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Project Planning and Control in Social and Solidarity Economy Organizations: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Formal project planning and control systems include planning, measuring, and monitoring functions that enable the development of project plans and the comparison between the planned project objectives and the actual project performance. Social and solidarity economy brings new challenges to the project management discipline, especially on project planning and control, which need to be performed in an unusual context. In this paper, we review the project management literature in social and solidarity economy organizations to evaluate the main control issues faced by project managers working in this context. The AACE framework for project control plan implementation is used to classify the current literature in that domain. Our analysis shows that only three of the fourteen processes of the framework are covered, namely project scope and execution strategy development, resource planning and project performance assessment.

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1. Introduction

Project management science is not a new concept for scholars. Many studies have been conducted in the aim of improving project management practices while others focus mainly on studying the impacts of project management in different environments or contexts. IT projects, large engineering projects and event planning projects are just a few of the specific environments covered in the project management literature. A glimpse at the literature guided us to consider project management in the social and solidarity economy (SSE), which is scarcely covered by existing and actual research initiatives. We posit that the specific context of this economy sector might bring new challenges to the project management discipline.

This paper focuses specifically on the project planning and control processes of project management, as evaluating all project management processes is an overwhelming task and may be undertaken in future research. Formal project planning and control systems include planning, measuring, and monitoring functions that enable the development of project plans and the comparison between the planned project objectives and the actual project performance. Project planning and control is carried out through various processes and tools that are used to set adequate objectives and to detect specific issues that may arise when executing any project and that favor the right selection of corrective actions.

Researchers have recognized the positive impact of using project planning and control tools and techniques to manage projects¹, but the social and solidarity organization literature has largely ignored these tools. This might appear surprising as project management practices within these organizations has found a wide application for supporting multiple activities such as appointing project teams or managing budgets². Nevertheless, descriptive use of project planning and control mechanisms in this type of organization is uncommon, which may suggest that standard project control mechanisms are not adapted to their specific context³. This paper aims at identifying these discrepancies and to encourage future research in that domain based on a literature review.

Before defining the specificities that differentiate regular private firms versus social and solidarity economy organizations (SSEO), we need to define the concept of social and solidarity economy (SSE). According to Fonteneau et al.⁴, the main principles of the SSE are solidarity and participation, both helping in value creation through goods and services that have a social and economic goal. Marques⁵, in a United Nations Research Institute for Social Development's (UNRISD) report, completes these principles with autonomy and self-management. Moreover, Malta, Baptista, & Parente⁶ refine the goals of the SSE: " goals are neither centered in profit nor in individualistic needs. It is an economy that presents itself as a material and human alternative to capitalist economy" (p.35). The SSE might take many forms such as cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations and community-based organizations, social enterprises and foundations⁴. All these forms of social and solidarity economy organizations have a collective dimension to it. Either they have a membership prerequisite (cooperatives) or they only live to offer financial support to a cause that benefits the society (foundations). As Marques⁵ points out, the SSE emerged from the individualism and poverty that arose with the advent of the industrial revolution. With the collectivity, it was a way to fight the problems that the government was not able to solve⁶. SSEOs often rely on voluntary involvement, as there are usually no obligation to get involved in the decision-making processes. It is more frequent to see this voluntary involvement in cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and other associations⁴. The last differing principles is participation. Indeed, SSEOs are usually seen as more democratic than private firms as they tend to apply the one person one vote paradigm instead of one share one vote.

We could then define SSE as an economy that has an economic and social function (main goal), a collective dimension (society), solidarity, autonomy, voluntary involvement and that needs participation (one person one vote)⁴. More often than never, social entrepreneurs want to change the world⁷. Malta et al.⁶ perfectly summarize the concept as "Solidarity Economy presents an alternative project of society more fair and less unequal: it is in fact a political project" (p.37).

Crawford and Bryce⁸, with their paper on humanitarian aid projects explains perfectly why there is a need for separate literature on this precise subject. Indeed, the authors argue that, as the project goals are more often interested in "social transformation/human development" than traditional projects in other industries making measurements and control more complex. As the authors⁸ explain, "although aid projects frequently have a "hard" element (e.g. drilling boreholes), this is normally viewed as a "mean" to some developmental "end" (e.g. improved public health" (p. 364). Moreover, Crawford and Bryce⁸ continue with a focus on stakeholders of aid projects. Having obvious social, economic and ecological impacts, projects tend to be more political, hence attracting "a wide range of stakeholders

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