THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF KEY FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROJECT FINANCED THROUGH THE COHESION FUND

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Abstract
In the context of Romania’s poor absorption of European Funds, the successful implementation of public projects becomes a major factor in improving the current situation. But the successful implementation of projects is not an easy target to reach, since, if this were through, the existing situation of funds absorption would have been quite different than it actually is.
The implementation of a project depends on a variety of factors, out of which, the human resources, respectively the personnel involved in the project’s management and development is, in my opinion, one of the core elements that determine either its success or failure. In this sense, the project managers on behalf of the involved institutions and their respective teams have the “obligation” to collaborate in the most professional manner in order to ensure the project’s proper development and implementation. Their skills, competences and expertise, as well as their inter and intra-organisation relations are the foundations on which the successful implementation of the project is laid.

Keywords: role, project manager, team leader, project sponsor

Human resources is one of the most important aspects of project management because of the training, competences and relations that form between the personnel involved in the project depends, to great extent, the failure or success of the respective project.
In the case of projects financed through the Cohesion fund, the main actors that are involved in the development, management and implementation of a project are represented by the Beneficiary of the Project, the Consultant/or Contractor and the Project’s Sponsor, generally a national public authority (minister). This article analyses in a short manner the role and importance of key personnel from the perspective of the three main stakeholders, meaning:
1. On behalf of the Beneficiary – The Project Implementation Unit
2. On behalf of the Consultant/or Contractor
3. And on behalf of the project’s Sponsor

1. On behalf of the Project’s Beneficiary – The Project Implementation Unit (PIU)

The Project Implementation Unit has a technical role in the project’s coordination, its members coming from various areas, containing experts from the economic, legal, administrative, and technical field etc. The Project Implementation Unit can be looked at, from the point of view of its members, into two distinct “bodies” – the Head of the PIU and the Members of the PIU.
The Head of PIU is the person responsible for the proper implementation of the project within the beneficiary’s organization. In general terms, he/she is responsible for maintaining a liaison with the other stakeholders involved in the project and for managing his/her team into delivering a successful project.

As specific requirements, the Head of PIU, who acts mainly as a project manager, has to focus on achieving some specific tasks, such as:

- **Allocate the human resources available within the beneficiary’s organization and shape them up into a team.** This specific task requires the Head of PIU to select the experts which best fit the necessities of the project, to make sure he/she clearly defines their roles and responsibilities and to ensure that all experts work together into a team for the successful implementation of the project.

- After the team has been selected, the Head of PIU must **plan the project** as accurate as possible in order to make sure that the deadlines and milestones set in the project are respected so that the project can be finalized in due date, with minimum expenses from delays due to the PIU’s fault.

- Make sure that the **control mechanism** agreed with the other parties involved in the project is put in place and everyone knows exactly what is required to report and at what intervals so that the stakeholders have a clear idea of the project’s actual progress.

- Probably one of the most important tasks that Head of PIU has to perform is to **manage the project’s scope.** Controlling the project’s scope ensures the beneficiary of the fact that the project will deliver the projected performances and will achieve the goals it is set to achieve.

- **Manage the quality of the project,** by not allowing any concessions that will modify to the worse the quality of works or materials that are being used in the project, of course, within the project’s budget. In this sense, the beneficiary of the project is protected from the potentially disastrous consequences of implementing a system/project that doesn't work or does not deliver the performances it was projected to deliver.

Even though project managers vary in terms of character, there are a few general qualities that a project manager must poses in order to perform his activity at high standards. So, as general lines, a project manager should have the ability to and like to manage projects. In order to do so, the project manager:

- must keep in mind that he/she must manage rather than co-ordinate, preside or act as an outside spectator;

- must be a born planner, to the extent that he/she should try to predict any possible surprise and think of solutions to prevent it from occurring;

- has to find quick solutions if a problem does manage to occur;

- has to be able to reward and punish the members of his team, but on the other hand he/she must be a good motivator and team builder, maintaining the work environment between the team members at satisfactory levels. In this sense, the project manager must always address conflicts rather than letting them to be solved on their own;

- must be approachable by the team members;

- must get consensus whenever possible, but dictate when necessary.

The **team members of the PIU** must be selected from the fields the project is related to. For example, if the beneficiary implements a major project in the field of waste management, the members of the PIU team must comprise at least one expert in the following fields: **economics and finance** – will be responsible for the economic and financial implementation of the project, **legal** – will be responsible with the legal aspect of the project, **technical** – will verify if the technical specification of the project correspond to the technical needs of the beneficiary region, plus the **administrative personnel** responsible for the proper functioning of the team (secretary, etc.).
The PIU members must be responsible persons that collaborate in the interest of achieving a project that will serve the better interests of an entire region. In this sense, even though in the current economic climate is difficult to find a motivation to work within the public administrative body, the members of the PIU must demonstrate that their competences and experience are reasons enough for their inclusion in the PIU.

Between some of the team member’s specific attributions are the following:
- he/she must help assess the amount of work that will be assigned to him/her and plan it in a responsible manner, so that he/she manages to achieve it within the project’s time and budget constraints;
- he/she must sign up and respect the elaborated work plan;
- he/she must report progress on the activity its responsible for;
- he/she must be accountable for the quality of the works it has performed;
- he/she must alert the Head of PIU of problems and issues that appear or might appear during the process of implementing the project;
- he/she must suggest improvement to the project plans, control mechanism or on any other item that he/she might think will help during the project’s implementation process.

2. On behalf of the Consultant/Contractor

The Consultant/Contractor must, among other of its responsibilities, provide a competent team that will assist the Beneficiary into implementing and achieving a successful project. Depending on the complexity of the project, the team supplied by the Consultant should consist in:
- either a Team Leader or a Project Manager
- Experts in the different fields of the project
- Administrative personnel

For the project’s technical relevance, only the first two parties are more important, the later one being only the support personnel that the company already has on hand for its daily functioning.

