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**The Management of International Development
Projects: Enhancing Sustainable Outcomes with
Improved Project Management Education and
Training**

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**The Management of International Development Projects:
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**Abstract
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Abstract

This paper is focused on the management of international development projects. The primary aim is to put forward innovative new ideas for project management education and training in the light of the current realities of development projects. These are defined as projects funded by international donor organizations that focus on development issues such as poverty alleviation, health, education, agriculture, food security, trade, private sector development and institutional capacity building in developing countries. The paper addresses projects that cover the provision of technical expertise, rather than infrastructural development and supplies, as funded by the European Union, World Bank or bilateral donors such as USAID, the Netherlands Government and DFID. The paper provocatively examines current problems in the field, highlighting some general success and failure factors, and then considers some interesting cases of innovation using new learning technologies and learning designs. The analysis is based on an exploratory research approach through the authors' hands-on experiences, either as project managers, project management trainers or individual experts, in over 200 donor-funded projects over 18 years in a large and diverse number of developing countries.

The current realities of development project management, including education and training, are examined and contrasted with current project management methodologies, especially Project Cycle Management (PCM) and the Project Management Institute's (PMI) approach regarded as important in that it is as an increasingly emergent industry standard and training provider. The PMI's 'Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMBOK) provides both a curriculum for training as well as a useful analytical framework for assessing project management performance and is used here to study current issues and problems in development projects: the critical success and failure factors. The PMI, however, is generally better known in the private sector and despite an innovative quality-driven approach using distance education technologies, lacks strong recognition in the institutions of international development. On the other hand, donor-funded project management methodologies, notably PCM, remain *de rigueur* and there has been little innovation over the last 20 years, especially in the ways project management is taught and trained. A particular issue is distance education and the opportunities provided by electronic learning environments. Drawing on case studies presented, the paper explores how traditional donor project management systems such as PCM can be enhanced by innovative training methods, including e-learning and blended learning; as well as collaboration and sharing with distance education providers such as the PMI and higher education institutions.

The paper is also in part intended as a vision and point of departure for a capacity group that will be focused on developing new approaches and materials for project

management training that will ultimately contribute to the more effective management of international development projects and promote sustainable outcomes.

Introduction

This paper critically examines some of the reasons why a substantial number of international development projects do not achieve their planned objectives. The 'Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMBOK) usefully serves as a conceptual framework for analyzing projects and a suggested way forward for reforms in international development management practice. The views expressed are drawn from the researcher's own personal experiences as a development project manager over a 20 year time period, and as such constitute exploratory research with the understanding that generalizability is problematic and that further evidence is needed. The intention is to contribute to the discussion on what works and what does not work in development within a framework rooted in the fundamentals of project management; the overarching lesson being that a rigorous and systematic project identification, formulation and implementation approach is necessary. The 'Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK)' represents one guiding and constantly updating framework for the discipline of project management following a systems approach to project management. As argued here, and despite the growing recognition of PMI as an industry standard, the PMBOK framework is under-utilized in the management of development projects and PMI certification is not seen as an asset in the CV of a Project Manager. A way forward could lie in PMI adapting materials and tools to suit the development environment and expanding the range of certificated courses. The PMI, however, while it has arguably the strongest brand name in the field of project management, is not the only training provider and consideration in this paper is given to case studies of innovative distance education initiatives undertaken by an international business school, the Maastricht School of Management, and a consulting company, CESOCI. The attention given to the PMI training approach is merited due to the effective use of electronic learning environments – exactly where innovation is needed in skills training for development project managers. This paper provides some pointers in that direction by highlighting some areas where not only the PMI, but also other recognized training providers can contribute to improved development project management.

