THE QUALITY MATTERS IN THE EU PROJECTS DESIGN IN THE FRAME OF THE PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT METHOD

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The author is responsible for the quality of the article

Introduction

The name of present article is "The quality matters in the EU projects design in the frame of the project cycle management method".

The quality in the project design and management is important issue that defines project implementation and achievement of the objectives (solution of the problem or product/service) in terms of resource, cost and time.

Author's master paper name is "The project design in the frame of the project cycle management method". The author in the master paper will not analyze deeply the matters of the quality therefore this article could be as chapter or as appendix of the master paper. Therefore the aim of this article is to express the author's opinion about quality in the EU project cycle management

Methods of Research

For researching of the object of the present article, author applied the quantitative research method - contienanalysis. The obejct of the method of contientanalysis is differnt texts. This method is applied for the quantitative analysis of texts and is towards master and analysis of the contient of different sources of the information – books, rcommendations, publications on the internet and other (Socioloģisko pētījumu metodoloģija...1981:95). The sources of the information mentioned before were used because of their comprehensive information concernig the theme of the article.

The author carried out research in following manner:

1. Author analyzed the content of the EC recommendations in project cycle management;
2. Author analyzed the content of the legislation about the project management (implementation);
3. Author analyzed the content of the publications on the internet.

Results

1. This is important to define what is the European Union fund project. Applying method mentioned above, the author of the article found two definitions of the EU funds project:

1) definition of the project by European Commission: A project is a series of activities aimed at bringing about clearly specified objectives within a defined time-period and with a defined budget (European Commission, Projects Cycle Management Guidelines, 2007).

In the context of the Logical Framework Matrix, a project is defined in terms of a hierarchy of objectives (inputs, activities, results, purpose and overall objective) plus a set of defined assumptions and a framework for monitoring and evaluating project achievements (indicators and sources of verification).

2) definition of the project by law “Law On Management of European Union Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund”: European Union fund project – a submission of a European Union fund project, which complies with the criteria for the evaluation of a project submission and which is approved by the institution involved in the management of the European Union fund (“Latvijas Vēstnesis” 33 (3609) 23.02.2007.).

2. The *quality* in the project cycle design and management is the characteristics of a process or/and a product (service) that satisfies a defined and accepted set of requirements**,** is assessed using defined and accepted measures and criteria**,** and is performed using a defined and accepted process.

This definition of the quality in the project cycle management was taken partly from the following link http://www.maxwideman.com/pmglossary/PMG_Q00.htm and modified by the author of this article.

3. The EU project quality consists of three key quality attributes.

The firs quality attribute is relevance, the second quality attribute is feasibility**, t**he third quality attribute is effectiveness and good management (European Commission, Projects Cycle Management Guidelines, 2007).

4. The project cycle quality control plan also defines project cycle management quality.

Discussion

In the first definition of the project is given the essence of the project that describes the project itself. There are clearly defined components that describe the project – project’s objective, activities, costs of the resources and project implementation time.

In the second definition is given important indication of the EU funds project - the criteria for the evaluation of a project submission and, sequentially, for the whole project as well, as the project (project cycle) consists from several phases, scope, impact and others components.

The presented balanced quadrangle describes an aim or an objective of the project. Please see Figure 1 below.

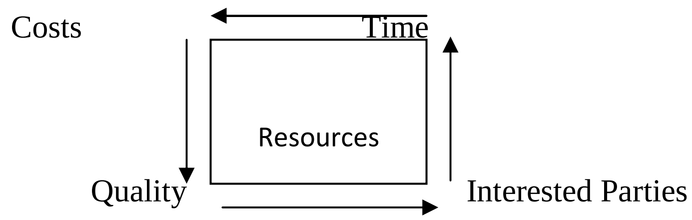

Figure1 Description of the aim or objective of the project.

The picture explains that the objective of the project is achieved in terms of interaction of the resources, costs, time, quality and interested parties (stakeholders) and as the result of this interaction the target group is given sustainable benefits or solution of the problem.

Sequentially, the quality in the project cycle design and management is all processes which run inside the project cycle or/and a product (service) that meets certain needs of the project target group. The quality of the project is defined implementating it according to the plan and an evaluation of the product (service) by the target group, or accordance of the product (service) to the standarts which are issued by Government or international organizations (laws, rules, ISO standards etc.) or by other bodies.

