

International cooperation for development

Design of a competence-based model for managing programmes and projects

Managing international cooperation for development projects is a complex task that involves technical, political, socio-economic and cultural variables. The technical, contextual and performance competences of those who manage these kinds of projects must take this complexity as their starting point and tackle it with all their accumulated experience to decide what actions need to be carried out. This research includes an analysis of the theory and application of the project management methodologies currently used by development organisations; an analysis that takes a critical look at the success or failure of development interventions, assessing the components of competences and the essential skills for project managers. It also examines how proposals for cooperation project management methodology are drawn up, specific training programmes in this area, the coordination between players, and knowledge management, with the purpose of enhancing the impact of development interventions.

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Introduction

Public sector development projects or programs specifically designed for economic and social needs of developing countries, usually financed by a donor are known as international development projects. These projects are either implemented by recipient governments under a bilateral agreement with the donor country, or through an 'implementing partner' of the donor – frequently a nongovernmental organization or professional contractor (Crawford and Bryce, 2003). International development projects differ from industrial or commercial projects. The objectives of development projects by definition, concern poverty alleviation and improvement of living standards, environment and basic human rights protection, assistance for victims of natural or people caused disasters, capacity building and development of basic physical and social infrastructures (Khang and Moe, 2008).

The Millennium Declaration with its ensuing definition of objectives, goals and common indicators represents an attempt to internationalise a Management Model for Development Results (MfDR) in International Cooperation programmes and projects, indicating the path to be followed by the countries in the world as a whole and putting forward the importance of partnership for development. This is a unique and extremely novel experience within the sphere of public policy which sets a simple, easily communicable action framework that is highly suited to mobilising resources. Beyond having realistic and achievable goals, the Objectives of the Millennium Develop-

ment have established the way to cooperate in recent years. This research work aims to verify the hypothesis that a better training in competences and skills for programme/project managers in the areas of intervention leads to a sustainable impact and results based on the shared social processes of empowerment and learning. The following questions need answering: Do the currently used methodologies adapt to the new context of international cooperation for development? Do project management training strategies adapt to the local context in terms of satisfying local expectations? Are currently used project management models and the sustainability of long-term actions being strengthened? To what extent do local partners, counterparts and the beneficiary population take part in planning, monitoring and evaluating interventions? Do they have the necessary mechanisms to be able to meet the requirements for control, monitoring and evaluation?

This paper reports on research that sets out to identify the competence profile of effective managers of cooperation for development projects, with the purpose of promoting an improvement in development interventions within the new framework of cooperation through the training in, and strengthening of competences and skills adapted to local contexts.

The evolution of project management models for development and the new framework

The gradual introduction of results-oriented management techniques has helped many public sector

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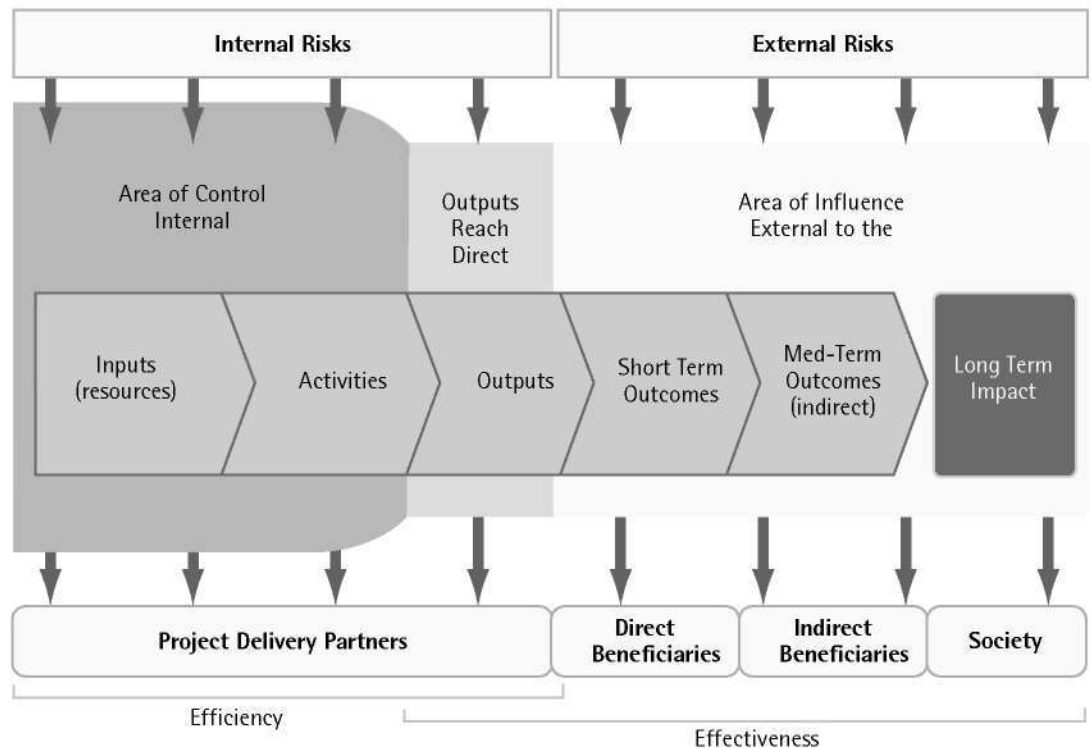


Figure 1. Results chain for the Development Results Management Model.

and development agency managers to adopt a more systematic approach to all aspects of project and programme management.

