



“YOU CANNOT TAKE THE HEART OUT OF THE PROJECTS”

The use of project management and KPIs in social activity projects

Björg Jónsdóttir

Thesis of 12 ECTS credits

Master of Project Management (MPM)

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Table of abbreviation

PM – Project management
KPI – Key performance indicator
CSF – Critical success factors
PMI – Project Management Institute
APM – Association for Project Management

Abstract

This paper covers the research of the level of project management with the emphasis on evaluation and the use of KPIs in social activity projects. The research questions are as follows; Is general project management used in organizing and executing social activity projects? And, is the use of KPIs commonly used in social activity projects?

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, where a survey questionnaire was sent out to people who work in the social activity (leisure) sector. Also four open interviews were conducted. Two of the interviewees work as managers for the leisure division of the School and Leisure Department of Reykjavik Municipality. The other two work for non-profit organizations that provide social activities to various groups of people, among other projects.

The findings of the research is that those organizations who provide social activities miss out on opportunities to add value to their work by the lack of systematic project management, evaluation, and identification of KPIs.

Introduction

The use of project management, as a management tool, is becoming more and more common in more variety of professions. Project management as a discipline has changed immensely for the last decades. The change is mainly due to the fact that the subject matters in project management have become more diverse while today's projects are getting more complex and hark back to various businesses. No longer is project management practiced only among engineers in the warfare industry, focusing on operational factors, tools and techniques, but in various industries where the highlight is on many different factors based on different definitions or needs of different stakeholders, both internal and external, for the short or long term. Hence the definition of project's success must be viewed in terms of expectations of different stakeholders.

The idea of critical success factors (CSFs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) emerged in the 1980's, at the same time as the influence of different stakeholders in the project process became recognized. But the definition of stakeholders was still vague during that time, taking into account limited counts of actors in the projects. The notion of the CSFs stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders in the project to attain a collective understanding of project processes and its' success. (Davis, 2014). In the next decades that followed, the development of CSFs and KPIs became focused on stakeholders being both external and internal raising the issue that CSFs were not static but followed trends in the environment and both between and within industries. Nowadays it is commonly viewed that in order for a project to be successful many dependent elements have to be in place and there must be an agreed understanding on which factors have to be present in order for a project to be considered successful and how it is evaluated as well. These factors can vary between industries and projects.

Leisure has become an industry. Leisure mainly takes place during people's free time ... *"but to qualify as leisure the action or behavior must be seen as leisure by the participant, it must be his or her choice, it must be pleasurable and a positive experience"* (Sigurgeirsdóttir, 2010, p. 1). Despite this quote, there is no common definition of leisure in the discipline or to what it applies (Sigurgeirsdóttir, 2010), so for the sake of this paper, the terms **social activity** will be used when referring to leisure or leisure related activities. The supply of various kinds of social activities is increasing and touches all kinds of people of different ages. At the same time the industry has become more professional along with the awareness of the fact that social activities are beneficial in many ways, both on an individual level as well as the societal level. Along with the option of a university degree in the discipline, the demand of enhanced professionalism is becoming more prominent.

The social activity sector provides social projects or services to various people, of all ages. In general, all these projects have in common the underlying purpose to improve society by enhancing social skills and/or minimize social isolation of those involved by learning and participating in projects in an informal and voluntary way. This work is done by nonprofit organizations as well as organizations run by municipalities and governments.

Like in other industries, a systematic project management is necessary in social activities and for improvements to take place it is necessary to learn from one project to another. In order to do so a mature process of evaluation has to be in place for the learning to be utilized. The social activity sector is on a fast track in maturing in context of educating and training its employees and volunteers, according to demands from the

society and its trends as well as according to legal constraints set by the government (the general welfare, human rights, and children's rights and protection etc.). Therefore, the application of well-defined success factors, CSFs and KPIs should become a common use and the discipline of project management has to accommodate tools and best practices.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the level of project management (PM) in social activity projects with the emphasis on evaluation and the identification of CSFs and KPIs when assessing success or failure of projects. The purpose and method of evaluation will be looked at as well as the perceived value of evaluation will be but into focus.

The hypothesis of this research is that the formal use of project management tools like CSFs and KPIs is not a common practice in the social activity sector and therefore improvements and learning opportunities are underutilized.

Literature review

The following literature review will discuss what has been written about project management concepts in general in context to evaluation of projects, where the use of critical success factors (CSF) and key performance indicators (KPI) are important. The use of KPIs and CSFs can be used to identify factors that can influence projects in a positive way as well as making an overall impact on the project's success, both in the long and short term. As the times have changed and the importance of project management in organizations is becoming more advanced; more diverse kinds of projects are starting to get fitted in the methodology. Social activity projects are no exception thereof.

Projects

Today's projects are diverse, complex, and differ in size and uniqueness and "*...factors associated with project success are different for different industries*" (Meredith & Mantel, 2010). Organization strategy is established according its' mission, vision values and in the context of its ever changing environment (Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Thompson, Gamble, & Strickland III, 2005), therefore projects should be selected and evaluated in the context of its organizational strategy (Morgan, Levitt, & Malek, 2007).

There are many definitions in the literature referring to projects. The PMI defines projects as following; "*A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result. The temporary nature of projects indicates that a project has definite beginning and end*" (PMI, 2013). The APM in the UK defines project as "*... a unique, transient endeavor undertaken to achieve a desired outcome*" (APM, 2006). According to Ingason and Jónasson, projects activities are constrained by time and budget and are aimed to deliver product according to predefined quality and standards (Helgi Þór Ingason & Haukur Ingi Jónasson, 2012).

The key element of a project is that it is *unique*, in that sense that it has never been implemented before, by the same people or group of people, in the same surroundings or environment, executed in the exact same way, or obliged to deliver the same product according to the goals.

Leisure projects, or social activity projects, take place in people's free time. That is, the time where people do not have any obligations or responsibilities towards someone or something else, like school or work (Leitner & Leitner, 2004). Project

management proves very beneficial in these projects like others and adds value to its output.

Success or failures of projects

The literature argues that there is a positive relationship between project management performance and project success (Bryde, 2008; Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996). Project success should not be a fluke; it should be planned for according to goals, purpose, and strategy. Success indicators should be defined and the projects process, from the beginning to the end, should be monitored and evaluated in order to increase the odds of success. In his book *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling and Controlling*, Harold Kerzner, defines the key components to success and failures of projects those referring to constraints of time, budget and quality, according to the traditional ideas of project definition. Also a project has to meet the customer's expectation. In addition, for projects to be successful a proper support has to be in place as well as good communication (Kerzner, 2013). In the book *Reinventing Project Management*, the authors Shenhar and Dvir, challenge the traditional model that only defines success or failures of projects according to time, budget and quality. They go on and say the traditional model suggests project management to follow a pre-determined and stable process without room for variation. They state that these elements only fit a small group of today's projects. Most modern projects are full of uncertainty, very complex, and subject to unforeseen changes in the environment. They argue that ... "one size does not fit all" (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). Shenhar and Dvir argue further, that even though projects are temporary in nature, they can have a long-term impact in the sense that the benefits or influence from the project may emerge in the future or long after the project's completion. Shenhar and Dvir claim that there is "...no universal way to measure and assess project success" (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007) but instead the assessment and success of projects has to be linked to their contribution to the organization to which it belongs and its wellbeing in the long run (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007).

