

NGO Achieve Mission Accomplishment: A View from the Field Office. Proposal for a Theoretical Model NGO Case Study

Patsy Kraeger, PhD
Graduate, Arizona State University, School of Public Affairs at Phoenix, Arizona
e-mail: patsy.kraeger@asu.edu

Abstract

NGO organizational success in the field is an important area of study. NGOs are taking on roles that were initially the roles of governments. It is important to study how an NGO achieves mission success in the field. This paper presents a case study of mission success of an NGO from the perspective of the field office. The paper is concerned whether culture affects mission accomplishment in the organizational structure.

Introduction

This paper outlines a research proposal which will examine the problem of identifying the factors related to the success of host country field offices established by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Field office success is not defined by the NGO headquarters in terms of how well or poorly it reaches self-defined goals rather success will be a multi-dimensional concept based on distance from host country national culture. A model of success predictors will be tested and the perceived causes of success will also be solicited from field office directors of a single NGO.

In identifying important variables that are related to success, as well as defining success itself, the unit of analysis is the field office for the case study. Causal factors will be derived from the literature and capture categories of variables such as [1] managerial tactics and techniques dictated by the organization and adopted by field office leaders (things such as cultural training or the absence of it for operating in the host country; the extent to which the field office role and structures are set by the NGO; discretion given to the field office manager to deal with local issues; adequacy of funding for the field office as perceived by the manager); [2] the distance between cultural features of the host country and those of the country of origin of the field office manager and personnel utilizing Hofstede's (1980) six cultural dimensions but the variable is "distance"—do the cultures match on these dimensions or not [e.g.1].

The overall objective of this research is contribute to gaps in theoretical knowledge regarding NGO field office mission success by considering distance from host country culture is assessing the actions of the field office director.

There has been much research in the private sector regarding expatriate management training to achieve organizational success in host countries. Given the unique shared missions of NGOs at a general level, to “change the world”, a definition of success and its measures are different than measures of success in the private sector. This is a cross sector issue which will lead to new theoretical knowledge as well as have significant practical applications for NGO field office managers. Specifically this paper will address NGO mission success from the field office perspective which will contribute and fill in gaps in the field. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to connect theoretically and empirically the definitions of NGO field office success to national culture and distance on Hofstede’s (1980) cultural model. This paper will add to the emerging literature in the NGO field and specifically address cross-cultural dimensions which impact mission success [e.g.1]. To date, there has been little empirical work done in this area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this paper on the issues of success and distance from national culture is grounded in the disciplines of NGO and Non-Profit Organization (NPO) Management, Social Entrepreneurship and Program Evaluation relating to success measures; and using Hofstede’s [1] six scale taxonomy for defining attributes of national culture in an organizational context. From the literature review, a survey has been developed to administer to field office directors and a scale will be developed on which to measure success based on closeness or distance to traits associated with national culture in the context of NGO organizational mission.

Research Problem, Objectives and Plan

The research focus for this paper is the NGO field office. The reason for selecting the field office rests with their critical role in carrying out the mission of the NGO. The majority of the literature in this field has looked at success from an operations management perspective rooted in Anglo-American principles of management focused on organizational inputs rather than mission alignment and sustainable mission impact in the field.

This paper will argue that a new model for success should be adopted by NGOs focused on accomplishing mission and achieving sustainable impact in the field based on the NGO’s mission and the needs of the population it serves rather than on external pressures from funders. This research considers the impacts of cross cultural training and management within a single NGO. A survey was administered to field office directors of an international NGO in South and Central America.

Literature Review

A Model for NGO Field Office Success – The Nominal Definition

The literature review seeks to develop a definition of field office success focused on NGO mission. There has been almost no empirical work in this field which considers the impact of cross-cultural training on organizational mission success. Twenty-five years of literature studied to and through the 1990s in the private sector looked at why cross-cultural training is important to organizational performance in the foreign host country [e.g. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6].

