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In search of excellence in social entrepreneurship project management: Experience and standards of the European Union

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ABSTRACT

The development of social entrepreneurship has required new effective management approaches and tools. The authors refer to European experience and standards in the field of project management in order to develop a methodological approach to organizing project management for achieving the outstanding results in social entrepreneurship projects.

The article presents the results of the quasi-experiment aimed to identify differences in the achieved results among projects using the European PM² methodology and projects carried out within the PMI methodology. The assessment technique developed by the authors is based on EFQM model.

No significant difference among the project results in the experimental and control groups has been found, which indicates the importance of applying the project management methodology, regardless of its origin. By clustering project results, it was found that projects adapted the European methodology were more focused on strategic development and integration into the ecosystem on the principles of long-term cooperation, while the projects of the control group paid more attention to the effective organization and coordination of processes, resources and activities.

KEYWORDS:

project management, project management methodology, European project management methodology PM², social entrepreneurship, excellence, EFQM model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The modern economy of the social sphere is characterized by the emergence of new economic models of business entities [Pache, Santos, 2013; Doherty et al., 2014]. Social entrepreneurship, being aimed at solving social and environmental problems, doesn't look for making a profit. At the same time, managerial efficiency and economic sustainability are not only denied, but seem to be the key to the success of the project in this area [Alberti, Varon Garrido, 2017]. This served as the impetus for the transfer of management models that have worked well in the commercial sector into the field of social entrepreneurship. In this regard, an appeal to the project management methodology for the implementation of social entrepreneurial projects [Lannon, 2019; Malsch, Guieu, 2019] seems logical.

The purpose of our research is to develop a methodological approach to organizing project management in order to achieve outstanding results in social entrepreneurship projects based on European experience and standards. The reference to the experience of the EU countries is conditioned by two circumstances.

First, the European Union has a wealth of experience in both social entrepreneurship and project management. In the EU countries, social entrepreneurs, social enterprises and their ecosystems have proven their ability to influence economic resilience, solving social problems and environmental issues.

The so-called new PM² project management methodology developed by the European Commission [The PM2 Project .., 2018] is characterized as affordable and easy to use, in contrast to traditional "heavyweight" methodologies. Analysis, selection and adaptation to Russian conditions of successful practices of European project management methodology can become an important competitive advantage of a social enterprise.

Secondly, the focus of our research is focused on the formation of a methodological approach to project management aimed at achieving excellence in the subject area. "Excellence" in business, entrepreneurship, project management is one of the most recognized concepts [Toma, Marinescu, 2018; Escrig-Tena et al., 2019], which can provide the ability to achieve long-term and sustainable success, focusing on the coherence and harmonious functioning of all organizational systems. The European Foundation for Quality Management proposed the EFQM[1], Business Excellence Model in 1991, which has since been updated several times. In our work, we relied on its latest version (November 2019) with the aim of developing a toolkit for conducting an empirical study of social entrepreneurial projects and conceptualizing the results obtained.

The article is structured as follows. First, we presented the general theoretical framework used in the article: modern ideas about social entrepreneurship and project management, models of excellence and their contribution to the development of management science. Further, the research methodology and the results of the empirical research are presented. Finally, we provide directions for future research and conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a broad sense, social entrepreneurship is a form of implementation of social services and positive social change aimed at improving conditions, livelihoods and living standards of both the population and entire ecosystems. In the scientific literature, social entrepreneurship is considered as one of the types of entrepreneurship, which has both common characteristics for this class of objects,

[1] URL: https://www.efqm.org/.

and a number of specific features [Mair, Noboa, 2005; Dees, Anderson, 2017], the main of which is the implementation of the social mission [Dees, Anderson, 2017; Muñoz, Kimmitt, 2019].

Traditionally, enterprises of the non-profit sector were considered as the main objects of social entrepreneurship [Stecker, 2014]. However, with the development of humanitarian ideas about society, the area of social entrepreneurship has become embraced by both the public and private sectors [McMullen, 2011]. Scientists today talk about the blurring of institutional boundaries between these three sectors and the formation of hybrid forms [Austin et al., 2006, Tracey et al., 2011; Doherty et al., 2014; Stecker, 2014; Morales et al., 2021]. Moreover, it is argued that such hybrids can significantly increase the efficiency of the distribution and use of the resources of charitable foundations [Dees, Anderson, 2017].

