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EARLY VIEW

Factors Influencing Governance Practices in Rural Development Projects: A Case Study of Rural Road Project in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Rural development projects are essential as a catalyst for balanced development between urban and rural areas as well as tools for enhancing the living standard of rural poor. This study focuses on the identification of factors that influence the governance practices in a rural road project in Malaysia. A single case study was conducted from the perspective of a stewardship theoretical lens on a rural road project in East Malaysia, and multiple sources of evidence were used for data collection. The study discovered four (4) main factors namely intrinsic motivation, altruistic empathy, effective leadership, and shared vision that influence project governance practices in this project. Thus, this article contributes towards a better understanding of the interplay of these motivating factors, which drives public officials in different project actors for effective delivery in this project context. The findings of the study are limited to the utilization of a single case study related to the rural road project and its contexts.

Keywords: Project governance; Stewardship; Rural road; Development; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of a project governance framework is crucial to achieving project success in the public sector infrastructure development (Khan et al., 2019), but less rigorous arrangements and stewardship-driven governance could be appropriate in smaller-scale projects. Rural roads projects are essential for public sector infrastructure development, specifically to provide a highly needed communication system in rural areas. Parked under the purview of the Ministry of Rural Development (KPLB), the government has managed to achieve 51,262 km of rural road coverage as of 2015 (Economic Planning Unit (EPU), 2015) and is committed in building and upgrading another 3,000 km of the rural road during the just concluded 11th Malaysia Plan (2016 – 2020) (Ministry of Economic Affairs (MEA), 2018). Apart from connecting the people, the broad coverage of rural roads could enhance the well-being of rural poor and crucial for socioeconomic development in developing countries (Mahamadu et al., 2015).

As one of the key initiatives to alleviate poverty, a high budget has been allocated in each development plan, and this reflects a clear vision of the government to enhance the quality of life among the rural folks. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, DOSM (2017), the percentage of households travelling more than nine kilometres from home to

the nearest public health centres in the state of Sabah and Sarawak is 32.8% and 43.6%, respectively, although the national average is only 14.2%. The statistics show that a broader coverage of rural roads is necessary, particularly for continuous development, and failure in delivering the projects to the people is not an option for the government.

Considering the rural poor are frail and vulnerable, public funds might be improperly utilized, and the target group could be placed at risk when governance and accountability failed to be adequately addressed (Dicke, 2002). Besides, the government has to efficiently utilize public investment resources since other sectors' interests also need to be considered (Fan, Zhang and Zhang, 2002). Evidence suggests that the risk of failure in construction projects could be minimized through the adoption of project governance practices (Zhang et al., 2016). Project governance is the process of decision making and the process in which that particular decision is executed (Abednego and Ogunlana, 2006) and could be viewed in terms of managing the relationship between project actors to maximize project outcomes (Chen and Manley, 2014). However, there has been limited empirical evidence that could explain the factors that influence the governance practices among public officials who are involved in public projects, mainly in the rural road projects, which could lead to successful project delivery.

Hence, the current study seeks to address the questions on what are the factors that influence project governance practices and how they are practiced in real project settings. This study provides new insights into the

project governance practices in rural road projects and contributes towards a new dimension of knowledge, mainly on the motivating factors that drive project governance. The following sections present the literature review and theoretical notion, the methodological approach, the findings, discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the public sector, project governance will ensure that project objectives are met from all stakeholders' perspectives involved in the projects. Thus, the literature review outlines the rural road infrastructure projects and its link to the project governance practices as well as the theoretical notion of the study.

Rural Road Projects as Tools for Enhancing Wellbeing of Rural Poor

Rural infrastructure development is crucial in progressing the economy and enhancing the living standards of the poor. Early studies found a positive relationship between infrastructure development and economic development (Antle, 1983; Owusu-Manu et al., 2019), while Ng et al. (2019) discovered the growth in road length per thousand population contributed positively to the economic growth of a country. Sustainable economic growth is positive towards enhancing the wellbeing of rural poor since many programs and projects could be implemented, including widening rural road coverage, which often needs high budget allocation. According to Lucas et al. (2016), transport poverty, which is due to poor connectivity and unsafe

travel conditions, is still affecting the rural poor, particularly in order to satisfy their daily basic activities.

