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Tapping into the Power Lines of Project Success: The Strategic Role of Ethical Climate

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Abstract
Success has continued to elude many projects world over and hence raised the need to step up measures aimed at reversing this trend. Given the unique nature of particular projects, any efforts to cause project success ought to be targeted at a clearly defined set of projects. This study aimed at investigating the strategic role that the ethical climate components of Egoism, Principle and Benevolence play in enhancing the performance of Poverty Eradication Projects in LDCs, particularly Uganda. Cross sectional and quantitative survey designs were used with a study sample of 323 National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) projects. The results revealed that the ethical climate components of Egoism, Principle and Benevolence positively relate with and predict performance of poverty eradication projects. These findings generate implications and inform particular recommendations on the success of projects in LDCs as this article articulates.
Keywords: Project, Ethical Climate, Poverty, Performance, Strategy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the wake of heightening global economic pressures, many institutions both Government and non Government have adopted project oriented strategies as a way of achieving Goals within cost, time and quality constraints (Andersen, 2006; Cashin 2012; Shenhar *et al*, 2001; Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996; PMI, 2013; Rodriguesa, et., al. 2014). On the contrary, project failures have continued to be disappointing high hence jeopardizing the would-be success (Sauser et al., 2009; Nangoli et al., 2012). A case in point is the high failure rates experienced among the NAADS projects in Uganda. These have failed to improve agriculture and reduce poverty to the anticipated levels, which was the main programme intention (Musiime & Nakayima, 2013; Engela and Ajam 2010; Uganda national Famers' federation, 2011; NAADS secretariat report of 2003/04). According to NAADS secretariat report of 2003/04, the NAADS project have in most instances registered over 60% failure rate with some projects in districts like Kotido registering 100% failure rate while projects in more than 10 districts registering a failure rate of above 90%. As a result of this high failure rate, the poverty level has remained high with more than 31% of Ugandan population living below a dollar a day.

Research by Bouckenooghe, Zafar and Raja (2014); Joyner and Payne (2002), point to the fact that the poor performance of these projects could be attributed to unethical climate in these projects. This could be in lack of moral standards or otherwise. Bandura (1999) has argued that moral standards in many public projects are always neglected for self satisfaction thus giving rise to moral disengagement in these projects (see also Maitrot 2014).

According to Mubatsi (2009), NAADS projects have for long been flawed by corruption and political interferences which leaves no systematic and agreed upon basis of telling what is right or wrong to the wide majority of stakeholders. Bickering over the quality of products supplied to farmers has thus been rampant within such poverty eradication projects (Mubatsi 2009; Mukundane, 2011). The auditor general's report (2008) also established that there were fraudulent activities that took place in NAADS projects, for example in Wakiso district at Masuliita sub county where funds totaling to UGX 24,465,400 were lost in fraudulent transactions. This is supported by Agency theory which stresses that an agency problem exists when managers' economic interests differ from those of the firm (Baiman, 1982, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989).The research question of this paper was whether ethical climate positively relates with performance of poverty eradication projects and whether ethical climate Components Predict Performance of Poverty Eradication Projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

According to Barnes (2013), ethical climate possesses perceived prescriptions, proscriptions, and permissions regarding moral obligations and thus, ethical conduct. On the other hand, Schneider, (1975) understood Project Ethical Climate to mean the perceptions that are psycho-logically meaningful to moral descriptions that people can agree of that are characterized in a system's practices and procedures. According to Buchan 2006, ethical

climate is the psychological environment in which individual behavior takes place. This study adopts all the above definition since they contain the same gist besides the different wording. According to Schneider (1975) the prevailing perceptions of typical organizational practices and procedures that have ethical content constitute the ethical work climate. For example, when faced with a decision that has consequence for others, how does an organizational member identifies the right alternative at least in the organization's view? Ethical climates are conceptualized as general and pervasive characteristics of organizations, affecting a broad range of decisions. Thus, ethical climate refers to how people in an organization typically decide whether it is right or wrong to do something (Trevino *et al.,* 1998). The ethical climate may be viewed as one component of the overall organizational culture or climate constructs that have long been recognized to influence individual decision making (Victor & Cullen, 1987, 1988; Trevin˜o *et al*., 1998; Bouckenooghe, Zafar and Raja, 2014). Dower (1997), stresses that ethical climate as consists of a set of values and norms considered to be universal or applicable to all people, and a set of obligations or responsibilities towards all people in the organization. With such an approach, ethical climates are conceptualized as general and pervasive characteristics of organizations, affecting a broad range of decisions in the organization. The existence of an ethical work climate therefore, requires that normative systems in the organization be institutionalized. That is, organizational members must perceive the existence of normative patterns in the organization with a measurable degree of consensus. Organizational members are asked to report not on their own behavior and values but, rather, on the practices and procedures that they perceive to exist in their organizations.

