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What can be learnt from the Icelandic national team's managers, in project management and in shaping group dynamics?

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Abstract

Football is one of the most popular sports in the world. The football environment is demanding and challenging. In the last years there are more financial resources involved and social demand is increasing. Football is about creating the correct winning environment, overcoming significant challenges and handling expectations and pressure. At first sight, this environment seems very similar to the project management environment, but is it really? What can be learnt from the Icelandic national football team's managers in project management and in shaping group dynamics? The IPMA eye of competence is used as a framework for this thesis with a focus on leadership, strategy, team building and how to lead successful teams. The thesis is built up in two ways: qualitative study and quantitative study. In the qualitative study, two in depth interviews were conducted with the Icelandic national team's managers. The conclusion is that the main building blocks of the team are a structured working environment, values that support the organizational structure, appropriate combination of task- and social leadership style and team cohesion. In the quantitative study, a questionnaire was sent out to the Icelandic national team members. The conclusion is that the key success factors from the training processes are a structured working environment, discipline, mutual trust, mutual respect and repetition. It is our conclusion that the football environment provides a good testing ground for project management, but since fewer variables affect the outcome in football it can be difficult to apply it directly to business.

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1. Introduction

Project management is a young discipline, evolving and expanding at an increasing pace. That is why it is important for project managers to gather information from different perspectives and to apply the lessons in their personal development as project managers. The football environment is very complicated but also very structured and rule based. The financial aspect is getting more important and it has billions of television audiences all over the world (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004). The Icelandic national football team has been climbing up FIFA's World Ranking List ever since 2011 when Lars Lagerbäck and Heimir Hallgrímsson started leading the team. By the end of 2014 the national team rose from 104th place to 33rd place (Men's ranking, 2015). In this thesis it was decided to find out if there was a winning formula that leads to the Icelandic national football team's success. The research question is: What can be learnt from the Icelandic national football team's managers in project management and in shaping group dynamics?

The IPMA Eye of Competence, technical and behavioural competence is used as framework for this paper (IPMA, 2006). The main focus is on project management success, interested parties, leadership and team behaviour. The story of the Icelandic national football team's success concerns many stakeholders and surrounding environment: the team members, managers, supporters, media and the community. In laying the cornerstone for shaping a successful team, one must carefully review the leadership method and the team's behaviour. How do these two factors align with each other? What are the qualities that the manager and his team should have? How is a successful team shaped?

2. Literature review

The project managers' environment is all about planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling resources and procedures to achieve specific goals. The factors that project managers need to have in mind when planning a project are scope, time, budget and quality. In the project management environment, the project and its scenarios differ between projects- almost no task is the same. Various articles have been written about project management success and failure. There are some that stress the importance of time, cost and quality and there are additional articles that claim that measuring other factors such as the human factor are also important (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Kendra and Taplin, 2004). In this thesis ten success factors identified by Pinto and Slevin (1987) will be used to evaluate the success factors of the national team managers. The first factor they identified was the project mission or the importance of having clearly defined goals and benefits from the beginning. It is important not only by the team to understand what the goals and benefits are; it is also important for the whole organization. The second factor is top management support. The support of the senior management is important for the project manager as they are responsible for the allocation of the resources (financial, manpower and time). Project management confidence increases in accordance with management support. The third factor is the project schedule and planning. The importance of having a detailed plan of the stages of implementation is vital for success. In the plan, the milestones, resources and equipment are described. The fourth factor is client consultation. Client consultation is important in the successful project implementation since the client will be the end user. Once the project manager is aware of who will use the result he will be more likely to fulfil the client's expectations. The fifth success factor is personnel issues like recruitment, selection and training and the nature of the personnel involved with regard to skills needed for the project. Goals, personalities, skills and knowledge have to be considered. This is important as the personnel contribute to the empowerment of the organization. The sixth factor claims that the personnel are able to perform the technical tasks and have adequate technology to perform tasks associated with the project. The seventh factor is the client acceptance that must be taken into account. The eighth factor is monitoring and feedback. The key personnel receive information on how the project is going in comparison with the initial plan. This gives the project manager opportunity to anticipate and take corrective measures if the project is going off track. The ninth success factor is communication. The environment must support good communication channels for the organization and clients to exchange information. The tenth factor is trouble-shooting as the project manager has to be able to anticipate problems if they arise.

An organizational strategy shows where to focus in the future, explaining how to manage the company's resources for better performance. There are a few important dimensions to look into when creating a strategy: the existence, the content, the process and context. The existence dimension is especially important for sports clubs and similar organizations. The existence of the company is very important in strategizing as it provides the legal frame

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