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Resource Planning and Leveling (RP&L): A Look at Its Use by Construction Firms in Kenya

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Abstract:

Effective resource management is crucial to the success of building projects. Both resource planning and leveling are essential parts of resource management that should be completely included and practiced on every site. Project expenditures, timeline overruns, and quality decline due to insufficient resource management via lack of planning and leveling. This claim is supported by the work of Tarek (2010), who argues that adequate resource planning and leveling aids in resolving resource conflicts, which present a number of difficulties for the organization, including the following: delays in completing certain tasks, difficulties in assigning a different resource to a certain task, inability to alter task dependencies, addition or removal of certain tasks, and overall time and cost overruns of projects. He goes on to state that the goal of resource leveling is to maximize project efficiency by making the most of available resources. Although many writers have written on the need of effective resource management, the author of this piece believes that resource planning and leveling within the Kenyan construction sector is under-explored. This is because of many factors that call for more investigation. Many authors, including Abeyasinghe et al. (2001), Ballard (2000), and Bandelloni et al. (1994), have delved into many facets of resource leveling and planning. However, it should be noted that all of these scholars discuss the issue in industrialized nations. The industrial sector is the inspiration for some of the available literature on the subject. This necessitates research into the Kenyan construction sector to determine the causes of widespread use of resource allocation and equalization strategies. This study set out to investigate what role resource planning and leveling (RP&L) plays in the Kenyan construction sector and what variables influence contractor participation. Case studies with accompanying questionnaires were the primary method of data collection for this study. Nairobi served as the study location, and NCA Levels 1-3 Contractors were the subjects of interest. The 106 participants were selected via a random-sampling process. The final tally for the percentage of people who responded was 76%. Descriptive statistics, a relative significance index, and a spearman's correlation were used to assess the data. Despite widespread use of RP&L in Kenya's largely unstructured construction industry, the study found that: construction projects' progress is still impacted by delayed materials, a lack of labor, and a lack of equipment at the points of need; RP&L is more common in older contracting firms and where there is support from top management. Manuscript, Revised Version Dated February 16, 2017 as received.

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Department of Construction Management, School of Architecture and Building Sciences, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Juja, Kenya, Dr. Stephen Diang'a. management; and finally a high degree of RP is associated with reduced negative impact of construction project progress

Keywords: Resource Planning, Resource Leveling, Construction Project Performance.

INTRODUCTION

The term "construction industry" refers to the broad sector of the economy that employs people at every stage of the process from planning and design through constructing, maintaining, and tearing down structures in the built environment (Chitkara, 1998). The building sector is crucial in emerging economies like Kenya, says K'Akumu (2007). This is as a result of the positive effects it has on the national economy as a whole, including the Gross Domestic Product (GDP),

gross fixed capital creation, inter-sector links, and job opportunities it provides for the general people (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, 1984).

However, successful expansion of the construction business depends on the timely and well completed building projects.

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Good preparation greater effectiveness. Reddy and Nagaraju (2015) state that materials are crucial to the success of any building project. Unskilled workers, skilled workers, management, administrative support, technical support, tools, equipment, construction materials, and financial support are all examples of resources that may be needed throughout a project's duration. It is largely dependent on how well these resources are handled that the building sector performs (Abeyasinghe, Greenwood, & Johansen, 2001).

Planning for a building project is done with the assumption that the contractor will have constant access to all necessary materials and labor (Aslani, et al 2009). Resource planning refers to the practice of allocating resources to meet the needs of different project activities. This is carried out in a manner that causes little disruption to the projected end date of the project (Dubey, 2015).