In order to consider success and failures of projects, a project manager has to consider various types of factors that leads to success, both internal and external, and according to different kind of stakeholders and level of their engagement in the projects (Kerzner, 2013).

Bellassi and his colleagues did a research in 2007 where the researchers found that a project success factors were positively influenced by organizational culture. They argued that, if organizations would make an effort to improve their culture, the likelihood of improvement rate of the project success would increase (Bellassi, Kondra, & Tukel, 2007). But there does not seem much room for the abstract or the subjective factors, such as culture or the behavioral dimensions in project management literature. In his paper, *Recognizing Project Management as an Abstract Science*, Jeffrey. S. Ray argues that the challenges today's project managers face are under strong influence from social sciences as well as humanities, that is, the behavioral perspective. Therefore it is necessary to take into account more factors that can lead to project's success and failure. Due to this assumption, Ray argues that there is need to start to adjust the definitions of performance metrics (KPIs) to subjective factors in project management (Ray, 2012).

Evaluation and KPIs

As mentioned briefly earlier, the assessment of projects success or failure is a matter of evaluation process. As Meredith and Mantel put it; "*Certainly the major element in the evaluation of a project is its "success" "* (Meredith & Mantel, 2010).

The term, evaluate, means to set the value of or to appraise. "*Project evaluation appraises the progress and performance of a project compared to that project's planned progress and performance, or compared to the progress of performance of other, similar projects*" (Meredith & Mantel, 2010). In the *Project Manager's Guide to Evaluation*, issued by the European Commission, it is argued that evaluation has two main purposes, *project improvement* purpose and *project justification* purpose. By *project justification* it is meant that evaluation is used as a measuring "stick" that can be used to measure factors such as quality standards, value of money, etc. in order to justify the existence of the project and its continuation. *Project improvement* can serve as a "torch" that illuminates problems and recognizes good practices. The underlining motive of evaluation is about collective learning which process reduces the likelihood of repeating mistakes and using mistakes as critical learning incidents. Neither purpose is better than the other according to the handbook, good evaluation practice should include elements of both (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005).

In order for evaluation to be meaningful it has to be planned and organized in the early stages of project planning, simultaneously as the goals and objectives are set for the project. For evaluation be successful it has to be purposeful, systematic, and scientific. Evaluation helps people ask questions and seek answers about specific projects, and eventually make decisions about the future. "*Evaluation means that someone, ultimately, has to make judgment about the value or worth of something so its outputs must be interpretive not simply descriptive*" (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005). Therefore it's necessary to have the project's objectives well defined in order to be able to evaluate the *right things* and for that reason indicators are important.

Indicators, Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can provide important insight for the project and its stakeholders. They can provide focus, highlight strengths and weaknesses, and help make comparisons and predict future behaviors. Indicators are specific and refer to attributes, outcomes, characteristics, or factors in the evaluation process that are helpful tools to use in order to identify what has to be taken into account or considered useful for project to be successful, with regards to the projects stakeholders (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005; Kerzner, 2013) The CSFs are the external factors that have to be in place to help identify what is necessary to achieve an objective and for customers to meet desired deliverables. KPIs, on the other hand, are internal indicators that provide information that are directly relevant to performance in order to make decisions that will lead to positive outcomes. KPIs have to be SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime based) (Kerzner, 2013). Even though KPIs are usually based on some sort of quantitative data or information, there are some cases where KPIs are based on qualitative information such as feelings and subjective judgment (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005) hence difficult to quantify.

KPIs can either be lagging or leading. *Lagging* indicators follow an event, are backward focused and measure data already captured. They are easy to measure but hard to influence or improve. *Leading* indicators, on the other hand, predict future events or directions some things are going. Leading indicators are input oriented, hard to measure, and easy to influence (Lannon, 2014). In the book *Executing your strategy*;

how to break it down & get it done, it is recommended to use leading indicators. The authors state "... that the lagging indicators are derived from the past and seldom useful and mainly reinforces the notion on what is possible and what isn't" (Morgan et al., 2007). Leading indicators are forward based and are concentrated on which inputs are needed in order to meet the goals of the project at hand. According to Kerzner, leading indicators evaluate the input that predicts the future. He carries on, "...there is no point in measuring and activity if the users cannot change the outcome" (Kerzner, 2013).

In nearly all projects you need more than one KPI. David Parmenter categorized the KPIs in three categories according to what element is being evaluating. First, there is the result indicator (RI), which evaluates what has been accomplished. Second, the performance indicators (PI) that evaluate what must be done to increase and meet performance. And finally the key performance indicators (KPI), that define the critical performance indicators that can drastically increase the performance or accomplishments of the objectives. When selecting the KPIs for a project 10% should be RIs, 80% of the PI kind, and then 10% KPIs. This presents that the emphasis should be on the performance and what to do to increase the probability of success (Parmenter, 2010).

KPIs have to be carefully chosen, most importantly they must be based on the objectives of the projects and should determine what information needs to be gathered and needs to be understood by all stakeholders and familiar to those participating in the project (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005).

Importance of KPIs

Indicators should be the reflection of organizational culture, values and strategy and "...the development and the use of indicators should be a dynamic process that informs decisions rather than being the an end in itself" (Keeble, Topiol, & Berkeley, 2003, p. 151). Dialogue should be with key stakeholders to identify what is expected in the project and which indicators are best to enhance improvements and address sustainability (Keeble et al., 2003). D.J. Bryde upholds similar view when he introduced the model he called: Project Management Performance Assessment (PMPA). The PMPA model, based on EFQM excellence model, focuses on several criteria in relation to project management in organization. The criteria that are included in the model are; leadership, management of staff, policy and strategy, partnerships and resources, project lifecycles, and finally KPIs. In Bryde's model KPIs are the indicators of results that are expected by the projects stakeholders. Also, the KPIs are tools within the project management system to evaluate improvement (Bryde, 2003a). According to Mir and Pinnington management of KPI is the most important variable contributing towards the success of any project, and well-defined performance evaluation, including KPIs, in an organization can significantly impact project success. "Therefore, methods should exist in an organization to formally develop these KPIs" (Mir & Pinnington, 2014, p. 209). The development of the KPIs should involve participation of all stakeholders and should include not only short-term benefits but also long-term (Mir & Pinnington, 2014).

