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A STUDY OF STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) PROJECTS WITH WORK FROM HOME (WFH) DURING COVID-19 TIMES

Muralidhar Deshpande*

ABSTRACT

The project stakeholder management in IT (Information Technology) projects is a key activity to improve the value in project management and to bring about more value add project results. There are various definitions and views about the stakeholder. The stakeholder(s) consist of either individuals or group of individuals, who have capability to influence and/or get influenced by results of the projects. The major debate presented in this paper is that the good stakeholder management has led to project success or failure in general and organizational efficiency in particular. There will be shift from office to Work from Home (WFH) due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The effective project management enables the project manager to achieve the planned project objectives, which in turn shall enhance the (a) stakeholder expectations, (b) probability of the project success, (c) completing and handing over of the project to the clients on time, (d) resolving problems related to project including identification, recovery, or termination of unsuccessful projects, (e) managing the triple constraints (viz., scope, time and cost) of the project, and (f) poorly managed projects that may end-up in missing the project-timelines, cost-overrun, low-quality, re-work/work amendments, reputation risk for the business enterprises and stakeholders' dissatisfaction regarding the project management (PMBOK, 2017). The Business enterprises will invest the large amount of resources in the development of IT projects, so that the decision makers can take right decision whether to fund a project further or not when its prediction for the success of the project are uncertain. (Zhang et al, 2003).

Keywords: Stakeholders management, Work from Home (WFH), paradigm shifts, mutual value creation, Customer Satisfaction

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The Project Success depends on Project Management Structure (Role & Responsibilities). Primary Stakeholders are three (Business, Users and Suppliers) are called as project interest. Success can be achieved through Benefits Review (Realization Benefits), Best Practices, Providing the resources, Authorization of funds. Product focus delivery by asking questions such as 5W & 1H (i.e., Why, When, by Whom, to Whom, Where; and How) (Office of Government Commerce, 2009). There is a tri-focal lens available to access the results 1) project Success, 2) Project Manager Success, 3) project management success. The intersection Point is called as 'sweet spot' Tri-focal lens is defined by stakeholders' point of view, at various interval of project stage. (Milliholian, Chunk, Kaarst-Brown, Michelle, 2016). And, to achieve the success, the methodologies, tools, knowledge and skills are the key factors (Delone and Mclean, 2003) and the Information Systems Project Success had six key dimensions/categories – Quality of Systems & Information, satisfaction of utility & users, and impact on individuals and Organizations.

The new paradigm has space for WFH to engage the stakeholders. The purpose is to increase the overall stakeholder satisfaction by engaging them. The stakeholder management improves and enhances significant relationship with various stakeholders through the effective management of explicit & implicit expectations from both internal and external stakeholders of business enterprise with corporate objectives. We need to adopt the emerging technologies like CAMS (Cloud, Analytics, Mobility and Social Analytics) and how it will be efficient work from Home, whether we can achieve same level of stakeholder's satisfaction level? Given the above context, an analytical study of stakeholder management in IT projects through Work from Home (WFH) as a strategy to deal with COVID-19 pandemic has been undertaken and the results are presented with its findings. 68% of employees ready to work from home and 32% from office (NHRD, 2020)

INTRODUCTION

Many organisations and business enterprises, especially large firms/corporates in the Technology space (referred to as IT/ITeS Sector), are planning for work from home with the aim to make it a major way of working in the future by changing policies to support it. These organisations across the spectrum have adopted a range of newer initiatives to manage the employee-connect through this COVID-19 crisis period encouraging virtual team meetings and HR 'reach-out' along with periodic and frequent leadership communications through virtual methods. The webinars, virtual classrooms and e-learning have emerged as commonly used methods/tools, although some companies have adopted some gamified &/or Artificial Intelligence based learning tools (NHRD, 2020).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Project stakeholder theories in IT projects support the participation of end users.

