



Project Management Development – Practice and Perspectives

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SUSTAINABILITY IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

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Abstract

There is a growing demand for a good implementation of sustainability in project management standards. With the new IPMA Individual Competence Baseline ICB4 (IPMA 2015) we have a significant improvement on contributions regarding sustainability project management compared to ICB3 (IPMA 2006) – and also a significant improvement compared to standards like PMBOK® (PMI 2013). These contributions are discussed here. The implementation of ICB4 is open and a challenge for the future.

Key words: *project management, project management standards, competence baseline, ICB, PMBOK®, sustainability*

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Introduction

Sustainability is one of the most important challenges of our time. How can we develop prosperity, without compromising the life of future generations? We are looking for a balance among economic, environmental, and social and human issues – a long term balance. The integration of sustainability in project management is very important because projects initiate changes – and changes must be shaped by sustainability criteria (Reusch, Peter J.A. 2015).

With the publication of ICB4 in 2015 we have a significant improvement of contributions on sustainability in the project management standards – compared to ICB3 published in 2006 and compared to other standards.

In ICB3 in chapter 3 on the introduction of certification there is just a hint on sustainability related to the contextual competence 3.09 on ‘Health, security, safety & environment’ (IPMA 2006, page 32).

And the next and final hint on sustainability we find in the description of the competence 2.04 on ‘Assertiveness’ in a list of possible process steps sustainability is included “8. Cultivate sustainable relationships with interested parties” (IPMA 2006, page 94).

In ICB4 we have a strong new focus on sustainability in project management. After the reorganization of the competences and competence clusters – compared to ICB3 – we have “sustainability thinking” even in the first competence 4.3.1 on strategy – and the strategy is just the right place to start with sustainability. There are many more contributions on sustainability in project management as well as in program and portfolio management in ICB4.

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Sustainability issues in ICB4

In ICB 4 we have 29 competences in 3 competence clusters (strategy, people, and practice). In almost 10 of the new 29 competences in ICB4 we have significant contributions on sustainability – hints on sustainability are even in more competences. The following review on significant contributions is based on the part of ICB4 dealing with projects – the additional parts on programs and portfolios cannot be discussed here.

ICB4 competence **4.3.1 on strategy** describes how to develop and implement strategies in projects aligned with the mission and strategy of the involved organizations – esp. aligned with the sustainability strategies of the organizations. Special tools and techniques are recommended for the development, communication and control of strategies like environmental analysis, balanced scorecards, critical success factors, and key performance indicators, to “assure the sustainability of an organization”.

In ICB3 strategies were underdeveloped. In ICB4 we have a cluster of competences dealing with strategies – competences 4.3.1 up to 4.3.5 with a focus on strategy, governance, compliance, power, culture and values. And ICB4 also deals with the problem that we often have a strategy when we start a project but forget many aspects of our strategy when the project runs. Ongoing reviews of strategies and ongoing reflections of organizational goals are recommended in ICB4 – a strong contribution on sustainability project management.

In ICB4 competence **4.3.3 on compliance, standards and regulations** knowledge on sustainability principles is highly recommended – including all relevant standards and regulations on health, safety, security and environment.

Individuals in projects should be able to balance economic, social and environmental aspects of the project – clear perspectives are given:

“The individual is able to assess the impact of the project on the environment and society. Realising his or her responsibility, the individual researches, recommends and applies measures to limit or compensate negative consequences. The individual follows (or even exceeds) guidelines and rules on sustainable development coming from within the organisation and from the wider society, and is able to realize a workable balance between the demands of society, impacts to the eco-environment and the economy. The individual understands that sustainability aspects, measures and attitudes often vary in different countries and cultures.” (IPMA 2015, page 52).

In ICB4 competence **4.3.5 on cultures and values** the perspectives of sustainability project management are extended for international projects. A core concept introduced here is corporate social responsibility:

“The individual needs to be sure that the project supports the sustainable development of the organization, which includes corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is a lever of control in complying with legal and non-governmental regulations, professional standards and other ethical and international norms. By CSR, if practised in the right way, an organization encourages a positive impact through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the society.” (IPMA 2015, page 60).

