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SUCCESS FACTORS IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT. LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Projects are widely recognized nowadays by organizations. They are part of the activities of both education providers and companies. Project management has been applied in organizations since the 1960's. However, despite garnering experience and improving on available methods, a significant number of projects (including educational ones) still fail. According to the Gartner Group's world-wide research, the percentage of unsuccessful projects (failed and challenged) as of the year 2012 was 61%.

Therefore, the question, "what drives the success of the project?", remains a fresh issue. Researchers thus undertake to continuously narrow this knowledge gap. However, as the issue is a complex one, many ideas, concepts and pieces of advice are given. In the article, based on the literature review, different approaches to projects' success are presented, discussed and systemized.

The factors influencing the success of projects are identified and presented in the following areas: (1) applied methods, (2) people in projects, (3) and organizational context.

Method-related issues are about utilizing tools and techniques in project management. Moreover, they cover the application of global standards while managing the projects.

The discussion on the influence of the people involved in the project is not limited to human resources only. Widely recognized and fresh ideas of the Stakeholder Management concept are discussed as well.

Last, but not least, the issue of the organizational context in which the projects are executed is emphasized. This matter is of high importance nowadays as the complexity and the number of managed projects has increased significantly within the last twenty years.

Furthermore, the author outlines some characteristics related to the different types of projects and their associated success factors.

Some advice for practitioners is given on what kind of action should be undertaken to increase the success of projects.

The findings of this article can be of special interest to managers of any type of projects, including international ones where Stakeholder Management and organizational issues tend to play an important role in project success.

Keywords: Project Management, projects, success, factors, organization, failure, innovation, operational management.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the increase in number of courses and training sessions in project management, a significant number of projects still fail. According to the Gartner Group, a world-wide consulting company, the number of projects that failed or were challenged in the year 2012 was 61% [1]. It is remarkable that, according to Gartner's highly extensive research, the number of successful projects never exceeded 50% and, over the last 8 years, have actually stagnated [2]. Latterly, substantial progress has been made. However, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

The number of projects has increased exponentially over the last two decades, to the extent that the implementation of the methods and tools in project management has become insufficient to raise the rate of project success. Moreover, it was observed that around ten years ago, the number of unsuccessful projects even temporarily rose [3]. The author implies that it was due to the increasing number of projects managed by the companies, forcing them to operate in a new, multi-project environment, thus creating new challenges. This situation brought about the acquisition of new skills

of people involved in projects and created the 'project stakeholders' approach where stakeholders are assumed to be any kind of individual or institution with an interest in a project's outcomes [4]. However, potential negatives can arise. The author argues that the traditional approach to success through the implementation of methods and tools is not sufficient any longer. There is a need to focus on Stakeholder Management and new, multi-project environment issues.

2 INFLUENCE ON SUCCESS OF PROJECTS

There have been numerous works indicating the different factors influencing the project's success [5-17]. The author, in his previous work [18], based on the world-wide study in over 400 companies, he discusses the issue of success's influence in project management on the operations of the company as a whole. However, the impact on the entire company is still not widely recognised [19].

This article focusses on three aspects influencing the current success of projects: (1) applied methods, (2) people in projects and (3) organisational context.

2.1 Applied methods

The methods applied in project management are widely discussed by a number of authors [20-23]. They are usually connected with a particular industry [24-28]. The global non-profit organizations of project management: PMI (Project Management Institute) [4] and IPMA (International Project Management Association) [29] advocate their standards.

The authors, in a plethora of literature, discuss the issue of success factors and are in general agreement that the level of influence of the applied method depends on the type of project. Brown and Eisenhardt [30] discuss the methods used in product development from the perspective of process performance and product effectiveness. The importance of a new, high-quality product process was also noted by Cooper and Kleinschmidt [31]. The factors influencing new product development (NPD), according to Veryzer [32], depend on the type of NPD project: incremental or radical. Depending on that classification, he proposes different methods to be used. Schmidt *et al* [33], using the Delphi method, argue that focusing on risk identification methods is a first step towards increasing the success of projects, regardless of the cultural aspects. Balachandra and Friar [34], in German literature analysis, found those methods applied in technological aspects, dividing them into two groups, namely high tech versus low tech. Song and Perry [35] investigated 788 Japanese and 612 American NPD projects. They noticed the importance of applied methods from different perspectives. Furthermore, one remarkable observation was that the success factors are no longer country sensitive. Specifically, they stated [35, p. 12]: "Our findings suggest that, regardless of the methods used to enhance implementation of the NPD process, the impact of implementation quality on the relationship between sources of advantage and positional advantage is consistent across Japanese and U.S. cultures. This consistency raises questions about the possible existence of some universal principles in the NPD process". Tatikonda and Rosenthal [36], analysing 120 projects, observed that methods applied in the field of technology are of the utmost importance in relation to NPD projects' success.