Development Project Management Critical Success or Failure Factors: the Key Questions

1. Political and commercial goals or developmental goals?

What can be described here as the 'political economy of development aid' refers to the use of aid money to promote the political objectives of donor and/or recipient countries. In such cases conditionalities are tied to the giving of aid and the larger purpose may be more to do with the shoring up of client state relations or commercial advantages for donor country firms. This can be mutually beneficial, as shown by some infrastructural development projects funded by China, but politically motivated projects also run a high risk of failure, however, as the financing decision is implicitly understood to be linked to factors other than the stated development-related purpose and objectives. In one case, a donor organization has repeatedly funded new phases a trade facilitation project in a highly corrupt country knowing that the project will fail; it is merely regarded as a

listening post and a worthwhile presence to have. Politically motivated projects frequently encounter further problems when they are under implementation with rent seeking from individuals in and around the project system: in such systems the project is seen to be a pot of money to divvy up rather than a means to a sustainable future. There is no project management methodology or training curriculum that can entirely eliminate political influence, but rigorous maintenance of professional standards can minimize the negative effects. In this respect, the PMI industry standard can reduce problem areas such as rent seeking and influence peddling; and it emphasized ethics the inclusion of ethics into project management training – also as a defined knowledge area – will help.

2. Project initiation: in the interests of donor, provider or beneficiary?

A unique feature of PMBOK is the differentiation of process groups and knowledge areas. The 'Initiating Process Group' has particularly important up-front knowledge areas of 'Developing the Project Charter' and 'Identifying Stakeholders.' Both of these domains are essential steps in the identification of development projects and given substantial emphasis, for example, in the Project Cycle Management (PCM) approach required by the European Commission (EC). In fact, the EC procedures, relating to what PMI describes as the project charter, encompass a number of different steps, including quality checks, pre-feasibility studies, feasibility studies, financing proposals, financing decisions and a financing agreement. A key difference between donor-financed development projects and conventional private sector projects are that project initiators, project sponsors and stakeholders are more complex in the case of the former. In theory, development projects should originate from approved country strategy papers founded in the recipient or beneficiary country's policies concerning priority development issues such as health, education, industrial and agricultural development and so on. In practice, the initiating process group role and function is often weak in developing countries so donor agencies take the lead in project identification and steer the project towards their own desired aims. This leads to a recommendation that project management training providers, can strengthen the content and materials relating to the key initial phases of project identification with special reference to students and project managers in developing countries. Distance education is a key vehicle to strengthen this considering the difficulties of face-to-face training.

Identifying stakeholders should also be the task of the initiating process group. While stakeholder involvement and consultation is regarded as a necessary up-front activity by donor organizations, with guidelines available for the conduct of stakeholder problem analysis workshops, stakeholders are frequently by-passed. The consequence is the project charter and draft planning documents are drawn up by international development consultants in isolation with resulting lack of ownership. Knock-on effects include conflict with stakeholders and implementation agencies/consultants with confusion around the project's real goals. The importance of stakeholder involvement is underscored by frequently complex project designs aimed at changing attitudes and behaviors in local communities. In the PMBOK, managing stakeholder expectations is a major element of the 'Project Communications Management' knowledge area and rightly highlights a 'stakeholder management strategy' as input into managing stakeholder expectations. Regarding development projects, participatory

planning skills as well as training on managing diversity and intercultural sensitivity are vital knowledge areas for application in developing countries. These skills are especially vital in developing countries characterized by ethnic diversity, including the presence of sensitive indigenous groups in and around project sites.

3. Realistic or over-ambitious project scope management?

Project scope management is a key knowledge area in PMBOK; in particular, it defines the project's deliverables and the work required to create those deliverables. Importantly, in relation to managing stakeholder expectations, those areas excluded from the project, but impacting on the project are also defined and included in the logical framework matrix – the key project document encapsulating the project deliverables and activities. In the PCM approach favored by many donor agencies, these are regarded as assumptions that need to hold true for the project to achieve its intended objectives. Needless to say, a substantial number of development projects are over-ambitious in scope and significant contextual factors outside the project's boundaries receive scant attention. Many development projects, for example, have had to be abandoned due to failure to adequately plan for the influence of forces beyond the boundaries of the project, but affecting project performance. This raises further questions about the need for strategic systems thinking capabilities in project scope management and project planning.

