

## **Public Project Management in Europe: perspectives on project success - One page summary**

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To expose views on project success common in North – Western Europe, 50 interviews were conducted with public project managers of infrastructure projects (NETLIPSE contacts from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the UK). The 2014 study, based on Q-methodology, resulted in the extraction of three collective perspectives on project success, described hereafter:

**Perspective 1 – Product – oriented management** is common to managers with clear priorities in the project's implementation. If there are no casualties (safety first), the iron triangle indicators are respected and the product is of substantial quality and fit for the user's needs, there is no reason not to consider the project a success. They keep track of the human factors surrounding a project, without prioritizing them over project goal, and downplay the influence of politics on their assignment. Relations with their team and contractors have an average influence on success, and the client organization's image – even less. Growth and development are by-products. P1 managers refrain from following the "right" process blindly, showing a flexible approach.

**Perspective 2 – Management in politicized/ decision making context** is held by managers working on projects with political influences, or still pending decision. The focus is less on users and product quality, due to dependency on the decision makers - political factors, share- and stakeholders, making the managers process bent. The political pressure relates to well defined criteria: on-time, on-budget elaboration of all phases is essential. The quality and fitness for purpose of the final option is still subject to external influences, and are not seen as key criteria for success. Interests of the project team and of contractors are deemphasized. The client organization's image needs to be maintained, but its interests come last in defining project success.

**Perspective 3 – Process – oriented management** is common to managers who try to manage the expectations of external parties in order to achieve project goals. Collaboration and communication are seen as the basis towards achieving a successful project. Further, they follow the traditional indicators of time, cost and quality, and are not willing to compromise on safety. There is no clear focus on product itself. Managers see things in their external context, and the undertaking is a social service towards their users, not a political mission or an isolated product. The image and interests of their organization are important, but less other actor's interests. Politics and shareholders are kept aside the project by keeping to indicators and tending to the human factors.

The three perspectives derived in this exploratory research were not particularly country-specific. However, UK and Sweden managers tend towards a product-oriented view, along with half of Finns and Danes. Finland shows more inclination towards a P3- collaborative approach. The political – bent approach appeared mostly in Belgium and Denmark. When combining this data set with the one obtained in 2013 in the Netherlands, it can be seen that there are perspectives valid overall (product and process orientation), as well as particular, Dutch views (social engagement or top-down bias).

**Cultural influences** (based on Hofstede's theories on cultural dimensions) were looked into, but no direct link was identified with the valuation of project success. There are cultural peculiarities in the aspects mentioned, which are not nation-wise, but specific to managers. The interviewed infrastructure project managers were culturally inclined towards low Power Distance, medium Uncertainty avoidance, and medium-high Long Term Orientation, and appear to combine Masculine (assertion) and Feminine (consensus) characteristics, in order to successfully lead projects. Results are encouraging for international collaborations in the European construction sector.