

LECTURE

Searching excellence in project management

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A main outcome of this paper is supposed to be a model of an effective management of projects in specific conditions of foreign aid programmes funded by the European Union.

It was decided to fund three basic projects focused on the Health Care Financing, Health Management and Privatisation. All these projects were completed by the end of 2000 with a different level of success. Different projects' results were achieved in dependence on both the internal management system and external factors.

Based on a theory examined, empirical, practical and evidence-based experience from the above projects the paper discusses particularly those aspects of project management that may influence a successful implementation of projects and may lead to the excellence in managing projects. (Ref. 25.)

Key words: project management, project strategic and operational planning, process management, performance management and measurement.

Perspectives of Project Management

This part addresses two theoretical perspectives relevant to this study.

The first perspective involves an analysis of theoretical aspects of project management including the exploration of what project management is and why it is important for an organisation.

The second part is focused on excellence in project management. It will pursue a view that adhering to certain rules and theoretical findings it is possible to develop such projects that can be most likely accomplished successfully.

Project management is nowadays a widely discussed topic associated with changes in environmental conditions in the last decades. Experience has shown that highly bureaucratic structures cannot respond promptly to a changing environment. Thus, the traditional structure must be replaced by other temporary management structures that are highly organic and can respond rapidly as situations develop inside and outside the organisation (Cole, 1995; Kerzner, 1998; Mullins, 1996).

Project management is considered one of a "workable possibility of organisational forms that could integrate complex efforts and reduce bureaucracy" (Kerzner, 1989).

According to Kerzner, "this approach does not really destroy the vertical, bureaucratic flow of work but simply requires that line organisations talk to the other horizontally so work will be accomplished more smoothly throughout the organisation" (Kerzner, 1989).

One of numerous definitions of project management states that "Project management is the planning, organising, directing, and controlling of company resources for a relatively short term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives. Furthermore, project management utilises the systems approach to management by having functional personnel (the vertical hierarchy) assigned to a specific project (the horizontal hierarchy)" (Kerzner, 1989).

The above definition of project management reflects the objective entity perspectives, i.e. a better use of existing resources by applying proper quantitative tools and techniques while getting work to flow horizontally as well as vertically within the company.

It means that, though the knowledge of general practices, such as planning, scheduling and controlling techniques (so called Body of Knowledge – BoK) is vital, effective project management requires also understanding of organisational structure and organisational behaviour (Mullins, 1996; Vecchio, 1987).

It is imperative that project manager fully understands operations and processes within the line organisation. In addition, understanding of organisational behaviour is important because the functional employees at interface positions find themselves repor-

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ting to more than one boss depending how 'the authority, responsibility and accountability' (Turner 1993, Cleland & Ireland, 2000) is devoted to the people performing on the project.

This horizontal work flow and project co-ordination may result in the development of future general managers who understand more of the total organisation compare to the traditional managers.

Except of thorough knowledge of business processes they are expected to apply also 'total organisational excellence practices' (Oakland, 1999) and emphasise the need for a 'behavioural management' and development of people over pure technical management.

The new approaches to a general management have impact also to the project management. In the past it was thought that project failures "were due primarily to poor planning, inaccurate estimating, inefficient scheduling, and lack of cost control" (Kerzner, 1998).

Today, excellent companies realise that project failures has more to do with 'behavioural shortcomings' such as negative human relations, low productivity, or lack of commitment (Kerzner, 1998).

Basic project management stresses behavioural topics such as multiple reporting relationships, 'people oriented' leadership style, time management, conflict resolution, negotiation, teambuilding, and motivation.

As a result of this, people must be trained not only in understanding an organisational and project structure (Meredith & Mantel, 1985; Cleland & Ireland, 2000), roles and responsibilities of the team, common systems and processes that will be used throughout the life of the programme, but also in team skills, interpersonal skills or "knowledge management" (Gore, 1999), which are keys to achieving a behavioural excellence in project management.

Moreover, as the processes evolve and the methods require a new culture, appropriate training has to focus also on the project management culture (Cleland & Ireland, 2000).

It is essential that all members of the organisation, not only the project teams, should be familiar with the principles and philosophies of project management. Just the understanding of the project management principles could have moved us further in our attempt to introduce this new way of management within the bureaucratic and formal civil service.

Excellence in Project Management

Successful project management is generally classified as "accomplishing the effort on time, within budget, and at an acceptable level of quality" (Kerzner, 1998). However, the process should result in "continuous improvement" (Oakland, 1999; Kerzner, 1989) in order to reach excellence.