Many institutions and agencies in both developed and developing countries now use a variety of practical MfDR techniques. These include results-based strategic planning, the use of logic models or project results frameworks, results-based budgeting, risk management and results-based evaluation and monitoring (Fontaine, 2004). Management in the public sector used planning, programming and cost control models in the 1960s, placing an emphasis on financial planning and cost accounting. 'Input' management (human resources, operating costs...) became more important demonstrating control over the management, distribution and use of financial resources (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993).

Programme management by activities (PMBA) reached its peak between the seventies and the eighties when donor organisations got involved in infrastructure and industrial development projects. This combined with different activity planning tools and techniques (project structure breakdown, Gantt diagrams, the Critical Path Method, Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) boosted the implementation of activities in line with a programming framework that became extended to management systems in the building industry and engineering (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2003). In the field of international cooperation the introduction of management methods by objectives goes back to this period. Such methods were the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Objective Oriented Project Planning methods (GTZ).

The 2002 Monterrey Conference called for creating a new partnership for development: the

developing countries reaffirmed their commitment to policies and actions to promote economic growth and reduce poverty, and the developed countries supported them with more effective aid and trade policies. In this context of shared responsibility, world attention has moved towards management strategies in order to achieve results. At the international round table on results in Marrakech (February 2004), the development agencies gave their backing to five central principles for management by results. More recently, at the High Level Forum on the Effectiveness of Aid in Paris (March 2005), the member countries and the donors backed the Paris Declaration, which contains specific commitments related to Managing for Development Results: actions to be taken both separately and jointly to "administer and implement aid in a way that is focused on the desired results and uses the information to enhance decision-making".

Development results-based management is centred on a strong notion of causality. It is supposed that certain inputs and activities logically lead to certain results (Binnedijk, 2001). The relevance of these results follow an increasing order: the most basic results (the 'products' or outputs) contribute to the success of the most complex results ('effects' or outcomes) and finally lead to getting 'impact', which is the most far-reaching result. Therefore, attention must be paid to achieving results at every stage of the management process, from planning to monitoring and evaluation, since every level of development of every process is affected.

For those working on this incipient programme, however, it is sometimes difficult to know how and where to begin, who to include and where to seek aid. There are no black and white answers to these questions because every country and agency has its own unique situation. Notwithstanding,

as certain agencies and countries advance in this work, they have begun to mark out a path that can be useful to others.

Out of the search for this balance certain recent proposals have arisen aimed at improving the quality of participation of all the parties interested in the life cycle of an intervention and in making planning models more flexible so that they better interact with their surroundings and thereby re-guide activities and results according to how the context evolves. This work takes account of all the theories on development, as well as the management approaches used: the logical framework approach (Gómez Galán and Cámara, 2003), results-based management, the process approach to learning (Korten, 1987), projects as experiments (Rondinelli, 1993) and organisational learning-based processes approach (Chambers, 1994). In addition, we have studied how international organisations plan, evaluate, and manage development projects: UK Department for International Development (DFID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Research project

Adapting the system of International Cooperation to MfDR, involves a profound change in methodology, but, above all, a medium and long-term effort that means a change in organisational culture, in management and in actions for cooperation. It is for these reasons that new technical, personal and contextual skills have been identified in this area. Development programme/project managers work in a rapidly changing context, with many parties involved and external influencing factors. Projects are more numerous, complex and of a more varied nature. The demand on managers and their teams' personal and contextual skills has become more pronounced and exacting in the last decade (IPMA, 2007). The need for a broad, real description of the skills needed to manage development projects and programmes in this changing context is top priority.

The methodology used to support this research programme took its lead from the established McBer job competence assessment process initially developed for industrial psychology by McClelland (1973). Over the last 30 years, a number of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness and validity of the McBer job competence assessment methodology which comprises: (i) The identification of those criteria defining effective performance; (ii) the identification of a criterion sample group of performers; (iii) data collection through behavioural event interviews; (iv) the identification of core competences; (v) the validation of the competence model. The participants were 24 International Cooperation programme and project managers specialised in all the human development sector areas (UNPD, 1997): rural development, education, health, water and sanitation, environmental sustainability, technology and innovation, culture, gender, migration and peace-building. A variety of data were collected from the managers selected. Initially, they were asked to describe their job tasks and key responsibilities

