Behaviors of Top Management for Successful HRD Projects: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This paper aims to focus on refining the multidimensionality of the idea of top management support for HRD projects. On the bases of research gap and future direction, a research question was articulated: "What supportive behavioral types are associated with top management support for successful projects?". The study was exploratory and qualitative in nature and the design was cross-sectional. Twenty in-depth interviews were done with project managers and project coordinators serving in Human Resource Development Projects of Higher Education Commission, Islamabad Pakistan. The results from current study extended literature relevant to dimensions of top management support in HRD projects. The results suggest that providing financial, technical and resources like HR are key dimensions regarding top management support, play significant part in success of projects of HRD. However, the findings of study identified various profiles of support and developed a framework of behavioral types. The developed framework is suggested to use in planning, executing and evaluating support from top management in HRD projects.

Keywords: HRD Projects, Higher Education Commission, Top Management Support

1. Introduction

Failure rate of projects is frequently studied in the field of project management; consequently, researchers are trying to improve theories for enlightening project success. Research recognized numerous perilous factors of project success, where it is considered that top management support is one of the utmost acute success elements in various industries. Top management support affects effective implementation of projects in organizations is effected by top management support (Ziemba and Obła̧k 2013). As Zwikael (2008) stated that of top management support gives substantial effect on project success, whereas the fundamental cause of project failure is lack of top management support. Staehr (2010) acknowledged that although top management support is a critical success factor for projects but inadequate research is done on top management support's dimensions. It is not known that what is meant by top management support practically and kinds of patterns of behaviors associated are to be explored. Likewise, top management support occasionally taken as particular construct in connection with the project success. Ragu et al., (2004) described, top management support viewed as single construct, and however, it cannot explain the top management support construct in a multidimensional way.

A considerable research on appropriateness of various support types given by the top management is required to be done (Boonstra 2013). This will assist project leaders to make the most of the appreciative about the top management support, influence on success of the project (Chollet, 2012). Project success cannot be achieved without a tremendous support from the top management (Young and Poon (2013)

Boonstra (2013) focuses on classification and recognition of possible top management supportive behaviors. The limitations of the exploratory study of Boonstra (2013) directed for future research based on following questions:

- To what level the supportive behaviors of top management are inter-linked or interchangeable?
- How organizational and technical contexts explain, form, or hinder various behaviors of top management support?
- What more fine-grained categorizations possible supportive actions of top management?

The present study aims the objective to link gaps in research. This article focuses on refining the top management support in purview of its multidimensional context along with concept of HRD projects. It aims to identify further probable patterns and dimensions of top management support in addition to the study conducted by Boonstra (2013). On the bases of research gap and future direction main research question is articulated: "What supportive behavioral types are associated with top management support for successful HRD projects"? The impact of the current study to prevailing understanding deceits in its developing

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concepts of top management support as a single construct but in multi-dimensional way. That is possible only because of this conceptualization. This research develops a framework clarifying the dimensions of support given by top management. However, the aim of this paper is to uplift understanding into various patterns and subtleties of behaviors available in literature generally and specifically presented by Boonstra (2013). Moreover, this research addresses construct from a challenging viewpoint by expanding a structure of top management support's dimension that is perceived providing top managers with a framework that could be useful for establishing sufficient rules in terms of establishment of top management support during long life of a project.

"Top management term is referred as the highest management level of the organization that includes the CEO and immediate subordinates responsible for corporate policy" (Green, 1995). As found in future research recommendations by Boonstra (2013), this study specifically concentrate on human resource development projects. These projects include various stakeholder, involve large funds, they are time bound ranging from 2 to 5 years, and organizationally or technically complex. The selected projects are being governed by the Government of Pakistan, making significant investments towards developing educational institutional facilities, introducing new disciplines in cutting-edge and market-based technologies, developing human resource including faculty, improving research facilities and student services, creating linkages with local and foreign universities and promoting university-industry interaction. The vision of Government of Pakistan is being translated by the Higher Education Commission into projects and programmes and making it possible through the development, funding and implementation of projects in these key areas. Higher Education Commission has launched 167 projects under Public Sector Development Programmes, 138 and 125 projects in 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively (HEC, 2016). The overall framework of development project portfolio of 2013-14 had been categorized in four components like Human Resource Development (HRD), Infrastructure Development, Equipment for R&D and other allied facilities. In the reported year, 41 projects of HRD, 38 relevant to equipment, 39 project of Civil works and 8 projects in general category were governed by HEC.