In explaining the categories and classification of ethical climate, Victor and Cullen (1988, 1987) proposed a conceptual typology of climate types based on two dimensions that is; the ethical criteria used in decision making (egoism, benevolence and principle); and the locus of analysis (individual, local, cosmopolitan). The ethical criterion is based on three major classes of ethical theory that is; egoism which focuses on maximizing self-interest, benevolence (maximizing joint interests) and principle (adherence to moral principles). The adoption of these criteria assumes that organizations or organizational subgroups may be prototypically benevolent, principled, or egoistic (Victor & Cullen, 1988; Barnes 2013). The locus of analysis dimension refers to who is considered when contemplating ethical or moral issues, or the limits of consideration when making moral judgments. The locus of analysis may be at the individual, local (organizational), or cosmopolitan (social) level. A cross-tabulation of these two dimensions produces nine potential ethical climates. In a factor analysis performed by Victor and Cullen (1988), these nine factors were collapsed into five ethical climates: caring (egoism at the cosmopolitan level and benevolence at all levels, where employees have genuine interest in others' welfare); instrumental (egoism at the individual and local levels, where personal and organizational interests are most important); rules (principle at the local level, where employees are mainly directed by organizational rules and procedures); law-and-code (principle at the cosmopolitan level, where employees are directed by laws, regulations and professional codes); and independence (principle at the individual level, where employees are guided by personal convictions and personal morality).

Farrell and Fraedrich (1997) clarified Victor and Cullen (1987)'s ethical framework, through contending that an egoistic or instrumental criterion is based on the moral philosophy of egoism, which implies that a consideration of what is in the individual's best interest will dominate the ethical reasoning process. The benevolence or utilitarian criterion is based largely on utilitarian principles of moral philosophy, which suggests that individuals make ethical decisions by considering the positive or negative consequences of actions on reference to others (Farrell & Fraedrich, 1997; Erondu *et al.,* 2004; Osifo 2012). The principled or deontological criterion is largely based on deontological principles of moral philosophy, which posits that individuals make ethical decisions after considering actions in regard to universal and unchanging principles of right and wrong (Farrell & Fraedrich, 1997; Erondu *et al.,* 2004). This classification of ethical climates has been validated in various organizations, including non-profit ones (Deshpande, 1996; Joseph & Deshpande, 1997).

Atkinson, (1999); Pinto & Slevin,(1988); Wateridge, (1998) stress that project performance can be viewed narrowly as achievement of intended outcomes in terms of project specification, completing the activities on time, completing the project on the agreed budget, only carrying out activitities within the Scope, with requisite performance (technical requirements).According to PMI Standards Committee (2004) and Bryde (2005), this is the golden or the iron triangle measurement of project performance i.e. that if the project is completed in time, within budget, and to specification it would achieve the intended objectives thus performing well. This is the operational mindset, which is influenced by the "get the job done" approach (Dvir *et al.,* 2006). Several studies support the inclusion of customer satisfaction as a fourth dimension of project performance (Lipovetsky *et al*., 1997; Lim & Mohamed, 1999; Zwikael & Globerson, 2006; Kerzner, 2006; Voetsch, 2004; Bryde, 2005). This study therefore adopts the measurement of project performance in terms of Schedule, project quality, Customer satisfaction, time management and achieving project objectives (reducing poverty level).

Ethical climates influence performance of projects. For example, Deshpande (1996) showed that managers perceived a caring climate as responsible for managerial success in a non-profit organization (see also Barnes 2013). In another study conducted in hospitals, a caring climate was found to increase performance of

nurses (Joseph and Deshpande, 1997). According to Stajkovic and Luthans (1997), ethical climate affects organizational performance through influencing the ethical standards of people in organizations. According to Berenbeim (2000) project champions have to set codes of ethics that will build a favorable ethical climate in order to ensure responsible ethical stakeholders. Nijhof *et al*., (2003) stresses that ensuring the code values are embedded in the project ethical climate can be one hope to ensure not only responsible individuals but also responsible projects. In his analysis of moral disengagement in organizations, Bandura (1986 and 1999) identifies a number of distinct points at which the individual can disengage from these internal self regulatory mechanisms, these includes moral justification, advantageous comparison, euphemistic labeling, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, diminishing or disregarding the consequences of his/her actions and dehumanization or attribution of blame. It is expected that each of these points will weaken the linkage between the individual's moral reasoning and intention to behave in accordance with that reasoning thus affecting the performance of the project (Bandura, 1986 and 1999). Project ethical climate therefore has a major part to play in enhancing the performance of the project (Wood, 2000).

