CHOOSING AND JUSTIFYING A PUBLIC PROJECT

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Abstract:

This material aims to bring to the fore, through an empirical approach, corroborating the literature with the authors' view, the main features of project management – initiation phase of a investment's public projects, on the one hand, but also the directions of use of this information both against the background of conditions for improving the choice and justification. This study combines significant elements of economic epistemiology, such as: project management, problem analysis, problems tree, comparative study, in order to growing the sensitivity of feasibility and durability of public investments

Key words: *project management, choice, justify, public investment*

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Introduction

The first challenges facing a program manager are deciding on and justifying the work to be done and obtaining management approval or "buy-in" for the project. Determining what is to be done can be a major challenge in itself and is a critical first step for a project manager or researcher to consider.

Within Public Administration Sector, and in the scientific and engineering community in general, there is an overabundance of interesting and challenging ideas and projects to pursue. In fact, there are generally more interesting research and technical topics and challenges than there are resources available to pursue them. Clearly, some process or method is necessary to decide on what is to be done and how to select and prioritize projects across diverse technologies.

Many possible ideas for projects stem from needs and requirements that are unmet in industry and society, in areas such as health, defense, manufacturing, transportation, communications, and information technology.

Still, other ideas stem from the pursuit of science and technology as the search for new knowledge and understanding continues. From this broad landscape of possible ideas and areas to pursue, a project manager or researcher must carefully decide which are the most important or urgent areas, and then provide the necessary rationale and justification for proposed work.[1]

Literature Review

In the specialized literature at national level there are a series of steps taken by Romanian specialists related to defining the project concept, of which I will present only the opinion of Constantin Opran according to which the project is "a non-repetitive

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process that achieves a new, well-defined within a specialized organization. The project is characterized as a unique, specific action, composed of a logical sequence of coordinated and controlled component activities, with innovative character of different nature, carried out in a methodically and progressively organized manner, with time, resource and cost constraints, intended successful achievement of new complex results, necessary to meet clearly defined objectives ". [2] (Opran et al., 2002)

Project cycle management

Project cycle management addresses these issues by trying to ensure that projects and programs are in line with and contribute to achieving these overarching objectives of EU external cooperation policy.

After 1993, the use of PCM - Project Cycle Management has expanded from the traditional project approach to sectoral programs, for which the principles and methodology of the PCM are applicable.

In PCM terminology, the use of these standardized concepts, tools and documents throughout the (life cycle) of a project is called an "integrated approach". The effectiveness of the PCM depends to a large extent on the quality of the information available (especially from beneficiaries and target groups) and on the correct use of concepts, techniques and tools together to achieve a common general objective, usually relevant at sector level, the country. or even internationally.

In some contexts, the concept of program is understood as an institutional framework that allows the implementation of several projects to fulfill a global goal or mission.

It is obvious that the purpose and impact of a program are more comprehensive than in the case of individual projects [3].

Project initiation phase
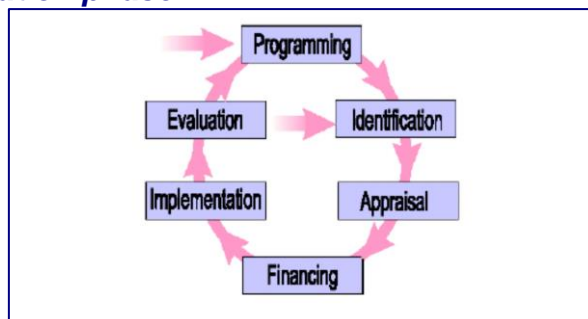
Fig no.1 Project Cycle Management Source: PM Illustrated

From the cycle of the project process phases, the preparatory stage contains only the programming, identification and evaluation to approval of the project concept

1) Programming

In the programming phase, the principles and steps to be followed for cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the beneficiary country are established in close consultation with the Government Plan

Careful analysis of the problems and opportunities that exist at national level, priorities at national and European Union level, current and future actions of the financier and resources available at local level form the key elements on the basis of which decisions are taken to focus European Union interventions on a particular topic. or a sector of activity. The main programs and projects are also outlined in this phase.

The main document that is elaborated in this first phase is a national, county or local strategy or another document supporting the national strategy

2) Identification

In this phase, specific ideas regarding programs and projects within the framework established by the national strategy documents are identified and reviewed, the problems, needs and interests of possible stakeholders are analyzed

To help, sectoral, thematic or pre-feasibility studies are undertaken. Based on these studies and analyzes, decisions will be made on the options to be considered in the future in order to finalize a project proposal.

3) Appraisal

During this phase, the project idea is materialized in the project proposal. Also, during this phase, an ex-ante evaluation is made. The key aspects of the project are analyzed in detail.

Key elements of quality are taken into account, and the main stakeholders are directly involved in the project development and analysis process.

Also in this phase, the logical framework matrix of the project is elaborated, including the strategic elements of the project: objectives, activities, results, indicators, risks and hypotheses, together with the graphical planning tools for implementing the activities, resource charts.

These are used to assess the key elements that help predict the impact of the project: relevance, feasibility and sustainability.