Well organized and structured definition of KPIs in the evaluation process is a learning opportunity and provides an opportunity for improvement and development. Either by recognizing a problem or by noticing good practices and therefore possibility to develop lessons learned for future projects (Hughes & Nieuwenhuis, 2005).

The social activity industry is getting extensive and affects individuals of all ages and with various backgrounds. The projects of the organizations which offer social

activities are diverse and of various magnitudes. The research that was conducted addressed the following questions:

- Is general project management used in organizing and executing social activity projects?
- Is the use of KPIs commonly used in social activity projects?

Research Method

The aim of this research is to endeavour towards an understanding on how organizations that provide social activities to individuals or groups use general project management with the emphasis on evaluation. That is, when evaluation takes place when project is completed, to what extent do those those organizations use performance indicators, and to what end to enhance project success and improvements.

A mixed way of research was chosen, that is, to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain information for this research project. On one hand, the researcher decided to conduct in depth interviews with experienced people who lead social activity projects for qualitative research purposes. On the other hand, it was decided to send out a survey questionnaire to professionals in the same field to obtain a quantitative data. The benefit of using the both methods is to collect a comprehensive perspective to align with in depth knowledge (or information).

Qualitative research method

There are various ways to do a qualitative research, different kinds of interviews, focus groups, field studies etc. For the benefit of this study it was decided to conduct interviews which enable the researcher to attain matter of concern relevant to the research through interviews. This research method has great potential in providing enlightening information which gives the researcher an opportunity to learn something that is outside his/her knowledge. The disadvantages of interviews are that they may be time consuming, during the preparation stage, the interview itself, and the process afterwards. By conducting an interview the researcher has to be careful not to let his/her own biases affect the process (Robson, 2011).

A focus group research could have been an interesting option for this study, particularly because that kind of research can provide considerable amounts of information that can be useful, especially in early stages of research. But the downsides of it are that the results may be hard to generalize and hard to represent on a wider population. Also, in case of this study, it was difficult to find individuals to take part in the focus group who were at the same level in the industry's hierarchy as well as experience which can cause an imbalance of power in the group. That is the main reason a focus group research was not conducted in relevance to this study.

For the qualitative part of the research, four unstructured, in depth interviews were conducted. Three of the interviewees were very experienced project managers, employed by the Reykjavik Municipality. All of those project managers manage numerous projects each year, all of which have the purpose of improving both the lives of the individual who partakes in the projects as well as improving their surroundings and society. The fourth participant works as a senior manager for a non-governmental organization which is very (high profile) efficient in all kinds of social as well as humanitarian work. The interviews were conducted in the first months of 2015 and took on average about 40 minutes.

Although the interviews were unstructured, there was some structure. A short list of questions served as a checklist of topics that the interview was intended to cover and in order to maintain flow and stay on topic. The following describe the line of questions asked, used as guideline.

- How much project management is used in your organization?
- What kind of assessment do you/your organization use in your projects?
- ... and what is the purpose of your evaluation?
- When do you conduct your evaluation?
- Have KPIs been defined in the beginning of projects? What are they (in general)?
- How important is it to have quantitative data in order to evaluate your projects?
- What is the value of assessments in your organization – and whom does it benefit?
- How easy or difficult is it to translate the subjective (or abstract) purpose of your organizations to objective meanings?

It was the expectation to have the subjects do as much talking as possible in hope to shed some light on the topic as well as providing new knowledge. The aim of the in-depth interviews were to figure out how the performance assessment is conducted and for what purpose. Also if the systematic use of KPIs were common from a project management point of view.

Quantitative Research Methods

The purpose of the qualitative methods is to turn information or data obtained with research into numerical form and in case of this study a questionnaire survey via internet was chosen. The advantages of conducting a survey is that its approach is relatively straightforward and simple. It gives an opportunity to reach an abundant sample, which provides means to generalize and standardize information. An internet survey is cheap, efficient, and allows anonymity which can encourage participants to be (more) straight forward than for example in interview surveys. The disadvantages of an internet survey is that it typically has low response rate. Participants may not really respond according to their true or actual beliefs or actions, but instead they answer in a way they believe is acceptable by society. Also it gives no chance of clarification of misunderstandings or ambiguities (Robson, 2011).

To conduct the internet survey, the use of *SurveyMonkey* was chosen. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the perception of the participants towards the use of performance indicators and their relations to the objectives of projects performed (or executed). The survey represented with the title; "*Performance in social activities*" (ísl. Árangur í félagsstarfi) consisted of twelve questions. The first two served a background purpose. Five questions were statements and the participants were asked, using a Likert scale, whether they; strongly agreed/agreed/neither agreed or disagreed/disagreed/strongly disagreed. The purpose of these questions was to find out if the use of performance assessment exists and its purpose. In four questions, participants were asked to check in a box if some of the features did exist in their organization. The purpose of these questions was to shed a light on the use of KPIs of some kind. Finally, the last question was an open one, were the participants were asked to write down, in their own words, what they considered to be a successful project. The intention of that question was to see if there was a consistency between the strategy of the organization and what they considered a success.

The survey was sent out to 343 recipients who work either as a project managers or seniors managers in approximately 40 municipalities in Iceland. All participants organize social activity projects for children up to 18 years old and senior citizens. The survey was sent out in the last week of March 2015 and a reminder sent out after Easter in the beginning of April. The survey closed on April 10th. The response rate was 25%.

Limitation of the research

As stated earlier there are limitation to both research method which are necessary to take into account. When conducting an internet survey the response rate is low and people who participate may not answer accurately, but rather in the line of what is expected. Also for the purpose of the research there were only four interviews conducted, to individuals who have similar position in their organization. For more accurate results more interviews may be necessary.

Results

As stated above, to conduct this research a qualitative method was used as well as quantitative. The results of the research was analyzed by the researcher who interpreted the in depth interview in relation to the research question. A questionnaire was sent out via *SurveyMonkey* and when analysing the results from that questionnaire the *SurveyMonkey* program provided built in hardware to analyse the results.

Questionnaire

The following are the findings of the survey questionnaire. The response rate was 25%. 93% were employed by the government (state or municipalities) others were employed by nonprofit organizations.