Hypothesis:

H1: Egoism, Benevolent and Principled Are the Components of Project Ethical Climate.

H2: Project ethical climate positively relates with performance of poverty eradication projects

H3: Project ethical Components Predict Performance of Poverty Eradication Projects.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional and quantitative survey design. Correlational and regressional designs were adopted to explain the relationships between project ethical climate and project performance and the extent to which project ethical climate explains project performance. The study sample consisted of 323 projects of the 2,062 NAADS projects undertaken in the 28 sub-counties of Mukono district. Mukono district was selected to be the study area because the District has had the benefit of being first on many government pilot programs. Two categories of stakeholders of the project were considered, these included sponsors/ coordinators and project beneficiaries/ team members (farmers). This study adopted a multi stage sampling procedure in order to get representative views of the various stakeholders on performance of poverty eradication projects in Uganda. This involved using proportionate sampling to select the 323 projects and 370 project stakeholders (respondents) who comprised of 356 farmers/ team members and 14 NAADS coordinators from the 323 projects. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents of the two categories (team members and or project coordinators) from each project. The response rate was 88.5%. Primary data was collected through administering a Questionnaire which contained structured questions relating to each study variable in question. The respondents answered based on the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements in the questionnaire. Secondary data was also used.

Project Ethical Climate was measured by the questionnaire developed by Victor and Cullen (1993) was adopted to assess the ethical climate of the projects Project performance was measured using four dimension; Schedule overrun (this tests whether the project committed outputs were delivered within the agreed timeframe), Cost overrun (whether the committed outputs were produced within the agreed budget), Project quality (whether all committed outputs were delivered and met agreed quality standards), Customer satisfaction (whether the project customers achieved all the targeted outcomes), Achieving project objectives (whether the government achieved its major objectives, the key one being reducing poverty level) (NAADS secretariat report of 2003/04; Kerzner, 2006; Voetsch, 2004). Each of the four categories was measured by items on a five-point scale, where 5 represented "strongly agree" and 1 represented "strongly disagree". The research instrument was examined for its reliability by using Cronbach's Alpha valve and the results showed that the instrument was reliable with a coefficient that was above 0.5. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 16.0

Results and discussion

The study employed factor analysis with principal component analysis to extract variables from the indicators on Ethical climate. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0. 842 and Bartlett's test was significant at $\chi^2(321) = 3269.974, p \prec .001)$ indicating that factor analysis is an appropriate model for dissecting Ethical climate for further analysis. The communalities for each of the indicators in table 1 varied between 0.436 and 0.784. Indictors with a communality of 0.55 were considered to vary closely with the extracted components and indicators with a communality of < 0.55 lowly correlated.

Indicators 1 to 4 measured egoism, with indicators 3 (In this project, each person is expected, above all, to work efficiently), 2 (The major responsibility for people in this project is to consider efficiency first) and 1 (The most efficient way is always the right way, in this project) the having the highest variances of 0.793, 0.784 and 0.760 respectively. Indicators 5 to 9 measured benevolent with indicators 9 (People in this project are actively concerned about the public interest) and 8 (The effects of decisions on the public are a primary concern

in this project) having the highest variances of 0.711 and 0.703, Indicators 10 to 15 measured principled ethical climate, with variables10 (People in this project have a strong sense of responsibility to the outside community), 13 (In this project, the law or ethical code of the profession is the major consideration) and 12 (Everyone is expected to stick by project rules and procedures) having the highest variances of 0.763, 0.759 and 0.722 respectively.