In situations when there are adequate or even plentiful supplies of a given resource, yet it would be beneficial to smooth out the pattern of that resource's use, the resource leveling issue occurs. These variations are very undesired since they often cause contractors financial, utilization, and labor challenges (Schultz, Slevin, & Pinto, 1987). The goal of scheduling is to achieve relatively consistent resource demand, or to achieve acceptable non-uniform resource levels in resource leveling. The goal of the scheduling technique known as "Resource Leveling" is to minimize the impact of cyclical increases and decreases in resource demand. Using this method,

the resources so that we may distribute them as evenly as possible. Cost and schedule overruns are the direct outcome of inefficient resource management. Mendoza (1995) concurs, noting that most projects experience unnecessary delays due to insufficient resource planning and management. Low quality work is often associated with mismanaged resources. Planning and allocating resources fairly are the two most crucial parts of any resource management strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project planning

Project planning has been argued by many to be the cornerstone of any project implementation. Project management requires a proper strategy which is usually formulated at the planning stage. It gives a road map of how the project will be implemented and the resources which shall be employed in the process of executing the project. Planning involves defining project goals, specifying tasks and formulating how the objectives shall be met (Badawiyeh, 2010).

Project Constraints in Project Planning

(a) Labour Constraints

Human resources are typically classified by the skills they bring to the project: carpenter, steel fixer, welder, painter, operator, inspector and engineer among others (Cunningham, 2013). Sometimes, the available labour lacks the skill and expertise to effectively execute their mandates in the project. It is for this reason that once the project team or contractor get effective workforce, they find it very difficult to release the

usually leads to em. They feel that they may get jobs elsewhere and lose them. They will then tend to hold on to them even when there is no work for them at the moment.

(b) Materials Constraints

Most of the material resources required for construction activities are in non-renewable and not easily replenished. Some are not available locally and have to be imported from overseas. Periodic shortages are also bound to occur. Poor performance of projects has been blamed on material unavailability and shortages within the construction industry (Lau & Kong, 2006).

(c) Equipment Constraints

Equipment is usually presented by type, size, and quantity and is often overlooked as a constraint. The most common mistake is the assumption that the resource pool is satisfactory for the entire project. High crashing or delay costs can be avoided by recognizing all equipment constraints before the start of the project (Lau & Kong, 2006).

Resource Planning & Leveling in Construction Projects

The four main essential resources required in any construction project include; materials, equipment, people and time. For the project to accomplish the project plan and schedule, it is important to make sure that the necessary materials, personnel, equipment and time are available in desired quantities at the time they are scheduled for in the project plan and schedule.

Despite resource planning phase being very important in construction projects, many projects suffer avoidable delays from inadequate resource planning and control (Mendoza, 1995). Resource planning aims to identify resource quantities for different activities and schedule these resources over the project duration.

The aim of undertaking resource planning is to identify the types of labor required for the project; roles and key responsibilities for each labor type; number of people required to undertake each role; quantities and types of equipment required; items of equipment needed and their purposes and total amount of materials required (Kass, 2012; Kumari & Vikranth, 2012; Stukhart, 1995; Badawiyeh, 2010).

Resource Planning and Leveling can either be carried out in the head office or site office depending on where the person executing the exercise is based. It can either be carried out in a formally written or informal unwritten format. A range of personnel working under the contractor can be utilized to carry out the exercise.

Labour Resource Planning & Leveling

The most important resource to a project is its people; the project team. According to Mendoza (1995), human resources for construction projects can be grouped into three categories; office personnel, construction personnel (field supervision and labor) and construction subcontractors.

The task of personnel recruitment for construction project relies with the project manager who may delegate the responsibility to the construction manager or other project team members. It is thus the responsibility of the recruiting officer to acquire the personnel according to the needs of the project. It is also their responsibility to release the personnel from the project if they are no longer needed by the project.

Material Resource Planning & Leveling

The materials plan is used to guide the project manager in planning for material resources. Depending on site constraints, different approaches could be used to plan for the materials schedule. Concepts like Just-In-Time (JIT) have been used for confined sites. Though this concept is widely considered as the best for procuring materials, it can only be used for materials whose future availability is certain. While different sites adopt different strategies for materials planning and scheduling, they should all ensure that materials are present on site at the time the project schedule dictates and they should not be seen to delay the project (Ala-Risku & Kärkkäinen, 2006).