Finally, the most important characteristic of modern social entrepreneurship is the hybridity of the applied business models [Pache, Santos, 2013; Doherty et al., 2014; Stecker, 2014], combining a proactive search for sources of external funding and the formation of economically sustainable and scalable models for the implementation of innovative projects in the social sphere.

The basic project management methodologies set out in the relevant standards. A project is understood as a unique set of interrelated targeted activities aimed at creating a product or service in the context of specified requirements and constraints[2]. Thus, for the purposes of this study, a project in the field of social entrepreneurship will be considered as an entrepreneurial activity pursuing a social mission and having the attributes inherent in the project (purposefulness, limited time and resources, uniqueness, need for a time structure).

Project management has gone from a specific tool applicable to solving a certain class of problems to one of the basic management methodologies required for a successful business [Pollack, Adler, 2016; Musawir et al., 2017]. Several studies [Brady, Davies, 2004; Ethiraj et al., 2005] found that a company's design capabilities are central to competitive advantage. Thus, the research focus has shifted from the level of the individual project to the level of organization [Söderlund, 2005; Crawford, 2006], developing the concepts of organizational project management[3], organizational competence in project management[4], project management maturity [Grant, Pennypacker, 2006; Görög, 2016].

The current stage of project management development is characterized by the expansion of the subject field due to the best practices of other areas of management and "paradigmatic, thematic and methodological diversity" [Padalkar, Gopinath, 2016] methodologies that combine cascading and flexible models, best practices and methodological development of basic standards. This trend can be traced in the development of the European project management methodology, which generalizes and greatly simplifies the classical project management methodologies, thus presenting a simple actionable guide. PM² incorporates elements from a wide range of generally accepted project management principles and Agile best practices, project management standards and methodologies such as PMBOK, PRINCE2®, IPMA-ICB. The developers of the standard assert [The PM2 Project .., 2018] that this methodology is suitable for any type of project, providing a standard model of project lifecycle management, a set of management actions, principles and work patterns, as well as a set of effective solutions for project teams.

Despite the widespread use of project management methods and practices, the topic of project success remains quite acute [Mir, Pinnington, 2014; McClory et al., 2017; Musawir et al., 2017; Turner, Xue, 2018;]. It led to a significant amount of research related to the implementation of excellence models in project activities [Scheiblich et al., 2017; McGrath, Whitty, 2020] and social entrepreneurship [Lannon, 2019].

The theme of business improvement strategies as a key element of business philosophy, formulated in the pioneering work of Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman [Peters, Waterman, 1982], has spawned a significant number of successful business models [Laihonen, 2015], and performance measurement has become a subject of interest in the business literature. [Kanji, 2002; Bou-Llusar et al., 2009].

The European EFQM model is widely used as a diagnostic assessment tool and as a basis for developing improvement strategies. Despite some uncertainty in the evaluation criteria noted by scientists [Daniel et al., 2019], the benefits of using the EFQM model are confirmed by the results of empirical studies [Boulter et al., 2013; Calvo-Mora et al., 2015; 2018].

The above discussion leads to the following research questions. What are the best project management practices that drive excellence in social entrepreneurship? What are the differences in the achieved results of projects using European project management practices and projects carried out within the framework of other well-known methodologies?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The exploratory nature of our research does not imply the formulation of hypotheses, since our goal is to "crystallize" the theoretical and methodological approach from empirical data. Therefore, to develop the design of the study, we relied on the research questions posed above.

