



LIST OF WEAKNESSES IN PROJECT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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This document is aimed at assisting participants in H2020 EU-funded projects, in particular TN 1302: BESTPRAC participants, to identify issues that may arise before or during the Action. This document is provided for information purposes only. Neither the author(s) of this document or any BESTPRAC WG1 Administration member contributing to the preparation of this document sharing their knowledge, experience or weaknesses identified in project planning and implementation, can be held responsible for the use made of this document.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of identified weaknesses in project planning and implementation to assist project administrators in preventing or resolving possible dilemmas related to the project planning and implementation. This document is a result of COST Action *TN1302-The voice of research administrators - building a network of administrative excellence (BESTPRAC)* supported short term scientific mission “Sharing the best practices – identifying the weaknesses in project cycle management” hosted at the Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna, Austria. The document is open for update and additional contributions of research administrators involved in the COST BESTPRAC.

Planning Stage

Coordinator

Not knowing your partners well: If an organisation, acting as coordinator, is preparing a project proposal it may not be fully aware of who its potential project partners are i.e. what their structure and organisation is (e.g. are they acting as a network, have they third parties included), Person Month (PM) rates, deductible VAT). This can result in an inadequate input in project proposal, weak budget planning and potentially cause difficulties later on in project implementation.

Preparing a project in a short period and just before the deadline: If an organisation prepares a project in a hurry (2-3 weeks) there is not enough time to plan and detail and thus the proposal may be unsuccessful. If the proposal is awarded it can create problems in the implementation afterwards. Late planning can also create problems in the communication between partners (not having a clear picture of what each partner does and to what extent). Plan wisely: In H2020 amending agreements are difficult.

Co-leadership: This can be required in interdisciplinary consortia. A clear assignment of tasks and roles between the co-leaders is essential then to avoid ambiguity. Likewise, if there are too many responsible people, no one might actually take the responsibility.

Inexperienced project coordinators: Sometimes institutions acting as project coordinators do not have sufficient experience, for example they might not exactly know the rules for the specific call or lack proficiency in project management (or leading projects). This can negatively impact upon both the success of the application and the implementation of the project, create flaws in the conduct of project activities (weaknesses in coordination due to lack of experience in project coordination) as well as in internal communication.

Problems with the participant portal (FP7/HORIZON 2020): If a coordinator does not know the online system well a project might suffer from this lack of knowledge, resulting in delays e.g. in submitting the right and complete documents during submission and implementation of the project, causing errors and late payments.

Implementation

Coordinator

“Coordinator knows best”: Some coordinators tend to know best and do not ask administrators for help, ignore the implementation rules and the grant agreement regulations. They might try to force financial transactions and purchases not described in the budget or changes to the project without the prior consent of the EC Officer. This can lead to non-reimbursement, and, as a consequence, project failure.

Partners are not aware of the rules of a call: If the partners are not fully aware of the rules of a specific call (e.g. defining eligible costs, how the grant provider treats different structures/organisations and engagement of persons from other institutions), project implementation issues may arise later on. This is not a problem the coordinator can solve.

Lack of risk assessment and risk management: Lack of a “Plan B” in case of materialising risks.

Partners not fulfilling their obligations: If a partner does not perform as agreed there are few methods to exert pressure. A replacement for the task(s) will be required, and sorting out the financial consequences of such changes is an additional challenge (also an amendment will usually be required).

Partner

Delay of deliverables: This is particularly problematic in cases where work packages (WP) depend on one another and when a project cannot move forward until previous deliverables are finalised. Budget reallocation may be required to solve the issue.

Delay in submission of financial report: If a project partner is delayed in submitting the financial report then it also causes delay for the entire consortium in receiving the further instalments from the grant provider.

Internal communication between partners: Relying solely on the tools such as the “internal” zone for partners on project website is problematic since it is often not accessed regularly by the team members. Classical e-mail lists (to reach all project partners at once) and direct communication (phone, Skype, face-to-face) may be better solutions.

Different communication cultures and cultural differences: If the Coordinator (and project office) fails to adapt to the favourite communication styles of partners, communication may be flawed. A good coordinator is a bit of a psychologist, knows which of his partners is fine with an email and which one will require a face-to-face conversation.

Impact indicators are sometimes not fully developed: It is then difficult to measure the impact of the project and its results.

Person in charge of administration/management at a partner organisation does not have the full overview of financial project issues: The budget can remain unspent.

Changes from what was planned to what can actually be done in the project: This can be problematic with programmes that are not flexible and when a coordinator/partner has to change some part(s) (adjust the planned activities to what is actually possible). In this case the auditor can make problems because changes/adjustments are not stipulated in the concluded agreement/added as an annex. It is

highly advisable to inform the project officer every time. Assess possible risk in project implementation before submission of application.

Unclear division of work in WP or tasks: Having everybody doing everything in WPs or Tasks without clear distinction of tasks and responsibilities of each partner can result in a delay of implementation of a particular WP/task.

Lack of awareness of and/or compliance with internal rules related to project management and implementation: Sometimes there are special rules regarding accountancy or public procurement that may result in delays in purchasing equipment for example.

Too bossy coordinator: – The coordinator does not respect partner's suggestions on budget/PM planned for them and this may result in irreconcilable number of PM to work planned or budget planned.

Unclear roles of staff involved in project: – Have one or two persons involved in communication between partners, otherwise responsibility of who has to reply is unclear.