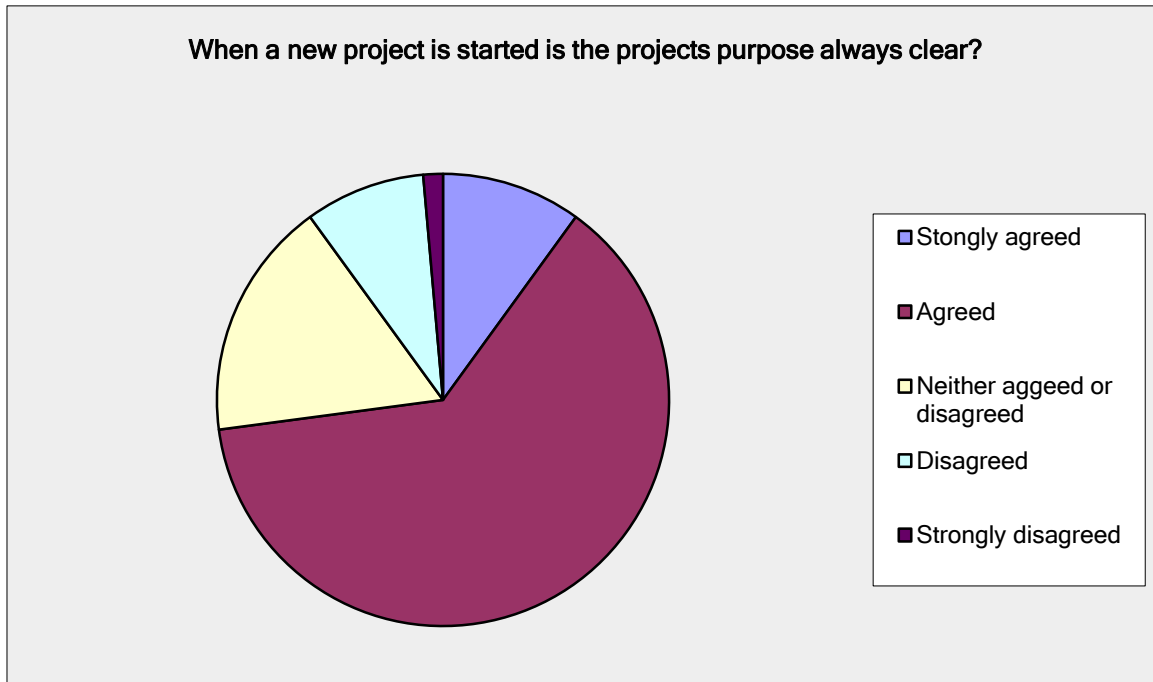
Aim and purpose of the organizations

The participants were asked if the organizations they work for have declared strategy, objective, or agenda for their function. Over 85% of the participants said they do. In general, the objectives aim to promote participation in the social activities which will lead to the wellbeing of the individuals as well as the society in long term. The organizations aim to provide diverse social activities in a safe, creative, warm and inviting environment. The social activities have a purpose to strengthen the social skills of the participants as well as breach social isolation without prejudice of any kind.

Level of Project management, preparation, and purpose

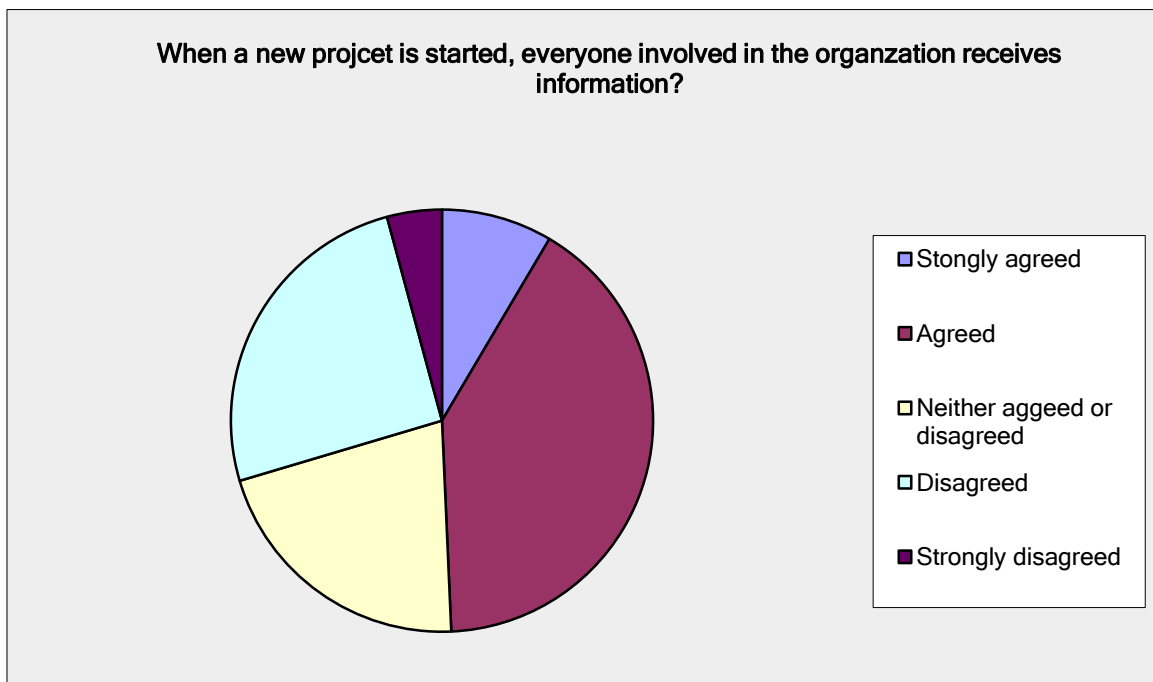
The participants were asked several questions about use of basic Project Management, especially purpose and aim of new projects. About 70% of all participant felt that the purpose of all new projects were clear and 25% were indifferent or disagreed. 5% did strongly disagree. Half or 50% felt that sufficient communication about the project throughout the organization and the rest were indifferent or disagreed.

Figure 1: When a new project is started is the projects purpos always clear?



Half or 50% felt that sufficient communication about the project throughout the organization and the rest were indifferent or disagreed.

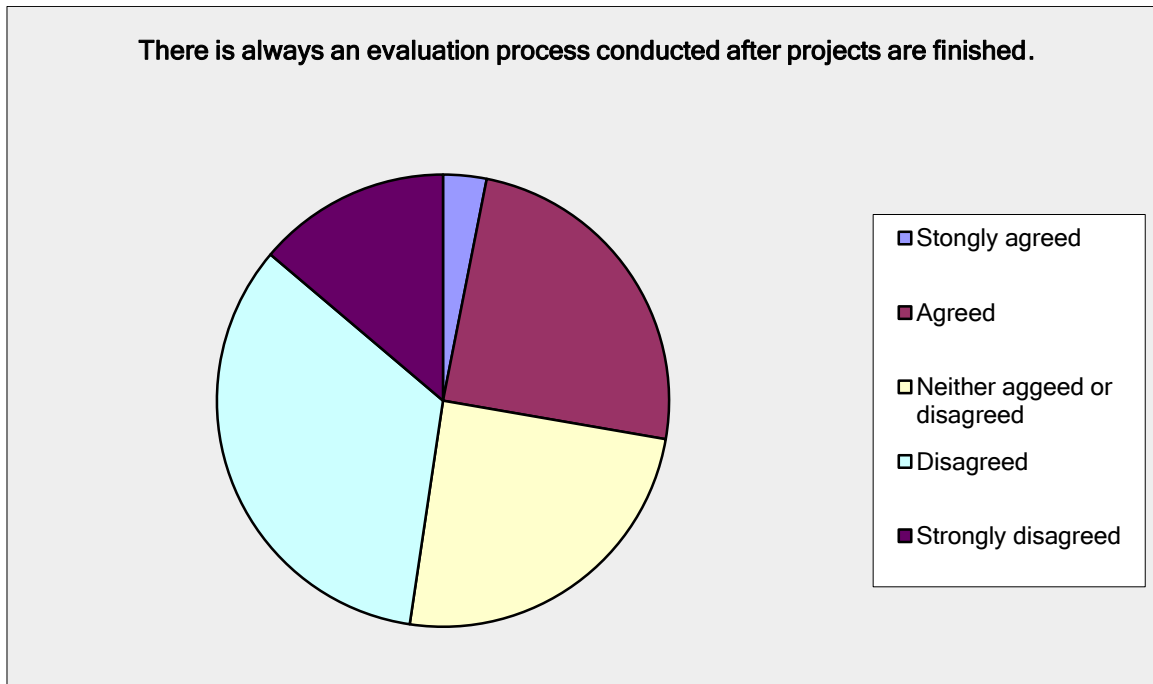
Figure 2: When a new projcet is started, everyone involved in the organization receives information?