NGOs are mission driven organizations who seek to affect some change through their work. Mission success includes good organizational and operational systems; success may be more than good internal and external management; perhaps a definition of success should also consider sustainable impact. Is success the sum of management styles or is it something else, if it is something else than what is it? Should success be considered from the perspective of the field office, which is directly responsible for carrying out the NGO mission?

The NGO literature to date with a few exceptions considered success from a top-down organizational perspective based on systems established by NGO headquarters institutionalized in the field office which often leads goal ambiguity in achieving mission success[20]. The definition of success proposed in this paper seeks to avoid the tensions related to the problems of goal ambiguity and differing performance measures by focusing on the outputs, programs that are impactful and sustainable.

Collins [7, 8] developed a framework which was centered on discipline. Disciplined people include considerations of leadership and hiring the right people for the organization. Disciplined thought includes confronting the brutal facts about your organization and realizing that regardless of the difficulties that the organization will prevail and recognizing that just because you have been doing something forever that it may not necessarily be the right way. Disciplined action is an organizational culture.

A theory of discipline as a model for a great organization, in order for a third sector organization to be successful; it must be disciplined to the dictates of mission in order to achieve sustained impact [e.g.9, 10, 11, 12].

The NGO literature continues to stress the multiple bottom lines to external stakeholders which produce goal ambiguity and varying performance measures. One of the greatest contributors to this problem is the NGO-donor issue which can lead to mission creep and even mission abandonment. Scholars suggest that by adhering to the mission, money will follow, projects related to mission will be carried out by employees who share a commitment to the mission and ultimately there will be sustainable impact [e.g.9, 10, 11, 12].

NGO field offices execute the mission of the organization.

Success is a measure of both organizational inputs and outputs. Success includes capacity building which ultimately will produce high performance and desired results. NGO headquarters should support field operations through a participatory relationship. NGO headquarters and field offices must be disciplined to adhere to the organizational mission and focus on sustainable projects that have impact in order to be successful[18,19].

Operationalizing Success

Light [10] discusses a process for social entrepreneurs to be successful. The nominal definition and this framework as developed from the literature will be operationalized by looking at the following variables: [i] organization mission and vision; [ii] organization leadership; [iii] organization decision-making structures; [iv] communication management; [v] human resources and administrative management; [vi] funding resources/donor relations; [vii] program monitoring and evaluation; [viii] financial management; and [ix] emergency and disaster management planning. A summated rated scale questionnaire has been developed based on the literature and said questionnaire will be administered to the selected NGO field office directors.

Cross-Cultural Measures

A definition of culture will be adopted which suggests that culture is a set of norms, customs, values, and assumptions that guides the behavior of a group of people. This behavior passes down through the generations, although it is not static and affects organizational behavior. Hofstede [1] wanted to know if management principles were universal or to see if management was affected by culture. He was interested in finding comparative measurements for multi-society research and avoids the problems associated with language difficulties and ethnocentrism using “country” for the unit of analysis [1]. Ultimately each country is bound by its culture and that deference must be given that culture in order for an international organization to survive [1]. Hofstede [1] uses the country or nation as the unit of analysis whereas other scholars criticize this unit of analysis and say that culture is more than country.

Hofstede’s [1] cultural dimensions will be used despite criticisms when developing the independent variables because they are variables which are directly applicable to differences in the developing world versus the industrialized world. This is important because the NGO headquarters are places in the industrialized world and carrying out their programmatic activities in the developing world [e.g 13].

The particular problems faced by NGOs especially in a development context that employ Western models of management may clash with local institutions and organizations in developing countries [14]. Adler and Doktor [2, 3, 4, 5, 6] western management styles and techniques do not fit with developing country contexts.

Cross-Cultural Management

The management “discourse” has therefore been rooted in the Anglo-American concept of leadership and there is a need for a theory of leadership in an intercultural context which has led to the concept of cross-cultural theory and its research paradigms to in order to avoid cultural bias [15]. Classic Western principles of management and leadership disregarded cultural differences as being pertinent. Western theories assert that management principles were equally applicable across cultures[16,17].

