

*Robert Kowalski*<sup>1</sup>  
*Inga Kaškelyte*<sup>2</sup>  
University of Wolverhampton

## PROJECT CYCLE MANAGEMENT TRAINING TO EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### Summary

A drive for accountability in public administration throughout development agencies has been manifested in the adoption of tools of strategic planning and *ex post* evaluation. The result has been the adoption of a planning, implementation and evaluation tool known as the Logical Framework (LF).

Previous training assistance in Project Cycle Management (PCM) provided to beneficiaries of PHARE assistance primarily sought to transfer basic information on LF completion in order to achieve the pragmatic objective of receiving documents that would get past the *ex-ante* check of the European Commission and thus become eligible for funding. As a result, the staff of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) learned how to fulfil the bureaucratic requirement to complete a LF. In fact, most of the organisations would complete the LF after writing up the proposal itself and, after their bid was granted support, never looked at it again!

No attention was devoted to instilling the principles of PCM into the beneficiaries with the result that the quality of PHARE programming documents has not improved over the period of PHARE's existence. The secondary effect of a substantially disempowered recipient community, alienated from the benefits that PCM holds was equally as damaging to the development process.

A case study is presented that contrasts the PCM approach with its LF predecessor and to identify those aspects that contribute to successful development initiatives. The chosen case is a Non-Government Organisation capacity building project from the Czech Republic. Under the support of the British Department for International Development, a small training project was planned, implemented and evaluated that adopted the approach that the LF is an irreplaceable tool for the proper management of the whole Project Cycle, but that people needed to be empowered in its use through the promotion of a participatory process. The scale of the programme was modest, consisting of:

---

<sup>1</sup> Principal Lecturer, Centre for International Development and Training, University of Wolverhampton

<sup>2</sup> Project Manager for NROS

- A 4 day training of trainers workshop focusing on PCM and the use of LF, with the last day spent considering issues of how to train in PCM
- A fund to support cascading training events for which the trainees could bid.
- The trialling and elaboration of a training manual.
- A follow-up workshop to evaluate progress and share lessons learned.

The participants in the initial training were recruited from all three sectors – state, private and civil society, although the majority represented CSOs. The applicants were required to have previous experience as trainers and to be prepared to cascade the know-how gained. It was important to approach the training methodology for PCM as a piece of mediated experiential learning in order to empower people to get advantages for themselves out of the tool.

The most graphic illustration of the success of the initial training workshop was the widespread enthusiasm for donating future time and effort to prepare the case study and training manual. In addition, the scepticism shown for LFs at the outset of the training had been entirely replaced by a pragmatic appreciation for them as management tools.

There were 7 additional PCM workshops conducted outside of the funded scheme, which means a minimum of 70 additional people trained. It was clear that this PCM training had targeted a blind spot in the area of CSO training and was met with great demand and interest from CSOs.

A number of strengths of the design and implementation of this initiative were identified:

- Targeting a blind spot – the absence of a comprehensive methodology in the area of project management.
- Including a grant programme for the cascading of training to CSOs within the project budget – ensuring the multiplication effect.
- Selection of qualified people for the initial training (the fact that candidates were required to have previous experience as trainers as well as project management issues, and to be willing to transfer the know-how received; representation of all three sector trainers was a distinct plus).
- Selection of a trainer that really believed in the PCM approach and had Central European project experience.

## Streszczenie

Artykuł jest studium przypadku z zakresu zarządzania projektami. Autorzy koncentrują się na podejściu określanym jako Zarządzanie Cyklem Projektu (PCM) oraz narzędziu zarządzania stosowanym przy planowaniu, wdrażaniu i ewaluacji projektów, zwanym Longframe (Logical Framework). Na przykładach czeskich organizacji pozarządowych autorzy identyfikują te aspekty, które przyczyniają się do skutecznego korzystania z narzędzi zarządzania projektami, a – jak pokazują autorzy i cytowani przez nich badacze – ciężko przenoszą się na grunt organizacji Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Autorzy twierdzą również, iż aby skutecznie wprowadzić te narzędzia, należy dobrać trenerów dobrze znających podejście PCM i mających doświadczenie, także w środkowoeuropejskich organizacjach, jak również tak zaprojektować cykl szkoleń, by miał charakter intensywny i wzmagający efekt.