In the EU project cycle management a set of quality assessment attributes and criteria are provided to support structured and consistent analysis and decision making.

There are three quality attributes and criteria that define if the project is high quality or the project is designed and implemented weak. Project's manager and others involved in the projects group, applying these quality attributes and criteria, therefore must to determine which criteria are more or less important in relation to the project objective and scope within which projects group are working.

Under each of these three main quality attributes are many key criteria which indicate the key issues that need to be assessed in order to make an evaluation of and judgment about project quality.

Project is relevant if it meets demonstrated and high priority needs of the projects target group. This attribute is indicated by following criteria:

1. The project is consistent with, and supportive of, National Strategic Reference Framework and Operational Programs and relevant sector programs;

The problem of the target group is well and properly analyzed and the objectives of the project are defined according to the Operational Programs and rules of the Cabinet of Ministers. These documents are the main documents which the project manager must follow up.

2. Key interested parties (stakeholders) and target groups are clearly identified;

Due analysis and definition of the problem, the managers of the project must define the projects target group that needs the improvements of the situation or solution of the problem. This stage is important in terms of projects consistency with Operational Programs.

3. Problems have been appropriately analyzed;

4. Lessons learned from experience and linkages with other projects and programs have been assessed and incorporated into strategy of the proposed project.

The experience of previous projects realization should be included in the proposed project design and implementation if the organization already implemented projects and project group members have already gained some skills and some experience. The learned experience will not be such a useful as this experience is gained from other projects implementation using just descriptions (publications) or reports and in details could not be corresponding to the present project. Often this is only the description of the problems that arose during implementation of the projects, according to this article author’s thoughts, as consequence of planning weakness (mistakes).

Project is feasible if the project is well designed and will provide sustainable benefits to target group - project is qualitative designed if it balances those factors that mainly explain the interaction of the project objective achievement– resources, time, costs and interested parties. High quality project delivers the benefits or solutions or certain results within project’s scope, on time, and within budget. The relationship among these factors is such that if any one of them changes, at least one other factor is affected and project scope is changed and there appear risks for the project feasibility and objective.

The presented misbalanced quadrangle describes an aim or an objective of the project which scope has been changed due changes in the project implementation time. As consequences of those changes the project costs have increased.

Please see Figure 2 below.

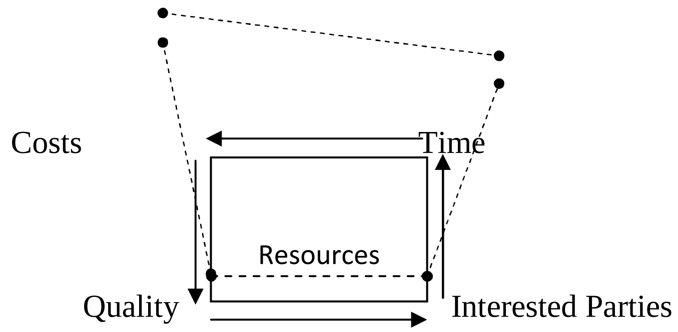

Figure 2 Description of the aim or objective of the project which scope was changed.

This attribute is indicated by following criteria:

1. The objectives (overall objective and purpose) and the activities are clear and logical;

The project's overall objective is linked to a National Strategic Reference Framework and Operational Programs and relevant sector programs and demonstrates a long term development outcome. Activities must be according to the rules of the Cabinet of Ministers. The project's purpose specifies direct benefits that the target groups will have from the implementation of the project, and is consistent with the analysis of problems of target groups. The project's results as results of a feasible set of activities describe tangible improvements that will directly support the achievement of the project's purpose.

2. The resources and costs are calculated and set up, and the project is provided financially;

The resources - such as personnel, equipment, materials - required for the implementation of the project are clearly described and the plan of the assignment is prepared. Project costs are defined and detailed analysis of the costs and a financial analysis were made, which show that the project is provided financially. If it is necessary and possible the project must earn the income (cost-recovery mechanism) in order to provide sustainability of the project.

3. Coordination, management and financing (finance management) are set up;

Management organization and responsibilities are defined and set up, build on the analysis of institutional arrangements and capacity. The arrangements for coordinating the activities of interested parties (stakeholders) are described and practical to implement. Operational work planning and budgeting with fit legislation and good practice and support the ability of manager to implement the project cycle. Financial management is clearly specified (in order to provide an internal control also) and shows accountability and transparency.