Management traits when examined under Hofstede’s [1] dimensions recognize the importance for international managers to know how to interact when working in and with foreign cultures. People act differently around members of their own culture than with members of different cultures due to barriers related to communication [2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Differing management styles and/or techniques can lead to misunderstandings in the international context and ultimately lead to mission failure [2, 3, 4, 5, 6].

Cross-Cultural Training

There is not a universal theory of cross-cultural training. Early studies of cross-cultural management tended to focus on personality traits such as ability to adapt, technical competence, academic qualifications, knowledge of host countries while further studies focused on personality characteristics such as extroversion, agreeableness, openness, and others [16]. They note that previous studies focused on predictive values for studying the success or failure of the training but very little focus was placed on a conceptual framework.

Developing a Tentative Model of Variables that Have an Impact on Field Office Success

Three classes of variables have been developed from the literature review which may have a relationship to the dependent variable of success (or lack thereof). The following variables will be considered: (1) managerial tactics and techniques adopted by the field office leaders or extended to the field office leaders by the NGO; (2) the impact of cultural features on the host country that may affect field office success; and (3) characteristics of the host country government and setting and its impacts of the NGO's ability to work in that country. This paper attempts to answer how do field office directors characterize success for their offices?

Case Study Context and Data Collection Methods

Data management and analysis were conducted by using the statistical software package, SPSS. A case study method is used to facilitate analysis of the self reported data. The study's quality was enhanced by using a summated or Likert type of scale for the purposes of this analysis. The census size was small. Data not shown here was analyzed as a univariate and the results shown here utilized a bivariate cross-tab measure.

NGO Respondents

The researcher recruited The Nature Conservancy's South and Central American field office to participate in the study. A survey was sent to the sixteen offices a total of nine directors responded to the survey. The researcher developed a census from the countries that had field office directors. The nine offices were self selected respondents from the email that was sent out to all sixteen countries.

Findings

Variable: Field Office Directors receive Cross Cultural Training for Host Country

This variable looks at whether Field Office Directors receive training from the NGO in the host country culture. There were seven respondents to this question. 22.2% of respondents did not answer the question. 11.1% agreed that there was training. 22.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. 33.3% disagreed that this type of training was provided while 11.1% slightly disagreed with this variable. (sd = 1.732). See table 1.

Table 1: Variable: Field Office Directors Provided with Cross-Cultural Training for Host Country

Field Office Directors are given EFFECTIVE cultural training (with refresher training) tied specifically to the country of service.

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	1	11.1%
Neither A or D	2	22.2%
Disagree	3	33.3%
Strongly Disagree	1	11.1%
No Response	2	22.2%

Variable: Staff is Provided with Cross-Cultural Training for Host Country

This variable looks at whether NGO staff receives cross-cultural training from the NGO in the host country culture. 22.2% of respondents declined to answer this question, 22.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. 33.3% of respondents disagreed that staff received cross-cultural training about the host country culture while 11.1% strongly disagreed. (sd = 1.464). See Table 2.

Table 2: Staff Cross-Cultural Training

Field Office Staff are given EFFECTIVE cultural training (with refresher training) tied specifically to the country of service.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	11.1%
Disagree	3	33.3%
Neither A or D	2	22.2%
No Response	2	22.2%

Variable: Field Office Directors are given Communication Training for Host Country

This variable asks whether Field Office Directors are given effective communications training or refresher courses relating to communicating with others in the host country. 11.1% of directors agreed, 11.1% of directors slightly agreed while 11.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, 33.3% of directors disagreed that they received this training compared to 11.1% who strongly disagreed. (sd = 1.464).

Discussion and Conclusion

NGO Senior Staff Findings: Organizational Culture First.

Senior Staff from the NGO responded to an open ended questionnaire about measures of success for the field. Field Office directors are a mixture of expatriates and first country nationals. Key factors in hiring field office directors are considered to be the person’s ability to be collaborative and work in a team and to be able to develop strategic partnerships.

