MANAGING A LARGE DISTRIBUTED PROJECT ON THE WEB

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SUMMARY

This article touches upon the problems and opportunities that emerge in modernising projects in Central and East European countries as part of the process of their approximation to the European Union. A new approach is described that enables the effective monitoring (and therefore management) of large-scale modernisation projects in public/national administration. The key element of this approach is the merger of computer-supported project management with the Internet. The synergy of the advantages of both technologies enables the optional decentralisation of implementation, at the same time as offering effective monitoring of the realisation of the planned work. It is possible to introduce the described method of project monitoring in a very short space of time by employing existing technology and know-how, all at very low cost. This article aims to describe the multi-stage process of the introduction of the approach, and the experience gained in using it.

1. INTRODUCTION—PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The approaching information society needs to contribute to the more effective and successful management of national resources, more efficient national administration, and the exploitation of new business opportunities. This applies especially to Central and East European countries, which are trying to close the historically pre-conditioned gap between...
them and developed EU countries. One of these countries is Slovenia which is currently running several wide-ranging projects for the modernisation of processes in the economy and in public and national administration. Slovenia became aware relatively quickly that regulated geographical data, as the fundamental element of the (global) geographical information infrastructure, can be said to be the basic ability and capability for the effective management of today's modern and complex society. The processes for the provision of this data are important factors for ensuring the appropriate dynamics and success of reforms. For this reason, the ONIX project that deals with this area, is currently one of the most ambitious.

Despite the fact that project management and control is seen by many people as "déjà reconté, déjà vu and déjà pensé" (already said, already seen, and already thought), everyday practice shows that there have been projects that have failed, or succeeded only in part. In order to avoid these situations, rules of implementation have been drafted for the ONIX project in an extensive document entitled 'The ONIX Project Organisation Regulation'. Indeed, this kind of regulation was required by the heterogeneity and complexity of the project. The project is of an international character and is co-financed by the World Bank, meaning that the people in charge of the project must adjust overall project management and control to the World Bank's requirements. This ranges from the very drafting of documentation and the invitation to tender, to the preparation of the control function and reporting system. The project is inter-disciplinary as it encompasses professional individual sub-projects areas as well as the national administration areas, such as finance, legislation and administration.

The project has the required organisational structure since it includes more than 20 organisational units of the public and private sectors at both national and local levels. It consists of 159 activities, involves 80 participants, and has a duration of 32 months.

2. THE EXISTING SITUATION AND LIMITATIONS IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

On assuming the task of establishing a project management system that would meet all the aforementioned requirements, the contractor of the "Management" sub-project had to take into account the following limitations:

- the extremely short period of time available from the assumption of the task to the commencement of the project (45 days);
- the wide dispersion of the locations for the implementation of individual activities;
- the differences between individual contractors, all of whom are top experts in specific areas but not all of whom have the appropriate experience in project work;
- the lack of knowledge of the work methodology of the project in public and national administration environments;
- the limitations in the selection of hardware, software and communications equipment, whereby only the existing equipment of the contractors and project managers was allowed to be used.

Irrespective of these strict limitations, we required an exceptionally accurate monitoring of implementation at the levels of the project, sub-projects and activities. The condition for this was, of course, the provision of up to date and accurate data on the time and resources consumed, and on the work done. One of the vital tasks was therefore the establishment of an adequate system of periodical reporting.