We decided to analyze how the results of projects of this type, carried out using the European project management methodology (hereinafter referred to as EPM projects), differ from the results of projects where another project management methodology was used (hereinafter referred

[2] International Project Management Association (2015). Individual competence baseline for project, programme, portfolio management (Version 4.). International Project Management Association, IPMA Global Standard.
Project Management Institute (2017). A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK® Guide; Sixth Edit). Newtown Square.
[3] Project Management Institute (2014). Implementing organizational project management: A practice guide. Newtown Square.
[4] International Project Management Association (2016). IPMA organisational competence baseline for developing competence in managing by projects (Version 1.). International Project Management Association, IPMA Global Standard.

to as PM projects). Our goal was to find characteristics common to all EPM projects, which at the same time would be absent in PM projects. For this, we have developed a quasi-experiment research design. The unit of the analysis is a project in the field of social entrepreneurship. In this article, we present the results obtained in the course of the study over 5 years (2016–2020).

The experimental group included EPM projects. The control group (PM projects) consisted of project teams using the PMI methodology, the choice of which is due to its widespread use and good methodological support.

To ensure the comparability of project results, the following requirements were set for the selection of projects for participation in the experiment:

- subject area of the project: socially significant projects aimed at creating social value in order to improve the living conditions and standards of the population and (or) the ecological system;
- scale of the project: local (size of the project team - from 4 to 15 people, geography of the project - Omsk region, number of beneficiaries / clients of the project - from 50 people, duration - from 4 to 6 months);
- the presence of expertise in project management and social entrepreneurship: members of the project management team must have experience of participation in project activities, experience of participation in socially significant projects, undergo basic training in project management and social entrepreneurship. Given the fact that social entrepreneurs, as a rule, do not have such training, three academic courses were offered for the participants of the experiment (each at least 72 hours, including 36 hours of classroom lessons), including "Project Management: Basic Course", "Social entrepreneurship: experience and practices of the European Union "," Project management for social entrepreneurship: experience and standards of the European Union ";
- sustainable business model of the project: the project must be scalable and (or) replicable. The revenue side of the project can be formed both on the basis of an active search for funding sources, including the provision of non-financial resources by third-party organizations as part of the implementation of corporate social responsibility programs, and through the monetization of the created social value; if the income of the project exceeds its expenses, the resulting balance is used for the development of the project and (or) charity;
- application of project management methodology during the implementation of the project: the project team, depending on belonging to the experimental or control group, within the framework of its methodology, selected and adapted the processes required for project management;
- traceability of project results: the team must create artifacts suitable for assessing the results and progress of the project (photo, video documents, magazines, publications on the Internet), as well as receive feedback from all project participants.

To develop the author's methodology for integral assessment, the EFQM excellence model was initially used. With the release of the new version in 2019, we adjusted a number of criteria and grouped them in three projections: "Direction", "Execution", "Results" - in accordance with the logic of the EFQM model. Thus, the assessment methodology is based on 7 criteria, disclosed through 32 sub-criteria:

"Direction" (Why?)

Criterion 1. Purpose, vision and strategy of the project: the purpose of the project and vision; identifying and understanding the needs of project stakeholders; understanding of the ecosystem, own capabilities and main problems; availability of a project implementation strategy; project management system.

Criterion 2. Culture and leadership in the project: support culture and values in the project team; creating conditions for the implementation of social changes; creativity and innovation; involvement of participants in achieving the goal, vision and strategy.

"Execution" (How is it done?)

Criterion 3. Involvement of project stakeholders: creation of stable relationships with project clients, volunteers, business partners, suppliers; contribution to the development of society.

Criterion 4. Creation of sustainable social value: development and creation of social value; communication and implementation of social value; delivery and service; work with customer experience.

Criterion 5. Performance and change management: performance and risk management; internal transformations for the implementation of future projects; stimulating innovation; use of data, information and knowledge; asset and resource management.

"Results" (What has been achieved?)

Criterion 6. Perception of stakeholders: feedback, recognition, reputation of the project and (or) the project team received from the clients of the project, volunteers, business partners, suppliers.

Criterion 7. Strategic and operational indicators of the parties: achievement of the stated goals, financial sustainability of the project, implementation of the expectations of key stakeholders, social changes initiated by the project, the possibility of scaling and (or) replicating the project.

