

LECTURE 7. RISK, COMMUNICATION AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

Lecture Plan

1. Identification, analysis, assessment and response planning for the risks of an international project.
2. The risk register, the assumptions log, the contingency plan, and the management of uncertainty.
3. Project communication strategy: internal and external communication, visibility, dissemination of results, and exploitation of results.
4. Stakeholder management and intercultural interaction within an international consortium.
5. Quality management of results and project deliverables, peer review, and monitoring of compliance with donor requirements.
6. Conflicts within the project team and mechanisms for their resolution.

1. Identification, Analysis, Assessment and Response Planning for the Risks of an International Project

Project Risk is an uncertain event or condition that, if it occurs, has a positive or negative effect on at least one of the project's objectives (scope, schedule, cost, quality). Risk management is a cyclical process comprising four sequential stages.

1.1. Risk Identification

The systematic identification of potential risks is carried out using **brainstorming**, **analysis of checklists** of typical risks in international projects, **analysis of the assumptions** of the logical framework (discussed in Topic 2) — since every assumption whose likelihood of occurrence is uncertain is a potential source of risk — as well as **SWOT analysis** and consultations with experts and consortium partners.

1.2. Classification of International Project Risks

It is appropriate to classify the risks of international projects by source of origin: **political and security risks** (changes in legislation, political instability, military action); **financial and economic risks** (currency fluctuations, inflation, delayed donor payments); **organisational and managerial risks** (staff turnover, insufficient consortium coordination); **operational risks** (delayed delivery of equipment, inaccessibility of target groups); **reputational risks** (negative media coverage, conflict of interest); **compliance risks** (non-compliance with the donor's financial rules, breach of reporting deadlines).

1.3. Qualitative and Quantitative Risk Analysis

Qualitative analysis involves assessing each identified risk against two parameters — the **probability of occurrence** and the **degree of impact** on the project's objectives — using a scale (for example, "low/medium/high") and constructing a **Probability-Impact Matrix**, which allows risks to be prioritised according to their level of criticality. **Quantitative analysis** (applied chiefly in large infrastructure and investment projects) involves numerically

estimating the expected monetary impact of a risk and probabilistic modelling (for example, the Monte Carlo method).

1.4. Risk Response Strategies

For negative risks (threats), the following strategies are applied: **avoidance** — eliminating the cause of the risk by changing the project plan; **mitigation** — reducing the probability or impact of the risk; **transfer** — shifting the consequences of the risk to a third party (insurance, subcontracting); **acceptance** — a conscious acknowledgement of the risk without active response measures (passive or active, with the establishment of a contingency reserve for unforeseen costs). For positive risks (opportunities), mirror strategies are applied: exploit, enhance, share, accept.

2. The Risk Register, the Assumptions Log, the Contingency Plan, and the Management of Uncertainty

2.1. Risk Register

The **risk register** is the central risk-management document, which records, for each identified risk: a description of the risk and its source, its category, probability and impact, priority, the chosen response strategy, specific response measures, the responsible person (risk owner), and the current status (active/materialised/closed). The risk register is a "living" document that must be regularly reviewed and updated throughout the entire project life cycle, not only at the planning stage.

2.2. Assumptions Log

Since the assumptions of the logical framework (Topic 2) are, by their nature, external factors not controlled by the project team, it is advisable to maintain a separate **assumptions log**, which records the status of each assumption (confirmed/at risk/not fulfilled) and ensures a direct link between the project's design logic and ongoing risk management at the implementation stage.

2.3. Contingency Plan

For high-priority risks, a **contingency plan** is developed, which sets out in advance the specific steps to be taken in response to the actual occurrence of a risk (rather than merely preventive measures), including the trigger conditions (risk triggers) under which the plan is activated, and the contingency reserve of resources for its implementation.

2.4. Management of Uncertainty

Unlike identified risks, **overall project uncertainty** is the cumulative effect of a multitude of small, individually insignificant factors that cannot be exhaustively identified in advance. Managing overall uncertainty involves establishing a **management reserve** — an additional budgetary and time buffer that is not tied to a specific risk but serves as a general reserve of project resilience — as well as maintaining a high level of flexibility and adaptability in the consortium's management processes.

3. Project Communication Strategy: Internal and External Communication, Visibility, Dissemination of Results, and Exploitation of Results

3.1. Internal Communication

Internal communication ensures effective interaction among consortium participants: the coordinator, partners, the steering committee, and working groups (discussed in detail in Topic 5, Section 5). The internal communication plan defines the channels, frequency and formats of information exchange, as well as procedures for escalating problematic issues.

3.2. External Communication, Visibility and Dissemination of Results

External communication encompasses the project's interaction with external stakeholders, target groups, the mass media and the wider public.

Visibility is a set of measures aimed at the public acknowledgement of the project's source of funding, including the mandatory placement of the donor's logos and funding disclaimers on all materials, websites and publications produced within the project — a requirement that is a legally binding condition of the grant agreement for most donors, including EU programmes.

Dissemination is the systematic publication of project results for interested audiences (scientific, professional, governmental) through conferences, publications, the project website and social media, with the aim of maximising awareness of the project and its achievements.

