

Performance–Driven Project Management in Cyprus

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The training and consultation effort, performance-driven project management for the Turkish Cypriot community in Northern Cyprus, was funded because implementation of project plans was not satisfactory. The community was faced with considerable challenge. Non-performance was an issue for all stakeholders, directly affecting incomes, access, quality of life. Over nine months the result was upgraded manager/consultant project management skills. Both quality of project design and implementation of projects radically improved. Project results closed the fundamental performance gaps, with a remarkable 80% of the projects completed within timeframe and budget. These included retail sales increases, higher certification scores, new product/service launches, and cost savings. The level of understanding of organizational project dynamics was raised significantly, along with the skills needed to manage projects with a performance-driven approach. This sustained effort was evaluated in the design and early stages of implementation of the second wave of projects.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Delivering technical assistance in developing countries has high stakes, and success can translate into significant improvements. When the outcome is of value to the local stakeholders, the end users are seriously invested. The funding or development agency and host authority are invested in objectives contributing to their agreed outcome. In a dynamic situation, projects are the usual approach to move step by step toward the agreed social and economic objectives (Kelly & Novak, 2007, 2010).

The authors' professional experience; along with academic and business research, acknowledges project management as a significant weakness – often, failure – in a significant percentage of applications (Discenza & Forman, 2007). We as managers and implementers have trouble moving from a plan, a stated objective, through implementation to a result. This limits potential value of the results to the end users. This troublesome experience and acknowledged concern, coupled with research findings, calls for a focused effort. This is one successful approach.

The Performance Driven Project Management (PDPM) program is designed in accordance with organizational theory, the clients' expectations, and *especially* to provide practical tools to get the agreed project outcomes done, to the standards or criteria required. Equally noteworthy is that project management is the critical process which metamorphoses interventions and initiatives into successful economic and social development.

Yet, few who manage projects in the developing world have any project management training -- let alone performance driven. Alas, projects are rarely approached from a performance standpoint. In this case, an international donor was funding a capacity development program for the Northern Cyprus small business and nonprofit community (Coughlin & Kelly, 2009). An initial assessment of these sectors identified weak project management skills as a cross-cutting issue to be addressed.

PDPM is applicable across sectors. A performance approach can be coupled with any topical technical assistance. It can avoid the most common mistakes, break down silo mentality, and eliminate putting project outputs at cross-purposes by enhancing project planning and communications. Benefits with a performance driven approach include assistance in decisions concerning resource allocation, setup and design of the project, monitoring and feedback procedures. Another important element focuses on iterative evaluation -- identifying the critical measures of effectiveness, sustainability, and ownership. The stakes are high.

It has been noted that the characteristics, tools, and benefits of PDPM exactly address the failures of traditional project management and/or the non-use of any organizational (systemic) project management protocol, as detailed in studies over several sectors and perspectives.

SETTING THE STAGE

The North Cyprus Situation

Cyprus (Figure 1) has remained politically divided since 1974. At that time after an attempt by Greece to annex the island, Turkey invaded with a resulting partition of the island. The northern portion is heavily dependent on Turkey and is not recognized by the international community. Few expect an easy reconciliation; however, recent developments have left many cautiously hopeful. All parties have something to gain from a unified Cyprus. Greek Cypriots will get access to the dynamic mainland Turkish economy and Cyprus will become a more attractive tourist destination. Turkish Cypriots will realize the full benefits of trade and cooperation with the European Union, including preferential market access. Other potential advantages of reunification include opportunities for improved productivity, environmental protection, and an enhanced business environment with the potential of attracting additional foreign direct investment.

Although prospects for unification are improving, significant barriers remain. Chief among these is the need to move closer to economic parity across the two communities and foster a culture of mutual understanding and respect. There are many factors inhibiting private sector development in the north.

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