The result is a decision on whether or not to submit a funding proposal.

Choosing Criteria

As defined above, it can be concluded that in order to streamline the management of projects and programs, all aspects, principles and conditions regarding the process of their development and implementation must be taken into account.

The most important **principles of choice**:
• Systematic compliance with major EU priorities and policies, as well as those of beneficiary countries and other donors;
• Design and implementation of projects based on clear and realistic objectives;
• Relevance, feasibility and sustainability of projects;
• Ongoing consultation, stakeholder involvement throughout the project;
• Using the Logical Framework Approach for designing, managing and monitoring project evaluation;
• Establishing some key quality factors for starting the project.

The **conditions** refer to:
1. Clear and realistic objectives for projects or programs:
• Clear distinction between objectives and the means to achieve them;
• Clear and realistic definition of the Purpose of the Project, which must always involve lasting benefits for the target group (s) and final beneficiaries;
• Assumptions and preconditions: major external factors of the project that could significantly influence its success.
2. "**Quality Factors**" which reinforce the long-term benefits of the project and ensure the sustainability of the project and its positive impact:
☐ Participation and involvement of beneficiaries in the elaboration and development of the project;

Ensuring political support from local and central authorities for a stable and rational policy framework assumed by the beneficiary, in particular for sectoral and regional policies;

 Adapting the project strategy to the socio-cultural aspects specific to the target area;

 Systematic application of principles and practices that ensure equal opportunities for women and men;

 Choosing the most suitable technologies;

 The management capacity of public or private institutions that implement projects and programs;

 The economic and financial viability of the projects or programs and the sustainability of the benefits generated by them;

 Integration of environmental protection aspects;

3. Consistency with and contribution to the "comprehensive achievement of EU objectives" through projects and programs.

First, Project Cycle Management is closely linked to the broader framework for external cooperation promoted at EU level, in which poverty reduction is the central goal. From this perspective, the strategic areas arising from the Maastricht Treaty are the following:

• Sustainable development, in particular by promoting the equitable development of investment and employment policies, social and human development and environmental protection;

• Integration into the world economy, by supporting regional cooperation and integration;

• Fight against poverty;

• Democracy, human rights, the rule of law, peacekeeping and conflict prevention.

Methodology Research

Research methodology in choosing and justifying a public project involves a questionnaire addressed to the relevant public authorities that manage public investment projects. The process for justifying and selecting projects typically involves satisfactorily answering and evaluating the following kinds of questions:[4.]

• What are the problems or issues?
• What parts of a problem should be investigated?
• Why is the selected work needed or important?
• Who will benefit from the results and how?
• What will be the significance or impact of this work? Scientific? Economic? Societal?
• How will this work be done?
• What are proposed solutions or technical approaches?
• What are the risks and unknowns?
• What risk-mitigation strategies or steps are needed?
• What is the likelihood of success? Of failure?
• What are the resources (time, people, money, and so on) needed to accomplish this work?
• Will sufficient resources be available for this work when needed?
• Who should do the work? What are their roles and responsibilities?
• Am I qualified to conduct1lead this work?

- Is my organization qualified and able to perform this work?
- Should UAT/AP conduct this work, and can UAT/AP make a difference?
- Who else is doing similar work? Can this be leveraged?
- Are other qualified people and1or organizations needed, and what are their roles and responsibilities?
- How will results be delivered and accepted?

Results

As a first result of the research is the **analysis** of the identified problems which are following those steps:
• Define the initial unwanted situation
• Identify and list potential / interconnected issues
• Choose a 'startup issue'
• Arrange issues hierarchically:
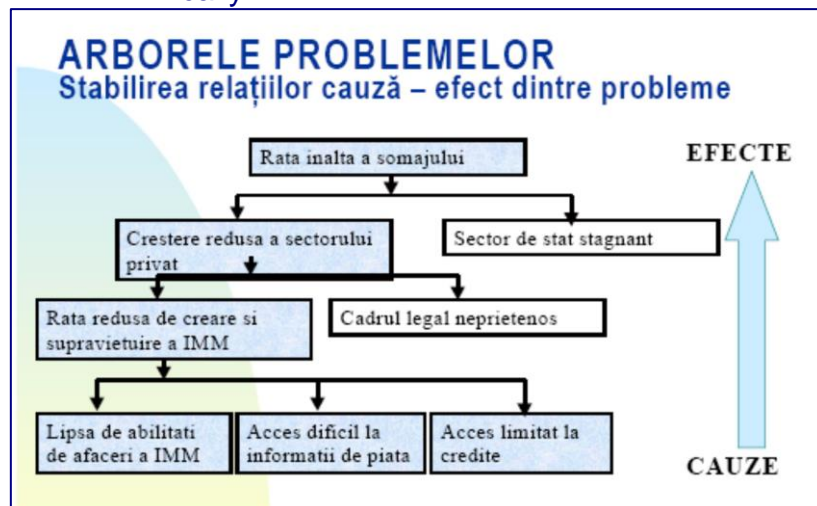
Fig.no2. The Problem Tree – (Romanian language)
Source: Opran C.