This study is interested in whether place and culture affect mission; therefore, the senior staff were asked about cross cultural and communication training relative to the host country where that director was posted. The response was that most field office directors were first country nationals so cross cultural training relevant to the specific host country was not provided to a specific country. It was previously noted that the field office directors were a mixture of expatriates and first county nationals. Although the organization may hire first country nationals, it does not appear to provide cross cultural management or communication training for its expatriate staff or managers. The senior staff response notes that there is extensive organization culture training for staff relating to operations, finance, legal and other specific training on internal processes.

Senior staff emphasized in their responses that one of the principal values when operating in foreign host countries is respect for local culture. A key finding here is that emphasis may be placed on the organizational culture and/or the larger economic situation in the host country as opposed to other environmental factors such as national culture particularities which may or may not affect mission success.

Future Research

The unanswered questions in this study relate to how attributes of national culture impact the execution of mission in the field. The studied NGO does not provide cross cultural management or intercultural communication training. Field office respondents did not respond to open ended questions asking about the impacts of national culture on field operations. In terms of practical knowledge, while this study does not address donor logic, mission and targeted countries for aid, conditions for of aid, and, examining eternal assistance on existing practices and structure of an NGO all relating to performance and accountability— it addresses the very core of the NGO- the field office.

The field office is charged with carrying out the mission of the NGO.

Lessons can be learned from the responses of the field office directors regarding the use of performance data to support management and goal achievement objectives, assessing the scope of work versus actual and available resources, field office director's ability to be flexible in decision-making in the field as well as perceived tensions between the headquarters when it comes to mission. Finally and importantly, field offices operate in foreign host countries and the role of national culture may impact how the mission is carried out and whether the target population is being served and serviced in a culturally appropriate manner. There is much room for further research.

Limitations

One limitation for the case study approach is external validity as it is arguable that a case study of a single organization may limit its great generalizability in building knowledge for the field. External validity should be established based on the concept replication in the field. The small sample or census size will not allow for generalizability. However, this limitation may also be a starting place for future research.

References

- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values* (1st ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Adler, N. J. (2002). *From boston to beijing: managing with a world view* (1st ed.). Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western.
- Adler, N.J. (2002). *International dimensions of organizational behavior*. (4th ed.). Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western.
- Adler, N. J. (1983). Cross-cultural management: The ostrich and the trend. *The Academy of Management Review*, 8(2), 226-232.
- Adler, N.J. & Doktor, R. (1986). From the atlantic to the pacific century: Cross-cultural management reviewed. *Journal of Management*, 12(2), 295-318.
- Adler, N.J. (2002). Global companies, global society. There is a better way. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(3), 255-260.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Collins, J. (2005). *Good to great and the social sectors*. Boulder: Jim Collins.

- Light, P. (2004). *Sustaining nonprofit performance*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Light, P. (2008). *The search for social entrepreneurship*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Dees, J. G. (1998). Enterprising nonprofits. *Harvard Business Review*, 76, 55-67.
- Dees, J. G. (2003). Social entrepreneurship is about innovation and impact, not income. Message posted to www.fuqua.duke.edu/centers/case/articles/1004/corner.htm
- den Hartog, D.N., House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Ruiz Quintanilla, A.S. & Dorfman, P.W. (1999). Culture specific and cross-culturally generalizable implicit leadership theories: Are attributes of charismatic/transformational leadership universally endorsed. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 10, 210-238.
- Lewis, D. (2001). *The management of non-governmental development organizations*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Collard, J. (2007). Constructing theory for leadership in intercultural contexts. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(6), 740.
- Lee, L.Y. & Croker, R. A. (2006) A contingency model to promote the effectiveness of expatriate training. *Industrial Management & Data*, 106(8), 1187-1205.
- House, R., Javidan M., Hanges, P., & Dorfman, P. (2002). Understanding cultures and implicit leadership theories across the globe: an introduction to project GLOBE. *Journal of World Business*, 37, 3-10.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Collins, J. (2005). *Good to great and the social sectors*. Boulder: Jim Collins.
- Suzuki, N. (1997). *Inside NGOs: Learning to manage conflicts between headquarters and field offices*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.