QUALITY IN ERASMUS+ PROJECT MANAGEMENT

by Gregory MAKRIDES, Director of Research and International Relations, University of Cyprus, President of the European Association of Erasmus Coordinators

"The 10+1 Commandments"

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The Commandments of quality project management

A list of 10+1 conditions/approaches/advices on how to manage a project with quality

Quality Management does not begin once the proposal is approved.

Quality is planned at the time of proposal preparation, so some basic issues and requirements should be considered **at the time of proposal writing**, otherwise you may have no chance for reaching any quality in your project management.

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The Conditions/Approaches/Advices

✓ <u>**Condition/Approach 1 – Preparation and Identification**</u>

➢ Make sure your project concept is based upon solving a **genuine problem** and NOT just an idea that sounds good.

➢ Basically, you should think of your idea as the solution to a big problem, at least important for you and your partners.

➢ You should consider and take into account the policy priorities published by the European Commission for the call under which you submit your proposed project.

➢ Read the Council of Ministers of Education Minutes, The Speeches of the Commissioner for Education, Youth and Sport and may Directors of DGs.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 2 – Fulfilment of basic criteria (innovation and uniqueness)**

Ensure your project concept is innovative and provides a practical solution to your partnership joint problem.

If it is not a new concept, why should the European Commission invest in it?

Sometimes projects duplicate other past projects, so in order to be ahead of the curve think something new.

✓ **Condition/Approach 3 – Partner Selection and cooperation**

Select your partners carefully as a weak partner can jeopardise the project's viability and chances of success. A bad partner can mean at best additional workload and a lot of frustration; and at the worst case a failed project.

There are partner search databases, do not pick a partner from whom you received an email expressing interest or availability.

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Important issues...

- Be very transparent with your partners

- Make them participate in the development so they share the responsibility

- Your project partners are not your employees so following accountability on them requires a different approach than the one you do as a manager at work

- Double check on the information they give you and do not be shy to ask for evidence and proof

- Three factors for selecting partners and participants can be drawn from the definition of Competence, which are *Knowledge, Skills, Attitude/Communication*

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✓ **Condition/Approach 4 – Communication**

Communication is often the key to success.

1. Monitoring progress and managing performance is critical in any project and even more so in larger, multi-partner projects. Apart from emails you can always use teleconference tools (it's more personal and you can avoid misunderstandings).

2. The agreed contingency plan(risk plan) will give you the critical friendly right against your partners to ask for progress reporting and ask for evidence as the procedure is part of the contingency plan for preventing delays and quality problems.

3. Bring your partners to the meetings to report on the progress of their part of work, in front of the whole partnership.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 5 – Action**

Take action on day one of the funding or even better before. Time is always precious and therefore do not waste time waiting for the Kick-off Meeting. Often, too much time is wasted in the first year and you might end up playing "catch-up".

➤ Develop and deliver what you promised in your proposal.

➤ If you come up with new ideas and you want to change the output make sure you communicate it to the project manager in Brussels in order to make sure whether an official amendment is required.

➤ Read the Programme Guidelines, especially where they list eligible and non-eligible activities.

➤ Read the FAQ section of the programme you are applying, listed in the EACEA website.

➤ If you have comments on your progress report to the Commission, make sure you follow a plan to adapt the recommendations and provide evidence in your final report that you did.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 6 – Development of Procedures**

Develop your procedures based on audit trails from day one and set an example. This way you will ensure that your partners will do the same and can save you from an administrative nightmare later on.

It is very important to **define** your project management procedures up front.

You should **outline** the resources that will be used to manage the project.

More specifically, you should include sections on how the team will manage arising issues, scope change, risk, quality, budget and communication.

It is essential to be able to manage the project **thoroughly and proactively** and to make sure that your partners have a clear understanding of how the project will be managed.

Keep in mind the reporting requirements…

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✓ **Condition/Approach 7 – Strategy and Implementation**

Make sure you have a clear strategy in implementing the project work plan.

➤ Without detailed planning at the proposal stage, you will often encounter unnecessary problems during the implementation of the project.

➤ Furthermore, **you are likely to end up with confused partners** who are not sure what the project is about and what they need to do.

➤ Begin by **reading the progress and final report documents/forms**. If not available yet, read the previous year's forms….they will be 99% the same.

➤ Set **indicators of progress** and discuss them with your partners.

➤ Develop a **quality assurance statement** and discuss it with your partners so you all know what quality means in your project.

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➢ Provide step-by-step instructions to the project participants how to develop project deliverables and on how you will manage the project.