Kerzner argues (1989) that the excellence in project management requires first "a continuous stream of successfully managed projects" and second, "that decisions made on individual projects must take into account the best interest of both the project and the company as a whole".

Moreover, a customer must see first "the project as having an 'appropriate fit' with the mission, objectives, and goals of the enterprise" (Cleland & Ireland, 2000). Second, "stakeholders are happy with the way the project was managed and the results that have been produced" (Cleland & Ireland, 2000). This is particu-

larly important in the foreign aid programmes where the 'stakeholders' satisfaction with the results has a direct impact on further funding of the programme. Third, the author points to the importance of the role played by the project team members and their perception of the value earned from the project.

Kerzner (1998) further developed the six components of excellence in project management as follows:

- Integrated processes (e.g. total quality management, risk and change management, time management).
- Culture of the organisation (including project culture).
- Management support (i.e. project sponsorship, decision making, visible support from senior managers, empowerment of project managers, etc.).
- Training and education in modern project management practices.
- Informal project management (i.e. co-operation, teamwork, trust, communication, etc.).
- Behavioural excellence (including situational leadership, tolerance of external events, tolerance of people's personalities, conflict resolution, commitment to the project and to the project team, staffing of project team, etc.).

Author supported an idea that project management effectiveness is more behavioural than quantitative and recognised the importance of behavioural factors in working relationships.

Besides, he argues that project management excellence may be achieved not only through proper use of project management systems but also by 'establishment of control processes, interim metrics and involvement of customer' (Kerzner, 1998).

Kerzner so defined some other important complementary management processes, which have to be integrated into the project management in order to accomplish required project results. These are total quality management (TQM), concurrent engineering, employee empowerment, teamwork, continuous improvement, re-engineering, risk management and change management. According to the author, these complementary processes are a key to achieving excellence in project management (Kerzner, 1998).

Model of Effective Project Management

This paper is primarily aimed at developing a model of effective project management in the specific context of the foreign aid programmes. It is anticipated that the model would help the staff involved in the programmes to understand better basic processes and factors that have impact on success in project implementation.

There are some distinguishing actions that may ensure effective project management and can make project success more likely. These actions were summarised based on relevant theory, empirical, practical and evidence-based experience gained during managing the Phare projects at the Ministry of Health.

Four basic parts of the model are focused on strategic and operational planning; process management; performance management and people development; and performance measurement and feedback with respect to the specific conditions of the EU funded programmes.

By suggesting some of the actions and causes of project success or failure, it is to be recognised that the end results of the project can be affected by many other forces and factors, as each project tends to be unique.

However, by being aware of these basic factors and forces, the chances are improved that the project may be more successful and less likely to fail.

1. Strategic and operational planning

The strategy development in the discussed context is more or less about selling projects to the responsible authorities, EU donors and senior managers of beneficiary institutions. It requires that they all recognise a problem and accept the need for funding of the particular project or the whole programme.

Prior to project implementation an effective strategy and supporting plans have to be developed for achieving the required project results.

An adequate organisational design and information system has to be established together with a workable set of project planning and control tools (Kerzner, 1989; Turner, 1993; Cleland & Ireland, 2000;).

“Project planning is the process of thinking through and making explicit the objectives, goals, and strategies necessary to bring the project through its life cycle to a successful satisfaction of its cost, schedule, and technical performance objectives” (Cleland & Ireland, 2000).

A choice of the ‘project life cycle’ (Majtán, 2000) influences to a great extent the quality of the project preparation. It should be chosen with regard to the project size, financial resources available, professional ability of the project team, or a level of a client involvement in the project.

In the discussed case of foreign aid programmes the project planning starts with the preparation of a project intend. Based on the approval of this document by a relevant authority so called Summary Project Fiche (or master project) is elaborated by the beneficiary institution. The document includes among others project wider and immediate objectives, project description, list of stakeholders and institutional framework with defined responsibilities, budget allocations, implementation arrangements, and implementation schedule.

A logframe planning matrix then defines indicators of achievement and how, when & by whom indicators will be measured. A definition of assumptions & risks in objectives, outputs and inputs is an important part of this matrix. The document is annexed by a detailed breakdown of costs, time implementation chart, contracting and disbursement schedule, relations to other foreign aid programmes, and list of relevant laws and regulations.