Each subcriterion received a performance / presence assessment depending on the achieved level on a 5-point scale (0 - not met / absent, 1 - partially, 2 - good, 3 - high, 4 - manageable, 5 - improvement). When calculating the integral assessment, weights were used, taking into account the proportion of criteria and subcriteria in the EFQM model so that the maximum possible score was 1000 (for criteria 1, 3 and 5 - 4, for criteria 4 and 6 - 10, for criterion 2 - 5, for criterion 7 - 8). For the integral assessment, a non-linear scale was used:

- more than 900 points - A (outstanding results have been achieved in the project, all three projections have

been implemented in a balanced manner; continuous improvement tools are purposefully applied);
- from 750 to 900 points - B (the project achieved high results, in general, two of the three projections were implemented; tools of continuous improvement are applied fragmentarily);
- from 550 to 750 points - C (the project achieved high results; project activities are not effectively organized: in general, one of the three projections has been implemented; it is necessary to improve the work according to some criteria);
- from 300 to 550 points - D (in general, the results of the project have been achieved, however, their sustainability is questionable; project activities are organized ineffectively; it is necessary to pay attention to most of the criteria);
- less than 300 points - E (one or more project objectives have not been achieved; the project partially meets most of the criteria; the likelihood of further development of the project is low).

Further, using content analysis, we investigated the frequency of project management processes selected by project teams during the adaptation and customization of the project management methodology.

The following data sources were used:
- documentation: project charter, project rationale (Business Case), project logs (if any), final written report;
- in-depth interviews with key figures in project teams;
- project artifacts: brochures, booklets, presentations, videos and websites of ongoing projects.

Evaluation of the project results was carried out by an independent team of experts, consisting of five people. Requirements for experts: experience in project management and (or) implementation of a separate management function in a project, experience in implementation of social and (or) charitable projects.

4. RESULTS

The quasi-experiment involved 64 project teams that developed and implemented projects in the field of social entrepreneurship, 32 each in the experimental and control groups, including in 2016 - 12, 2017 - 14, 2018 - 16, 2019 - 12, 2020 - 10 . The total number of project team members - 596 people.

In terms of content, projects were distributed as follows:
- work in the local community (implementation of social value for the local ecosystem, for example, the organization of tree planting in the adjoining territories, cleaning of public places) - 8 EPM, 6 PM;
- professional implementation (application of professional competencies in a certain area to realize social value, for example, organizing thematic trainings and seminars, creating an information space) - 14 EPM, 12 PM;
- events (organizing large-scale events in order to draw attention to a specific social problem, for example, popularizing a healthy lifestyle, organizing charitable events) - 15 EPM, 19 PM.

The distribution of projects in accordance with the integrated assessment of the results is shown in Table. 1.

As you can see from the table. 1, none of the projects fell into groups A and E, while in groups B and C were the majority of projects of both groups - 89%, 91 and 88%, respectively. In group D, the number of projects is insignificant: 9% EPM and 13% PM.

After clustering the obtained estimates along the projection axes ("Direction", "Execution" and "Results"), we identified the following empirical profiles of projects.

"Strategic integrator" – - projects that won high scores in the "Direction" and "Results" projections. Such projects are characterized by a high level of achievement of goals (criterion 7) while striving to integrate the project team into the surrounding ecosystem in the long term (subcriterion 1.3) and with a strong social mission (subcriteria 1.1, 1.2). In

Table 1
Distribution of projects in accordance with the received integral estimates

Project group	EPM Projects Number of projects (%)	PM Projects Number of projects (%)	Total number of projects (%)
A	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
B	16 (50)	16 (50)	32 (50)
C	13 (41)	12 (38)	25 (39)
D	3 (9)	4 (13)	7 (11)
E	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

such projects, concern for the future of the project is noted, including attention to the reputation of the project and the team in the external environment (criterion 6). The team is focused on creating an economically sustainable business model for the project "for growth" (subcriterion 1.4) and the formation of an internal culture of project activities (criterion 2), while the organization of the current processes did not receive due attention (criterion 5). If the profile boundary is drawn at the level of 75% of the maximum grade, this group includes 41% of all projects, that is, 41% of projects of both groups (experimental and control) have an integral grade in the "Direction" projection of more than 150 points, and in the "Results "- more than 300 points. If the profile boundary is drawn at the level of 80% (160 and 320 points, respectively), 22% of all projects fall into this profile.