The Evaluation and KPIs

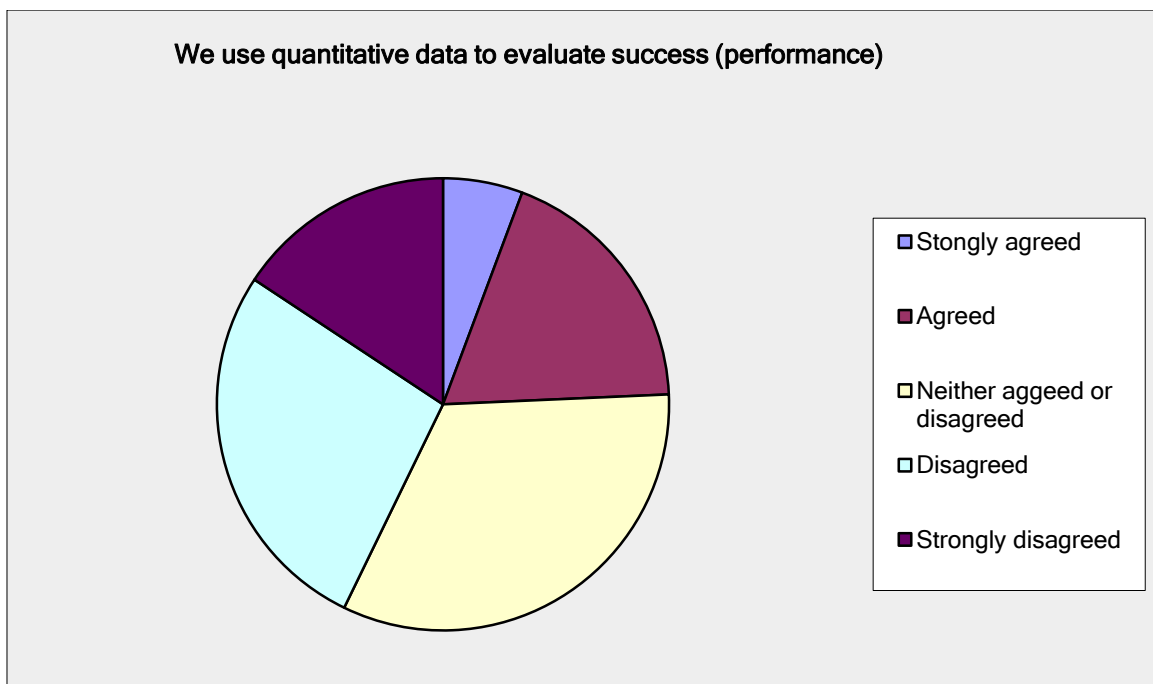
The participants were asked to offer their opinion on the following statement; "After every project an evaluation process is always conducted". 29% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, 25% were indifferent, and 47% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 3: There is always an evaluation process conducted after projects are finished



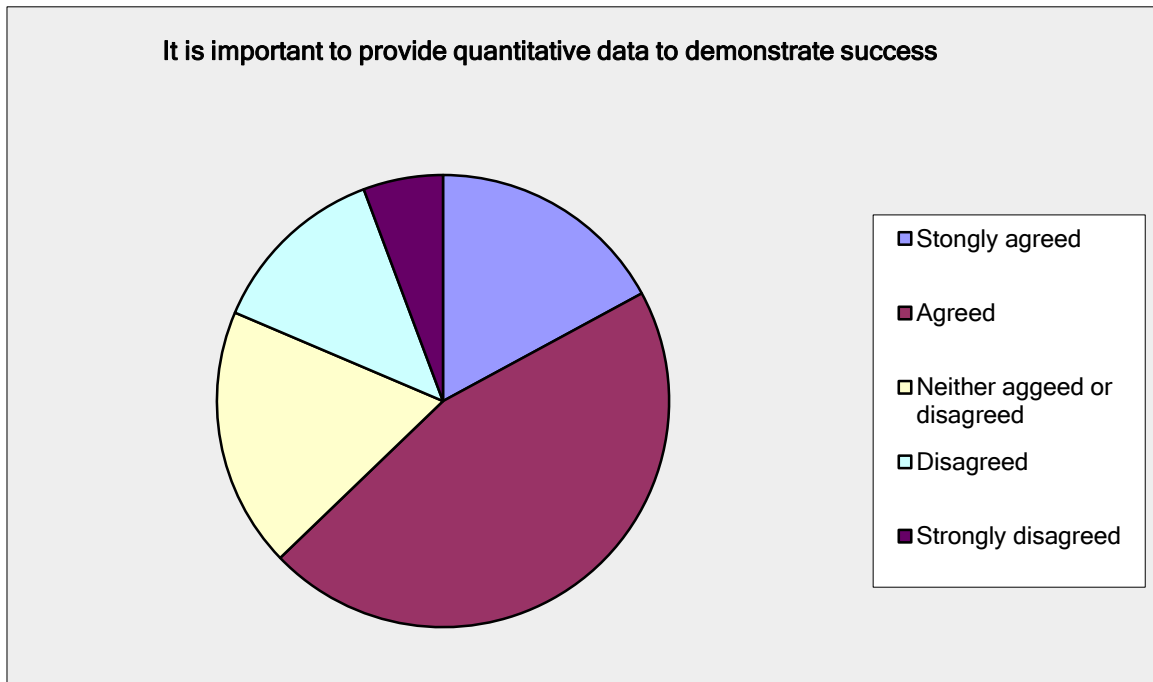
25% testified they used quantitative data to evaluate success (or performance), 30% were indifferent, and the rest 45% did disagree or strongly disagree.