In the development context, a serious issue in project scope management concerns what is termed 'absorptive capacity' or, put differently, the lasting ability of the beneficiary to learn, take on or adequately apply the services, skills or products that are being delivered to them. All too often, absorptive capacity is given inadequate attention by project planners who are more obsessed by selling their home (donor) country products and services; in other cases project designs are motivated by the personal interests of the project design consultants. In principle, donor agencies' procedures emphasize clear separation of formulation and implementation project task responsibilities, but in practice conflicts of interest abound. In this regard, William Easterley, a former World Bank economist and critic of supply-driven or top-down imposed development aid, has made a distinction between project planners and project searchers. Self-interest and remote bureaucratic imperatives drive the former while on-the-ground searching for the most realistic and ideology-free solutions that make sense for the local communities for whom they are intended drives the latter. Project scope management is a key knowledge area, correctly emphasized in PMBOK, but requiring combinations of intuitive searching and understanding of local contexts and needs in order to develop a viable project plan.

4. Risk management or risk avoidance?

Some of the traps discussed thus far can be mitigated by comprehensive risk management, which identifies potential risks, analyzes their potential adverse impact, and then formulates strategies to manage the risks. PMBOK of course includes 'Project Risk Management' as a knowledge area with detailed task requirements for the planning process group; it is particularly strong on the need for both qualitative and quantitative risk analysis, including modeling techniques

– an undertaking seldom, if ever, conducted in development projects. From personal experience, development projects have frequently had to be postponed or canceled due to unforeseen natural disasters – a case in point being the earthquake in Haiti where pre-allocated project funds were unable to be used until eventually the program controlling the funding was itself terminated and the opportunity was lost. While situations such as this can be unpredictable and negative: “black swans” – in the terminology of Nassim Nicholas Taleb, risk assessors should reflect on what former US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, called “known unknowns.” Again from recent experience, a successful project was completed for nascent Civil Society Organizations in Syria. On the basis of positive results, a second follow-up project was accepted and launched in the period following the start of the Arab spring: however, contagion in Syria by that stage could have been regarded as a “known unknown” rather than an “unknown unknown” or black swan. The project had to be cancelled in the wake of escalating violence in the country, but there is also a case to be made for freezing the project rather than terminating it in the initial risk management assessment in the event of the country returning to stability.

Most of the typical risks confronting development project managers may not be as dramatic as those described above and require early project termination. Nevertheless, many long-term projects are faced with a variety of lesser problems that contribute to cost and time overruns. Risk management at the project inception, combined with regular ‘risk register updates’ as detailed in PMBOK, can mitigate risks through more effective monitoring of the external environment. In fact, the PMBOK approach to risk management can benefit development projects where risks tend to be given rather peripheral treatment. The reasons for this relate to the business imperatives of completing projects within the political economy of development aid, including the ‘billable hours’ system for contractors, and sometimes, a prevailing cynicism on the real worth of development projects in unresponsive environments, but with regular flows of donor funds available to launch new projects. It is argued that the PMBOK is relatively strong on rigorous risk management while most of the project management methodologies followed in international development projects are relatively weak. There is therefore an opportunity for PMI to engage more in development issues and, as an growing professional standards authority, encourage development professionals to be more aware of the need to identify, manage and monitor project risks instead of avoiding them.