➢ Develop a work-breakdown structure and/or a network diagram

(expand in more detailed the proposed Gantt chart and convert into

a flow chart).

➢ **Remember that you should manage the project as a project.** You can use standard project management methodologies but the one that usually works is "management by objectives".

➢ Make sure you know your critical path; have a risk assessment plan; communicate your key milestones and monitor outcomes and progress.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 8 – Planning and time management**

Plan, plan ahead and then plan some more – this will help you avoid missteps and unexpected situations. It can also help you to save time and a lot of frustration. If you are coordinating a project make sure you have on your desk-top one file that you open very morning while you drink your coffee….this is the time-work-plan of your project in the form of a check-list.

1. Lay down **your planning horizon** and create a detailed plan estimating the work as far out as you feel comfortable.

➢ Your planning horizon will move forward as the project progresses.

➢ Any activities that were initially vague should be defined in more detail as their timeframe draws near.

2. Once you have finished with your planning activities, you can begin with the execution of the work.

➢ *In theory, since you already have your plan,* **the only real challenge you will face is to execute your plans and processes correctly and in a timely manner, assuming that your partners are responding!**

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3. Of course, you should keep in mind **that almost no project proceeds entirely as it was estimated and planned**.

➤ Therefore, you should **be ready to expect the unexpected** and to have the necessary discipline to apply your project management skills correctly and proactively.

4. Remember **to identify completed tasks** and activities and update the work plan accordingly. It will make you feel good….and you need it.

5. Determine whether there are any other activities that should have been completed and whether you are behind your schedule.

6. Once the work plan has been updated, assess whether the project or the activities will be completed within the original effort, assigned resources, cost, and timeframe. If not, **determine the critical path** and find ways to accelerate these activities to get back on track.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 9 – Risk assessment**

1. **Assess and review risk**. During the planning phase, the project partners should try to identify all potential risks.
2. For each identified risk, they should also determine what the probability of that risk event to occur is and what could be its potential impact on the project.
3. When and if possible try to **make a distinction** between possible low, medium and high-risk elements and make plans to mitigate them so they do not, in fact, occur.
4. Every stage of a project has associated risks, therefore **conduct a risk review** before starting working on an activity or an intellectual output in general.
5. Always have **a contingency plan handy** (what is the risk? what should I do to prevent it? what do I do when it occurs?).
6. You should continue to assess potential risks throughout the project's life cycle.

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7. It is also very important to be able to identify warning signs and to be able to take swift action.

> *There is a tendency to misjudge situations and to think that something minor cannot affect your project negatively. That is not always the case though, for example a small change in the schedule or in the budget can have a domino effect, especially early in the project. If these signs are not addressed quickly, the impact might be unrecoverable.*

8. ….and do not forget about Quality in the Outcomes and Products. Use evaluation and assessment of your outcomes , pilot them and test them, and provide evidence for everything you claim that you are outcomes are offering.

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✓ **Condition/Approach 10 – Budget**

You have two choices on managing the budget: **Centralized or Decentralized**

➢ Decentralized means you distribute the budget to your partner as advance payment based on the proposal and approved grant distribution

➢ Centralized means you make the payments after work is done and evidence is provided.

➢ Do not forget to check when procurement procedures are required. Clear with the internal regulations of your organization, whether the internal rules are stricter than the funded project rules.

➢ Check the case of VAT, when it can be charged to the project budget and when it cannot.

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➤ There are many small details that need to be considered when actions that require payments are made and make sure you as a project manager/coordinator understand them and make sure that your partners are aware of them.

It is possible that something valid under your institution may not be valid under a partner institution.

If you follow the decentralized approach, how do you know that your partner is applying correctly the financial rules?

- Closely monitor the budget. Look at the amount of money your project has actually spent in order to determine whether your actual spending is above or below your original estimations.
- If you spent too much act accordingly and work with the team to determine how the remaining work will be completed by staying under the original budget.

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✓ **<u>Condition/Approach 10+1</u>.**

➢ Archive documents , evidence and Legal Issues, upload to Website

➢ Use Open source and consider open innovation

➢ Data protection, IPR registration, if needed

➢ Privacy and protection of under-age people

➢ Ethical and political issues should be considered

Remember

Ideally, a successful project is a project that continues to operate even after the funding stops. Keep in mind that being clear about the long term and having plans for the post funding period is critical. Many project outcomes do not survive long after the funding is concluded.

For hands on come to Cyprus in July 2015

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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