Figure 4: We use quantitative data to evaluate success (performance)



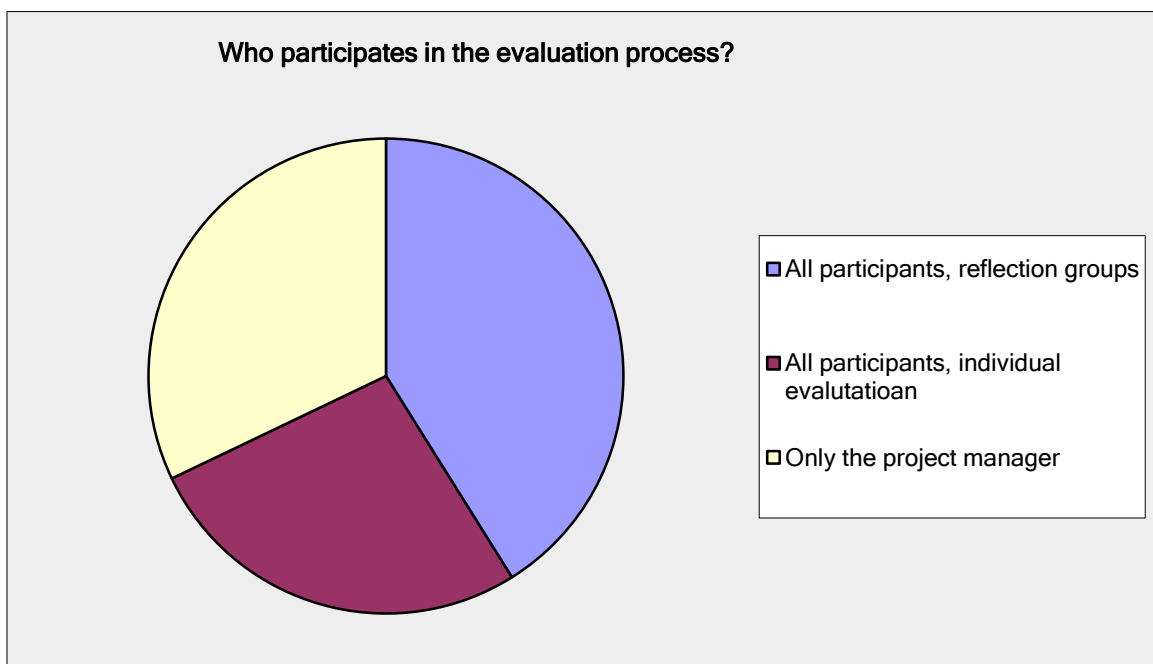
But when asked if it was important to possess quantitative data 63% agreed or strongly agreed. 19% were indifferent, and the remaining 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 5: It is important to provide quantitative data to demonstrate success



75% of participants answered the question; who participates in evaluation? 68% of those answered "all participants" and 32% answered that only the project manager made the evaluation. Others, the 25%, had the opportunity to write down their answer to the question and half of those said that it varies depending on the project; the remaining said their organization did not conduct evaluation on projects.

Figure 6: Who participates in the evaluation process?



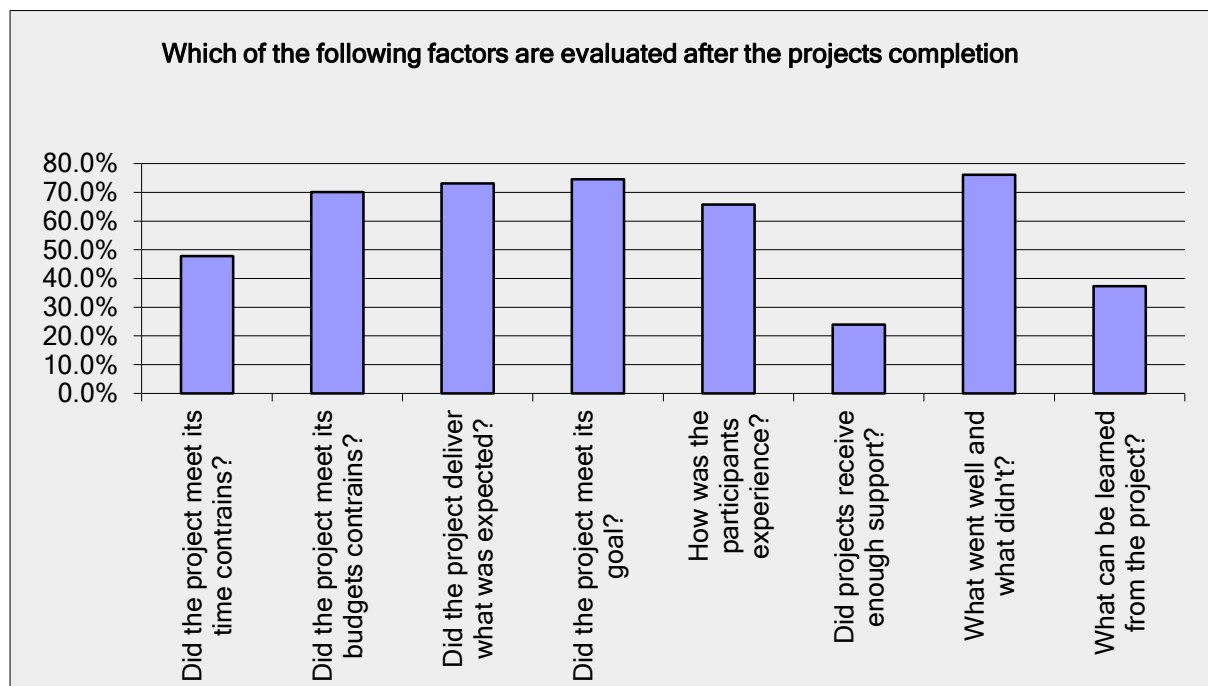
In the survey participants were asked which of the following factors are evaluated after the project is finished;

- Was the project completed within constrains of time?
- Was the project completed within budget?
- Did the project deliver the predetermined quality/product?
- Did the project reach its goals?
- What was the experience and feeling of participants during the project?
- Was the support towards the project adequate (from the ones next in command)?
- What was effective and what could have been better in the execution of the project?
- What can be learned from the projects?

The participants could check with more than one option.

Over 70% of the participant, stated they evaluated how the budget was met, if goals were achieved, as well as if its products were delivered. 75% say they evaluated the projects execution. 67% of participants in the survey said they paid attention to the experience and feelings of participants in the project. Little less than half said they paid attention to time constrains in the evaluation, and 37% saw the project as a learning opportunity. 24% felt they had the adequate support from their seniors during the project.

