

# **Lecture 5. Planning the Implementation of an International Project and Managing the Project Team**

## **Lecture Plan**

1. The project management plan: content, structure and functions in the management of an international project.
2. Managing project scope and boundaries: defining project boundaries, deliverables and the work breakdown structure.
3. Scheduling: the Gantt chart, critical path, milestones, deadlines and control points.
4. Managing resources, roles and responsibility: the responsibility assignment matrix, team interaction, leadership.
5. Coordinating partners, organising meetings, recording decisions and managing change.
6. Digital tools for managing international projects.

## **1. The Project Management Plan: Content, Structure and Functions in the Management of an International Project**

The Project Management Plan (PMP) is the foundational document that integrates the outputs of all planning processes and defines how the project will be executed, monitored and closed. Unlike the project proposal (application), which is a document intended to persuade the donor of the merits of funding, the project management plan is an internal operational document of the consortium that details the approaches to implementing a project that has already been approved.

### **1.1. Structure of the Project Management Plan**

A typical plan for managing an international project includes the following components:

- the Project Charter — a document that formally authorises the start of the project and defines the project manager and their authority;
- the scope management plan — a description of the project boundaries, the work breakdown structure, and the procedures for controlling changes in scope;
- the schedule management plan — the calendar schedule and the methodology for updating deadlines;
- the cost management plan — the budget and the methodology for controlling expenditure (examined in detail in Topic 6);
- the quality management plan — the quality standards for project outputs (Topic 7);
- the resource management plan — the allocation of roles and the responsibility matrix;

- the communications management plan — channels, formats and frequency of reporting (Topic 7);
- the risk management plan — the risk register and response strategies (Topic 7);
- the procurement management plan — procedures for engaging contractors;
- the stakeholder management plan — the strategy for engaging with stakeholders.

## **1.2. Functions of the Project Management Plan**

The project management plan performs three key functions: an integrative function (bringing together all aspects of management into a single, coherent document), a communicative function (serving as a shared reference base for all consortium partners, thereby reducing the risk of divergent understandings of tasks), and a control function (serving as the baseline against which actual progress and deviations are measured).

It is important to distinguish between the project management plan (internal, flexible, and subject to updating) and the Grant Agreement with the donor, amendments to which require formal approval and are subject to a considerably more rigid procedure.

## **2. Managing Project Scope and Boundaries: Defining Project Boundaries, Deliverables and the Work Breakdown Structure**

Scope Management is the process of defining and controlling what is, and is not, included within the project's body of work.

### **2.1. Project Scope**

The project scope delineates the totality of work required to produce project outputs with defined characteristics. Clearly defining the boundaries at the outset of implementation is a precondition for preventing the phenomenon of scope creep — the uncontrolled, gradual expansion of the content of work without a corresponding review of resources and timelines, which is one of the most common causes of budget overruns and schedule delays in international projects.

### **2.2. Project Scope Statement**

A document that details the project boundaries, including a list of the principal project outputs, the criteria for their acceptance, and a list of what is explicitly excluded from the project scope (in order to prevent divergent stakeholder expectations).

### **2.3. Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)**

The methodology for constructing the WBS, examined in Topic 3 (Lecture 3, Section 3), is elaborated at the implementation stage to the level of the specific operations required to complete each task within a work package. The WBS Dictionary is an accompanying document that, for

each element of the structure, defines the description of the work, the acceptance criteria, the resources required, and the responsible party.

The scope baseline is formed from the approved project scope statement, the WBS and the WBS dictionary, and serves as the benchmark for controlling changes throughout implementation.

### **3. Scheduling: the Gantt Chart, Critical Path, Milestones, Deadlines and Control Points**

#### **3.1. Determining the Sequence and Duration of Activities**

On the basis of the WBS, the logical dependencies between activities are determined (finish-to-start, start-to-start, finish-to-finish), the duration of each activity is estimated (expert judgement, analogous estimating, three-point estimating using the PERT method), and the project network diagram is constructed.

#### **3.2. The Gantt Chart**

The Gantt chart is a horizontal bar chart that visualises the project schedule: activities/tasks are arranged along the vertical axis, the time scale along the horizontal axis, and the duration of each activity is represented by a horizontal bar of corresponding length. The Gantt chart is the most widely used tool for visualising the work plan in project applications and reports, since it provides clarity for stakeholders who lack specialised project management training.

#### **3.3. The Critical Path Method (CPM)**

The critical path is the longest sequence of logically linked activities in the project network diagram, which determines the minimum possible duration of the entire project. Activities on the critical path have zero float — any delay in their completion directly extends the overall project completion date, whereas activities not on the critical path have a certain amount of slack that does not affect the final deadline. Identifying the critical path enables the project manager to focus management attention on the activities most sensitive to delay.

#### **3.4. Milestones and Control Points**

Milestones, examined in Topic 3, are used during implementation as a tool for ongoing progress monitoring: whether or not a milestone is reached on schedule is a signal to project management and the donor regarding the state of implementation. Control gates are planned decision points (for example, a decision on moving to the next phase of the project) that are often linked to the assessment of interim results and, where necessary, to adjustment of the plan.