"Effective performer" – projects that have scored high scores in the "Execution" and "Results" projections. Projects of this profile are focused on the rational organization of all aspects of project activities (criterion 5), significant attention is paid to risk management (subcriterion 5.1) and communications (subcriterion 5.4), as well as the process of designing, creating and implementing social value for the client (criterion 4). These projects also achieved high results (criterion 7), responsive to changes in the needs of consumers of social services and the requirements of partners (criteria 3 and 6). This group includes 36% of projects if the cut-off limit is drawn at 75% of the maximum grade (projects that scored more than 300 points in both the Execution and Results projections), and 22% of projects with a cut-off of 80% (respectively , projects that scored more than 320 points in both projections).

"Rational performer" – projects that received no more than 50% of the maximum possible grade in all three projections (less than 100 points in the "Direction" projection, less than 200 points in the "Execution" and "Results" projections). This profile is characterized by the minimum effort of the project team in the context of all the considered criteria. The team's efforts are focused on achieving the goals stated in the project, but the sustainability of these goals and the reproducibility of activities are not in the focus of attention.

Tab. 2 and 3 characterize the selected profiles quantitatively.

As you can see from tables 2 and 3, successful EPM projects mostly fell into the "Strategic integrator" profile (72% at the 75% cut-off, 44% at the 80% cut-off), while successful PM projects were mostly in the "Effective performer" profile (66% at 75% cutoff, 44% at 80% cut-off).

Each project team has adapted and customized the appropriate project management methodology. None of the project teams used all of the project management processes outlined in the methodology, and 94% of the project teams applied no more than 24 processes. Content analysis of the selected processes in the projects of groups B and C (group D was not considered due to insufficiently high results) made it possible to identify the most frequently used processes.

In EPM projects:

– development of the project charter, development of the project justification, development of the project work plan, preparation of the final report (100%);
– holding a kick-off planning meeting, developing a stakeholder matrix, disseminating information (86%);
– managing the transfer of results, holding a wrap-up meeting (72%);
– risk planning (66%);
– development of a business implementation plan (52%).

In PM projects:

– development of the project charter, definition of the content, management and management of project work (100%);
- schedule development, risk identification (93%);
- stakeholder identification, resource control (82%);
- communications management (64%);
- monitoring and control of project work, high-quality risk analysis (57%).

5. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Such high integral assessments of the results are explained, in particular, by the influence of the experimental factor: the project teams were motivated to apply the project management methodology. In this paper, we rely on the results of a quasi-experimental design, since it is difficult to conduct

Table 2
Composition of empirically selected project profiles with a cut-off limit of 75% of the maximum score for the Strategic Integrator and Effective Executor profiles

Profile	EPM Projects Number of projects (%)	PM Projects Number of projects (%)	Total number of projects (%)
Strategic integrator	23 (72)	3 (9)	26 (41)
Effective performer	2 (6)	21 (66)	23 (36)
Rational performer	5 (16)	7 (22)	12 (19)
Other	2 (6)	1 (3)	3 (5)

Table 3
Composition of empirically selected project profiles with a cut-off border of 80% of the maximum score for the Strategic Integrator and Effective Executor profiles

Profile	EPM Projects Number of projects (%)	PM Projects Number of projects (%)	Total number of projects (%)
Strategic integrator	14 (44)	0 (0)	14 (22)
Effective performer	0 (0)	14 (44)	14 (22)
Rational performer	5 (16)	7 (22)	12 (19)
Other	13 (41)	11 (34)	24 (38)

a pure experiment of this kind due to the weak training of social entrepreneurs in the field of project management. However, this result represents a certain scientific value, confirming the feasibility of applying project management methods and tools to achieve sustainable results. We did not find any significant difference between the integral results of the experimental and control groups. This indicates that it is not so much a specific project management methodology that contributes to the success of the project, but the very fact of its application, since the social entrepreneur focuses on the parameters that are significant for success and, following the recipes for project management, it largely removes uncertainty in the course of project implementation. To confirm this thesis, it seems appropriate to continue this experiment using other popular project management methodologies.

