



The impact of a call centre on communication in a programme and its projects

Taryn Jane Bond-Barnard ^{a,*}, Herman Steyn ^a, Inger Fabris-Rotelli ^b

^a Graduate School of Technology Management, University of Pretoria, South Africa

^b Department of Statistics, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Received 6 September 2011; received in revised form 12 December 2012; accepted 18 December 2012

Abstract

Call centres are increasingly being utilised in public sector programmes to facilitate and manage communication between numerous stakeholders. Yet, the impact of call centres on projects has not been investigated. This paper reports on a survey with 92 respondents that assessed the impact of a call centre for a repair and maintenance programme. An empirically verified model is presented to illustrate the relationship between call centre communication and project performance. A balance of frequent informal and formal communication is shown to reduce mistrust and conflict of interest resulting from each party trying to maximise his respective economic position in the principal–agency relationship. The data provides evidence that a call centre improves the communication, collaboration and trust in project principal–agency relationships which, in turn, is perceived to contribute to project performance.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. APM and IPMA. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Communication; Project communication management; Call centres; Principal–agency theory; Project performance

1. Introduction

It is clear that programme management has the potential to make a significant contribution to integrated service delivery by the South African government; programmes may act as an ideal vehicle through which various government departments could coordinate their efforts (de Coning and Günther, 2009). However de Coning and Günther (2009) state that a number of organisational, human resources, financial and system challenges exist for officials from different departments to act on the same programme teams across organisational boundaries. These challenges can be narrowed down to a need for effective project communication across organisational boundaries and a greater focus on stakeholder satisfaction.

Literature confirms that communication is an essential prerequisite to successful project-based management (Dainty et al., 2006). However Lehmann (2009) and Dainty et al. (2006) agree that communication is paid scant attention in project

management even though there was an increased interest in project communication and information management research from 1960 to 1999 (Crawford et al., 2005; Kloppenborg and Opfer, 2002). The lack of communication literature in project management has resulted in communication being cited as a primary cause of project failures on numerous occasions (Dainty et al., 2006; OGC in Akintoye and Shehu, 2010; Gillpatrick cited in Pinto and Pinto, 1990; Souder, 1981).

It has already been established in literature that frequent communication improves stakeholder satisfaction (Shao and Müller, 2011) and project member collaboration and trust (Müller, 2003). Communication has also been identified as one of the most important contributors to project success. Therefore it is essential that communication in the project management body of knowledge be expanded to include ‘how’ to communicate effectively in projects and programmes rather than just stating ‘why’ communication is important.

A project usually involves a number of stakeholders including; the project owner/client, project manager, contractor and beneficiaries. The project manager acts on behalf of the client and manages the project delivery on a day-to-day basis (Turner and Müller, 2004). Furthermore, the contractor is often instructed

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +27 836312274; fax: +27 867684453.
E-mail address: tarynjanebond@gmail.com (T.J. Bond-Barnard).

to act on behalf of the project manager and carry out the project work.

As in other delegated tasks, the client and project manager are in a principal–agency relationship (Bergen et al., 1992; Jensen, 2000). Similarly the project manager and any sub-contractor are also in a principal–agency relationship. If the aim of both parties is to maximise their respective economic positions, then it is possible that the agent will not always act in the best interests of the principal. Thus principal–agency theory explains the potential for a conflict of interest to arise between the principal and the agent because, as Jensen (2000) states, people will not act in the best interest of others (their principals) to the exclusion of their own preferences.

However, Turner and Müller (2004) state that communication between principal and agent reduces the mistrust and conflict of interest between them and thus improve project performance. Furthermore, it has been established that the communication needs of project principals and agents are best met by a mixture of formal and informal communication, and of written and verbal communication (Turner and Müller, 2004).

Literature advises project managers to be aware that project stakeholders rely on several communication channels, which includes not only face-to-face and written media, but also telephonic/verbal communication (Müller, 2003). Project managers on the other hand have a strong preference for verbal communication over other forms (Mintzberg et al., 1976). These communication type preferences and the fact that the project or programme manager is at the centre of the project delivery process is a real communication management challenge. He or she must maintain a range of complex communication channels with different types of organisations (Dainty et al., 2006); while still facilitating and managing frequent communication with the project members and stakeholders, to ensure project success.

As a result of principal–agency theory it is common for project members to manipulate information in their favour if unexpected problems occur (Loosemore, 2000). The manipulation of information in closed communication systems erodes the trust which is necessary for effective teamwork (Dainty et al., 2006).

Based on the numerous communication channels present in a project and the possibility of manipulation of information in project principal–agency relationships; it stands to reason that the utilisation of a programme call centre can mitigate these issues. The programme call centre which was investigated for the purposes of this paper acts as an objective third party communication hub responsible for facilitating and managing the communication of project issues to all stakeholders on behalf of the project manager. This paper addresses the following questions:

1. Does a programme call centre improve the frequency of communication and collaboration in the principal–agent relationships present in a project?
2. Does the project communication provided by the call centre reduce project ‘surprises/issues’ and subsequently improve project team trust?
3. Does a programme call centre improve the management of project communication and the perceived performance of the project?

Furthermore, some of Turner and Müller’s (2004) findings regarding the frequency, type and effect of communication on the level of trust in principal–agency relationships are tested in this paper. This was done by incorporating said findings into a proposed model of call centre facilitated communication and project performance. The model therefore illustrates the role that a project call centre can play in improving communication, collaboration and trust in a project which is perceived to contribute to improved project and programme performance. This model is then tested by means of a survey to determine the impact of a call centre on communication in a programme and its projects.

1.1. The national repair and maintenance programme

Akintoye and Shehu (2010) define programme management as an integrated, structured-framework to co-ordinate, align, and allocate resources, as well as plan, execute and manage a portfolio of construction projects simultaneously to achieve optimum benefits that would not have been realised had the projects been managed separately. In line with this definition, the South African Department of Public Works (DPW) repair and maintenance programme aims to alleviate the repair and maintenance backlog at approximately 600 national government facilities. Communication regarding reactive maintenance (or ‘breakdowns’) at these facilities which is facilitated, monitored and managed by a central call centre, is the focus of this paper.

The DPW is tasked with promoting commercial attitudes within the public sector regarding the efficiency of service delivery programmes and facilitating the service delivery of other national government departments through the provision and management of public sector infrastructure. DPW implemented the programme in 2000, with the aim of repairing public sector infrastructure to a functional condition and maintaining such infrastructure so that it could be used by the other departments for its intended purpose (DPW, 2004). It was decided that a call centre would facilitate and manage the communication, documentation and performance reporting of all reactive breakdown repair and maintenance work for all projects involved, to improve the service delivery to user department representatives. The call centre communicates with the various project teams on a regular basis. The project team referred to in this study consists of:

1. The client, DPW, and the user department representatives at the facility;
2. The project manager who oversees several projects, usually at different facilities;
3. The consulting engineer (consultant) who manages the project on a day-to-day basis and instructs the contractor;
4. The contractor responsible for performing maintenance and attending to breakdown repairs at the facility.

The call centre process commences when the client at the facility phones a specific number to log a breakdown, which could be anything from interrupted water supply at a prison to damage of a section of fencing at a border post. The call centre logs the details

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/275925>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/275925>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)