. For this study to be valid and reliable, and since the study is specific to one single case study, ethical measure was taken into consideration. Participants were enlightened of the intended anonymity to be used in the sensitive nature of handling personal opinions on organisation structure and performance measurement.

**Phase 1: Situational Scripts**

This tends to occur when the situation is clearly specified, where several actors (project team) have interlocking roles to follow, and where each of them shares a understanding of what is supposed to happen. Thus, project team ‘assume and enact relatively clearly defined roles within the confines of the anticipated sequence of events’ (Mangham 1978). In this phase, different project team actors within a single rail industry were observed and seen as actors using the Roles, Accountabilities and Responsibilities RACI table below (adopted from PRINCE 2 book) to explain who is responsible for what, who is accountable, who needs to be consulted and who needs to be kept informed in realising benefits and managing change.

*Figure 1: RACI describing division of responsibility for benefit realisation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsible (who does the work) - Supplier / Project Team</td>
<td>Project Sponsor</td>
<td>Programme Manager / Director</td>
<td>Programme Manager / Change Manager</td>
<td>Project Manager / Change Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountable (who owns the process and approves) - Buyers / Sponsors</td>
<td>Programme Manager / Change Manager</td>
<td>Project Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>Programme Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>End Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted (Who’s involvement is required) - Users and other internal / external stakeholders with influence and power</td>
<td>Programme Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>Project Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>Programme Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>End Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed (who needs to know) - Users and other internal / external stakeholders</td>
<td>Project Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>Programme Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>Programme Management Team / Change Manager</td>
<td>End Users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This observation also led to the projects governance structure of this organisation’s project environments been seen as a driving factor on how projects benefits are managed.
and how individuals act and behave in the organisation. In Crawford and Cooke-Davis (2009) view of project governance, the driving purposes are to define, regulate roles, accountabilities, decision making and boundary management to achieve coordinated project planning and control function. The table above emphasise the importance of addressing individual roles and responsibilities in order to address any conflicts or misinterpretations.

**Phase 2: Personal Scripts**

According to Mangham 1978, this occurs when a performance is constructed to achieve some personal goal. In this phase, the personal script would generally exist solely in the mind of the initiator (in this case the author) and the actors (project team) may not share an understanding of what is supposed to happen. Several project managers, project engineers and the supporting functions such as, commercial managers and procurement managers were informally engaged at different times / intervals without prior warning or preparation. The engagement was to obtain data on their understanding of benefit management, the impact of governance structure and how they manage and ensure benefits are realised on their projects. This was carried out by unstructured interview over a period of time with table 1 revealing some of the open-ended questions asked from various actors categorised under their job titles. It should also be noted that the participants below are both from supplier / client environment.

From the questions asked, Mangham's argument on the criticality of improvisation to achieve any performance came into play. According to Mangham, it is the performer's task to bring text to realisation and in this situation; the open-ended questions represent the text. Performance in this instance is the appearance and general demeanour of the various project team members and their maintenance of impressions in answering the various questions.