4. The monitoring (controlling) and evaluation system are clear and practical;

The project's Logframe Matrix includes a set of indicators and sources of verification, which will allow management information to be collected and used for purposes of controlling and evaluation of the project and its progress. Roles and responsibilities for collecting, recording, reporting and using the information are clearly described. The information needs of target groups in order to provide public control are given priority, and include means by which they can express their opinions and concerns.

5. Assumptions (risks) are identified and risk management procedures are defined;

Assumptions in the Logframe Matrix show key factors outside the direct control of project manager which have the potential to impact negatively on the project implementation (risks). The manager must assess importance of different risks, including the degree of negative impact that they might have on to objectives achieve. The risks management procedures are clear and defined.

6. The project is sustainable.

The analysis of the project impact often is carried out and the project is technically feasible, meets relevant industry (sector) standards and uses technology that is appropriate to the needs of target groups. The project has a clear strategy to ensure that benefits are appropriately targeted at identified target groups.

To provide projects feasibility, the main attention of the projects manager and other members must be paid to the project design as well as on the projects implementation itself in order to create the exact plan of the implementation. All necessary schedules - activity schedule, resource and cost schedule, budget, time and terms schedule, controlling and reports plan, quality plan, responsibilities plan and others must be prepared in a good order in terms of logic, sequence, correspondence to regulations, and relevance. This will help to achieve the objective on time and within defined budget. All necessary resources for the activities and tasks must be assigned according to principles of efficiency and must be evaluated according to the market prices. Costs of the project cycle must be calculated precisely and must not exceed the sponsor's demands for the certain project. The analysis of the project's environment using "SWOT analysis matrix" and set of true evaluated assumptions will help the project manager define the potential risks for the project feasibility.

Project is effective and well managed if project is delivering to target group planned benefits and is being well managed. This attribute describes the actual efficiency and effectiveness of the project during implementation, while the impact of the project can only be assessed after the project is completed. This attribute is indicated by the following criteria:

1. The project remains relevant and feasible;

The project remains consistent with current program priorities. The project objectives remain relevant to the needs target group.

2. Project objective are being achieved;

Results (process, solution and services or product) are being delivered as planned, are of good quality and the project's target group find them relevant and good to their needs. The project cycle achieves the overall objective, and there is evidence that the project's target group will benefit from the project.

3. The project is being well managed by those directly responsible for implementation; Inputs are being provided on time and within budget and the activities are being implemented on time. Relevant information on project achievements/results is being collected and used for evaluation of the project's progress. Operational plans and budgets, including risk management plans, are reviewed and updated on a regular. Financial management is independent and effective in identifying corrupt practices.

4. Sustainability issues are being effectively realized;

Sustainability is a continuation of benefits produced by the project and a continuation of the project itself after the external financing has ended. Financial sustainability matters like affordability and skills adopted by project's group members and cost-recovery mechanism (income) are being realized. Institutional strengthening and capacity building activities (organization development, training of trainers etc.) are being effectively carried out.

Project cycle is qualitative if there is drawn a quality control plan to control the indicators of the project quality. The quality control plan is a frame (table) which contains the main indicators of quality which must be controlled (what the manager needs to control), defined time of control, responsible for the control men, procedures of control and other methods and matters that according to the project manager could be reasonable. There are several main steps how to do control of quality:

1) to define the main indicators according to the project plan;
2) to control practically and physically defined indicators that ensure project progress according to the plan;
3) to compare analytically gained results with planned results;
4) to evaluate the final results of the quality controlling.

The object of quality control is any matter of the project that ensures project progress. For example, such an object can be budget expenditures or certain tasks realizations.

Conclusions

1.The quality in the EU project management is very important factor for the implementation of the project (as a process) and achievement of the project objectives (as a product/service), delivering sustainable benefits to the projects target group.

2. The quality in the project cycle design and management is the characteristics of all processes which run inside the project cycle or/and a product (service) that meets certain needs of the project target group

3. The set of attributes of the quality – *effectiveness and good management, relevance and feasibility* and criteria describing these attributes ensure quality of the EU project cycle design and management.

4. The project quality control plan defines the quality of the project cycle also. The quality of the project must be controlled according to the plan of quality control in order to make sure that quality indicators of project progress are according to the project plan – the main document of the project cycle.

Literature

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