In Malaysia, a specific budget for the construction of rural roads has been allocated in every five-year Malaysia Development Plan, and between 2010 and 2017, it has benefited 3.7 million villagers through the construction and upgrading works of 6868 km of roads (Civil Service Delivery Unit (CSDU), 2017). Although higher rural road coverage with other rural-based investments helped to reduce rural poverty, it is crucial for the agencies that provide public goods or services to improve efficiency and delivery effectiveness (Fan and Chan-Kang, 2008).

In order to improve governance of rural infrastructure development, Manggat, Zain and Jamaluddin (2018) emphasized the importance of close collaboration and integration among the project stakeholders, while Wong et al. (2017) discovered that rural governance in the village could enhance the quality of the rural road in the area. Besides, effective project governance practices driven by a proper framework could subdue the management deficiencies related to the public sector infrastructural development projects in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2018). The previous studies have not been able to determine the factors that could influence governance practices in rural development projects from the perspective of public officials. Hence, the review of project governance and its influencing factors could further enlighten the gap concerning the governance of rural development projects.

Project Governance

Project governance provides a platform for decision-making including structures, processes, rules, and method to support and complement the functional goals of project management (Xiang, Li and Shou, 2013) as well as ensuring the practices of mechanisms and aligning the goals of project actors (Kujala et al., 2016). Much of the current literature on project governance pays particular attention to developing project governance frameworks and its translation process into practices in major projects (Brunet and Aubry, 2018; Volden and Andersen, 2018), while several related past studies touch on project governance issues in regional public infrastructure projects (Khan et al., 2019) and the importance of information in improving rural governance (Kosec and Wantchekon, 2020). However, little attention is given to the governance practices of public projects, particularly the motivation of public officials in accelerating development and enhancing the rural poor's well-being.

As project governance could be identified as a system involving any elements pertaining to the governance of a particular project (Musawir, Abd-Karim and Mohd-Danuri, 2020), it could be influenced by many relevant factors particularly in the context of rural development projects. Brunet (2020) argued that project actors must collectively understand the policy requirements for better project efficiency, and this is crucial in rural projects where rural development and poverty policies are the main government agenda. In addition, a project governance structure should be built with the flexibility to provide guidance to the project actors and demonstrate

accountability (Müller et al., 2013), which will positively influence the project's success. According to Jałocha et al. (2014), public employees tend to be more effectively committed to the organization's values and are highly motivated by a concern for the community and serving the public interest. Thus, moral commitment and motivation of public officials are needed in the context of rural development projects such as rural road project as well as the importance of building a trustful and transparent relationship with external stakeholders as suggested by Derakhshan, Turner and Mancini (2019).

On the other hand, tight hierarchy, adaption, and trust are associated with leadership style in project-based organization governance in developing countries (Lizarralde et al., 2013). Apart from emotional intelligence, Clarke (2012) found that empathy, teamwork, attentiveness, and the ability to solve conflicts are among the leadership characteristics that need to be possessed by the project manager. Taken together, these studies support the notion that the ability of project managers or public officials in public projects to get the trust of other project actors is crucial to carry out works on the project.

Overall, the literature review highlights the importance of rural road projects effective delivery and several factors that could influence the project governance practices, particularly in rural development projects. Nevertheless, ethical values and motivation need to be in place as the public officials who are the backbone of effective project delivery are accountable for each action and decision making throughout the project cycle.

Theoretical Notion

Governance could be described through many theoretical notions that support the contextual perspectives of the circumstances. Transaction cost economics theory offers several governance mechanisms that best suit specific economical transactions, while agency theory promotes the delegation of decision making and authority to the agent to execute services on behalf of the principal. On the contrary, stewardship theory inspires the organization to conduct activities for the benefit of the stakeholders and communities (Contrafatto, 2014) and also beneficial to the principals and various stakeholders cooperatively as well as maximize social welfare and long-term economic benefit to the society (Caldwell and Karri, 2005).