## Introduction

Good governance, in a western democratic interpretation, requires accountability (Power 1997; Porter & Onyach-Olaa 1999). This drive for accountability has been manifested throughout western development agencies in the adoption of managerialist tools of strategic planning and *ex post* evaluation (Goldsmith 1996; Wallace 1997; Gasper 1999; Wield 1999). In development terms, it is no longer sufficient for donors or their agents to have good intentions and to be sincere in pursuit of those intentions. It is necessary for them to demonstrate to the people who provide them with funds<sup>1</sup> that the use of such funds has been carefully thought through to achieve maximum impact.

The end result has been the adoption of a planning, management of implementation and evaluation tool known as the Logical Framework (Logframe) (Wield 1999; for a review see: Dearden & Kowalski 2003). As Power (1997) has suggested, this drive for the use of Logframes has been fuelled by “the spread of a distinct mentality of administrative control” and the Logframe has become the project planning tool of choice across many funding agencies. As Wield (1999) observed “Although [the Logframe] has the rhetoric of participation, it ends up being one of the most imposed tools in development policy and practice”. Furthermore, Gasper (1999) acknowledged, that the Logframe has been subject to much criticism and little objective evaluation, and his assessment was that “logframes appear inherently easy to misuse”. Additionally, Wallace (1997) emphasised that, because of their conceptual complexity, the requirement to use Logframes is an act of cultural hegemony that disempowers local people from participating in their own development initiatives.

The result of these experiences has been a growing emphasis upon an approach known as Project Cycle Management (PCM). This still uses the Logframe but the focus is distinctly less controlling and is far more a process that enables participation in a mutual learning and growth endeavour (Eggers 1998; Dearden & Kowalski 2003).

In this paper we wish to present a case study that contrasts the PCM approach with its Logframe predecessor and to identify those aspects that contribute to successful development initiatives. The case we have chosen is a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) capacity building project from the Czech Republic, which was supported by DFID and managed and implemented by the authors.

---

<sup>1</sup> The British Treasury in the case of the Department for International Development (DFID) through the Public Service Agreement; the public in the case of International Non-Government Organisations.

## The Case in Point

In the interaction between the European Union (EU) and the pre-accession states of Central Europe, such as the Czech Republic, and those of the former Soviet Union, a whole variety of initiatives eg. PHARE, TACIS, SAPARD, ISPA, have relied and continue to rely upon a central tool in the process of bidding for grants for development aid – the logical framework.

In the Czech Republic, over the past 10 years, Nadace Rozvoje Občanské Společnosti (NROS) has been a major grant-giver, and implementation agency for PHARE programme support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). As such, its staff have seen and assessed a large number of project bids from all types of Czech CSOs. One feature that many of these applications have exhibited has been a lack of real understanding, not only with regard to for whom the project was designed, but also what the problem was that they were trying to address, and indeed with whom they should be working. Additionally, they almost always lacked a real basis on which to measure the project's impact.

NROS' initial strategy to address these deficiencies was to provide training and consultation in the preparation of project applications. However, this did not have any significant impact on the quality of project bids subsequently submitted. Moreover, the shortcomings were exhibited well beyond any ability to write good project applications, which many of the major CSOs were eventually able to do in a formal sense (i.e. fill out a form successfully). Other problems emerged once the proposals were examined in some detail, at which point it became clear that the applicants had failed to consider a whole range of factors that would clearly influence the project's success. The majority of these projects tended to lack clear analysis of the prevailing situation and failed to demonstrate a full understanding of the context in which they and the implementing CSO were operating. This poor level of design and preparation then manifested itself during implementation and tended to have a negative influence on the project's final impact. Thus the CSO failed to deliver quality projects, struggled to generate further income, and often remained unable to acquire the skills (through staff or training), that would help them out of this cycle of underachievement.

In mid 2001 the guidelines for PHARE programme assistance introduced a requirement to submit a logical framework as a part of bidding for PHARE assistance (NROS itself had been preparing programme fiches using Logframes for the European Commission since 1996). The training that NROS provided to CSOs under the auspices of the PHARE programme was focused on the bidding procedure and general requirements which made CSOs eligible for EU funding with a brief half-hour devoted to logical frameworks. As a result, the CSO staff learned how to fulfil the bureaucratic requirement to complete a Logframe. In fact, most of the organisations would complete the Logframe after writing up the proposal itself and, after their bid was granted support, never even looked at it again! Thus showing all the symptoms of, what Gasper (1999) defined as, a logic-less frame.