2.2 People in projects

Discussion on the importance of people involved in projects has become of growing interest to the authors over the last 20 years or so. Brown and Eisenhardt [30] highlighted the significance of so-called agents, including team members, project leaders, senior management, customers and suppliers in the process of NPD. Those groups would currently be named 'Project Stakeholders'. Cooper and Kleinschmidt [31], in their study on 135 companies and the success factors of new product development highlight the importance of people, resulting in adequate human resources; senior management commitment and accountability, high-quality development and cross-functional teams. Umble *et al* [37], discussing the implementation of the ERP system at Huck International Inc, underline the high importance of the skills of individuals involved in projects, with a special focus on their education and training background. Ragatz *et al* [38] argue that including the suppliers in the NPD team is crucial for that kind of project success. Holland and Light [39] split the success factors of ERP implementation into two groups: strategic and tactical. It is remarkable that in each group, key roles are played by personnel, client involvement and top management support. Seddon *et al* [40] suggest that projects in reintroduction biology should consist of mixed managerial and scientific multidisciplinary teams to achieve the best possible progress. Investigating 111 organizations, Wixom

and Watson [41] noticed that “user participation, and highly-skilled project team members increase the likelihood that warehousing projects will finish on-time, on-budget”. Akkermans and van Helden [42] noticed that some people are more responsible for failure than others. Among them, they stated the stakeholder groups such as top management, project management, project champion and software vendor. Analysis of 151 independent systems development projects in eight different organizations, conducted by McKeen and colleagues [43], indicated that user participation has a crucial influence on the final outcomes of the projects. Based on the study of the responses of 112 new product development professionals, McDonough [44] noticed that increased use of cross-functional teams in NPD is related to higher project success. Young and Poon [45], using fuzzy set analysis of 15 cases, showed top management support to be much more necessary than any other success factor and sometimes being sufficient for success itself.

2.3 Organizational context

The organizational context became more recognised when companies started to manage a higher number of projects and when their complexity increased. The noteworthy observation on the correlation between R&D project success and marketing unit activities was made by Griffin and Hauser [46]. They underlined the informal and formal connections between those two project and functional organizational units. Hong and Kim [47], discussing the influence of so called organizational fit into the ERP implementation as the critical success factor. An interesting point of view is presented by Balachandra and Friar [34]. In their factor analysis, they underlined the importance of the market as an element of the broader R&D-oriented organizational context. The study, surveyed by Ali *et al* [48], on 497 participants from the IT industry, revealed the crucial impact of the organizational context on projects success. Bai and Sarkis [49], discussing the causes factors, developed the idea of the collaborative project environment, pointing out that interactions between key stakeholders are crucial for project success or failure.

One of the most common and modern ways to improve relations between the different stakeholders is by establishing the Project Management Office (PMO) within the organizational structure of the company. PMO, as a concept supporting project management activities, was developed in the mid-1990's [50]. From the very beginning, it was associated with the multi-project environment. Spalek, in his previous paper [51] based on the world-wide study in over 400 companies, discusses the different functions of PMO in the organization; the most common are (1) setting up and enforcing standards / methodology / templates, (2) reporting need (gathering data on project status) (3) Project / Program Portfolio Management (Prioritisation of the projects) and (4) data repository need (access to the historical data obtained and lessons learned). Although there is no mutual understating on the value that PMO brings to the organization [52], there is some evidence that it has a marked influence on the success of projects executed within the company [18, 53, 54]. Therefore, PMO seems to be the active agent which supports the applied methods mentioned above and also Stakeholder Management through the organizational context.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The influence of applied methods on a project's success or failure varies. The biggest variations are regarding the type of projects and, therefore, identified groups of success enablers [55]. The most widely discussed in the literature are success factors in relation to: new product development (NPD) [20], environment [56-58], healthcare [59, 60], oil and gas [61], fisheries [62], information technology [63-68], construction [5, 8, 69-71], rural development [72], agriculture [73], manufacturing [74], banking [75], governmental [76]and telecommunication [77].

Based on the literature review, the author determined that there is a large variety of approaches to success factors in project management. However, the authors of the reviewed articles mostly associate the drivers for success in one or more of the following areas: (1) applied methods, (2) people in projects, (3) organizational context. It is remarkable that the majority of detailed success factors lists are industry specific. However, they still operate in the abovementioned areas. Modern project management became a global concept whose success is no longer country sensitive (at least not to the extent to which it was 20 or more years ago). The interaction between industries precipitated the standardization of methods, resulting in “unification of the problems” nationwide and for overseas companies as well.

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