On the basis of the above document a detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) is elaborated for each subproject. The aim is to ensure that all issues are covered systematically and that key factors related to clarity of objectives and sustainability are thoroughly examined.

The thorough preparation of the ToR is extremely important for the ultimate success of the project. It is most likely to ensure that the project has been properly conceived, that the work is carried out on schedule and that the resources will not be wasted. Therefore greater effort during project preparation will save time and money in the later stages of the project cycle.

To sum up, the following actions are important for project strategic and operational planning:

- Establish the strategic and operational fit of the project. Vision, goals, strategies of the organisation and mission of the

programme must be thought through and shared in the project activities;

- Perform effective project planning in form of thoroughly prepared Strategic Plan or Summary Project Fiche;
- Plan organisational breakdown structure (Turner, 1993; Cleland & Ireland, 2000);
- Plan cost breakdown structure (Turner, 1993);
- Plan master schedules (Turner, 1993);
- Determine who the project stakeholders are and plan for the management of these stakeholders;
- Perform risk analysis and focus on risk management (Dawson & Dawson, 1998; Baldry, 1998);
- Maintain backup strategies (contingency plans) in anticipation of potential problems (Rosenau, 1998);
- Consider necessary change management and ensure that prompt decisions on changes and on risk will be made in case of need (Voropajev, 1998);
- Provide for the project information system;
- Plan for the nature and timing of the project audit;
- Gain project sponsorship (preferably a senior member of the organisation; also each core process should have its sponsor; if possible (Cleland & Ireland, 2000);
- Gain the top management commitment (Cleland & Ireland, 2000);
- Clearly define corporate values and required behaviours. These values and behaviours allow individual employees to understand how decisions are made and how they should interact with the parent organisation and the other team members;
- Implement top down and bottom up approach, i.e. let employees and staff participate in the project planning; understanding of project will make people less resistant to changes;
- Provide basis for controlling the application of resources on the project;
- Provide basis for monitoring and evaluating the use of project resources;
- Plan for performance measurement baseline and performance reporting;
- Seek sufficient authority and support from the responsible authorities and sponsor (i.e. the EC);
- Having applied all of the aforesaid attributes develop reasonable and good-quality Terms of Reference for a project. Deliverables after the planning cycle of the project should be as follows:
 - An agreed framework for goal deployment and mission of the project;
 - Reasonable organisational design and information system;
 - Reasonable budget and schedule;
 - Acceptance of change and proper change and risk management;
 - Agreed performance measurement framework.

2. Process Management

Basic definitions of the project management state that it is the process by which a project is brought to a successful conclusion. Delivery of the project’s purpose requires the management of five main project objectives, i.e. “managing: scope, organisation, quality, cost, and time” (Turner, 1993). Since each objective contains an element of risk, a sixth, managing risk can be added.

To achieve each objective requires the use of management processes that address the unique nature of projects and are aimed to a successful completion of the project.

In the environment of the discussed foreign aid programmes the following issues should be taken into consideration:

- Understand the project management core processes (planning, scheduling, implementation, control, project monitoring and evaluation), including the integrated processes (TQM practices and techniques, risk and change management, time management, leadership, teambuilding, and motivation);
- Analyse standard working processes (standard rules and procedures for EU funded programmes are determined in the Practical Guide to Phare, Ispa & Sapard contract procedures available on Internet website: [en.htm](#));

Managing scope:

- Ensure management of scope by establishment of an appropriate Work Breakdown Structure (Cleland & Ireland, 2000; Turner, 1993), i.e. break down the project into work packages that are assignable and for which accountability can be expected;
- Display interrelationships of the work packages to each other, to the total project, and to other activities in the organisation;
- Schedule work packages.

Managing organisation:

- Review the initially planned organisational design and establish the authority-responsibility matrix organisation (Cleland & Ireland, 2000);
- Develop project control concepts, processes, and techniques;
- Develop the project team (Cleland & Ireland, 2000);

Managing quality:

- Develop clear and workable operational guide for project managers;
- Based on a self-assessment and a gap analysis (Oakland, 1999; Oakland & Porter, 1998) define opportunities for improvement;
- Identify and document factors critical to project success (CSFs), e.g. adherence to schedules, budget, quality standards, change control processes, etc (Oakland, 1999);
- Define the key performance indicators (KPIs), i.e. the means by which success will be measured and targeted (e.g. use of appropriate project management systems, establishment of control processes, use of interim metrics);
- Apply benchmarking (Oakland, 1999);
- Ensure proper project monitoring and evaluation of project results, including the performance appraisal.