At the same time, differences were empirically revealed in the profiles of successful projects of the experimental and control groups. While both groups achieved fairly good results (Results projection), EPM projects focused more on strategic integration into the ecosystem and long-term cooperation while PM projects - on the effective organization of all processes, resource coordination and ongoing interaction. These results can be explained by the peculiarities of the applied methodologies. If the PMI methodology prescribes 49 project management processes, their inputs and outputs, ways of their implementation, accompanying them with appropriate document templates, then the PM2 methodology, also relying on the process approach, greatly simplifies the process system and builds a single logic of the project life cycle with a minimum set documents and solutions required for phase transitions. In addition, the PM2 methodology emphasizes the difference between project results and effects (changes that results lead to), introducing a special area - implementation (transition) management. Thus, despite the high level of results in both groups, they were achieved in different ways.

The results of the content analysis showed that the project management methodology was not fully implemented in any of the projects. The scale of the projects and the specificity of the subject area determined the demand for some groups of processes and the low relevance of others. Most often, the need to adapt the methodology is associated with changing the stages of the project management process, templates for project documents, the scheme of distribution of responsibilities. There is the role structure of the project to better match the leadership style of the social entrepreneur or the specific needs of the structure and culture of the social enterprise, as well as to align with its historically established internal processes and policies. In addition to adaptation, additional customization is often required at the level of each specific project. In some cases, projects required only separate project management methods and the introduction of the entire array of project documentation would significantly complicate the management of such projects. In other cases, only a complete system of documented project management processes is able to cope with the complexity and scale of the intended social transformations.

6. CONCLUSION

As part of developing a methodological approach to organize project management in order to achieve outstanding results in social entrepreneurship projects based on European experience and standards, we turned to modern ideas about social entrepreneurship, new models of which are numerous and diverse. Social entrepreneurs carry out their projects in all three sectors of the economy, since their main task is to satisfy needs.

Discussing to which extent the application of best project management practices can contribute to the success and sustainability of projects in the field of social entrepreneurship, we considered project management as an independent professional area that allows us to implement projects of various sizes and types in various fields of human activity. Their implementation is based on the use of special methods and tools, both specially developed in this area, and successfully borrowed in other types of management and adapted to the project specifics.

We use the toolkit of the European EFQM model to assess the achievement of outstanding performance in the

area under consideration. Over the past few decades, models of excellence have evolved into an overarching management framework aimed at assessing management practices and results and guiding organizations to improve performance. The EFQM model (as published in 2019) does not explicitly contain the concept of excellence, but it is implicitly integrated into all blocks of the model: "Direction", "Performance" and "Results", thereby linking together the strategic and operational cross-section of activities and all achieved results. The author's assessment methodology presented in the work, based on the EFQM model, can serve as a diagnostic tool and a structured basis for developing improvement programs.

There was no significant difference in the results achieved in the experimental and control groups, which indicates the importance of applying the project management methodology, regardless of its origin. The accumulated experience in the application of project management tools and methods in various industries and spheres of activity indicates the presence of such important effects as an increase in the level of achievement of goals in solving set tasks, a reduction in deadlines and budget optimization. Also, an increase in the overall satisfaction of all participants in project activities exists. The choice of methodology is associated with the scale of projects, their number and frequency, and the specifics of the subject area. In order for the project management methodology to effectively serve the needs of the social entrepreneur and the project he implements, its adaptation and / or customization is required.

At the same time, projects that adapted the European methodology turned out to be focused more on strategic development and integration into the ecosystem on the principles of long-term cooperation, while the projects of the control group focused on the effective organization and coordination of processes, resources and interaction.

Thus, our research has shown that in order to achieve sustainable high results in social entrepreneurship projects, it is necessary to understand your ecosystem and its needs, develop a project culture and the team itself, and apply best management practices.

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