5. Results-oriented project management or ‘ticking boxes’ project management?

Project time management is a core ‘nuts and bolts’ knowledge area for project planning process group. The steps and techniques involved in defining activities, sequencing activities, estimating activity resources and durations and developing and controlling schedules are fundamentals of project management and taught on most degree and diploma courses in this field. While development projects should originate in a thoroughgoing problem analysis that is then taken further into a project document (terms of reference), technical proposal, then finally an updated project document based on the situation on the ground at the start of the project. The latter document should provide a finalized activity schedule that also demonstrates the linkage of activities with the intended project results and

purpose in a logical framework matrix. In practice, however, time estimating and scheduling are poorly conducted in many development projects. A not uncommon abuse of project management principles is the use of 'slack' as billable project management time. Furthermore, 'expert judgment' as a tool and technique in developing the schedule is far from being expert. The frequent consequences are time delays and constant re-scheduling.

Monitoring of development projects is often criticized as being a perfunctory exercise and a matter of "ticking boxes" to ensure that activities are completed more or less according to plan. In this regard, a distinction can be made between results-oriented projects and activity-centered projects; the latter may nominally be concerned with results, but are more characterized by an obsession with 'ticking boxes': in Peter Drucker's terms, doing things right rather than doing the right things. The 'ticking boxes' culture of project reporting and monitoring also manifests in spending funds for short term achievements such as splashy events, 'junkets' and poorly designed study tours, rather than working to achieve lasting improvements and changes. The key issue is that rigorous application of the components of project time management actually promotes sustainable results. Increasing the numbers of development practitioners trained and certified in project management will surely help.

6. Correct project human resource management or MBTC (management by total confusion)?

Human resource management – entailing the development of a human resource plan, the acquisition of the project team, the development of the project team and the management of the project team – is another vital PMBOK knowledge area considered here to be of particular importance to development projects that provide services or technical assistance to developing countries. Concerning services projects, the selection of the project team is also a procurement issue because the evaluation of technical experts' CVs is in many cases the most important factor, given the biggest weighting, in the award of technical assistance projects. A crucial difference with most private sector projects is that the decisions about the selection of the project team are made before the launch of the project and on the strength of the team members' technical qualifications. In the past, a number of project disasters linked to questionable CVs resulted in tightening of rules and requirements requiring evidence of past project experience. However, the 'rules of the game' in the development world have allowed the formation of insiders groups in the different donor systems with what on the surface looks to be the right specific project experience, and some difficulty in outsiders breaking in even if they have relevant experience. More recently, donors have tried to introduce greater fairness by relaxing rules of origin, for example the EC no longer requires consultants on EU-funded projects to be only EU nationals and considers a category of 'junior expert'.

The award of development project tenders for services provided to developing countries strongly emphasizes technical expertise, country-specific experience and academic qualifications, which do not usually include specific training in project management through a recognized institution such as PMI. Given that technical experts manage many development projects who, while being skilled

experts in their fields, frequently do not possess the suite of skills required for effective project management – in effect the PMBOK knowledge areas. This can create situations of total confusion in projects; especially concerning poor project time and cost management; poor communication with stakeholders; and, dysfunctional management and personal relations between project team members.¹ The total confusion is also evident in the project management hierarchy, particularly in the relations between the project manager and responsible manager on the side of the contractor (tender winner). There are very limited possibilities for team building and training since the project manager and project team members were pre-selected on the basis of the tender and hence assumed to be the most competent experts. On the side of donor agencies, the reform needed is recognition of project management qualifications, certification and experience.

Project Cycle Management remains the standard methodological approach in the identification, formulation and implementation of development projects and is used in various forms by most of the main donor agencies. As a structured requirement for project managers, it is adequate provided that the project manager knows how to use the tool and has been trained – key human resource management processes. Typical PCM courses constitute 3 to 5 day formal classroom training, sometimes using outdated and traditional materials: for example, the European Commission's PCM Handbook is over 10 years old and in serious need of revision and updating. Encouragingly, training specialists have developed some innovative new training tools using the latest technology – described in case studies in this paper – that provide some alternatives to busy project managers having to find the time to invest in attendance of formal and traditionally run training programs. The PMI on its part has successfully harnessed the electronic learning environment, but needs to upgrade training curriculum that incorporates development issues and challenges will strengthen the reform process and contribute to the improved management of development projects.