This study utilized stewardship theory as the theoretical notion to better explain the factors that influence governance practices in rural development projects. Principally, stewardship theory provides the moral commitment needed by team members where they feel obliged to act in specific ways, which is mainly conducted for the benefit of others involved in the structure of relationships (Hernandez, 2012). Therefore, by adopting these contexts within the parameter of this study, public officials who are involved in the planning and implementation of the project are expected to be motivated by showing stewardship behaviour towards the project's successful outcomes. It also provides room for stewards and project team members to drive the project forward without facing accountability and integrity issues. However, caution shall be exercised as wrong moral compass among the project actors could hinder project execution efficiency.

METHODOLOGY

This section explains how the study was conducted and the researcher's stand about validity and reliability.

Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative method through the use of a case study. A case study research is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident and in which multiple sources of evidence or techniques are used (Yin, 2018).

As the current study involves several project actors in undertaking activities to ensure the deliverables of the project benefits to the primary target group of the projects, the case study research strategy is deemed suitable since it focuses on detailed descriptions, interpretations, and explanations as well as involves actors who participate in the social process (Swanborn, 2010). Moreover, identifying factors that influence the project governance practices and how it works in real-life contexts is better explained through the case study, which permits a micro-perspective look on the subject matter.

Selection of Case

In order to explain the phenomenon in the project's context through the theoretical notion perspective, a single case study is used, which also served

as a common case. This is in line with Yin (2018) since the rural road projects have similar implementation set up and machinery systems nationwide; hence, it might provide about the social processes related to the stewardship theory of governance.

A rural road Project XYZ (a pseudonym) in East Malaysia is selected as a case study because it fulfils the requirement of a completed project located in a remote area to represent the rural road which is used mainly by the rural poor in the area. The project is funded by the federal government, and the state Public Works Department (PWD) is the implementing agency. While a single case study could not be used to generalize the whole rural development projects in Malaysia, a thorough approach of empirical analysis by multiple sources of evidence permits the exploration of public officials' actions and decisions from different perspectives during the project planning and implementation. Besides, the selected project could provide better access needed to collect the case study evidence, enabling a thorough investigation of the case to overcome the limitation of a single case study strategy (Yin, 2018).

Selection of Informants

The current study has interviewed five (5) public officials involved in the planning and implementation of the project, and this is in line with suggestions by Yin (2018) to have targeted and insightful informants who can provide explanations and their personal view of the research topic. It certainly reflects the phenomenon and the study's context to answer the

research questions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Table 1 shows the informants' basic information.

Table 1. Basic Information of the Informants

Informant	Designation	Agency	Working Experience
Informant 1	Senior Assistant Secretary	Infrastructure Division, KPLB	14 years
Informant 2	Assistant Secretary	Infrastructure Division, KPLB	3 years
Informant 3	Project Manager (Civil Engineer)	Works Department (Regional Office)	18 years
Informant 4	Civil Engineer	Works Department (HQ)	8 years
Informant 5	Quantity Surveyor	Works Department (Regional Office)	18 years

All the informants selected for interviews satisfy the requirements, such as directly involved and managed this project as well as the combination of technical and management background with working experience between three (3) to 18 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

A case study protocol was developed to guide the researcher during data collection. Multiple sources of evidence have been used for data collection, such as semi-structured interviews, document analysis, direct observations, and field visits, as suggested by Yin (2018). On top of that, the researcher utilized the memo and reflection notes throughout the research process, and it helps during data analysis and interpretation (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

All interviews were conducted in the native language (Bahasa Melayu) and were transcribed in the language. As proposed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the analysis was conducted through NVivo 12 software with findings, supporting evidence, and selected quotes translated into English. The current study utilizes an abductive analysis strategy, and new ideas that emerged during the analysis were examined with the primary aim to answer the research questions. Thematic analysis was used where the initial coding template was developed according to data collected. This involved an exploratory process related to the organizing and reorganizing of the codes until a set of themes appeared, which represent the key ideas and relationship of the data.