The **Table 1** Depicts the expectations from project stakeholders in IT industry;

Sr#	Project Stakeholder	Expectations
1	Customer	Customer is the king & important stakeholder during the execution of IT Projects. We should enable customer to access the following information through PMIS (Project Management Information System) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milestone Project Plans / Progress & Revisions • Artefacts released for acceptance & pending with customer • Artefacts pending for Sign-off • Pending/Dependency Issues with them • Outstanding Payments
2	Vendors	There are various vendors who work with IT industry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring (Channel Partners) • Outsourcing Work (Subcontracting) • Product Vendors (Principals)
3	Management	Management should be able have the Birds' Eye view of the organization, should able to see a Big Picture. Most of the time, it will be in the form of summarized information.
4	Supporting Functions	All the supporting should able to access integrated & centralized applications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance/Legal Quality Operations HR Sales/Marketing
5	Project Team	Should be able to see their daily tasks & update the progress

**Table 1 : Expectations from Stakeholders in IT Project Management
(Source : Deshpande, Muralidhar, 2015)**

Benefits of Stakeholder management to the organizations:

- a) Productivity gains
- b) High Lead time
- c) Great Decisions
- d) Probability of Project success will be much higher.
- e) Happy stakeholders

In digital age, companies will adopt with technology to run the business very professionally, however we need to assess the stakeholders' gaps who are not using technology. Given the situation work from home, now it is becoming very much essential; more & more, companies are encouraging employees work from home. We have seen a rapid growth in the sectors like telecom, ecommerce and online selling has encouraged the project stakeholders move swiftly to the modern technology-tools and organizations effectiveness to enable stakeholders in using technology with 'self-service model', which is expected to add significant value. However, organizations have significant scope to move-up the growth ladder by using CAMS (Cloud, Analytics, Mobility and Social Analytics) technologies, thereby ensuring the stakeholders derive multiple benefits. The organisations are undertaking variety of initiatives (both routine organizational and digital collaboration) so as to facilitate the stakeholders by embracing technology to impart the benefits to employees, teams, managers, interdepartmental collaboration and CHRO/CEO/CXO etc. type of stakeholders through WFH.

Stakeholders are representing in three circles (Business, Users and Suppliers) as project interest. Success can be achieved through Benefits Review (Realization Benefits), Best Practices, Providing the resources, Authorization of funds. Product focus delivery by asking questions Why, When, by Whom, to Whom. (Office of Government Commerce, 2009)

Three key questions stakeholders and project manager should answer; 1) What does success look like for the specific project? 2) How will success be measured in different projects? 3) What are the critical factors impacting the success of project?

Project Success Depends on Project Management Structure (Role & Responsibilities). Primary Stakeholders are three (Business, Users and Suppliers) are called as project interest. Success can be achieved through Benefits Review (Realization Benefits), Best Practices, Providing the resources, Authorization of funds. Product focus delivery by asking questions Why, When, by Whom, to Whom. (Office of Government Commerce, 2009)

Failures are classified into four categories 1) Correspondence failure (i.e. failure of systems design specifications) 2) Process Failure (i.e. inability of project delivery, within specified timelines and budgets), 3) Interaction Failure (i.e. ineffective communication and coordination among users of the project in respect of attitude, satisfaction, and usage frequency, task performance, etc), and 4) Expectations Failure (i.e. projects do not meet the pre-agreed requirements and expectations of the stakeholders of the project). (Kaitlynn M. Whitney; Charles B. Daniels, 2013),

There is a tri-focal lens available to access the results 1) project Success, 2) Project Manager Success, 3) project management success. The intersection Point is called as ‘sweet spot’ Tri-focal lens is defined by stakeholders’ point of view, at various interval of project stage. (Milliholian, Chunk, Kaarst-Brown, Michelle, 2015)

Recent report from TCS, Post-COVID, TCS work force 75% of 4.5 lakh will work from home by 2025. This revised business model within IT-giant TCS is being captioned as 25/25 (i.e., only 25% of total workforce will work within TCS company premises by 2025, while 75% of the employees will be working for TCS through WFH). This strategy decision has taken its birth during COVID times, where TCS moved 90% of its employees to an operating model called SBWS (Secure Borderless Work Spaces), which is a new business model in IT sector (BT, 2020)