HRD projects were initiated to gain knowledge-based economy in the country where universities are encouraged to strengthen their PhD faculty. Various foreign and local scholarship schemes were planned and embedded in development projects. Local and overseas scholarships of 7.5 billion are offered in year 2013-14 under 41 projects. The study collects data by interviewing project coordinators and project managers of HRD projects of HEC. This article is ordered that current theory relevant to the concept of top management support be presented. Following this, the research design is discussed, and data analysis. Further, in the section of discussion, we tried to relate top management support's framework to prevailing theory also reflect applied repercussions and probable guidelines for future research.

2.   Literature Review

There is a crucial role of Top managers in creating and giving the circumstances required for the success of the project that is also named "meta-structuring" or "technology-use-mediation" (Staehr, 2010, Orlikowski, 1995). Commonly, the role of the top management is seen in definition of a project and structuring a project team as well. Moreover, the managers are in a situation that they can arrange the administrative context of information system project and expedite availability of the resources. Consequently, the change management theory and project management develop a strong example for knowing significance of top management support (McComb et al., 2008). For instance, Green (1995) examined top management support in more than two hundred projects in the field of research and development. The findings of Green (1995) declared that the projects having such support were unexpected to be finished. Top management support multidimensional framework was presented by Boonstra (2013) by conducting an empirical study, which is as follows:

2.1   Provide Resources

The top management's support is an important factor for project managers while attaining goals of project. In functional structure of organizations, it is evident that top management expedites and provides resources for projects (Dwivedi, 2013) .

2.2   Structural arrangements

The top management provides and imposes processes, measures and arrangements for achievement of goals of project, system adaptation, refining organizational effectiveness, and strengthening the support for stakeholders (Boonstra, 2013).

2.3   Communication

Communication is a vital factor for motivating team, supporting project success, discussing organizational implications and changes, collaborating with numerous stakeholders (Boonstra, 2013).

2.4   Expertise

There are few innovative social skills like clarifying role theory, conflict theory and behavior identification and communicative skills are considered as greater support from the top management (Ehsani, 2013).

2.5   Power

The Top management uses power in order to support project, providing protection to team members of the project, supporting changes in system while defining needs of the stakeholders (Boonstra, 2013).

2.6   Project Success

The life of project is temporary and have limited resources, it requires assessment calculate the support from the top management and influence over the accomplishment of the project. In most cases less top management support fails projects (Young and Jordan, 2008). Although research has proved significance of tope management support, it is required to examine the multidimensional top management support's construct and its influence on the success of project which was not investigated by Boonstra (2013). Following literature has evidence of project success measures but not in relevance to the top management support. There are five factors of project success are discussed in literature. These five factors of project success are a). Direct business and organization success (Turner et al. 2009) b). Impact on customers (Freeman and Beale 1992; Turner and Müller 2006; Kerzner 2009) c). Project efficiency (De Wit 1988; Pinto and Rouhiainen 2002; Cleland and Ireland 2002; Turner and Müller 2006) d). Impact on the team (Shenhar et al. 2001) e). Future preparation (Shenhar et al. 2001, 2002; Shenhar and Dvir 2007). The literature presented in this article about project success and top management support deduced those factors by changing into category of supportive activities which probably lead to improved project results. As per gaps highlighted in the previous research there is need to expand framework of multidimensionality of top management support. The suggested framework is expected to be valuable for project managers and consultants in developing, implementing, and appraising support-oriented behaviors.

3.   Methodology

The current research identifies one theoretical approach that is found to be helpful for addressing research gaps, guiding methodological approach and for further top management support's literature in general. Following Table connects Planned behaviour theory with the current research gaps and summarizes the implications for Top Management Support.

Table 1: Research Gap and Implications for Research

Planned Behavior Theory	
(Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)	
Research Gap	**Implications for Research in TMS & PS**
Addressing the gap - To what degree supportive behaviors of top management are inter-connected. - How technological and institutional contexts clarify, form, or impede the numerous top management support behaviors. - What more fine-grained categorizations possible supportive actions of top management	The planned behaviour theory argues that - people tend to behave rationally and to systematically make use of information that is available to them when deciding to act or not to act, - people's actions are guided by conscious motives and not by unconscious motives, and - people consider the implications of their actions before they decide to act or not to act The theory allows for identification of various supportive behaviour of top management which are rational, guided by conscious motives or implication based.