-If the problem analyzed is the CAUSE of the startup problem, it will be placed DOWN at the shaft construction
- If this is the EFFECT of the starting problem, it will be positioned level higher
- If there is no cause or effect, both problems, those analyzed and those proposed

Development of objectives
To set a goal, try to answer the following five questions:
☐ What are the key areas you want to change?
☐ Which segment of the population will be involved in the change?
☐ What is the direction of change (increase or improvement or decrease or decrease). who are you looking for
☐ What degree or proportion of change are you looking for?
☐ What is the deadline for achieving the degree of change?

Recommendations for outline an objective statement

The zone of change ⟹ what I want to change, to improve, to develop, to change, to improve

Population ⟹ who, what number or what percentage of ...

The direction of change ⟹ what I want to do: change, improve, eliminate, and increase

Degree of change ⟹ to what extent, by how much

Time period ⟹ how long

Objective in standard form:

Direction of change	+	Area of change	+	Population studied	+	Degree of change	+	Time interval
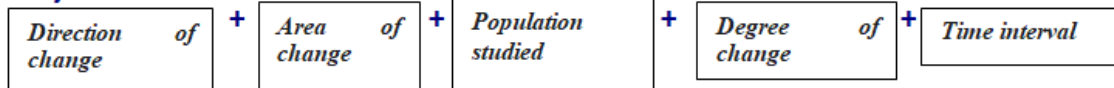
Basic elements in choosing the project structure

Recommendations for choosing the most impact project title

The title should describe the project well, give a correct image and help get maximum support for the project idea. A well-chosen title will help you capture attention and "ignite" your imagination. Remember: a common title suggests a common project. A long title suggests bureaucracy.

You may decide to have a main title and a subtitle that offers more explanations, but use "appropriate" subtitles. Both the title and the subtitle should attract different groups of readers with different professional levels and degrees of knowledge. good idea to discuss a series of possible project titles within your institution but also with people from outside.

Recommendations for choosing the location

- Defines the geographical or institutional location of the project. For most investment projects, the location of the project can be easily determined.

For example, bridges over the Danube or a modernized border crossing are targets with a clear geographical location.

- The location may be more difficult to establish for an institutional building project.

If, for example, laboratories are offered courses on new methods of sample processing, these courses may take place at their workplace or at a central laboratory in the country, or even elsewhere. In this case, the institutional location must be specified.

Recommendations for establish general objectives

General objectives are taken from the logical matrix of the project which is recommended to be elaborated before the standard summary sheet.

It is also recommended that the formulation of the objectives be accompanied by a performance indicator, which gives the image of the extent to which the objective is to be achieved.

Recommendations for establish the specific objectives

- Like the general development objective, the specific objectives are taken from the logical matrix of the project.
- As with long-term goals, try to quantify immediate goals through relevant indicators.

- From a methodological point of view, it would be incorrect to say that the aim of the project is to contribute to the elimination of illegal trade, or, more vaguely, to combat illegal trade.
- Contributing to or carrying out a battle are activities that may or may not lead to the achievement of goals. The difference between objectives and activities is important when it comes to measuring whether the project has really achieved what it set out to do.
- Try to be as concise as possible. Try to translate the long-term goal into one sentence and the immediate goals into no more than five sentences.

Recommendations for Project description

This subchapter should summarize the results of the problem analysis and should briefly and convincingly explain the rationale for the proposed project.

The minimum content of this subchapter must include:
• Explanations of the origin of the project and the reason why it is proposed
• The level of involvement of the partners
• Beneficiaries of the project

The description of your project should lead to a clear understanding of the intended use of the funds you intend to make. First of all, why the project is undertaken and what past and present links your project may have with projects of a similar nature. Next, you need to describe what you expect from the planned actions and what those actions will be.

The justification of the project will demonstrate the need and opportunity to implement the project, both for the territory and for specific target groups. In more detail, the justification for the project makes an empirical assessment of the current situation taking into account the available data - official statistics, surveys and any other information resources.

Project justification usually begins with an analysis of issues and needs:
- Description of the current situation in the field of interest in the selected region / country / area.

Once the problem is identified, the applicant will describe the target group affected by the current situation.
- The target group is different from the final beneficiaries of the project who will be selected from the widest range of target group / groups. The applicant will specify the reason for choosing the final beneficiaries of the project, as well as the level of involvement of the larger target groups (which in some cases include relevant stakeholders for the project) in the design and management of the project. The final beneficiaries will be quantified as much as possible.

The final beneficiaries will be classified into different categories: men / women, people from disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, ethnic minorities, rural population, people with disabilities, children outside the child protection system.

Conclusions

Answering these questions is a nontrivial effort that is essential to justifying a project and gaining management approval. It requires a project manager satisfactorily to answer important technical, management, and economic issues associated with a proposed project.

Even after a project is approved and work proceeds, many, if not most, of

these questions will need to be satisfactorily answered once again as problems and issues arise, to ensure that the project focus and effort are properly on target and that the work can still be justified.

Being able to answer these questions satisfactorily is an important part of being an effective and successful project manager in public administration.

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