Managing cost and schedules:

- Review the planned project budget and other resource plans;
- Estimate the time and cost elements;
- Review of master schedules with project time constraints;
- Review schedule with project costs and technical performance considerations;
- Establish procedures for making changes and their monitoring;
- Reconsider and quantify possible risks and adverse effects of scope creep (Rosenau, 1998; Kerzner, 1998);

- Ensure the functioning project information system;

The deliverables after the process analysis will be agreed core project management processes and awareness of necessary procedures and rules to be followed by involved parties. Action plans may be updated; better working relationships with the parent organisation and the project team will be developed with short and informal lines of communication.

3. Performance Management and People Development

An integral part of the project management is undoubtedly effective performance management with its main activities — appraisal, business planning, training and development, reward system and also with its attributes such as “a continuous process involving agreeing standards and objectives, giving and receiving constructive feedback on performance and identifying appropriate training and development opportunities in order to contribute to the success of the organisation” (Armstrong & Baron, 1998).

Effective performance management requires:

- Identifying and controlling system influences on performance.
- Developing an action plan and empowering workers to reach solutions.
- Directing communication at performance, rather than at the performer.

Identification of system factors involves careful study of the work situation. Moreover, an empowered approach should help to identify ways to effectively deal with existing work situation.

Communication between a rater and ratee is critical to effective performance management. The way of communication determines whether performance improves or declines.

In addition, it is to be recognised that one of the main benefits of the effective performance management is that it encourages managers to ‘think in the round’ about their staff and focus on people development and thus become less bureaucratic.

Performance management adjusted to the conditions of foreign aid programmes requires:

- Understanding the process of performance management (clarifying responsibilities, adhering to pre-established performance indicators and objectives, preparing action plans);
- Recognition of team processes (Manz & Sims, 1987);
- Recognition of leadership tasks (Briner et al., 1990);
- Understanding the organisational culture (Schein, 1989) and project management team culture (Cleland & Ireland, 2000);
- Insisting on staffing for excellence;
- Ensuring a high level of integrity;
- Go above and beyond politics and gamesmanship;
- Applying teamwork as the most efficient way to tackle process improvement (co-operation, trust, and effective communication);
- Ensuring training of modern project management in both technical and behavioural skills;
- Striving for continuous improvement of performance but in a cost-conscious manner.

Deliverables of the performance management framework will be better attitudes and stronger behavioural integration skills both internally and externally, improved communication of strategy and changes, good leadership, communication skills, and better management of project team or individuals.

4. Performance measurement and feedback

The performance measurement component refers to the central feature of appraisal (Carroll and Schneir, 1982), and is based on pre-established performance standards and criteria against which individual's behaviour and outcomes are judged in order to evaluate their performance.

Also according to Fleming & Koppleman (1996) the heart of effective project management is "the establishment of performance measurement baseline and performance reporting".

Once the processes have been analysed, "a balanced set of metrics" (Oakland et al., 1998) for measuring the performance should be developed. The main point is that metrics "reflect the true performance of processes, sub-processes, activities and tasks" (Oakland et al., 1998).

An approach to performance measurement has to be considered individually in the context of each organisation: its culture and structure as well as the views of its stakeholders, the work carried out and the type of people involved.

It is important to remember that organisations may have different standards for defining success. Nevertheless, the critical areas in project management performance measurement are technical aspects, time and costs.

Successful companies measure success both externally, by using "critical success factors" (Kerzner, 1998; Oakland, 1999) and internally, by referring to "key performance indicators" (Oakland, 1999).

Having examined the performance measurement in the health care projects, which were implemented at the Ministry of Health in 1996–2000, it was found out, surprisingly, that performance measurement and feedback was not practised within this programme. It was lacking quantifiable and reasonable outcome measures, measures of performance, appropriate benchmarking, and sufficient sources of data.

Furthermore, it was noted that the basic managerial functions, such as leadership, risk management activities, management of information, human resource management, commitment to the organisational and project management excellence, staff views about the project organisation, etc. were not assessed at all.

In such a situation it becomes difficult to create a 'performance measurement framework' (Oakland, 1999) or "performance improvement framework" as proposed by the Joint Commission, (1994).

In addition, no performance assessment results can be used as a feedback for strategic decisions, possible improvement for the future or for drawing clearer conclusions about current performance.