**Phase 3 Strategic Scripts**

Mangham (1978) further reported that strategic script arises where the actor is striving to instil certain behaviours from those with whom they are interacting. In this phase, during observation, similar behaviour was noticed within a project team environment. These are particularly manipulative in that the project team are only too well aware of what they are trying to achieve i.e. the project deliverables. The project manager consciously attempts to influence the response of the rest of the project team by planning and then invoking a strategic script of how the deliverables are met within the specified timescale and cost with limited attention to the project benefits.
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FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Summary of the unstructured interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants involved</th>
<th>Job Titles</th>
<th>Supplier or Client environment</th>
<th>Questions asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Project Sponsors</td>
<td>Client environment only</td>
<td>What do you think your role is with management and realisation of project benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Programme Manager</td>
<td>4 from client environment</td>
<td>How do you ensure effective and efficient management of various project benefits?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Project managers</td>
<td>14 from client environments</td>
<td>How do you manage benefit pre- and post-contract award? How do you ensure benefits are realised post completion of your project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 from supplier environments</td>
<td>Do you think the governance structure have any impact on the way benefit are managed and realised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Project Engineers</td>
<td>12 from client environment</td>
<td>What is your involvement with management and realisation of benefit and how do you ensure these are achieved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Commercial Manager</td>
<td>6 from client environment</td>
<td>How do you ensure and monitor efficient management and realisation of project benefit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Procurement Manager</td>
<td>4 from client environment</td>
<td>How often do you realise benefit during project’s procurement stage and how do you manage this process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of participants involved</th>
<th>Job Titles</th>
<th>Supplier or Client environment</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Project Sponsors</td>
<td>Client environment only</td>
<td>We define benefits properly and form the scope of projects at pre-start before passing the information to the project delivery team as part of the project brief. We get regular update from the project team and then review whether benefit has been realised at the end of the project with the end users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Programme Manager</td>
<td>4 from client environment</td>
<td>As the executers of these projects, there is not enough time and attention to actually maximise or realise benefits pre-contract and during the execution work therefore most of the benefits are not realised or measured until post projects completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Project managers</td>
<td>14 from client environments</td>
<td>There is currently no process in place for this. The business justification is detailed in the project brief. The deliverable checklist is reviewed and monitored throughout the project cycle to ensure delivery. In most cases however, we constantly respond to the overwhelming amount of changes during the project lifecycle and most often lose sight of expected benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 from supplier environments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Project Engineers</td>
<td>12 from client environment</td>
<td>75% of projects delivered within this industry are due to safety and compliance issues. Therefore, there is more focus on these aspects and any non-engineering matters are to be dealt with by Project Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Commercial Manager</td>
<td>6 from client environment</td>
<td>The focus is more on the cost benefit and ensuring that project does not exceed allocated budget. Cost change management are carried out by the project management with input from all supporting functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Procurement Manager</td>
<td>4 from client environment</td>
<td>Project benefits are rarely realised during procurement phase as in most cases, there is always pressure from the project team to use the fastest procurement option / route which the predefined framework is therefore not giving any room for possible benefit from open tender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 from supplier environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the results, majority of the participants do not share same understanding of their roles and involvement in the management and realisation of benefits. Most of the responses revealed that though benefit can be realised pre-contract award and during the life cycle of the project however, the organisation structure does not allow for this to happen. Majority of the time, the organisation is more reactive / adaptive to evolving issues and ongoing maintenance of the Railway industry than using a proactive approach to start up and manage project. Quick approaches to procuring suppliers are used with an already established framework and not allowing the opportunity for competitive tender and realising benefit pre-contract award.

It was also evident that a lot of the project benefits are not realised until after the completion of the project therefore the project team would have moved on to other projects long after the benefits are realised. This means that output has been passed on to the users and maintenance team. The maintenance team / users i.e. the audience though involved to some extent during the lifecycle of the project, but their involvement is usually limited and, in most cases, limited knowledge of the outlined performance objectives and measurement for the project. Therefore, the business case set at the beginning of the project no longer become a live document that project team review on a regular basis to ensure validity of the project but a set of documents that gets reviewed at the beginning of the project and post project closure by the sponsor.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The single case study conducted using the dramaturgical approach revealed some findings that there is notable lack of practices for implementation of benefit management at project level in this industry. Therefore, a less rigid governance structure is required to be in place in order to actuate this concept for effective management of benefits. It is evident from the study that changing the behaviours and culture of project team towards benefits realisation approach and gradually shifting their focus to simple application of benefit realisation strategy pre-contract award - to execution phase - to post completion is strategically important and crucial to any project delivery.

This study could be criticised that there is potential lack of objectivity from the author as participant observation and that results were generated from a single industry. However, this study lends itself to practical real-life ethnography study which is an ongoing development for the overall PhD study.

**REFERENCES**


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