In the list of knowledge aspects in this ICB4 competence we also find “green project management”. That’s a nice recommendation – and there are important contributions available



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since several years like (*online resource: <http://greenprojectmanagement.org/>*)– but the job to implement green project management into ICB4 and all training and certification units is open.

In ICB4 competence **4.4.2** on **personal integrity and reliability** individuals in projects are requested to promote the sustainability of project outcomes:

“Promoting sustainability means focusing on the endurance of solutions even when engaged in time-limited tasks. Sustainability is not only about social equity, environment protection or economic results. It is the consideration of the long-term outcomes and effects of behavior. The individual has the ability to keep the bigger picture in mind and act accordingly.” (IPMA 2015, page 67). In ICB4 competence **4.4.9** on **negotiation** individuals in projects are requested to negotiate to achieve a sustainable agreement.

ICB4 competence **4.5.3** deals with the **scope** - with the boundaries of a project and structural issues (work breakdown structure,...). Sustainability issues here are a bit fuzzy – the project and its outcomes are important but also an appropriate scope management avoiding scope creeps. ICB4 competence **4.5.9** deals with **procurement**. Sustainability has to be taken into account in procurement, for example when selecting commodities or suppliers – as discussed in (Reusch, Peter J. A.; Ojeda, Omarly 2013). ICB4 competence **4.5.13** deals with **change and transformation**. Change management should be developed in such a way that change and transformation sustain – and ‘falling back’ can be avoided.

Sustainability issues in PMBOK[®]

In the fifth edition of PMBOK[®] (PMI 2013) sustainability is as poor as in ICB3. On page 7 of PMBOK[®] there a remark that organizational project management can deliver a sustainable competitive advantage. In parentheses on page 15 sustainability is mentioned. In the chapter on project integration in the section on enterprise environmental factors sustainability is just an item in a list (PMI 2013: A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide), page 75). Finally there is no real sentence on sustainability in project management.

PMBOK[®] is very weak regarding sustainability in project management. Therefore other initiatives started to develop a “green project management” (*online resource: <http://greenprojectmanagement.org/>*). But the problem is that these initiatives remain isolated and cannot replace the old standards.

There are several proposals to extend knowledge areas in PMBOK[®] to include sustainability – Reusch, e.a. (Reusch, Peter J. A. 2015 and Reusch, S. Pascal 2014). There is one option to subdivide the knowledge area on project quality management and to collect processes on project sustainability management in the new subpart. There is another option to upgrade the PMBOK[®] approach in general (Reusch, Peter J. A. 2015).

Conclusions and perspectives

With ICB4 we have a significant improvement in sustainability project management. ICB4 is available since September 2015 – so far only in English. In several countries translators are active to prepare other language versions. The full implementation of ICB4 will take years. The main guidelines for implementing ICB are all based on ICB3 today (Hermarij, John 2013 and Gessler, Michael 2012). The handbook (Gessler, Michael 2012) consists of 4 volumes and more than 2500 pages – the upgrade with totally new competences will not be easy.



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The implementation of ICB4 gives the opportunity to strengthen many aspects of this new standard. The development of training units for the implementation of ICB4 can be used to shape the sustainability focus of ICB4.

The authors work in this direction – dealing for example with several methods and tools like balanced scorecards, critical success factors (CSFs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) combining perspectives of sustainability and project management. There are good sources available like Jessica Keyes (Keyes, Jessica 2011) or Harold Kerzner (Harold Kerzner 2013) but the right combination of sustainability perspectives and project management perspectives in CSFs and KPIs is still a challenge. With the project balanced scorecard we can improve sustainability from the beginning of projects when we develop strategies to later steps – not to forget our strategies while we run our projects.

While these approaches have a focus on strategies there are additional methods and tools supporting sustainability aspects of operations like dependency analysis, and the development of roles and responsibilities – Reusch (Reusch, Peter J. A. 2014 and Reusch, Peter J. A.; Löhr, Katrin, Khushnood, Muhammad 2012).

The new ICB4 also has an impact on other standards – even IPMA standards. There is for example an IPMA standard for the development of project management consultancy competences (IPMA 2016) – based on ICB3. Such standards must also be updated also.

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