As a result of this, one of the main recommendations of this study proposed that the project monitoring and project evaluation process should include, except of assessment of technical and business achievements, also a well-balanced performance measurement system. It should address multiple dimensions of performance, collect data about processes, outcomes, resources consumption, satisfaction level and employees views on quality of project management.

In order to establish the performance measurement system the following actions should be focused on:

- Allow suitable measures to be adopted.
- Develop balanced set of metrics for performance measurement. These should address operational functions, such as me-

eting budgets, procedures or deadlines, as well as organisational functions, e.g. risk management activities, leadership tasks, management of information, etc.

- Determine current level of performance and create performance improvement framework.
- Use performance measurement as a baseline for decision-making and as a feedback for strategy setting.
- Create database containing aggregate information about process performance, outcomes, satisfaction, cost and judgements about quality and values.

The main benefit of project performance measurement would undoubtedly be an improved tracking progress against organisational goals with a strong impact on strategy and effective decision-making. The latter would be based on direct physical measure for operational feedback and improvement. Moreover, the performance might be compared against internal and external standards.

Finally, to complete the Model, broad information about implementation of particular projects has to be provided not only to the parties involved but also to wider society, so that any misinformation was avoided.

Final Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above model it is possible to make a series of general conclusions and recommendations which should be taken as working hypotheses and guidance for people involved in project management in the specific conditions of foreign aid programmes.

First, an effective strategy and supporting plans, comprising relevant policies, objectives, targets and processes, have to be developed for achieving the project results required. Planning and strategy have to be based on information from performance measurement, learning and creativity related activities.

Second, the existing management structure has to be reviewed, core processes and integrated processes of project management have to be analysed and controlled by using appropriate project management techniques and tools. In addition, the importance of behavioural factors in working relationships has to be recognised and behavioural skills have to be focused on and trained.

Risk and change management as a key integrative project management functions are vital.

There is an overwhelming need for a markedly improved system of risk management. External and internal risks have to be identified, analysed and quantified, if possible, in each particular project and thus prevent the project failure.

Moreover, introducing change management requires revision of all project management elements and functions connected with changes of business environment.

It may also put pressure on the organisation in terms of changing its culture or even its organisational structure.

Having examined the relevant literature it was noted that the organisational culture and a project are mutually supportive. Often the need for change of cultural and behavioural attitudes may occur in order to achieve successful project results.

Third, effective performance management may encourage employee participation and provide a framework for common understanding of the projects. Consequently, external and internal communication may improve and senior management com-

mitment increase. Undoubtedly, these two factors are the most critical factors to success and still remain the greatest challenge. In addition, team processes and leadership tasks should be recognised, project management team culture understood, and experts in project management should be trained and developed.

Senior management commitment to project management, a new management tool, or their commitment to a continuous improvement will come about only as the result of a carefully planned and managed process.

A well-balanced measurement system, which addresses multiple dimensions of performance, collects data about processes, outcomes, resources consumption, satisfaction level and employees views on quality of project management, combined with a thorough knowledge of processes will certainly contribute to excellence in managing the projects.

The last element of the project management maturity phase is the development of a supportive long term educational programme demonstrating the organisation's commitment to the project management. Without a sustained educational programme an organisation may revert to old practices very quickly.

Finally, to complete the general conclusion, regularly updated information on the progress of the projects should be provided by the beneficiary institution for all stakeholders and the parties involved. This will help to avoid any misinformation about the project implementation and the results achieved.

To sum up, the excellence in project management is a continual process. It is dependent upon the organisation's ability to create such an environment in which there exist conditions for successfully managed projects and where success is measured by the achieved performance that is in the best interest of the organisation as well as of a specific project.

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Abstrakt

Stromšíková D.:

Možnosti zdokonalenia manažovania projektov

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Na základe štúdia teoretických základov všeobecného i projektového manažmentu bola spracovaná hlbšia analýza zdôrazňujúca systémový prístup k riešeniu projektov a komplexnosť pri hľadaní dokonalosti v projektovom manažmente.

Hlavným výsledkom štúdie bolo vypracovanie modelu efektívneho manažmentu projektov v špecifických podmienkach programov pomoci financovaných Európskou úniou (EÚ).

V článku sa poukazuje predovšetkým na tie aspekty projektového manažmentu, ktoré môžu ovplyvniť úspešnú realizáciu projektov a viesť k zdokonaleniu ich riadenia. (*Lit. 25.*)

Kľúčové slová: projektový manažment, strategické a operatívne plánovanie projektov, manažment procesov, manažment a meranie výkonov.

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