3.1 Research Design

a. Qualitative Research Design

This study uses a cross-sectional design. An exploratory study drawing on a qualitative interpretivist approach was considered appropriate to achieve the research aim of gaining a deeper understanding of multidimensionality of top management support for success of projects in general and its practical implication through personal interviews.

b. Data Sample and Data Collection

Subsequently the focus is on top management, therefore authors selected Higher Education Commission where compound levels of management with a top management who are liable for corporate level policy and approach. The study sampled minimum two and maximum three project managers or project coordinators as participants from each of the eight HRD projects of HEC for interview. In total 20 respondents participated in the interviews. The job title of the respondents are project managers and project coordinators; 9 females and 11 males. The sample was selected purposefully to ensure representation from each project. Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' demographics.

Project Title	No. of Participants	Participant's Designation		Gender	
		Project Managers	Project Coordinators	Male	Female
Faculty development of UESTP's and UET's	2	2	0	2	0
Pak-US Knowledge Corridor	3	2	1	2	1
Strengthening of Universities of Backward Area	2	1	1	1	1
Establishment of Sub-Campuses of Public Sector Universities at District Level	3	2	1	1	2
Academic and International Coordination	2	2	0	1	1
Pak-USAID Merit and Need Based Scholarship Program	2	1	1	2	0
Fulbright Scholarship Support Program HEC – USAID	3	2	1	1	2
Indigenous Ph.D. Fellowship Program	3	2	1	1	2
8 Projects	**20 Participants**	**14**	**6**	**11**	**9**

c. Procedure

Contact details and email addresses of the project managers were collected from the official website of HEC. Invitations to participate in the interviews were forwarded to their email addresses and personal sitting sessions were scheduled via telephonic appointment. Involvement in study was on volunteer basis and privacy was guaranteed. The interviews, which went around 60 to 90 minutes, comprised of questions with open ended nature with more penetrating to elucidate or succeed answers. Contributors' answers were taped and validated prior finishing the meetings. Eighteen semi-structured interviews done in person meetings and sessions; while 02 interviews were done online because non-availability of project members as they were on long leave. The online participants specified they did not feel any issue in comprehending the items of the interviews.

3.2 Data Coding and Analysis

The taped interviews were converted into the transcribed form. The interviews incorporated in NVivo for storing, managing and analyzing the data. The coding of transcribed text was done by three-stage procedure; it includes open, axial and selective coding (Neuman, 2003). In the first stage open coding began with a detailed evaluation of the transcription. During this procedure, patterns were identified, the full data was prepared into theoretical groups and evolving themes were then settled till then each interview had been appraised and done coding. Demographic information were also given to each member at this step, memos covering added ideas or opinions regarding the interview.

The following step was axial coding that evaluates the preliminary themes combined and settled with alike themes gathered together. Furthermore, one main class was chosen under that other connected topics converted subthemes. A concluding review i.e. selective coding finished the coding procedure with any discrepancies or overlying themes recognized and distinguished through associating and antagonizing extent of settlement between contributors' answers to confirm the arrangement.

4. Results

The results of analysis recognized one main and eight subthemes. The main theme was categorized as "Behavior of Top Management", which encompasses eight subthemes:

a. Financial Support
b. Mental Support
c. Support by HR
d. Support while establishing project structure
e. Support while communicating the project
f. Support by communication with the project teams regularly
g. Support by articulating a proper attention and being adequately conversant
h. Support by addressing uncooperative sponsors

Table 3 depicts the major themes and sub-themes, it gives summary of the descriptions and examples of TMS as quotes

Table 3: Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Main Theme: Top Management Behavior		
"Sub Themes"	"Summary Description"	"Examples of Top management support: Illustrative quotes"
Monetary Support	Sufficient financial and technical resources are precarious for success of Project	*The management has provided adequate resources for successful implementation of the project. We have sufficient space, funds for meetings, vehicles and required resources for project implementation. I as project manager never faced scarcity of resources in any shape.*
Mental Support	Sufficient resources presented also utilities in form of moral support for team and managers.	*I was given adequate resources for encouraging a supportive stakeholder atmosphere for positive project completion. Our high authorities guaranteed accessibility of essential resources to support the team through disasters.*
Support by HR	It establishes to team members of institutes that top management gives high priority to the project amongst its objectives.	*In my project there is no position vacant, we have sufficient staff. The HR department always fills the vacant posts of project staff without any delay, in order to achieve project objectives smoothly.*
Support by establishing project structure	The formation of a well communicated framework of project framework tied to the new structure of the organization.	*It is routine here that the clear structure of project and the relationships with organization were well demarcated. There is a strong convention in managing projects and accomplishing goals.*
Support by corresponding project to organization	Numerous official and informal correspondence among the project team, the top management other in the organization is important	*We started our project with a kick-off meeting, our two out of three top managers were present in this meeting. We got an idea of the strategic importance of the project from his speech, newsletter and other correspondence available here. .*
Support by ordered communication with the project group	Team meetings every week led by a top manager. These meetings are solid examples of top management support.	*Top management of Project continuously communicated to discuss implications of the project with us on weekly basis.*
Support by showing interest and being adequately conversant	Satisfactory level of information of the project by the top management is a significant form of support.	*The member of executive board was very ardent to implement the information system. He was knowledgeable and excited about its paybacks*
Support by tackling with uncooperative sponsors	Using official power in implementation of projects. Solving clashes and caring project team throughout political combats was observed as part of top management.	*The Top management enforced to collaborate with project, however I never observed much paybacks for my unit*