Equipment Resource Planning & Leveling

This involves identification of all the equipment that will be required to accomplish the project, e.g.: office equipment (PCs, photocopiers, mobile phones etc.), telecom communication equipment (cabling, switches etc.) and machinery (heavy and light machinery) (Charoengam, 2003). Sequencing of construction activities should be in such a way that equipment from one activity can be shifted to the other on its completion. This aims to reduce the total requirement of equipment at any given time. It also seeks to achieve effective utilization of equipment on the project.

I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the argument raised by Bryman, (2004), Bryman & Bell, (2007), Creswell, (2009), and Spector, (1981), this study can be classified as a survey research design, because quantitative data was collected on several variables during the same time. Survey research comprises a cross-sectional design in relation to which data are collected predominantly by questionnaire or by structured interview and at a single point in time with the aim of collecting a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with the variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of relationship or association (Bryman, 2008). Broadhurst, Holt, & Doherty, (2012) indicate that methods used to collect data in a survey research include questionnaire, interview (structured or loosely structured), observation, analysis of documents and unobtrusive methods. The researcher used questionnaires to seek the opinions and actual information from the target population. The research site for the proposed study was Nairobi County. This formed the basis for establishing the

target population. The research was confined to building contractors registered under categories NCA1 to NCA3 in this geographical scope.

The target population comprised of 145 contractors drawn from NCA1 to NCA3 categories. A suitable sample size was determined using the following formula extracted from Ankr ah (2007) and originally postulated by Czaja & Blair (1996). The same formula has also been adopted by Mugenda & Mugenda, (1999).

$$N = \frac{z^2 \cdot p(1-p)}{c^2}$$
 Where: N = sample size; z = standardized variable (1.96 which corresponds to 95% confidence level); p = percentage picking a choice, expressed as a decimal (50% or 0.5 was used.); 1 - p = proportion of the target population not having the particular characteristics; c = confidence interval, expressed as a decimal (degree of accuracy required, usually set at 0.05).

Random sampling was used to select the 145 respondents in this study. Data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS v.21).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents' Response Rates

Out of a total of 106 questionnaires distributed to respondents, 81 were returned. This was equivalent to a response rate of 76%.

Demographic Profiles of Respondents and their Firms

Role of the Respondent in the Firm

Table 4.1 below indicates that the highest percentage (24.7%) of respondents were Site Agents while the lowest were Architects with a representation of 1.2%. These results depict the norm in the Kenyan construction industry; that the contractor is mainly in the office (hence a frequency of 23.5%) and mostly represented by a Site Agent (hence a frequency of 24.7%) in most construction sites. While almost all construction sites have foremen in charge of different trades or even a general foreman in charge of all other foremen, a low frequency was due to the desire to mostly engage academically competent persons to respond to the questionnaire. The role of an Architect had the lowest frequency possibly due to the fact that majority of contractors in Kenya rely on design works since the most prevalent procurement system in the country is the traditional design-bid-build where the contractor is engaged when all the design work has been accomplished.

firms regarding resource planning and leveling.

The practice of RP & L among contractors

A number of questions were included in the questionnaire to explore the practice of resource planning and leveling among contractors. These included: the extent to which they carry out resource planning and leveling; the kind of resource planning and leveling carried out by the contractors; extent of support by top management in executing resource planning and leveling; the person bestowed with the responsibility of carrying out resource planning, educational background of such person and their academic qualification; aims of undertaking resource planning and leveling; effect of delayed materials, lack of labour and equipment on project progress.

Extent of Equipment Planning

When respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they carry out Equipment Resource Planning, their responses produced a mean of 3.67 as indicated in table 4.4. It is

clear from this that majority of contractors in the country practice Resource Planning in the Equipment category. The cost of equipment in most building projects ranges between 20-

30% of the total project cost. Kumari & Vikranth, (2012) point out that the equipment cost has to be controlled properly by allocating various items of equipment efficiently in different phases of the project. Kass (2012) asserts that equipment planning is necessitated by the need to establish the size and various types of equipment needed either on rent or outright purchase.