Technical Competences	Importance	
	M	SD
Parties involved	3,11	0,78
Risk and opportunity	4,78	0,68
Quality	4,31	0,69
Project Organisation	2,98	1,28
Teamwork	2,88	1,44
Project Coordination	2,86	1,69
Scope and deliverables	3,93	0,75
Time and project stages	1,97	1,18
Resources	2,74	1,00
Cost and financing	3,04	0,89
Supplies and contracts	1,51	0,93
Changes	2,56	1,18
Control and reports	2,77	1,41
Information and documentation	4,25	0,42
Project Completion	1,53	1,02

Behavioural Competences	Importance	
	M	SD
Leadership	3,21	0,89
Commitment and motivation	4,62	0,76
Creativity	1,74	0,64
Results-oriented	4,81	0,88
Efficiency	2,04	0,50
Consultation	2,15	1,25
Negotiation	3,47	1,31
Conflicts and crisis	3,65	0,87
Reliability	2,98	1,08
Ethics	4,71	0,71

Contextual Competences	Importance	
	M	SD
Project-oriented	4,01	1,31
Programme-oriented	4,04	1,08
Continuous improvement of projects and programmes	4,82	0,65
Coordination with the parties involved	3,71	0,78
Personnel management	3,53	0,71
Safety, health and environment	2,98	0,46

Table 1. Most important technical, behavioural and contextual competences for cooperation for development programme and project managers.

in order to identify competence requirements of their roles.

Next, behavioural event interviews were used to assess the behaviours underlying effective performance in their role. Interviewees were asked to recount an occasion where they had to manage a complex or problematic situation or event. Each informant was asked to describe a range of critical situations they had encountered, what events led up to them, who was involved, what they thought, felt or wanted to do in that situation and finally, what they actually did and what they thought the outcome was. Later a workshop was set up with the participants so that experiences concerning Development results management could be shared. The group worked to identify what MfDR parameters were managed by the organisation up to present and which not in order to get to know the difficulties and the requirements needed to implement this management model in the sector.

Results and discussion

Taking account of all the variables considered previously, the results of the interviews were as shown in the following table.

After the study undertaken, it is clear what the development project manager's profile is within the new framework of international cooperation. This study will enable specific training programmes to be designed in this area, to coordinate players and manage knowledge so as to enhance the impact of development interventions. Therefore, it can be considered that the essential competences for project management are:

Risk and opportunity. The project manager is responsible for keeping themselves and the team members working actively, be aware of risks and opportunities, and be committed to the risk management process in order to involve the parties in this process. Having made a quantitative assessment of risks and opportunities, they are classified according to the importance, impact and probability of their occurring. This classification is used to decide what strategy to use to deal with each risk and opportunity.

Quality. Project quality management embraces every stage and part of the project, from its initial definition up to the processes of the project, its team management, its deliverables and its completion. The functionality demanded of the product must be validated against its real functionality (at appropriate stages in the course of a project) with the customer in order to ensure compliance with product requirements.

Information and documentation. Information management includes modelling, compilation, selection, and project data storage and retrieval. A documentation system must have rules as to what information it contains, in what sort and type of document and what format this information should take in the document.

Commitment and Motivation. Commitment is a project manager's personal contribution to a project and the contribution of the people inside the project or connected with it.

Results-oriented. The team's attention must be focused on key objectives to obtain optimum results from all the parties involved. The project

manager must be convinced that the project results satisfy the parties involved.

Ethics. Ethics allows the people to carry out the project and deliver the results satisfactorily. They represent personal and professional freedom as well as limits. Ethics must be respected so that people work with no moral conflicts concerning the project, the parties involved or society.

Continuous improvement of projects and programmes. To improve project and programme management skills, as well as to increase the organisation's success in implementing its strategic plan, continuous improvement is required. Implementing project, programme and portfolio management in an organisation involves designing the best possible processes, methods, techniques and tools, it also involves changing attitudes and applying organisational changes in a continuous exercise of improvement.

Conclusions

The MfDR reform process must allow building on existing foundations without this leading to unnecessary conflict. The effort put into planning in recent years is noteworthy. The general, country, thematic and sector documents produced are high quality, in some cases reflecting the "state-of-the-art" of the issues analysed (the ability to govern, gender, environment ...). However, quite often they are more often ideological reports that give the broad outline - undoubtedly necessary - rather than authentic management tools.

The way processes and monitoring mechanisms have evolved has also been important. In this case, what is needed is to capitalise on the investment made in order to focus the tools on the results and transform them into more useful management tools.

The most difficult change will undoubtedly be cultural change. This involves MfDR development strategy going hand-in-hand with a spirit to communicate and train that involves the persons and groups that are most able to influence their peers in the process.

The framework of competences presented in this work clearly defines the parameters deemed to be most important by experts in the area of international cooperation for development. The development of training programmes in this direction will make it easier to confront the organisational change that will be seen in this sector in the next few years. With this paper we hope to be able to contribute to the improvement of the quality of actions for International Cooperation in third world countries, so that interventions will be more effective, and the process monitoring and follow-up system will be in closer contact with the project. It is hoped that programmes and projects will be easier to assess through indicators that can truly measure the impact of actions in the field.

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