### **4. Managing Resources, Roles and Responsibility: the Responsibility Assignment Matrix, Team Interaction, Leadership**

#### **4.1. The Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI Matrix)**

The RACI matrix is a tool that, for each task or project output, defines the role of each team member or consortium partner across four categories:

- **R (Responsible)** — the party directly responsible for carrying out the task;
- **A (Accountable)** — the person who bears ultimate responsibility for the outcome and approves it (there must be exactly one person with the A role for each task);
- **C (Consulted)** — those who are consulted before or during the performance of the task (two-way communication);
- **I (Informed)** — those who are informed of the progress or outcome of the task (one-way communication).

Constructing the RACI matrix at the implementation-planning stage prevents duplication of functions and “accountability gaps” — situations in which no member of the consortium actually considers themselves responsible for a particular task.

## **4.2. Team Interaction within an International Consortium**

The specific character of team interaction in an international project is shaped by the geographical dispersion of partners (distributed/virtual team), the need to combine in-person and remote coordination, and differences in the organisational cultures of partner institutions. Effective team interaction rests on clearly defined rules of cooperation (team charter/ways of working), agreed at the outset of implementation: the working language of communication, communication channels, the frequency of meetings, and the decision-making procedure.

## **4.3. Leadership within the Project Team**

The manager of an international project (Project Manager/Coordinator) combines the functions of administrative management (planning, control, reporting) with the functions of leadership — motivating the team, managing change, mediating conflicts (examined in detail in Topic 7), and representing the consortium before the donor and external stakeholders. In an international context, situational leadership — the ability to adapt one's leadership style to the cultural expectations of partners from different countries — takes on particular importance.

# **5. Coordinating Partners, Organising Meetings, Recording Decisions and Managing Change**

## **5.1. Consortium Coordination Mechanisms**

A typical organisational structure for managing an international consortium includes: the Steering Committee — the highest body for strategic decision-making, with the participation of representatives from all partners; the coordination group/Project Management Team — the operational body responsible for day-to-day management; and thematic/Working Groups, formed around individual work packages.

## **5.2. Organising Consortium Meetings**

A distinction is drawn between the Kick-off Meeting, held at the start of implementation to agree working procedures and enable partners to become acquainted with one another; periodic coordination meetings (monthly/quarterly) for monitoring progress; and interim and final meetings, timed to coincide with the completion of project phases or reporting periods. Each meeting requires a predetermined agenda and concludes with minutes.

## **5.3. Recording Decisions**

The Minutes of Meeting record the participants, the matters discussed, the decisions taken, and a list of action items with the responsible party and deadline specified for each. Systematic minute-taking provides an audit trail of management decisions, which is important both for the internal coordination of the consortium and for potential checks by the donor.

## **5.4. Change Management**

Any material change to the scope, budget or timeline of the project must go through a formalised change management procedure: submission of a change request, assessment of its impact on other elements of the project, approval by an authorised body of the consortium (typically the Steering Committee) and, where necessary, agreement with the donor by way of a formal amendment to the Grant Agreement.

## **6. Digital Tools for Managing International Projects**

Contemporary practice in the management of international projects involves the widespread use of digital tools, which may be broadly grouped into the following categories:

- scheduling and task-tracking tools (Microsoft Project, Smartsheet, Asana, Trello, Monday.com) — for constructing Gantt charts, assigning tasks and monitoring deadlines;
- team communication and video-conferencing tools (Microsoft Teams, Slack, Zoom, Google Meet) — for ensuring the prompt coordination of distributed teams;
- collaborative document-editing tools (Google Workspace, Microsoft SharePoint, OneDrive) — for the simultaneous editing of project documentation by partners from different countries;
- specialised grant management platforms (donor portals, in particular the EU Funding & Tenders Portal, with modules for reporting, document management and communication with the project officer);
- risk and quality management tools — electronic risk registers and document version-control systems;
- data visualisation and reporting tools (Power BI, Google Data Studio/Looker Studio) — for preparing analytical reports on the basis of monitoring indicators (Topic 8).

The choice of a particular set of digital tools within an international consortium is, as a rule, agreed at the kick-off meeting and enshrined in the communications management plan, having regard to the donor's requirements concerning cybersecurity and the protection of personal data (in particular, the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, for projects involving partners from the EU).

## **Self-Check Questions**

1. How does the project management plan differ from the project proposal submitted to the donor?
2. Give an example of “scope creep” in a hypothetical international project and explain how it can be prevented.
3. Why is identifying the critical path important for the manager of an international project?
4. Explain the distinction between the R and A roles in the RACI matrix, using the example of preparing the consortium's interim report.
5. What function does the consortium's Kick-off Meeting perform?
6. What data-protection requirements should a consortium take into account when selecting digital coordination tools?

## **Recommended Reading**

1. A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide). 7th edition. Project Management Institute, 2021.
2. PM<sup>2</sup> Project Management Methodology Guide. European Commission, CoEPM<sup>2</sup>.
3. Practice Standard for Work Breakdown Structures. 3rd edition. Project Management Institute.
4. Verzuh E. The Fast Forward MBA in Project Management. Wiley.
5. Model Grant Agreement (Multi-beneficiary General MGA). European Commission, Funding & Tenders Portal.