Validity and Reliability

In terms of validity and reliability, operational measures of the theoretical constructs were based on the theoretical notion utilized in this study. Therefore, this study used multiple sources of evidence to enhance the construct validity of the study (Yin, 2018). Next, early findings of the case study were sent through email to three key informants, and the feedbacks and critical comments by them functioned as a validation process to increase the credibility of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

With regards to the external validity of the findings, this study used theory in a single case study (Yin, 2018) and maximized the variation of the samples, which includes selected officials involved in the projects throughout the project cycle. In addition, adequate evidence is presented along with

the relevant quotes derived from the interviews, document analysis, and field notes which reflect the depth and richness of the use of single case study in this research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Besides, the application of case study protocol is consistent with Yin (2018) to enhance the reliability of the case study while the researcher keeps all the evidence in accordance to the sequence of the data collected to boost the confidence and reliability of the study (Yin, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a brief explanation about the project selected for the case study, the findings, and followed by the discussion, which are factors that influence project governance practices.

Brief Description of the Case

Project XYZ is a road upgrading project located in a remote area in the state of East Malaysia where it takes 2½ hours or 138 km travelling by four-wheel drive to get there from the nearest city, and it also takes 14 hours or 780 km travelling by four-wheel drive to get there from the state capital city. Previously, the road was a logging gravel road with a length of 3.7 km beginning at the existing oil palm road and ending at a village, which is a remote area in the northern area of the state.

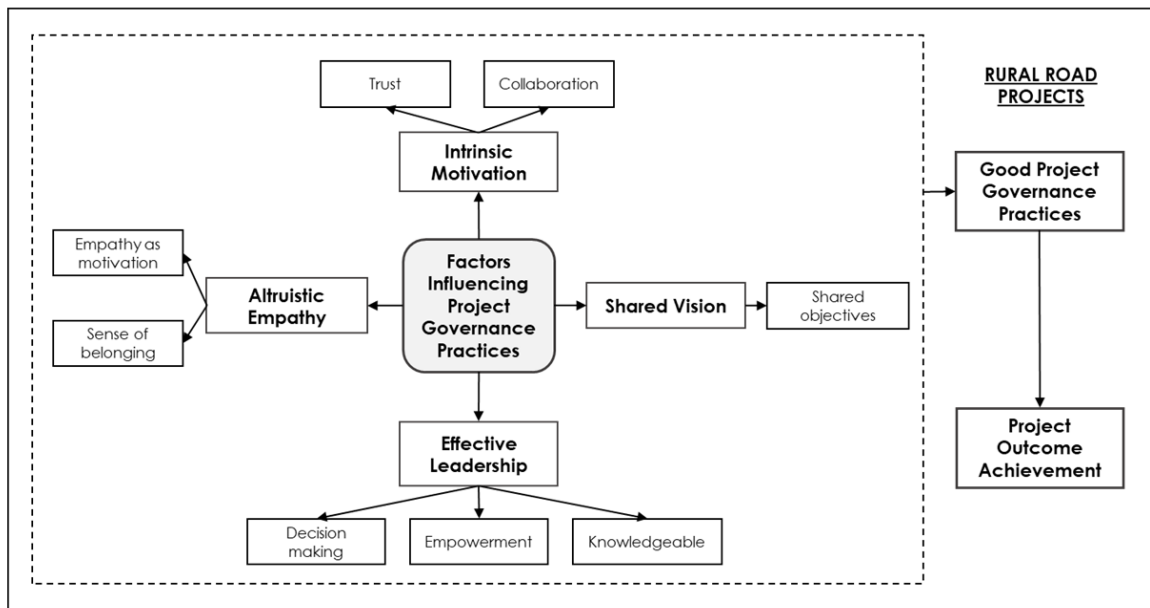
The project scopes include the upgrading of the 3.7 km gravel road to a tar sealed surface up to the PWD R1 Road Standard with 5 m carriageway width as well as 1.5 m shoulders on both sides on the existing gravel road

alignment. Other works include the installation of 60 m High Density Poly Ethylene (HDPE) culverts at three locations along the road alignment and the installation of road furniture such as traffic signs, road line marking, and other associated works. The Superintending Officer (SO) of this project is the Regional Manager of Northern Office PWD. The cost of the project is RM 8.2 million, with a contract period of twelve months. The project was awarded to a local-based contractor after the department's internal design and procurement process. The project objectives are to facilitate the villagers' road connection from and to the main junction and enhance villagers' socio-economic development activities who mostly consist of poor people. The project was completed in September 2019 after two series of extension of time (EOT) given to the contractor.