7. Closing projects or abandoning projects?

Many development projects are characterized by shambolic closures: PCM pays little attention to closing phase of a project. Completion is understood as the final stage of implementation and attention is mostly focused on the activities aimed at closing procurements; it is first and foremost a bureaucratic activity. The PMBOK considers finishing project as a stage in itself and frames it with a closing process group aimed at:

- Obtaining acceptance by the customer or sponsor;
- Conducting post-project or phase-end review;
- Recording impacts of tailoring to any process;
- Documenting lessons learned;
- Applying appropriate updates to organizational process assets;
- Archiving all relevant project documents in the Project Management Information System to be used as historical data;
- Closing out procurements.

¹ Acknowledgment to Dr. S. Foster for insights on MBTC

According to the PMBOK approach, finishing projects involves as knowledge areas 'Project Integration Management' and 'Project Procurement Management'. One of the most serious problems faced by development projects is the absence of institutional memory. Designs, manuals, processes, procedures, technical solutions, handbooks, tend to disappear once the project management unit is dismantled. It is not unusual that a couple of years later the same project, with the same beneficiary is repeated with a different title. Over and over again, millions are spent repeating, sometimes, the same mistakes with little attention to learning from best practices. The institutional knowledge bases of the partner organizations are not built and strengthened. Donor organizations do not keep a central database of all the technical deliverables prepared in the tens of thousands of projects financed worldwide. The PMBOK provides a solid process group to deal with the critical stage of finishing a project (or a phase). The aim is to keep track of lessons learned and safeguard the institutional knowledge base deemed necessary to create an institutional (technical) memory. Development projects would substantially benefit from such an approach that strengthens the processes aimed at closing a project.

8. Ethical project procurement management or “tenderpreneurship”?

The PMBOK knowledge area number 12 is 'project procurement management' – an important task for all project process groups from project planning stages to project closure. Donor agency procurement rules and procedures are to all intents and purposes strict and on the surface there would appear to be little opportunity for corruption and irregularities. Yet tender awards are frequently questioned and whistleblowers have brought some highly irregular procurement decisions to the fore. The term “tenderpreneurship” is employed used to describe a new class of insiders who have used political contacts and family connections to corruptly benefit from state tenders on both sides of the procurement process. “Tenderpreneurs” are of course are neither, real entrepreneurs nor real project managers and development specialists. The problem with tenders launched under such dubious circumstances is that they run a high risk of failure. If a tender is rigged, it is unlikely that the best product or service will win and public funds are wasted. The PMBOK provides a systematic approach to procurement management within a project and is also an essential knowledge area for project managers. It is particularly important for long-term projects, infrastructural development projects and what are called 'programmes' by donor agencies – or long term sectoral projects that usually in turn launch sub-projects. Procurement management also entails upholding ethical procedures and maintaining a correct procedural approach that aims to assure the best quality and value for money.

The potential of electronic learning environments

The typical development project manager is an independent professional with a CV containing a variety of experiences in a diverse number of developing countries. He or she is usually academically well qualified with at least a Masters degree in a relevant management discipline. Project management skills, however, have been acquired 'on the hoof' and can be rudimentary or entirely absent. Generally, these project managers move from one project to the next with little incentive or time to invest in training. This is

even more prevalent in the case of the freelance project professional driven by financial motives and assumed by the contractor to be fully competent. Contractors, on their part, also do not have incentives to train their staff and generally consider that contracts with independent project professionals can be structured in such a way that, in case of poor performance, dismissal and replacement can be easily handled. In this regard, however, some recent cases where contractors' dismissals of 'independent' project managers have been successfully challenged in courts only serves to highlight the need for more effective human resource management, including in-service training. The use of electronic learning environments gets around the problems of time and availability for project management skills training. Furthermore, as illustrated by two case studies below, the e-learning option provides the added value of a self-paced and competency-based method that enables the project management trainee to progressively build up learning and skills. The use of e-learning and blended learning is not entirely new to the world of international development: for instance, the WWF as a case in point best practice, has an online course on coaching skills available for all managers in the organization. The problem of incentives is more complex and would require at the very least stronger emphasis on the part of donor agencies for project management certification.

