Social Loafing Phenomenon And Lean-Thinking Model In A Taiwan Non-Profit Organization

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Recently, a trend of commercializing NPOs has developed, and increasing numbers of NPOs are attempting to run businesses and enter the market. Nonetheless, during the process of providing services and manufacturing products, NPOs frequently encounter obstacles, such as distinctive organizational characteristics and social loafing that hinder development. Such obstacles impede effective project management of the production management process in responding to market competitive logic and associated demands. Therefore, this study used the Assistive Technology Resource Center (ATRC) of “α” Social Welfare Foundation as the subject, and designed an appropriate project management system by implementing the lean kanban system based on the consideration of balancing NPO operational characteristics and solutions to social loafing issues. The objective of this study is to assist NPOs with resolving the unique challenges posed by commercialization. This study recommends that NPOs use lean-management tools to reduce operational management issues caused by various social loafing situations.

This study selected an ATRC of “α” Social Welfare Foundation and incorporated the lean-thinking concept and tools to investigate whether lean-management tools can improve social loafing. In academic, innovative research that discusses whether the phenomenon of social loafing exists in non-profit organizations (NPOs) is necessary. NPOs have faced controversies regarding organizational performance and mission accountability, particularly after an increasing number of NPOs have become industrialized; however, studies that provide relevant results and suggestions on this subject remain scant. The solution to the aforementioned issue depends on interdisciplinary integrated research. This study integrates the application of public administration knowledge to NPO management and the techniques and process modification methods commonly adopted in industrial engineering and management. Consequently, regarding the research results of organizational behavior and NPO management, technical discussions are centered on non-profit values without regarding methods as mere means to an end. This research approach also enables the agreement between theories and practices, contrary to previous studies that provided suggestions regarding NPO management issues by conducting ex post facto research and critical hermeneutics.

This study found that by promoting commercialization, NPOs may engender social loafing through various factors such as identification and evaluation of work performance, dispensability and fairness, distribution of incentives and rewards, conflict between individual and common interests, and involvement levels and work characteristics. Therefore, this study applied the lean-thinking concept and management tools. Based on three aspects (equipment, tasks, and systems), the lean-thinking concept was confirmed to resolve the operational management obstacles encountered at the ATRC. This study recommends that NPOs use lean-management tools that consist of lean kanban, value streams, and SOPs to improve the production and educational work environment of affiliated (or independent) organizations. These management tools can be used to adjust the member division of labor and reduce operational management issues caused by various social loafing situations. In other words, during the process of commercialization, these recommendations can provide NPOs with a reference for establishing a fair and equitable internal work environment and for developing strategies that respond to market pressure and efficiency. In addition, these recommendations can be used to prevent negative member behavior from affecting entire teams and the organization during the transformation process.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the implementation of NPO industrialization (e.g., financial sustainability achieved through increased efficiency), ensuring that the industrialization process incorporates the understanding of the non-profit concept in relation to internal and external clients (e.g., for inclusive education provided by organizations, job seekers, or external clients, understanding the efficiency management measures of industrialization provides immediate and concrete assistance because of environmental improvements, thereby enhancing the overall use of social resources). Social loafing is a sensitive issue in organizational research, particularly regarding public service organizations. The results of this study were based on case studies;
therefore, the organizational reform intentions demonstrated by executives and their acceptance of management tools might differ from those of other NPOs. Further interdisciplinary integrated research is recommended regarding the industrialization of different NPO types to clarify and answer concerns regarding the overall NPO industrialization environment.

Keywords: non-profit organizations, social loafing, lean thinking, case study