Furthermore, the training had failed to encourage an appreciation of the Log-frame's use as a project design and management tool and consequently there had been little understanding generated amongst the very people at whom the "development" funds were targeted, about how to design, implement and evaluate the projects that emerged successfully from the bidding process, ie. Local people were not being empowered.

Similar experiences characterised the efforts of other resource centres for CSO capacity building in the Czech Republic who also focused their training provision on grant application preparation rather than the project design process itself.

At this point it was obvious to NROS that some kind of training along the lines of PCM would be of enormous benefit to these CSOs as it would not only help them put together better projects, but also help them to understand the purpose of their work and how it impacts on others.

## The Development Initiative

Under the support of DFID, a small training project was planned, implemented and evaluated that adopted the approach that the Logical Framework is an irreplaceable tool for the proper management of the whole Project Cycle, but that people needed to be empowered in its use through the promulgation of a participatory process. In logical framework terms, the goal of the project was to increase the impact of projects carried out by Czech CSOs through the use of project cycle management (PCM) techniques as indicated by improvements in both the relevance and general quality of project design among Czech CSOs and their community partners. The purpose of the project was to embed the use of PCM in the Czech non-profit sector as widely as possible by giving them tools to analyse and understand the context in which they work and to forge community partnerships more effectively.

The outputs were to put in place a mechanism that would foster the use of PCM as a means of designing, implementing and evaluating projects, to build the capacity of local trainers from the CSO sector in PCM, and to provide support material as a downloadable manual in Czech on the NROS website.

The activities were based primarily around a training workshop, and the supply and management of training funds to support a cascading process. The scale of the programme was modest and took the form of:

- A 4 day training of trainers (ToT) workshop focusing on PCM and the use of Logical Frameworks, with the last day spent considering issues of how to train in PCM.
- A fund to support cascading training events for which the trainees could bid.
- The trialling and elaboration of a training manual.
- A follow up workshop to evaluate progress and share lessons learned.

## Implementation

The trainer was contracted from the UK group that undertake PCM training for DFID, based in the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton. The participants in the initial training were recruited from all three sectors – state, private and civil society, although the majority represented CSOs. They were selected through interview, by representatives of DFID & NROS. The applicants were required to have previous work experience as trainers and to be prepared to cascade the know-how gained. Ability to work in the medium of English was also a requirement.

The initial ToT workshop was rated as highly successful. Indeed, participants did not spare words of excellence to describe the experience. There was a general appreciation of the facilitation methods.

“One of the most important lessons learnt was first start with a LOGFRAME!”

“Very effectively spent time, very motivating way of learning, maximally intensive and practical”.

Perhaps the most graphic illustration of the success of the initial training workshop was the almost universal enthusiasm for donating future time and effort in order to prepare the case study and the training manual. In addition, the scepticism shown for Logical Frameworks at the outset of the workshop had been entirely replaced by a pragmatic appreciation for them as management tools, as demonstrated in the call for similar training to be made available for donor agencies’ staff.

The evaluation wheel, produced by participants at the end of the training, was very positive on most criteria, although comments were made indicating some misgivings about the extent of the participants’ experience in the various aspects of Project Management and its relation to the level of their confidence as trainers. Evaluation of the programme through a questionnaire indicated that it had been very successful, particularly as a model of future practice on the cascading training courses. The appreciation of the skills of the trainer was universally high and considerations of the other aspects of the workshop were consistently positive.

After the initial PCM workshop for Czech trainers the call for training proposals was put out. A fund totalling £15 000 was allocated in the project to support the cascading of training to staff of Czech CSOs and community leaders. Individual trainers were asked to submit their bids in co-operation with a CSO that would be the recipient of a grant from the fund and act as a guarantor of the organisational and logistics side of the training events. Training proposals included a specified regional scope and the area of activity of the CSOs to be targeted, which prevented overlap.

## Results

Eighteen training courses were supported to an average amount of £1030. Eleven out of the 15 participants in the original training carried out at least one follow up training course. A total of 249 representatives from 187 CSOs were trained (for information, the original project plan estimated that only 150 people would be trained on).

### Regional scope

The representation of CSOs by region was uneven. However, all of the Czech Nuts III regions were covered (the Prague and South Moravia regions were most represented, which also corresponds to the greatest concentration of CSOs in the Czech Republic). Similarly, the least numbers of participants came from the Central Bohemia and Kralovehradecky regions where the number of active CSOs is the lowest.