Figure 1: Tree Map: Behaviour of Top Management (Eight Sub Themes)

Figure 2: Word Cloud

5. Discussion

This part of the article discusses the main category of supportive behavior of top management recognized and categories eight sub themes into five main themes, during the investigations to answer the research question of this study: "Which types of behavior underlie top management support during HRD projects"?

Figure 3: Five Main Themes of the Study with Eight Sub-Themes

5.1 Provision of Human, Material and Financial Resources

Mostly contributors in eight projects agreed that adequate monetary, methodical, and human resources are important for a successful project. The participants also highlighted that acquiring such resources is a crucial duty of senior managers.

5.2 Structural Arrangements

Another sign of top management support is institution of a clear and well conversed project framework combined to new organizational configurations.

5.3   Communications
As per respondents' views, it is important to have regular official and informal communication amongst top management, the project team, and rest of the institution is significant.

5.4   Developing and Positioning Capability
The respondents assumed that an acceptable level of knowledge and attentiveness in project by top managers was a vital kind of support.

5.5   Power
Supportive top management behavior was the use of official power in performance of projects. However, in conflict resolution and caring the project team throughout political clashes was perceived as part of top management.

5.6   Implication of Theory
The planned behaviour theory argues that people tend to behave rationally and to systematically make use of information that is available to them when deciding to act or not to act, people's actions are guided by conscious motives and not by unconscious motives, and people consider the implications of their actions before they decide to act or not to act. The theory allows for identification of various supportive behaviour of top management which are rational, guided by conscious motives or implication based. The study deliberately focused on context of supportive behavior shown by the top management relatively to focus on observing effects of such kind of provision on the outcomes of the project. Previous researches have primarily concentrated on properties relevant to top management support on success of project, though observing the concept of support as a single one construct. This research has mainly focused the top management support content, stating that top management support contains a set of linked behavioral groups showed during a project life. Though such groups or classes have partly been recognized in other researches, as of now these behaviors are not been portrayed as a possibly comprehensible and clarified set of interconnected behaviors that can be recognized and followed through a execution progression. This research has clarified the details for any providing or concealment of support from top management. Now, we highlight that support is a rare resource in the domains of economics, individuals, communication, expertise, time and attention. This study declares that it has to be controlled when allocating it among all the themes possibly pertinent to a firm.

6.   Suggestions for Practice
The study offers experts comprehensive and clear framework for defining the providing top management support in shape of precise behaviors. The developed context focuses on useful amalgamation of entwined supportive behaviors. This study likewise proves vibrant role of top management support. In terms of application of new scheme to continue operative, executives have to be conducive, that shows that the top managers would be eager in bending their supportive behaviors. The developed framework could be useful in conversing, scheduling, regulating, and appraising top management support in numerous settings. This framework can inspire top managers in adjusting particular supportive behaviors towards existing and obligatory means on bases of the background and the features of the organization.

7.   Limitations
The researchers gather data from eight projects, which were executing different kinds of HRD projects. Hence, it could not be claimed that the findings have given a comprehensive summary of the matters neighboring top management support in numerous types of PSDP projects of Pakistan.

8.   Conclusions
Notwithstanding the over-all agreement on significance of support of top management for HRD projects, complete understanding of behavioral variety that develops this concept is to be studied more. There are number of authors who have conducted research on the nexus between project success and top management support, while frequently taking top management support like single construct. Few studies suggested numerous supportive movements and behavioral proportions to top management support. However, the current study enhances earlier work done while presenting a framework, discovering the application of its proportions, using an investigative lens, assessing negotiating proportions and purposes of top management. The addition of framework shows that it delivers a better-off and additional clear

explanation of top managers' supportive behaviors. It is encouraged more conjecturing on the wholeness, efficiency, and inter-link of the recognized behaviors. Lastly, and advantageously, the developed framework can give few real ideas on how to added precisely see and efficiently accomplish top management support.

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