

Problems of Scale, or of Scope?



The Project Management Challenges
of Internationalisation in
Higher Education

The Project Management Book of Knowledge

- Attempts in recent years to specify generic streamlined procedures for undertaking projects which are becoming steadily more important (20% of world GDP) but also more complex
- Culminate in UK's initiative in 2007 to replace BS 6079, leading to ISO 21500 (2007-12), a descriptive guideline
- Issues of organisational culture, sociology of knowledge and epistemic communities in international PM (hence ISO 21500 mentions technical, behavioural and contextual competencies)

ISO 21500 Definitions

- 'A project is a unique set of processes consisting of coordinated and controlled activities with start and finish dates, undertaken to achieve an objective. Achievement of the project objective requires deliverables conforming to specific requirements, including multiple constraints such as time, cost and resources.'
- Not to mention permissions (legal compliance with everything from planning or tender processes to health & safety)
- 'Project management is the application of methods, tools, techniques and competences to a project. Project management includes the integration of the various phases of the project life cycle. Project management is accomplished through processes.'

Project Management Challenges

- Agile, cascade or waterfall?
- PM is more dynamic than in routine operations, and hence the need for one common language/set of concepts and objectives
- Range of (competing?) stakeholders within and across organisations in different jurisdictions and hence need to avoid silos
- Integrated into processes rather than regarded as an 'overhead' (related problems are lack of dedicated budgets and management)
- Corruption
- Sustainability, review processes, terotechnology

Requirements for Good Outcomes

- Effective governance (covering management, processes, authorisations, risks and information flows)
- [Shared ownership?]
- Realistic expectations in definition, planning and estimates
- Streamlining through utilisation of good practice PM tools
- Clear goals, target recipients and processes
- Agreement about delivery and management
- Continuous review and documentation
- Workflow management, sequencing and milestones

Core Management Roles

- **Project sponsor** who defines business case and acts as the link between the goals, budget and delivery processes. Needs to communicate seamlessly with the
- **Project manager**, who is responsible for delivery and management of stakeholders and oversight of the
- **Project Management Team** who provide the expertise to deliver the various work packages of the project
- As ISO 21500 recognises ***The more project sponsors, the more complex the delivery!***

Processes

Stages

- Initiate (and budget)
- Plan
- Implement
- Control
- Close (and evaluation)

Issues

- Integration of team
- Stakeholders
- Scope
- Resource
- Time
- Cost
- Risk
- Quality
- Procurement
- Communication

Application to International HE

- ISO 21500 is largely designed for within organisations, rather than across them
- Political issues around who takes leadership
- Even where there is one sponsor, they may have limited connection with processes of delivery (particularly at the more research-end)
- Or they may – as in teacher-training in Egypt currently – contract with multiple providers with resultant issues in terms of consistency of outcome

Kurdistan - A Case Study:

1. Initiation

- In 2010 I was PI on a British Council DelPHE-Iraq project to develop a Centre for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in Kurdistan
- Clear project concept, sponsor and project team but....
- Had to change our local partner because of internal politics at the original partner university
- Illustrated the complex nature of local stakeholding

2/3. Plan & Implementation

- Although the proposal had been developed with partners in Iraq, it rapidly became clear that they did not have the internal capacity or culture to sustain such a centre
- Nor was the project cycle of the British Council aligned with the policy cycles of the KRG's Ministry of Higher Education
- Refocusing on resources and research training to build the infrastructure which might eventually sustain such a Centre
- In other words, we defaulted to cascade approaches
- Also adapted plans to focus on other issues which bulked larger as a result of the investigations, such as the need for development of capacity in social policy (subsequently followed up by a different University which had capability in that area)
- ISO 21500 does not highlight the need for lateral thinking!

4. Control

- This is a particular issue in the internationalisation of HE
- Working out authorisations and lead sponsorship needs to be done before project initiation (and bodies like the British Council need to be prepared to follow-up promising leads which take longer to deliver) because of the need to build relationships and understand political realities and rhetoric which can impinge on project development
- Issues such as: who controls the outcomes and what are the implications in terms of social effects in host countries (*Cui Bono?*)?

5. Close and Evaluation

- ISO 21500 is a useful tool for PM in internationalisation of HE, but more suited to cascade or waterfall models
- Does not fully convey the issues at initiation stage and the need for the sponsors (often different organisations to the project team) to address these
- Some other things are also more significant, such as
 - Shared goals, clear authority and political will, with key drivers fully committed to the project
 - Continuous communication in shared language

What's missing, apart from the need for lots of patience?