Extent of Labour Planning

Contractors were asked to give the extent to which they carried out Labour Resource Planning, the results produced a mean of 3.94 as indicated in table 4.4. It is clear from this that majority of contractors in the country also practice Labour Resource Planning. Labour planning helps the organization maintain the right number of employees at the right time with the capability to execute tasks which are aimed at ensuring success of the project (Thomas *et al*, 2004).

Extent of Material Planning

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they carry out Material Resource Planning. These responses produced a mean of 4.23 as indicated in table 4.4. It is clear from this that majority of contractors in the country practice Material Resource Planning. The cost of materials in most building projects ranges between 60-70% of the total project cost. A study by Stukhart (1995) argues that the cost of installed materials is more than 50% of the total project cost. According to Kumari & Vikranth, (2012), material planning is necessary to fulfil the requirements of the project at different phases of the project while reducing wastage at the same time.

Comparison between Equipment, Labour and Material Planning

As seen in Table 4.4, the means for the extent of resource planning by contractors in the categories of Equipment/Plant, Labour and Materials were 3.67, 3.94 and 4.23 respectively. This means that highest level of resource planning by contractors is in the category of material resources. However, means of 3.67, 3.94 and 4.23 indicate that contractors in the Kenyan construction industry carry out extensive resource planning in all major categories of resources.

Source: (Author, 2016)

The results, as per table 4.8 indicated that the most significant factor considered when carrying out Resource Planning and Leveling was "Identify the total amount of materials needed" with a RII of 0.8988. Other factors in descending order were: "Identify the types and quantities of equipment needed" (RII=0.8765); "Identify the number of people required to fill each role" (RII=0.8765); "Identify the roles and key responsibilities for each labour type" (RII=0.8625) and lastly "Identify the Items of equipment to be used and their purposes" (RII=0.8716)

Since the questionnaire gave the option of respondent suggesting other aims which they considered to be relevant, a number of factors were obtained from the study. These were: identify time needed to complete a specific task; determine rate of labour and equipment in terms of time; to identify which trade of labourers would be belaid off as the amount of work decreased; identify and prioritize procurement of resources time wise; to assist in planning accordingly; to ensure the project has the right skills and materials at the right time

me; identifying the cost of the project; identifying the time needed and timely planning.

Effects of resource unavailability on project progress

Respondents were asked to indicate (on a Likert scale) how often the progress in their projects was affected by delayed supply of materials, lack of labour on sites and lack of equipment on sites.

Although this research has already established that contractors pay more attention to material resource planning compared to labour resource planning and equipment resource planning, the table 4.9 below indicates that projects carried out by respondents' firms were more likely (3.11) to be affected by delayed material compared to lack of labour (2.68) and lack of equipment (2.68). This means that more needs to be done with regard to material resource planning

if building projects are to proceed more smoothly. However it could also be argued that material resources are an extensive area which involves many external project participants in the name of suppliers. This means that even though proper plans may be put in place to ensure materials are on site every time they're needed, it is hard to control parties (suppliers) who are not on site and whose activities are also affected by other parties (manufacturers).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The following conclusions were made from this study:

There is a high level of usage of Resource Planning and Leveling in the Kenyan construction industry. However much of this is carried out in a non-structured manner.

Since the emergence of project management profession, project managers continue to be relied upon by contractor to handle resource management in construction projects.

The reasons established for carrying out Resource Planning and Leveling from contractors were all anchored to the three main categories of resources namely; material, labour and equipment.

Despite contractors carrying out Resource Planning, construction projects' progress continue to be affected by delayed materials, lack of labour and lack of equipment at the point of need.

Older contractors perform better in Resource Planning and Leveling compared to younger firms.

Resource Planning and Leveling is practised more in contracting firms where there is support from top management.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made

Personnel engaged in Resource Planning and Leveling in contracting firms should not just be academically qualified but should also possess adequate experience in the area of resource management.

All levels of employees should be integrated in the resource planning and leveling exercise. Labourer employed in construction sites should also be properly trained on the benefits of resource planning and leveling. This will help improve their morale.

Contractors should preferably employ professionals who have a background in the construction industry in their sites.

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