### Focus of the CSOs involved

Participating CSOs were drawn from a variety of areas of CSO activity. The most represented was that of social services (78 representatives trained) and environmental protection (40 representatives trained); the least represented areas included training and leisure with 11 and 17 representatives trained, respectively.

### Position within the organisation

The majority of participants were project managers (74) and directors of CSOs (50). The least frequent positions represented were assistants (4) and financial managers (5).

### Gender representation

Women were twice as likely to participate as men: 89 participants were male and 160 female.

## Evaluation of the Workshops

Individual cascading workshops were generally rated very highly, with scores averaging 4.4 points out of a possible 5 across the board. Among the highest rated aspects of the training were *Understanding of and Interest in the PCM topic* as well as *Trainer performance* with average scores of 4.6. *Relevance of information*, *Usefulness* and *Facilitation methods* which averaged 4.5. The lowest average score (4.3 points) was given to *Organisation and logistics of the workshops*, where participants expressed their disappointment mainly over the quality of the refreshments.

The general comments by workshop participants were very positive overall. They can be divided into 3 main categories:

**1) Training atmosphere/facilitation methods.** Very positive comments with regard to “an atmosphere of equality, relaxedness and friendliness”, “more training in this spirit”, “new ways of self realisation”.

**2) Methodology/know-how.** This aspect received the most positive feedback, “the logical structure of the training, British know-how and training materials” were especially appreciated. “The best workshop concerning logical framework ever!”

**3) Change in the perception of the logical framework – from a bureaucratic requirement to a useful management tool.** From the Trainers’ evaluation: ‘it was obvious from the beginning that most of the participants perceived Logframes as a “necessary evil”, but in the course of training their attitude changed when they realised that actually a well designed Logframe can make their work easier, and is a very useful tool while designing, implementing and evaluating a project’.

### **Cascading effect outside the project framework**

To our knowledge, there were at least 7 additional PCM workshops conducted outside of the funded scheme, which means a minimum of 70 additional people trained. It was clear that this PCM training had targeted a blind spot in the area of CSO training and was met with great demand and interest from CSOs. Hence the strong cascading effect outside this project’s funding. There was great interest from individual CSOs to recruit individual trainers from this project to carry out tailored training for their staff. A complete PCM course was also integrated into the regular annual training programme for CSO managers. In addition, CSOs have submitted grant applications within the PHARE programme incorporating PCM training in the area of NGO sector capacity building.

### **Training materials**

As part of the design of this initiative, PCM training materials were translated and adapted to the context of the Czech civil society sector. The initial participants on the training volunteered to help review and modify the materials that had been used to train them, including the elaboration of a case study. The PCM manual was compiled and published in electronic version and is available as a download from the NROS website.

### **Key aspects of the programme success (as viewed by NROS)**

A number of strengths of the design and implementation of this initiative were identified from the perspective of the managing agency:

- Targeting a blind spot – the absence of a comprehensive methodology in the area of project management.
- Including a fund (grant programme) for the cascading of training to CSOs within the project budget – ensuring the multiplication effect.
- Selection of qualified people for the initial training (the fact that candidates were required to have previous experience as trainers as well as project management issues, and to be willing to transfer the know-how received; representation of all three sector trainers was a distinct plus).
- Selection of the technical guarantor that really believed in the PCM approach and had Central European project experience – CIDT (DFID's reference was used).
- Flexible and cooperative relationship with DFID's representative in the Czech Republic.

## Conclusions

It is clear that the two major drawbacks associated with the use of logical frameworks are that they are inherently easy to misuse (Gasper 1999) and that they represent an act of cultural dominance (Wallace 1997). The result has often been a condemnation of the tool (Chambers 1997), but one which fails to suggest any alternative.

This case study has demonstrated that it is possible to use logical frameworks to enhance people's ability to think strategically by taking these two drawbacks into consideration. Taking the aspect of their predisposition to misuse first, this seems to be founded in the asymmetrical relationship between donors and recipients. Fukuda-Parr et al (2002, p. 8) also drew attention to this particular issue when they wrote: "the asymmetric donor-recipient relationship [contains] the belief that it is possible for donors ultimately to control the process and yet consider the recipients to be equal partners". The result of this asymmetry is to generate the recipients' responses like those of unthinking automatons, as Ellerman (2002, p. 45) noted: "if the doers do X only to satisfy conditionalities and thus receive aid, then the motive will falsify the action, the reforms will not be well implemented, and the policy changes will not be sustained". And this has characterised the imposition of the logical framework as a requirement for successful funding applications.