As per times of India report, IIM Kozhikode’s Centre of Excellence for Social Innovation did a study to understand the perspectives of executives from 13 industry sectors when Covid-19 locked them within the confines of their homes, which morphed overnight into makeshift offices. Offices, we found, have come to mean so much more than a ‘space to work from’. For many, office was their ‘second home’, a few even daring to say ‘a more energising one’. It was a place that confirmed their identity as a ‘valued employee’ and a ‘successful professional’, adjectives they took back home with aplomb. This was more so for the women, since office was where they could express themselves and be recognised for contributions beyond stereotypical roles and expectations. (ToI, 2020)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is carried out using qualitative method. New Theory building (Matrix) – Stakeholders vs Project Team Roles (Table 2). The intersection point is classified as High, Moderate, Low and NIL which indicates communication requirements in Project.

Role/Stakeholders	Customer	Vendors	Management	Dept	Team
Project Manager	H=High	H=High	H=High	H=High	H=High
Business Analysts	H=High	L=Low	L=Low	L=Low	M=Moderate
Technical Leads	L=Low	M=Moderate	L=Low	L=Low	H=High

Programmers	L=Low	L=Low	NIL	L=Low	H=High
Database Administrators	L=Low	NIL	NIL	L=Low	M=Moderate

(Note: H=High, M=Moderate, L=Low are used to denote the stakeholders' relationship in project management)

Table 2 – Relationship between Stakeholders and IT project roles

Having given contact situation, Let’s analyse/tackle how WFH make an impact for High items using Communication Technology, less barriers in communication, proper usage of Communication Channel and Communication method.

Communication Technology is driving factor to make WFH success. Project Team members and Stakeholders are equipped with technology for virtual meeting, collaboration along with required hardware, software and internet speed.

Traditionally Project delivery have the following modes

- Onsite work (Complete Team sitting at customer place)
- Offshore work (Complete Team sitting at ODC - Offshore Development Centre)
- Mixed / Hybrid model of working (Blend of Onsite and Offshore)

Now because of Covid-19, the fourth delivery mode should be introduced called,

- Work from Home (WFH) model of working in Organizations/ Corporates

By project delivery through WFH, it should make the project stakeholder expectations very clear at the start of the project and it can be included in the contract as well.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Longer term, increased 'Work From Home' - but larger firms taking to it more vigorously than smaller ones by revising policies, as are IT/ITES firms as shown in Figure-1

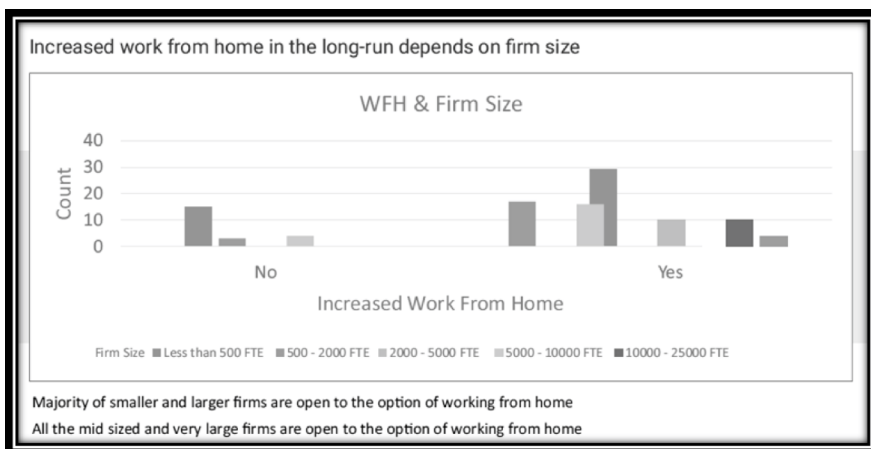


Figure1-Relationship between the size of Organization and the WFH (Source: NHRD, 2020)

