Chapter 13
Consideration of Sustainability in Projects and Project Management:
An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of integrating the concepts of sustainability into project management shows from the growing number of studies on this topic. These studies approach the topic mostly from a conceptual, logical, or moral point of view. Given the fact that the relationship between sustainability and project management is still an emerging field of study, these approaches make sense. However, they do not diminish the need for more empirical studies to understand how the concepts of sustainable development are implemented in practice. This chapter reports an analysis of 56 case studies on the integration of the concepts of sustainability in the way organizations initiate, develop, and manage projects. The research question of the study was: To what extent do organizations consider the concepts of sustainability in the initiation, development, and management of projects? The study found an overall average level of sustainability consideration in the actual situation of 25.9%. For the desired situation, this score is almost 10 percent higher, showing an ambition to take sustainability more into consideration. The study also showed that the way sustainability currently is considered in projects should be categorized as the traditional "making things less bad" approach to sustainability integration and not as a more modern "how can we contribute to making things good" approach. However, the scores of the desired situation indicate that the modern approach to corporate responsibility is certainly the ambition of the participating organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is recognized as one of the most important challenges of our time. Awareness seems to be growing that a change of mindset is needed, both in behavior and in policies. How can we develop prosperity without compromising the future? This growing awareness may, or should, influence projects and project management (Labuschagne and Brent, 2006; Gareis et al. 2009, 2011; Silvius et al. 2009, 2012). Association for Project Management (past-) Chairman Tom Taylor recognizes that "The planet earth is in a perilous position with a range of fundamental sustainability threats," and "Project and Programme Managers are significantly placed to make contributions to Sustainable Management practices" (Association for Project Management 2006). And at the 22nd World Congress of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in 2008, IPMA Vice-President Mary McKinlay stated in the opening keynote speech, "The further development of the project management profession requires project managers to take responsibility for sustainability" (McKinlay 2008). It is for that reason inevitable that 'sustainability' will find its way to project management methodologies and practices in the very near future. *But how is this responsibility put to practice?*

Studies on the integration of the concepts of sustainability are mostly interpretive, giving meaning to how the concepts of sustainability *could* be interpreted in the context of projects (for example Barnard et al, 2011; Maltzman and Shirley, 2010; Gareis et al., 2011, Oehlmann, 2011), or normative, prescribing how sustainability *should* be integrated into projects (for example, Silvius et al., 2012; Labuschagne and Brent, 2006). These studies approach the integration of the concepts of sustainability into project management from a conceptual, logical or moral point of view. Given the fact that the relationship between sustainability and project management is still an emerging field of study (Gareis et al. 2009), these approaches

make sense. However, they do not diminish the need for more empirical studies to understand how the concepts of sustainable development are implemented in practice.

The study reported in this chapter aims to do just that. It reports an empirical analysis of 56 case studies on how organizations consider sustainability in their projects and project management. The cases were assessed, using the maturity model for sustainability integration in projects and project management of Silvius and Schipper (2010). Based on the concepts of sustainability, this maturity model assesses the level of consideration of sustainability in projects and project management, in terms of resources, business processes, business model and products/services. It thereby answers the research question: *To what extent, do organizations consider the concepts of sustainability in the initiation, development and management of projects?*

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First the reader will be introduced to the maturity model that was used in the study. In the following section, the design of the study will be revealed and an overview of the participating organizations will be provided. The section Findings presents the results of the study and the section Analysis analyzes these findings. The chapter is concluded with a reflection on what the results tell us about the consideration of sustainability in projects and project management.

THE SUSTAINABILITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT MATURITY MODEL

Maturity models are a practical way to 'translate' complex concepts into organizational capabilities and to raise awareness for potential development. They provide guidance for action plans and allow organizations to monitor their progress (Dinsmore, 1998). Most maturity models are derived from the Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model (Carnegie Mellon Software

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