Factors Influencing Project Governance Practices

The project governance practices for the case are intricate and are influenced by many factors, as shown in Figure 1. Each factor is represented by theme and consists of elements (categories) which shows how they influence the project governance practices.

Figure 1. Factors that Influence Project Governance Practices



The practices of project governance in this project are influenced by four main factors as identified in the analysis of this case study, while it is essential to note that any formal project governance frameworks did not guide the project.

Intrinsic motivation

The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation appears to have an impact on project governance practices. Intrinsic motivation relates to trust and collaboration elements, which is characterized by self-efficacy and doing something with clear feelings of purpose (Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson, 1997), where it motivates a person to take personal responsibility for their actions (Hernandez, 2008). Trust is needed at every single activity conducted in the project, and it involves every project actor. At the beginning of the

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project, the ministry needs preliminary details abstract (PDA) about the project, which is prepared by the PWD. Since the PDA explains the estimated cost and design abstract of the project, the ministry places trust for PWD to do it following the industry standards.

Trust is also actively exchanged throughout the project implementation. The main project actors namely the ministry, PWD, and the contractor, exchanged trust with the help of the project contract, which tied them together in the project. The project's remote location makes the trust even more potent, especially from the ministry to the PWD and from the PWD to the contractor. Due to the project's remote location, the ministry officials rely heavily on the reports submitted to them, and sometimes, they visited the project together with the PWD officials. Informant 2 admits:

"For most of the time, it is PWD; their officials and also the SO who monitor and visit this project. We received reports from them and sometimes visited the project, but we completely put the element of trust on the PWD to do the best."

From the perspective of PWD, they believe they can implement the project accordingly since they have the ministry's full trust, and subsequently, they also have high trust in the contractor. An informant from the PWD, Informant 3 explains:

"The level of trust is good, or else they cannot entrust us to do the project. As a client, they entrust us to do this project. So, on our part, we also entrust our contractor to do the project with good quality... I believe...they entrust us.... good...they trust us as an implementer. There is not much interference from them, just a few site visits, a few comments which we are comfortable with."

Collaboration in this project is driven by the need to solve problems related to the project. As road infrastructure projects are always involved in relocating utilities located on the project site, collaboration with the utility and service providers is crucial to avoid delay and any potential disruption to the project. Mutual understanding and collaboration between the government, PWD, and the providers, specifically in terms of the relocation cost, could save government spending.

In most situations, mutual trust drives collaboration among project actors and further improves project performance (Meng, 2015). The findings are in line with the stewardship theory approach which promotes two main intrinsic values namely trust and collaboration as the main idea which should be embraced by the principal, stewards, project managers and the whole of the project team (Bond-Barnard, Fletcher and Steyn, 2018; Höglund, Mårtensson and Safari, 2019). Although trust and collaboration are the pillars of intrinsic motivation, it is best to be complemented by the element of control. Several processes, such as procurement and financial management,

need to be executed based on a combination of trust and control as it offers better checks and balances for project accountability.

Altruistic empathy

The findings indicate that the intrinsic motivation interplays with altruistic empathy, which influences public officials to execute works with high professionalism and competency in delivering projects to the people. Fundamentally, altruistic empathy is a motivation that drives a person to feel concern or any other-oriented emotion to perceive the welfare of someone in need. A genuine understanding and empathy with compassion to what the rural population suffers drive the project actors in managing this project. Some of the project officials have experience in dealing with low connectivity in rural areas during their younger days. Take it as motivation; the officials believe they can contribute to the project's success by expediting the process and trying to solve whatever problem that arises to ensure the project is completed according to the schedule. Looking from a layman's perspective, Informant 2 highlights:

"I am from a rural area; I choose this ministry because I want to help the rural people. Even I used to live in a longhouse that is still no access road. So, the motivation is very high because I understand how difficult it is if no access road, which means no other utilities such as electricity, which is very difficult. Sometimes, people with no access road have to use a boat through the river, where safety is the issue."