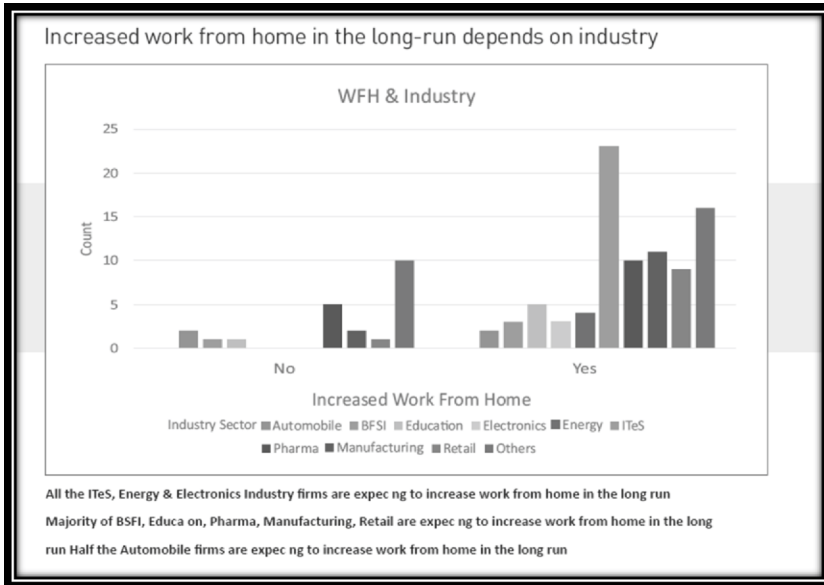


Figure-2 Increased work from home in the long run depends on industry (Source: NHRD,2020)

Organisations are using a number of initiatives to manage employee wellbeing in this period, predominantly with team calls and HR teams virtually reaching out as shown in Figure 3

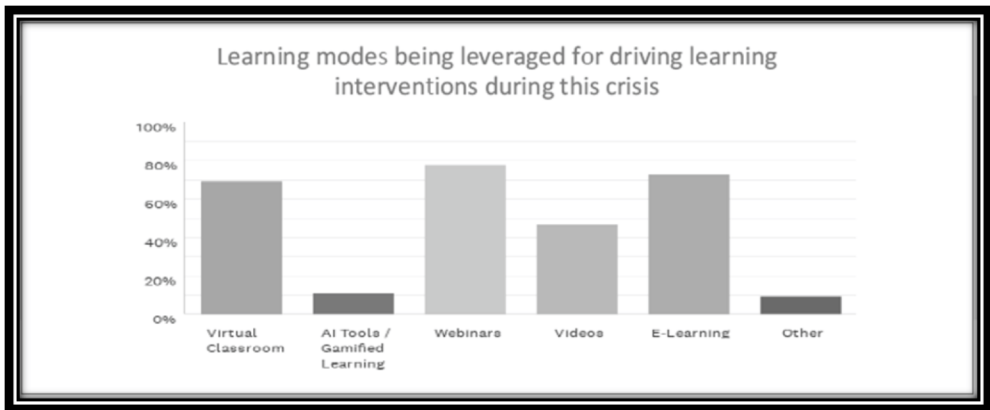


Figure-3 Learning models being leverages (Source: NHRD,2020)

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Based on this study, the broad conclusions are summarised as under

- a) Going forward, WFH is driving force to make the project success and managing stakeholder very important. Organizations should move all live projects to cloud
- b) Technology is playing major role to keep connected with stakeholders

c) Other factor, we can foresee people will move out of metros to tier II cities and work from home to support the project. Helping firms in smaller cities with latest technology

and business development ideas. Their saving potential will be higher since expenses in tier II cities are less. However, this will hit metro city economy of some of industries like real estate, hospitality and entertainment industries.

All though this is preliminary study, the detail research is in progress to understand and analyse the deeper inside.

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