There is little prospect that this situation will change and the asymmetry of the relationships between donors and recipients, between advisers and consultants or contractors, and within the hierarchies of Ministries between staff at various levels will continue to be features of the Development Assistance landscape (Kowalski 2004). So, taking note of Horton (1998, p. 122) when he stated: "You don't just tell people something; you find a way to use situations to educate them so that they can learn to figure things out themselves", it was important to approach the training methodology for Project Cycle Management as

a piece of mediated experiential learning (Dearden & Kowalski 2003), in order to empower people to get advantages for themselves out of the tool.

This was an essential ingredient in the successful cascading of the PCM methodology within this project.

In the matter of cultural dominance, the introduction of western approaches to strategic planning for development and its accompanying bureaucratic forms necessarily brings with it its own language, which represents a fresh colonialism. Again, with the increasing demands for accountability there is little prospect that this will change.

The previous training assistance in PCM that has been provided to beneficiaries of PHARE assistance primarily sought to transfer basic information on Logframe completion with a view to achieving a very pragmatic objective of receiving programme documents that would get past the *ex-ante* check of the European Commission and thus become eligible for funding. No attention was devoted to instilling the principles of PCM into key beneficiary bodies with the result that the quality of PHARE programming documents has not improved to any real extent over the period of PHARE's existence. The secondary effect of a substantially disempowered recipient community that had been alienated from the benefits that PCM holds was equally as damaging to the development process.

The inauguration of a project, whose primary purpose was to generate the capacity to design projects adequately and to disseminate this capacity widely, demonstrated an approach that, whilst not denying the cultural dominance of the format, empowered participants at all levels to understand the utility of what had hitherto been simply a matter for compliance.

## References

- Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose reality counts?: putting the first last*. London: Intermediate Technology.
- Dearden, P.N. & Kowalski, R. (2003). Programme and Project Cycle Management (PPCM): Lessons from South and North. *Development in Practice* 13(5), pp. 501–514.
- Eggers, H.W. (1998). Project Cycle Management Revisited. *The Courier* May/June 1998, pp. 69–72. Brussels: European Commission.
- Ellerman, D. (2002). Autonomy-respecting assistance: Towards new strategies for capacity-building and development assistance. In: *Capacity for Development*, S. Fukuda-Parr, C. Lopes & K. Malik (eds), pp. 43–60. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Fukuda-Parr, S., Lopes, C. & Malik, K. (2002). Institutional innovations for capacity development. In: *Capacity for Development*, S. Fukuda-Parr, C. Lopes, & K. Malik (eds), pp. 1–21. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Gasper, D. (1999). Problems in the Logical Framework Approach and the challenges for Project Cycle Management. *The Courier* Jan/Feb 1999, 173, pp. 75–77. Brussels: European Commission.
- Goldsmith, A.A. (1996). Strategic Thinking in International Development: Using Management Tools to See the Big Picture. *World Development* 24, pp. 1431–1439.
- Horton, M. (1998). *The Long Haul: an autobiography*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Kowalski, R. (2004). Development – Paradox, paralysis and praxis. *Protosociology* 20, pp. 390–411.
- Malik, K. (2002). Towards a normative framework: technical cooperation, capacities and development. In: *Capacity for Development*, S. Fukuda-Parr, C. Lopes & K. Malik (eds), pp. 24–42. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Porter, D. & Onyach-Olaa, M. (1999). Inclusive planning and allocation for rural services. *Development in Practice* 9, pp. 56–67.
- Power, M. (1997). The Audit Explosion. In: *Life After Politics*, G. Mulgan (ed.), pp. 286–293. London: Fontana.
- Wallace, T. (1997). New Development Agendas: Changes in UK NGO Policies and Procedures. *Review of African Political Economy* 71, pp. 35–55.
- Wield, D. (1999). Tools for project development within a public action framework. *Development in Practice* 9, pp. 33–42.
- Wiggins, S. and Shields, D. (1995). Clarifying the “logical framework” as a tool for planning and managing projects, *Project Appraisal*, 10 (1), pp. 2–12.

