Chapter 96
Considering Sustainability in Project Management Processes

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is one of the most important challenges of our time. How can prosperity be developed without compromising the life of future generations? Companies are integrating sustainability in their marketing, corporate communication, annual reports and in their actions. The concept of sustainability has more recently also been linked to project management. Sustainability needs change of business models, products, services, resources, processes, etc. and projects are a frequently used practice of realizing change. Several studies explored how the concept of sustainability impacts project management. This chapter elaborates on the impact of sustainability found in literature and analyses the most influential standards of project management processes for their coverage of this impact. The study concludes that the most important standards of project management processes still fail to refer convincingly to sustainability considerations. Based on the author's analysis, this chapter also provides guidance for the further development of the process standards towards a 'sustainable project management' process.

INTRODUCTION

In the last 10 to 15 years, the concept of sustainability has grown in recognition and importance (Silvius et al., 2012). How can humans develop prosperity without compromising the future? The pressure on companies to broaden reporting and accountability from economic performance for shareholders, to sustainability performance for all stakeholders has increased substantially (Visser, 2002). Industry leaders realize that 'greenwashing' of current business practices is not a solution. The 2012 BSR/Globe Scan study concludes that "The most important leadership challenge facing business today is the integration of sustainability into core business functions" (BSR/GlobeScan, 2012).

The concerns about sustainability indicate that the current way of producing, organizing, consuming, living, etc. may have negative effects on the future. In short, the current business processes of organizations are not sustainable. This conclusion outlines the need for re-thinking, re-designing and

re-developing of business practices in a more sustainable way. Sustainability therefore means change. Change of business models, products, services, resources, processes, reporting, and behavior (Silvius et al., 2012). A frequently used practice of realizing change in organizations is by initiating and performing projects: temporary, task oriented organizations (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Turner & Muller, 2003).

The concept of sustainability has therefore also been linked to project management (Gareis et al., 2009; Silvius et al., 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). Also in academic research, the relationship between project management and sustainability is explored (e.g. Gareis et al., 2009; Brent & Labuschagne, 2006; Silvius et al., 2009) as one of the (future) developments in project management. However, Eid (2009) concludes in his study on sustainable development and project management that the standards for project management "fail to seriously address the sustainability agenda" (Eid, 2009).

This chapter explores the integration of the concepts of sustainability in project management processes as identified by the most-prominent standards for project management. It aims to identify the relationship between sustainability and project management and to provide guidance on how the processes and standards of project management should integrate the concepts and principles of sustainability.

THE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

The balance between economic growth and social wellbeing has been around as a political and managerial challenge for over 150 years (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Also the concern for the wise use of natural resources and our planet emerged already many decades ago, with Carson's book "Silent Spring" (Carson, 1962) as a launching hallmark. In 1972 the 'Club of Rome', an independent think tank, published its book "The Limits to Growth" (Meadows et al., 1972). In the book, the authors concluded that if the world's population and economy would continue to grow at their current speeds, our planet's natural resources would approach depletion. The Limits to Growth fuelled a public debate, leading to installation of the UN 'World Commission on Development and Environment', named the Brundtland Commission after its chair. In their report, the Brundtland commission defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). By stating that "In its broadest sense, sustainable development strategy aims at promoting harmony among human beings and between humanity and nature", the report implies that sustainability requires also a social and an environmental perspective, next to the economical perspective, on development and performance.

The visions that none of the development goals, of economic growth, social wellbeing and a wise use of natural resources, can be reached without considering and effecting the other two, got widely accepted (Keating, 1993). In his book "Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business", identifies John Elkington, this as the 'triple bottom line' or 'Triple-P (People, Planet, Profit)' concept: Sustainability is about the balance or harmony between economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability (Elkington, 1997).

However, several publications consider more dimension or 'principles' of sustainability that are relevant to project management. For example, Gareis et al. (2011) define sustainability with the principles: economic, social and ecologic orientation; short-, mid- and long-term orientation; local, regional and

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