Besides, the officials uphold a sense of belonging to the project, which could further enhance the passion and cohesion to manage the project properly. Informant 5 opines:

"In terms of value, first, there must be a sense of belonging to the project because if we have no sense of belonging, we are just doing works for the sake of doing works. Therefore, we need to have a sense of belonging where we feel the needs of the project so that this project can be completed."

The feeling of empathy for the urgent needs of the rural poor people to have better road conditions is transformed into a unique motivational character and drives the officials to better decision making throughout the project planning and implementation. As the project was requested by the state government, the bottom-up approach in the project initiation and planning stage reflects the ability of the public officials to consider the rural people's voice and translate it into effective project delivery. Hence, this is the evidence of the altruistic empathy adoption by the public officials at every organization level, as touched by Kuppelwieser (2011). It portrays that stewardship-style behaviour is not limited to the executive levels; instead, applicable at every organization's level for the good of its stakeholders.

On the other hand, the development of rural infrastructure projects always lacks a proper quality assurance mechanism (Khan et al., 2019). This

factor will negatively affect the project quality and could lead to project delay and cost increment. Besides, this project also faced several challenges in terms of the terrain, land conditions and weather uncertainty at the project location, where flash flood and landslide could hamper the project's progress. While there are guidelines put in place at the ministry and PWD level, the public officials are expected to follow and comply with the guidelines to safeguard the public and government interests.

Hence, it is discovered that the public officials practice compliance with the guidelines at pre and post contract stages in this project in line with intrinsic motivation and altruistic empathy as project governance elements. The guidelines' compliance reflects the quality assurance system in this project which is significant in avoiding major project delay and cost increment. Informant 2 opines:

"In terms of accountability... I think it is good since when executing a government project, we are subject to guidelines and circulars... and documents, reasons, and justifications must support every single decision... why that decision was made at that time, so I believe it is not a problem."

Effective leadership

Another factor influencing project governance practices is effective leadership, which consists of elements of decision making, empowerment, and knowledge. The discovered elements are in line with effective leadership

cum stewardship, based on positioning and valuing trust and services, as explained by Russell and Stone (2002). Principally, project setting is divided into two main functions namely the project control at the organizational (ministry) level and project implementation at the project level. From both functions' perspective, decision making is a crucial aspect to support effective leadership as weaknesses in decision making always contribute to the failure of rural poverty alleviation projects to meet its objectives (Hoe et al., 2017). However, in the context of this project, the decision making process has taken into consideration the main stakeholders of this project, namely the rural poor people; thus, it is a collective decision making that considers the interests of the people and embraces it in each decision-making process. Informant 2 agrees that:

"Decision making is important in leadership, especially in this project where project implementation and rural population will be affected if we make the wrong decision. That is why, for me, an important element of leadership is decision making since it involves a right and fast decision."

From PWD perspective, even though there is a slight project delay, it has achieved the output objectives which are the quality of the project, delivery within stipulated cost and duration as well as excellent safety record. However, effective leadership demonstrates the firm action of public officials in taking action according to the contract. The contractor has been fined

with liquidated ascertained damages (LAD) for 45 days' delay, which is strictly according to the contract.

On the other hand, empowerment is exercised when project actors have placed trust among themselves and enabled the decision to cross the actors' boundary. It is found that there are excellent empowerment practices among the project actors in this project. The ministry empowered the PWD, especially at the headquarters, to conduct in-house project design and procurement, while the headquarters empowered the regional officer of PWD to implement and monitor the project until it is completed. It is an excellent empowerment practice since it involves the exchange of trust and the roles of decision making. Empowerment among the project actors reflects the strength of intrinsic motivation, which is practiced in this project. This is consistent with Davis, Schoorman and Donaldson's (1997) stewardship theory, where the employees will develop a behaviour of self-control when empowered and have a collectivist culture and positive attitude towards group harmony to avoid any conflict and confrontation. Apart from that, the far distance between the project location and the ministry is also the reason why empowerment is widely practiced in this project.

The findings also identified leaders with knowledge of the subject matters that contribute to the effective leadership needed to manage this project. The project leader has to acquire technical skills as well as knowledge in project management. At every level of the project, the understanding of project management and technical issues will

automatically help in terms of problem-solving and decision making.