Figure 7: Which of the following factors are evaluated after the projects completion



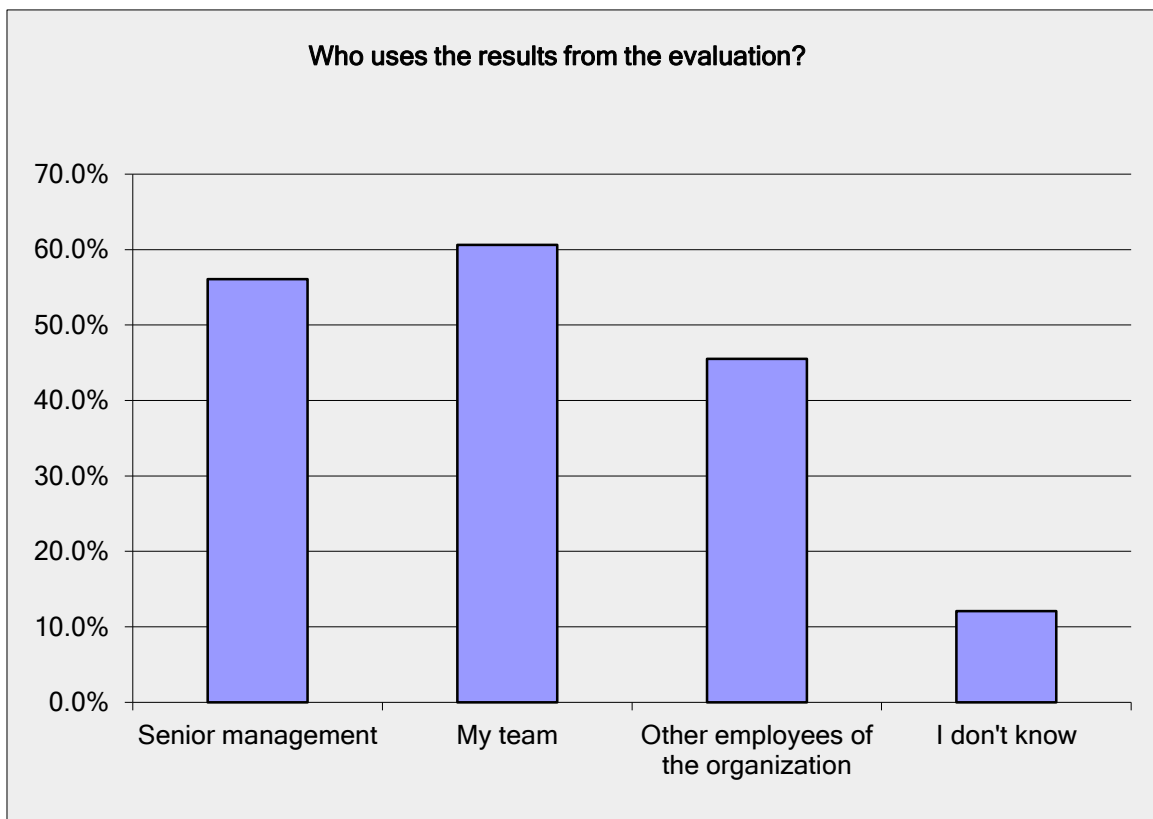
When asked about the main purpose of the evaluation for the organization, the participants had several statements they could check. The majority, or 77%, said the purpose of evaluation was for improvements, 51% used evaluation for developmental reasons, 48% for justification for the work they do, and 39% for comparison reasons.

Figure 8: What is the main purpose of evaluation in your organization?



When asked who uses the findings from evaluations 12% stated they did not know, 56% stated senior management, 60% stated my team, and 45% other staff of the organization.

Figure 9: Who uses the results from the evaluation?



The last question in the survey was an open one where participants were asked to describe in their own words what they consider to be good performance (success) when conducting projects. Over 80% answered in the line of "customer satisfaction" i.e. if people were happy/content, were interested, felt confident, had positive experience, and had learning opportunity after participating in the project.

Interviews

For the qualitative part of the research four interviews were conducted with individuals who all are very experienced in the field of social work and doing social activities. Two of the participants work for the Education and Leisure Department of Reykjavik Municipality as managers. The other two work for reputable nonprofit humanitarian organizations, both are part of international organizations. For the purpose of this research the two people working for the nonprofit organizations were only asked about their domestic projects, although a relatively great deal of knowledge can be attributed from this international affiliation.

Also a brief telephone interview (or conversation) was conducted with a manager who organizes social activity projects for senior citizens. The interviews can be divided in three informal parts according to the line of questioning and turn all interviews took:

- Level of project management in their organization
- The evaluation process in the organization
- The value of evaluation for their organization

Level of Project Management

The interviewer began to ask all of the interviewees to what degree systematic/formal product management (PM) is practiced in their organization. All said they used some formal PM in most cases but it differed in proportion to the scope of the project. They all executed a minimal planning regarding goals and expectation for the projects but additional planning varied according to level of magnitude, importance of projects, and from where the idea for the project derived. The interviewees felt, in general, that formal PM is important at least in the line of training people in the discipline in usage of resources.

One of the two organizations cooperates in international projects and has to follow strict protocol and standards of project planning with regards to those international projects. Also, it has to follow instructions concerning the kind of work it is obliged to do, both domestic and abroad. The other of the two has a bit more freedom in choosing what kind of project it does as long as it is according to the agenda of its organization and has considerable freedom as well as how to obtain its goal.

The interviewees were asked if they set goals for the projects in the beginning of the preparation stages. All but one said they did, although it differed in specification according to projects. One interviewee replied they did so too seldom and he continued, when referring to the promotional campaign his humanitarian organization is doing among young people.

"... I have no specific goals in relation to what the presentation will deliver, for example like number of new recruits or members in the organization. It would be good to have some kind of goal, because it is really time consuming. But on the other hand ... I don't have real information about the effect of the promotion, how much one learned ... although I know that people, especially young people, get affected when hearing about injustice and

discrimination and that is an end result that won't be visible until after a very long time. So that the results can be hidden".

One participant said:

"...it is important to have clear objective and a project plan but when it comes to evaluation ... some projects are just impossible to measure ... satisfaction maybe".

The same participants continued;

*"... sometimes one starts a project without proper planning ... it is just set off and becomes a pet project for someone and then it dies ... but in some cases it is o.k. **you cannot take the heart out of the projects.**"*

The level of formal project management is not very a mature in those social activity organizations.

Evaluation Process

The participants were asked if they planned the evaluation and/or if they planned to follow specific factor throughout the project that could serve as an indicator for expected outcome. None of the participant said they used that kind of method. In all cases they said the evaluation took place by the end of the project.

The most common things that were evaluated were financial expenses, number of participants, were the goals met, and what went well and what could have been done better. And this information went into the reports. The subjective information, like feelings of participant in the projects and the actual learning that took place, was evaluated but not necessarily put into reports. Also it varied between projects which were part of the evaluation and in what purpose. In Reykjavik Municipality (old ITR) it has been the tradition for a long time that after each project, all those who were responsible would sit down and reflect about the project from many angles. Afterwards the project manager would write down a report where only practical as well as quantitative information would be documented, according to a pre-issued checklist. Then on periodic basis all these "little" reports would be collected and made into a comprehensive evaluation on the whole operation of the organization, in this case a youth center. Then the project manager sent the report to the next one in charge and then it was over.