Exploitation is the practical application of project results after its completion: integration of the developed product into partners' activities, commercialisation (where applicable), and institutional uptake into policy or practice (discussed in detail in Topic 8, Section 5, in the context of project sustainability).

3.3. Communication Plan

The **communication plan** consolidates the elements set out above, defining, for each target audience, the key message, channel, format, frequency, and the person responsible for implementation, as well as indicators of the effectiveness of communication activities (reach, engagement).

4. Stakeholder Management and Intercultural Interaction within an International Consortium

4.1. Stakeholder Management at the Implementation Stage

Building on the stakeholder analysis carried out at the project design stage (Topic 2, Section 3), stakeholder management at the implementation stage involves the continuous monitoring of changes in stakeholders' positions, interests and influence, the updating of the power-interest matrix, and the adjustment of the engagement strategy in line with actual events (for example, the emergence of new stakeholders or a change in the position of public authorities).

4.2. Intercultural Interaction in Consortium Management

The factors of intercultural difference discussed in Topic 1 (Section 6) acquire an operational dimension at the project implementation stage. Practical tools for managing intercultural interaction include: establishing **shared ways of working** that explicitly align expectations regarding punctuality, decision-making style and feedback; conducting an **intercultural briefing** at the start of implementation for new team members; appointing **cultural mediators** within partner organisations; and consciously avoiding ethnocentric assumptions about the "correct" way of working.

5. Quality Management of Results and Project Deliverables, Peer Review, and Monitoring of Compliance with Donor Requirements

5.1. *Quality Planning*

Project quality management involves defining, already at the planning stage, the quality standards that project deliverables must meet — including acceptance criteria for each deliverable, agreed with donor requirements and the expectations of target groups.

5.2. *Quality Assurance and Quality Control*

Quality assurance is a preventive, process-oriented approach aimed at preventing defects by adhering to established standards and procedures for developing project deliverables. **Quality control** is a reactive approach that involves checking an already-created deliverable against established criteria before its final approval or submission to the donor.

5.3. *Peer Review*

A common practice for assuring the quality of substantive project deliverables (reports, analytical materials, learning resources) is **internal peer review** — the assessment of a deliverable by an independent member of the consortium not involved in its direct development, against predefined criteria, before the deliverable is submitted to the donor or published for an external audience.

5.4. *Monitoring Compliance with Donor Requirements*

A separate dimension of quality management in an international project is the systematic verification that all project deliverables comply with the donor's formal and substantive requirements: adherence to reporting templates, visualisation requirements (discussed in Section 3), grant agreement terminology, and horizontal requirements (gender equality, accessibility, environmental sustainability), which may be subject to separate verification during the assessment of interim and final reports (Topic 8, Section 3).

6. Conflicts within the Project Team and Mechanisms for Their Resolution

6.1. *Sources of Conflict in an International Consortium*

Conflicts within the project team may arise from: **disagreements over the allocation of resources** (budget, roles) among partners; **divergent understandings of tasks** owing to insufficiently precise definition of the scope of work (related to "scope creep", discussed in Topic 5, Section 2); **intercultural misunderstandings** arising from differing communication styles and management traditions; **personal incompatibility** among team members; and **conflicting priorities** between the organisational interests of an individual partner and the shared objectives of the consortium.

6.2. *Conflict Resolution Styles*

The classic Thomas-Kilmann model identifies five behavioural styles in conflict, depending on the relative attention given to one's own interests and those of the other party: **avoiding** (low attention to both); **accommodating** (priority given to the other party's interests); **competing** (priority given to one's own interests); **compromising** (partial satisfaction of both parties' interests); and **collaborating** (seeking a solution that fully satisfies the interests of both parties). An effective manager of an international project must command the full range of styles and

consciously select the most appropriate one depending on the nature of the conflict and its potential impact on the project.

6.3. Formalised Resolution Mechanisms

Within a consortium, formalised mechanisms for resolving conflicts include: provisions of the Consortium Agreement (discussed in Topic 4, Section 4) on dispute resolution procedures, including the possibility of escalation to the steering committee or, as a last resort, to mediation or arbitration procedures; regular structured meetings that allow tension to be identified at an early stage; the involvement of a neutral facilitator for complex inter-partner disputes; and the clear documentation (minuting) of agreements reached as a result of conflict resolution.

Self-Check Questions

1. Explain the connection between the assumptions of the logical framework (Topic 2) and the project's risk register.
2. How does the management reserve differ from the contingency reserve?
3. Give an example of a visibility requirement for a project funded under an EU programme.
4. How does quality assurance differ from quality control?
5. Describe a situation in which the "compromising" style would be more appropriate than the "collaborating" style when resolving a conflict within a consortium.
6. What role does the Consortium Agreement play in resolving inter-partner disputes?

Recommended Reading

1. A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide). 7th edition. Project Management Institute, 2021.
2. Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union External Actions. European Commission.
3. Thomas K. W., Kilmann R. H. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument.
4. Practice Standard for Project Risk Management. Project Management Institute.
5. Hofstede G., Hofstede G. J., Minkov M. Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind. McGraw-Hill.