Informant 1 opines:

"Knowledgeable is one of the leadership qualities. For example, we must know about project management even though we do not acquire it in-depth; the basic knowledge is still important. In fact, when it comes to technicality, we have the experts involved, geo technique, bridge, design... So, usually in terms of leadership quality for each project is the ability of the project manager or project director... to understand the issues and resolve them as soon as possible to avoid any consequences."

Hence, effective leadership is driven by the knowledge possessed and the ability to translate the knowledge into action. Apart from technical and management knowledge in project management, public officials must also understand the local people's lifestyle and culture. Knowing the local conditions particularly in the rural area will help public officials make better decisions and enhance their altruistic empathy for better project governance practice. This reflects the leadership essence in the construction industry of developing countries as suggested by Ofori and Toor (2012), which needs dedication and tenacity, altruism as well as effective human and stakeholders management.

Shared vision

The officials involved in this project are able to align their objectives to the project objectives and the organization's objectives. Closely related to intrinsic motivation and altruistic empathy, shared vision enables officials at different levels of project actors to work on the common ground to achieve shared objectives. As agreed by Informant 4:

"Yes, I do. My point is... the thing that I like about my branch now is that... to give connectivity to the rural. So, yes, I share the same aspiration."

As this project aims to enhance the mobility and connection of the rural population, there is no direct involvement of the target groups throughout project implementation. The community leaders were briefed before starting the project and from time to time during implementation. During the field visit, the community leaders voiced their support for this project but highlighted no consultation with the villagers on improving their life, enhancing their income, and making their lives better. While the voice of the community leaders is valid, it is essential to note that the project actors share the same understanding of project objectives as they work together in pursuit of the achievement of project outcomes, which are to enhance socio-economic development and also to facilitate communication and community of the rural poor. Accordingly, the shared vision among the project actors should also consider the voice of the target groups as this

would complement the altruistic empathy and intrinsic motivation factors that influence the project governance practices. This sentiment is better explained through the stewardship theory which acts as a suitable model especially with regards to the poverty reduction and clients stability since element such as trust is adopted, and shared among project actors to foster the organization's goals as shared by the whole members of the organization (Van Slyke, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

As this study aims to identify the factors that influence the project governance and how they are practiced in the rural road project, there is evidence that project governance is practiced even though without the formal project governance framework established by the authorities. The case study analysis of Project XYZ discovered four main factors that influence the governance practices in this project namely intrinsic motivation, effective leadership, altruistic empathy, and shared vision. The most prominent finding to emerge from this study is the identification of altruistic empathy and intrinsic motivation as two main elements that are significantly practiced and interplayed, which add values to the project and guide public officials to effectively deliver the project to the target groups and facilitate the project outcome achievement. Altruistic empathy drives intrinsic motivation, effective leadership, and shared vision in pursuit of common objectives to satisfy the needs of the rural poor. The case reveals the determination of public officials from different levels of project actors to contribute significantly

in uplifting the lives of poor people. Thus, the findings of the study will enable public organizations that are involved in rural development projects to enhance their awareness and be thoughtful for better project delivery towards the achievement of the project outcome.

On top of that, effective leadership which consists of elements of decision making, empowerment, and knowledgeability could influence ethical project governance practices. Although this is a common factor in a typical project setting, the interplay between effective leadership and other factors such as altruistic empathy and intrinsic motivation makes a significant difference in the context of this project. Collective decision making and self-control behaviour, when empowered, is the evidence of such interplay among the project actors. This study contributes towards a better understanding with regards to the factors that influence project governance practices in an infrastructure development project that is beneficial to the rural poor. The perspective of project governance from the stewardship theoretical lens led to the discovery of critical factors namely altruistic empathy and intrinsic motivation which is significant in the planning and delivery of rural development projects.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is methodologically limited to a single case study. Thus, further research can be extended by investigating other similar projects in which the cross-case analysis will enhance the depth of case study research. Furthermore, this study involved only public officials structured in the

government system; thus, future study is recommended to include other dimensions such as contractor, community, and political influence to determine their impact on the governance practices of the said projects. Besides, other theoretical notions could be explored in further research; hence, enabling various interpretations and enriching the knowledge and understanding of the research topic.

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