**The Team Leader** is basically responsible for coordinating the members of its team into delivering the project’s goods at the stated quality, and in the budgetary and time constraints. The general lines that the team leader must undertake are:
- **Detailed planning** – meaning the planning of tasks of each member of the team, while maintain a close connection with the other stakeholders involved in the project;
- **Control the team’s progress** – by controlling its team progress, the team leader makes sure that the deadlines and milestones envisioned by the project are respected and observed, making sure that that project is on the right path towards a successful implementation;
- Making sure that the **quality** of the team’s outputs corresponds to the quality agreed with the other stakeholders. Delivering products with a lower quality than the one expected by the beneficiary may lead to major setbacks in the project’s implementation, setbacks for which the team leader may also be held responsible, together with members of the other stakeholders’ personnel, depending on the situation which caused the occurrence of those setbacks.
- **Technical guidance** – the team leader must have some technical expertise in the field of the project and must be able to offer guidance and advice to both the project managers as well as to the project’s beneficiary and sponsor.

In order to control its team, the team leader’s specific activities may consist in:
• Monitoring the team’s status – meaning, knowing at any time where the team is standing versus the planned activities and timetable;

• Make sure the tasks are actually completed by requesting the team members to send notification, and, if necessary, the documents that demonstrate the completion of their tasks. This responsibility is closely linked to the achievement of quality standards imposed through the project;

• Being responsible for receiving all relevant documents from the experts and transforming them into a unitary document, required for the project’s development;

• Making sure all of the project’s records are kept, for future references, if necessary. In this case, the team leader’s administrative support must keep track of all submitted and received documents, as well as reports, notifications and other similar documents connected to the project.

• Being responsible for the collection of the team’s time sheets and preparation of financial payment documents

• Update the team’s work plan in order to correspond to the modifications in the project’s activity. In this sense, it is relevant to organise team meetings at regular intervals, in order to keep track on the team’s progress and setbacks. During these meetings, actions can be taken in order to correct or solve situations that might delay the project’s implementation.

The Team Leader is mostly required in the implementation of large scale projects, which comprise more than one area of development, areas for which project managers are assigned as responsible.

In the case of less complex projects, often the team leader and project manager become similar or even synonymous notions. This being said, the role of the project manager is a combination of coordinating and managing the team members, while liaising and maintaining friendly relationships with the other parties involved in the project.

In this case, the project manager must focus on some activities which will give him/her an accurate idea on the project’s development. These activities include, but are not limited to:

• Making sure he/she is properly informed by its team members of the actual state of their assigned activities. Together with the team members, the project manager can find solutions to speed up activities that met setbacks during their development;

• Revise the project’s plan and reallocate resources so that the activities are finalised at the established deadlines;

• Report at regular intervals to the other stakeholders involved in the project.

In terms of the character traits that both the team leader and project manager must possess, I don’t consider them to be much different from those mentioned in the first part of the article.

The experts involved in the project’s development are required to possess sufficient expertise in the field for which they are assigned in order to make sure that their work corresponds to the quality standards imposed in the project. Basically, their main responsibility is to deliver the required documents and accomplish their tasks by the imposed deadlines. Even though this might seem to diminish their importance, their role in the team is essential for the project’s successful development from the point of view of both their relevant expertise as well as their “behaviour” in the team.

The administrative personnel, even though extremely important for the day-to-day development of activities, do not have a key role in the project’s implementation.

3. On behalf of the project’s sponsor
The project’s sponsor is usually the public authority responsible with approving and making the payments to the stakeholders involved in the project. It mostly has a monitoring role in the project, making sure that the parameters set in the project’s documents are respected and achieved in due time and with the respective monetary constraints attached to the project. The sponsor has some tools that allow it to have a clear picture of the project’s development and progress among which:

- Status meetings with the beneficiary at certain time intervals (usually stipulated in the financing contract)
- Health check reports, including monthly, quarterly reports or reports at the finalisation of certain activities, stipulated in the contract set between the sponsor and the beneficiary;
- Approval or rejection of decisions/documents/reports with direct consequences on the project’s implementation;
- Approval/rejection of payment documents, also with direct consequences on the project’s development.

Conclusions

Considering that, in the case of beneficiaries that are public authorities, that implement projects financed through the Cohesion Fund, the sponsor plays a key role in terms of approving or rejecting payment documents, I think that the relations and roles between the trio Beneficiary – Consultant/Contractor – Sponsor must be clearly stipulated in order to maintain a working environment that allows the project to grow and develop as it was initially intended.

If a hierarchy in the importance of the three parties had to be made, I would say that the most important part in the project’s implementation and success belongs to the Beneficiary, while the Consultant/Contractor and Sponsor occupy the second and third positions. Since the Beneficiary’s region will actually benefit from the project’s implementation it is mandatory that no unnecessary concessions must be made from its behalf in terms of project’s scope, objectives, quality and other important elements that actually make the project unique. Major modifications to any of its components mean that a different project that the one originally thought will be implemented, probably with fewer benefits for the general public.

In my opinion, the quality of personnel involved in the development of the project – personnel from the Beneficiary as well as from the Consultant/Contractor and Sponsor – is the key element in having a successful project. The work connections and relations that develop between the parties involved in the implementation of the project are also of major importance in determining the path a project can take – success or failure. Tense relations existing between the stakeholders translate into setbacks and obstacles at the project’s level. But these relations can only be managed by the people involved, so, in the end, it all comes down to the personnel’s capacity of handling and managing both inter-organisation relations as well as coordinating and managing their intra-organisation connections and work environment.