"... we, the managers, used to write all kinds of evaluation reports, addressed to "someone" without really knowing the purpose of it is or what is supposed to be reported".

The interviewees consider what they do a kind of a grassroots activity and the tradition in the field or the nature of the work makes it hard to make concrete plans and to evaluate success because it has so much to do with the subjective factors. It is not impossible but more difficult. Then on the other hand;

"... we can conduct an evaluation after every project, have a questionnaire ready and ask; What did you learn? How did you feel? But do I want to do that? I don't know, I don't really think it matters ... some things can just dwell within the person".

Other interviewee said.

"we conduct many "feel good" projects and we don't really evaluate them, we just know from experience that they do good".

One said:

"only thing that really matters to me is "satisfaction" maybe I should get one of those smiley face things that the banks have and have my participants evaluate

the project or the activity pushing smiley face if satisfied with the project or frowny face if dissatisfied with the activity”.

Most agreed that participation is one indicator of success or failure. If participants come again to participate or have the need to talk about or to repeat a project it can be interpreted as evaluation. And as one interviewee put it;

“...if they come and comment on an event, that is one kind of evaluation ... the feedback ... and is our kind of goodwill (ísl. viðskiptavild), if one can say so ... if the kids continue coming to the youth center that is an evaluation.”

One of the participants, who works for Reykjavik Municipality, has been part of a committee for the last year developing quality standards and evaluation process for the work done in the leisure division of the School and Leisure Department. There they consider quality work same as success and to evaluate that is subjective and objective. The evaluation process is called *quality evaluation* and is based on both internal and external evaluation. Quality work has been defined, and lists and forms have been developed in order to help make the evaluation.

The evaluation process is comprehensive. It evaluates the same organization, singular youth center or recreation center from many angles, to test quality, by proofing and reproofing; (The interviewee used the expression; *“... if it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, swims like a duck, therefor it must be a duck”*). The employees evaluate the work that they do, the participants evaluate the work that they partake in, parents evaluate the work their children participate in, and managers evaluate themselves. Outsiders come in and do evaluation on various factors by conducting interviews, reviewing plans, data and strategies, filling out lists and do observations. The ultimate goal of the evaluation is to create a usable evaluation tool that is proactive, welcomes reforms and development for future work. Not just for the individual organization but also for the leisure work done in the municipality as a whole.

So far a test run of two organizations has been conducted and proved satisfactory. Of course there have been some disagreements on which factors should or should not be part of the evaluation and some elements are harder to evaluate than others because of the subjective nature or the long term effect the work has. But as the interviewee put it:

“... now at least we have quality evaluation, and it is not excluded of criticism”.

He continues;

“... we, who complete this quality evaluation have to make sure it does not become report in a drawer. It has to be reviewed by everyone and acknowledged in the planning for next year. Those factors that score low but deemed important should be put into focus, a reform plan should be made along with an action plan. And that should be put into next year's strategy plan”.

The value of evaluation

All interviewees said that it is a demand by higher authority to obtain some kind of quantitative measures to represent in reports especially to those allocating funds for future projects and it is important in the way that it is something that everyone understands. But the problem for three of the participant is that sometimes they felt that people who do work in the field spend considerable amount of time into translating the subjective result into the objective, and it may be inhibitory;

"... it is hard to stand in front of a politician and say; "I know that what I do works or I believe that it works. It reduces my opportunities".

Other participant said:

"... I have no problem in rationalizing what I do, but am I listened too ... I'm not sure?

But in general all interviewees considered this fact more as a nuisance than a problem because the real value of evaluation is seeing the people they work with benefit from the work they do, in one way or another, and that is subjective as well as individual.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to make an effort to examine if organizations that provide social activity projects use formal project management, with an emphasis on how or if they evaluated the success or failures of those projects and to what extent the use of KPIs is practiced

Both research methods, the qualitative and the quantitative, concluded that at least minimum project management is conducted when projects are implemented. That is, people or project managers set goals and define purpose of the project but if or what kind of additional planning is done varies depending on the nature and magnitude of the project. When the focus shifted to evaluation it seems that evaluation is not common practice, less than 30% agreed or strongly agreed they did an evaluation after every project. But after conducting interviews it might be safe to assume that the magnitude and size of project affect the perceived urgency of evaluation and its purpose. The majority of people might not consider some aspects of evaluation as such, that is evaluation, but rather a reflection on what has been done or achieved.

When the information obtained from the survey is reviewed, it is clear that there is a conflict between the attitudes towards the value of the subjective or objective findings (quantitative vs qualitative). People feel it is important to have quantitative data to show as evidence for success or failure, but they do not put much effort to make such benchmarks in projects. It seems that the general notion is that quantitative data is more important because it is a method to express results in a way that is commonly understood as accurate or significant. The subjective information is more subtle and therefore less important.

The research did show that the use of KPIs is very limited. In some cases is it used in evaluating basic things like budget, time and output. But the learning and the reformative purpose of the KPIs is underutilized and the organizations are missing out on tremendous opportunities improving their work and adding value to their projects.

The research did show that they people who work in the field do refer to their work as one big project, instead of many smaller ones. The individual projects or events are just part of the holistic strategy of the organization to reach a common goal. Therefore the project management, as commonly defined, is the management of the organization not individual projects. Each and every project is part of the big context. And as a consequence when people were asked to define the level of PM or evaluation they could not conclude in any definite way because it varied according to the context.

It may be interesting to think of the social activity field in context to the individuals who choose to work there. In general these people believe strongly in what they do. They believe that what they do is beneficial, both for the individuals who are

part of their projects as well as in the long run for the society as a whole. The youth clubs in Iceland were founded and driven by grassroots entrepreneurs who strongly believed in the value of providing youth work and social activity for the young people and the society in general. Therefore it may be the reason why they do not put much effort into communicating the evidence of the importance of their work in numerical or metrical way. But as stated earlier the people in the field may find the lack of recognition frustrating and cause for nuisance. And for organizations and the profession to improve and develop it is important to have a common understanding of from where the value is derived and what is considered best practice. Therefore methods and standards of what and how to evaluate the profession has to be concluded and developed. The identification of KPIs is crucial for the social activity sector to add value to the important work and shed a light on the benefits that can bring forth improvements and prosperity of the organizations. Inclusion of all key stakeholders is a necessity and especially those who will bring along his or her passion for the work.

“You cannot take the heart out of the projects”

Conclusion

The research has concluded that the social activity sector does not practice project management in order to make it beneficial for the projects the organizations are implementing. It was especially noticed that the lack of systematic evaluation and identification of the KPIs can result to lack of developing best practices. It is concluded that the organizations are missing out on a grave opportunity to improve themselves, add value to the work they do, both internally and externally, as well as for the long-term and short-term.

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