



Identifying perspectives of public project managers on project success: Comparing viewpoints of managers from five countries in North-West Europe

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Abstract

Public and private project managers contribute to the success of Large Infrastructure Projects. Considering the public client, so far researchers have been looking at him in a passive role with respect to project success. The focus of this exploratory research is what public project managers who are actively involved in the project, consider project success. Using Q-methodology, we identify four viewpoints in the respondent group, consisting of managers from five North-Western European countries and the specific success criteria accompanying these viewpoints. Within each viewpoint, the managers have the same vision on the ranking of project success criteria. Next to the conventional project manager, we distinguish the product driven manager, the parent oriented manager and the manager with a stakeholder focus. In Large Infrastructure Projects, where public and private partners collaborate, awareness of these different perspectives will help to understand the motives of the public project manager. © 2016 Elsevier Ltd. APM and IPMA. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Project success is widely discussed in the literature. Both the determination and the realization of project success are subject of worldwide research and many articles published (Ogunlana and Toor, 2010; Pinto and Slevin, 1988; de Wit, 1988). Research on the achievement of project success aims for the factors that contribute to, or enlarge, the chance of project success (Chan et al., 2004; Mir and Pinnington, 2014; Parfitt and Sanvido, 1993). Other studies try to gain insight in the criteria used to measure project success (Baccarini, 1999; Chan, 2001; Prakash Prabhakar, 2008; Shenhar and Wideman, 1996; Westerveld, 2003; de Wit, 1988). Researches in the field of project success

agree on the fact that the judgment of project success depends on the perspective taken (Bakker et al., 2010; Bryde and Robinson, 2005; Müller and Jugdev, 2012; Rashvand and Zaimi Abd Majid, 2014). The client is often mentioned as an important factor in achieving project success (Bresnen and Marshall, 2000; Phua and Rowlinson, 2004; Shenhar et al., 2001; Thompson, 1991), but most studies consider the client as an external factor and not so much in an active role towards the achievement of project success.

The initiators and clients of large infrastructural projects in Europe are governmental organizations. The government is a Project Oriented Organization (Arvidsson, 2009). In this type of organization, projects are external elements that prepare changes to the general work processes in the parent organization. The parent organization appoints a project manager to manage the project and the implementation of the new situation in the parent organization (Hertogh et al., 2008). For the governmental

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organization(s) this project manager is the representative of the project. Hertogh et al. (2008) distinguishes Client/Sponsor for the representatives of the parent organization(s) and labels the project management team responsible for the project the Project Delivery Organization (PDO). However from the contractor's point of view, the manager of the Project Delivery Organization serves as the client for the project. Hence from the viewpoint of the parent organization the contractor's client is considered as a part of the project organization. Because of that, the 'public project manager' can also be considered in an active role in achieving project success.

A number of studies have tried to gain insight in the key success criteria used by different parties (Bryde and Robinson, 2005; Frodell et al., 2008; Turner, 2007) but these studies only very limitedly relate to the public sector. Studies that do relate to the public sector report a difference in internal frame of reference in the public sector compared to the private sector (Thiel and van Leeuw, 2002). Therefore we are interested to know what project success is from the viewpoint of the public project manager. Recent research in the Netherlands (Koops et al., accepted for publication) revealed three different viewpoints on project success taken by Dutch public project managers: the holistic and cooperative leader, the socially engaged, ambiguous manager and the executor of a top-down assignment.

Within the European Union, large infrastructural projects are put up for tender in an international market, and can be cross-border projects. In this international context it is essential for private companies, consultants or contractors, to better understand their public client, in order to come up with internationally competitive bids and be able to successfully collaborate. However, the limited knowledge on which success criteria are considered essential by the public project manager can lead to a mismatch of expectations. Differences in business culture among countries might amplify the potential mismatch, so we need to incorporate cultural insights in this specific context (Jackson and Aycan, 2006).

In the earlier Dutch study (Koops et al., accepted for publication), the objective was to explore managerial viewpoints on project success and the specific success criteria accompanying these viewpoints. The nature of the distinguishing criteria in the Dutch study led to the assumption of cultural influence, especially the distinguishing criteria *the right process followed*, *satisfying needs of stakeholders/shareholders* and *profitability for the contractor*. Hence we expected preferences on specific success criteria and believed this could have influence on project success perspectives amongst international respondents. The research is limited to public project managers acting at the interface of their own public organization and the private partner. They are responsible for the preparation and execution of the project. The research is based on Q-methodology (Brown, 1980, 1993; van Exel and de Graaf, 2005) and includes the viewpoints of public project managers from Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the UK. The countries are selected from the NETLIPSE network: a network for the dissemination of knowledge on the management and organization of large infrastructure projects in Europe (www.netlipse.eu).

The performed research aimed at identifying the main success criteria in the perspective of public project managers of different Western European countries. The research in The Netherlands revealed that specific criteria outside the 'iron triangle' were distinguishing for differences in viewpoints. The nature of these criteria led to the assumption of possible influence of culture in ranking of success criteria. Both researches are performed in order to contribute to the understanding of the public side of public private collaboration in the increasingly international construction industry. Preliminary results of this international study were presented at the IPMA-world congress 2014 (Koops et al., 2015, accepted for publication) and were elaborated since then, resulting in this paper.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Public project success

Success criteria need to be separated from success factors, as both appear often in literature. Criteria are the measures by which projects can be judged in terms of failure or success (Cooke-Davis, 2002). It is often mentioned that projects are successful if the iron triangle criteria are met: delivered on time, within budget and meeting the preset quality measures (Atkinson, 1999; Jha, 2011; Lim and Mohamed, 1999; Mantel and Meredith, 2009; Morris et al., 2010). De Wit (1988) showed that these measures alone are not sufficient to determine the project's success. The increase in scope and complexity of contracts and projects lead to an increase in criteria (Bryde and Robinson, 2005), like safety, quality of the set requirements, the effect on the contracting organization, amongst others (Cox et al., 2003; Mantel and Meredith, 2009; Winch, 2010). Several authors have grouped criteria to create overview (Baccarini, 1999; Westerveld, 2003). Al-Tmeemy et al. (2011) introduced a categorization scheme including criteria related to product success, market success and project management success. The categorization of criteria Shenhar and Wideman (1996) developed, refers to the timeline of a project: pre-completion, short term, medium term and long term. Sometimes a distinction is made between project success, as to the success of the outcome or benefits of the project (Shenhar et al., 2001) and project management success, related to the controllability of the process up to project delivery and handover (Munns and Bjeirmi, 1996). In this paper, the notion of 'project success' includes 'project management success'.

Although some studies approached project success from different perspectives (Bryde and Robinson, 2005; Frodell et al., 2008; Lim and Mohamed, 1999; McLeod et al., 2012; Turner, 2007), most studies focus on the success criteria relevant for the executing party, represented by the commercial project manager (Cooke-Davis, 2002; Mir and Pinnington, 2014; Munns and Bjeirmi, 1996; Pinto et al., 2009; de Wit, 1988). Davis (2014) noted a lack of research on the perception of project success of the more senior roles in an organization. She included the owner in the senior management group. If encountered, the 'client organization' means usually a private sector client (Shenhar et al., 2001; Thompson, 1991) and not the public (governmental) party that is commissioning the large

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