

Identifying the challenges of transnational project management for an NGO: a case study of the World Wide Fund for Nature's Yellow Sea Ecoregion Support Project

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1. Background and objectives

Increasing globalization, the development of public media and enhanced citizen awareness of issues relating to natural resource conservation resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in developed and developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, transnational environmental NGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Greenpeace International work across state boundaries toward environmental protection at the global level. The WWF has created a project management framework which is now being used by other organizations worldwide. The framework incorporates certain steps and key factors to ensure the success of transnational project management. This thesis identifies and discusses the challenges and key elements of transnational project management for the WWF in relation to the ongoing Yellow Sea Ecoregion Support Project (YSESP) – presented here as a case study – along with two additional WWF projects that have already finished.

2. Methodology

I adopted qualitative inquiry research methods to conduct my research. These comprised 1) in-depth interviews with six key stakeholders from three projects performed by WWF; 2) participant observation of YSESP project activities over the course of my 5 months' internship experience at WWF Japan and WWF China, including participation in two international conferences in Tokyo and Shanghai and one fieldwork training program in Hong Kong; and 3) a qualitative analysis of the codes and themes extracted from the 20,000 words of data transcribed from the six in-depth interviews. During this process, each line or paragraph may contain more than one code. After finishing first time coding by hand on the hard copy papers, I started to recode all the transcripts by typing all the codes into computer and calculated the frequency of several main codes. Then I used "bottom to top" pattern to come up with the main themes by analyzing the hidden connections between the main codes and the others.

3. Findings

After the coding and recoding section of my analysis was complete, the original number of codes in my database decreased from 1087 codes to 304 codes. The recoded database contained key codes such as "communication approach" (appearing 43 times), "stakeholder relationship" (37 times), "partnership" (21 times), "project objective" (15 times), and "project design" (13 times). These frequently repeated codes determined five themes connecting with other key codes. These emergent themes allowed me to identify the challenges and key elements of transnational project management, sought at the outset of this research. Qualitative data from participant observation of the relationship of the stakeholders in the YSESP project supported the conclusions of the coding and theming of the interview transcripts.

4. Conclusions

The combined qualitative inquiry research methods employed in this research resulted in the identification of five challenges or key factors for WWF and other NGOs in delivering effective transnational project management. These are: 1) Stakeholder relationships, 2) Partnerships, 3) Communication approaches, 4) Project objectives and 5) Project design. Clarifying these factors at the start of a project and throughout every step of its implementation and ensuring their smooth interaction is discovered to be the key to the success or failure of the whole project management process.