Table I: Extracted communalities for the indicators of Ethical Climate

	Initial	Extraction
(1) The most efficient way is always the right way, in this project	1.000	.760
(2) The major responsibility for people in this project is to consider efficiency first	1.000	.784
(3) In this project, each person is expected, above all, to work efficiently	1.000	.793
(4) Efficient solutions to problems are always sought here	1.000	.652
(5) The most important concern is the good of all the people in the project	1.000	.592
(6) People are very concerned about what is generally best for members in the project	1.000	.665
(7) Our major consideration is what is best for everyone in the project	1.000	.436
(8) The effects of decisions on the public are a primary concern in this project	1.000	.703
(9) People in this project are actively concerned about the public interest	1.000	.711
(10) People in this project have a strong sense of responsibility to the outside community	1.000	.763
(11) It is expected that i will always do what is right for the public	1.000	.556
(12) Everyone is expected to stick by project rules and procedures	1.000	.722
(13) In this project, the law or ethical code of the profession is the major consideration	1.000	.759
(14) People are expected to comply with the law and professional standards over and above other considerations	1.000	.663
(15) In this project, people are expected to strictly follow legal or professional standards	1.000	.628

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The factor structure of ethical climate was analyzed with principal component method using varimax rotation to determine any underlying components for each indicator and validate whether the respondents perceived the three components of ethical climate to be distinct. The components of ethical climate included: Egoism, benevolent and principled. The results in Table II showed that all three factors had an eigen value >1.0 and cumulative variance of 29.98%. Further, the results showed the factor; principled to be the most important factor at explaining ethical climate with variance of 10.96%, followed by benevolent, variance of 10.443% and egoism, with variance of 8.57%.This finding mean that for the ethical climate to improve, managers must allow organization members to consider their interests in making decisions regarding their work on so to better their involvement in projects ,ensure that the project members also make decisions by considering the positive or negative consequences of actions on reference to others and ensure that individuals make ethical decisions after considering actions in regard to universal and unchanging principles of right and wrong . This implies that project champions have to set codes of ethics that will build a favorable ethical climate in order to ensure responsible ethical stakeholders

Table II: Rotated component matrix

	Principled	Benevolent	Egoism
In this project, the law or ethical code of the profession is the major consideration	.834		
People are expected to comply with the law and professional standards over and above other considerations	.805		
In this project, people are guided by their own personal ethics	.782		
The first consideration is whether a decision violates any law	.754		
In this project, people are expected to strictly follow legal or professional standards	.680		
Successful people in this project go by the book	.539		
People in this project have a strong sense of responsibility to the outside community		.810	
The effects of decisions on the public are a primary concern in this project		.764	
People in this project are actively concerned about the public interest		.761	
It is expected that i will always do what is right for the public		.602	
People in this project view team spirit as important		.582	
People are very concerned about what is generally best for members in the project		.482	
Our major consideration is what is best for everyone in the project		.427	
In this project, each person is expected, above all, to work efficiently			.817
The major responsibility for people in this project is to consider efficiency first			.791
The most efficient way is always the right way, in this project			.785
Efficient solutions to problems are always sought here			.669
Eigen Values	3.946	3.759	3.085
Percentage of variance explained	10.961	10.443	8.571
Cumulative Percentage of variance explained	10.961	21.404	29.975
Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation converged in six iterations			

Zero-order Pearson correlations among study variables were used and are presented in Table III. There existed principled (Mean = 4.03, SD=0.86) benevolent (Mean = 4.09, SD = 0.72) and egoism (Mean = 4.22, SD = 0.65) ethical climate. Egoism was the most pronounced aspect of ethical climate, which statistic points to fail to reject the hypothesis that there is no relationship between ethical climate and performance of NAADS projects.

The results further revealed that there exists a significant positive relationship between performance of NAADS projects and each of Egoism (r=0.259*, p<.05), Benevolent (r=0.462**, p<.001) and principled (r=0.374**, p<.001). The results mean that if project members are ethical in their practices by making decisions based on their interests while considering interests of others and the adhering to moral principles in the environment, It may improve on the quality, time of delivery and appropriate usage of financial resources which is a measure of performance of the projects. These findings are consistent with Stajkovic and Luthans (1997) who argue that ethical climate improves organizational performance through influencing the ethical standards of people in organizations. Nijhof *et al*., (2003) stresses that ensuring the code values are embedded in the project ethical climate can be one hope to ensure not only responsible individuals but also responsible projects that meet the performance set standards.

Table III: Zero Order Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Egoism (1)	4.0315	.86616	1			
Benevolent (2)	4.0958	.72044	.430**	1		
Principled (3)	4.2214	.65706	.368**	.259**	1	
Performance of NAADS Projects (4)	3.6718	.46686	.259**	.462**	.374**	1
***,**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels, respectively (2-tailed).**						

Hierarchical regression analysis

A Hierarchical regression model was estimated with variables entered simultaneously within each hierarchical step. Colinearity diagnostics were examined for all items entered at each step and found to be within the

recommended range (VIF <4 and torrelance >0.20; O'Brien and Marakas, 2007). The regression results are showed in Table IV.

Egoism was entered in model 1 and predicted 14.8 percent of the variance in performance of NAADS projects. (R^2=0.109). The R^2 change was 7.1 percent and the F change statistics was significant (F statistics = 22.645, β = .140, significance F Change of 0.000)

F change of 0.00), supporting H1. On entering benevolent in model 2, egoism was no longer an significant predictor but benevolent was significant and predicted 25.2 percent of the variance in performance of NAADS projects. (R^2=0.252). The R^2 change was 14.3 percent and the F change statistics was significant (F statistics = 53.931, β = .272, significance F Change of 0.000). This finding supported *H2* and also indicated that benevolent predicted 14.3 percent of the variance in performance of NAADS and that most likely benevolent mediated the influence of egoism on the NAADS projects performance. The third model was run introducing principled ethical climate. The results show that the β – Coefficient for benevolent reduced by 0.022, but was still significant, implying that principled could have had a partial mediation effect on relationship between egoism and performance of NAADS projects, further still the model results showed that "principled" was significant, the new model predicting 31.6 percent of the variance in performance of NAADS projects. (R^2=0.316). The R^2 change was 6.4 percent and the F change statistics was significant (F statistics = 26.182, β = .184, significance F Change of 0.000).This implies that principled ethical climate predicted 6.4 percent of the variance in performance of NAADS hence supporting the hypothesis H. The results in models 1, 2 and 3, support H3 imply that management of poverty eradication projects should ensure good ethical practice while engaging in the project activities and put less effort on individual interest thus improving performance of the projects. Therefore for an organization to move forward in the aspect of performance, it is important for such an organization to have a good understanding of ethics and also take it seriously as this can undermine the competitive strength of the organization and the society at large. These findings are in line with Oladunni (2000) who stresses that organization stability and survival depends on the consistency of quality of ethical decision made by managers.

Table IV: Hierarchical regression analysis

	Model1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Collinearity Statistics**	
	Egoism	Benevolent	Principled	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.776	2.125	1.634	na	na
Age Group	.040	.031	.019	.915	1.092
Gender	-.066	-.068	-.081	.916	1.092
Marital status	-.023	-.022	-.021	.932	1.058
Number of years worked in projects	.117	.108	.108	.945	1.058
Highest education attained	.024	.021	.020	.973	1.028
Egoism	.140	.046	.000	.741	1.349
Benevolent		.272	.250	.802	1.248
Principled			.184	.852	1.174
R	.330	.502	.562	na	na
R^2	.109	.252	.316	na	na
Adjusted R^2	.103	.244	.306	na	na
F Statistic	17.287	31.657	32.409	na	na
Significance	.000	.000	.000	na	na
R^2 Change	.071	.143	.064	na	na
F Change Statistic	22.645	53.931	26.182	na	na
Significance F Change Statistic	.000	.000	.000	na	na

Discussion and recommendation

This paper examines the relationship project ethical climate and performance of poverty eradication. The findings are related to what literature presents. For example, the findings indicate that there exists a significant positive relationship between performance of NAADS projects and all components of project ethical climate that is Egoism, Benevolent and principled. This confirms what is presented in literature from different populations. Such include Stajkovic and Luthans (1997); Barnes (2013) who argue that ethical climate improves organizational performance through influencing the ethical standards of people in organizations. This implies that the project members should be encouraged to be ethical in their practices by considering public interests in their decision making, so as to ensure good quality products, Timely delivery of the project and improvement of beneficiaries income levels. As a result poverty will be eradicated in communities where the projects are carried out.

Conclusions, limitations and areas for further research

It was observed in the study that good project ethical climate made a significant improvement in the performance of poverty eradication projects. Therefore, it's concluded in the study that consideration of public interests helps to improve the quality of products and services that the project comes up with and also the income levels of the project beneficiaries .The key limitation in this study was, it focused on stakeholders of NAADS projects. This limits the generalization of the findings to all the poverty eradication projects. However, given the large scope of NAADS projects, the study gives a picture of the situation in Uganda which other studies can build on. Further studies should be empirically done to examine Project communications and performance of poverty eradication projects; Stakeholder participation in decision making and performance of poverty eradication project; Project execution flexibility and performance of poverty eradication projects.

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