Case Study (1) ***iTunes U Course***

iTunes U is home to more than 500,000 free lectures, videos, books, and other resources on thousands of subjects. Among the hundreds of colleges, universities, and elementary and high schools on iTunes U, can be found [Stanford](#), [Yale](#), [MIT](#), [Oxford](#), and [UC Berkeley](#). With iTunes U, it's easy to create your own custom courses for iPad and teach them in your classroom. And the iTunes U app puts all the materials you create for your course—syllabus, videos, apps, books, class assignments, and more—all in one place. Right in the app, students can play video or audio lectures, read books, and view presentations. They can also see a list of course assignments, then check them off as they're completed. And when you create a new post, students receive a push notification. PC users can also have access to the contents through iTunes. MsM developed a short-term Project Cycle Methodology course that, besides an iBook, also uses the iTunes U app as a way to distribute content to the participants. The PCM iTunes U app makes available to the students the outline of all sessions, comprising the materials used (slides, relevant chapters of the iBook, assignments, short-movies etc). All the material can be downloaded to the iPhone or iPad and be accessible in a question of seconds. It's a new and fun way to learn specifically useful for professionals with limited time to invest in formal training.

Case Study (2) ***iBook on Project Cycle Methodology***

MsM developed a short-term PCM course based on an iBook (for iPad). The app condenses and updates the PCM approach using interactive materials from slides to short-movies, from self-assessment questionnaires to assignments. The European Commission has used the same PCM handbook for more than 10 years now. The language is outdated and the structure is not self-learning friendly. A draft version of the iBook on PCM was made available at 50 iTunes stores worldwide for free, but without any sort of marketing effort whatsoever. In less than 6 months, 1000 downloads were made in more than 50 countries worldwide. This means that everyday project managers around the world are searching on their iPads and iPhones for technical literature on PCM. Tablets are powerful self-learning tools (an interesting experiment is being conducted by the One Laptop per Child organization led by Nicolas Negroponte in two remote Ethiopian villages – simply dropping off tablets with pre-loaded programs and seeing what happens. After months, children are charging the tablets – using solar energy - on a regular basis, manage to customize the device, even hacking it and, more important, learning English and how to write by themselves). Development professionals are eager to learn using new channels and new platforms. Whether you call it a death, decline, or decimation, the PC and all its variants are quickly succumbing to the rising popularity of tablets. The latest indication of this ongoing trend is the decline in laptop PCs. Worldwide shipments of touch-based tablets in 2014 are expected to more than double that of laptops at 364 million, as well as ultra-slim PCs at 177 million. The use of iBooks or apps as self-learning tools for development professionals can be a solution to improve project management skills amongst a group with little time to invest in training courses.

The above cases have highlighted the enhanced opportunities provided by new technologies that can be convenient as well as fun and stimulating. Yet, development practitioners obviously still need to be mindful of the limitations encountered in poor and underdeveloped regions of the world. While mobile phone technology has resulted in some dramatic progress in the developing world, including in education, new technology as described above remains out of reach to many and connectivity is a continuing problem in a number of regions. A decreasing, but nonetheless still significant number of development project managers are faced with constraints of working in remote areas without internet access. In addition, every development professional should be concerned with the transfer of skills and this would include project management skills. The case studies described below combine e-learning with traditional classroom-based instructional design: the first case entailed project management skills training for Regional Economic Communities in Africa and the Caribbean with a difference: the trainers combined traditional classroom training inputs with 'self-learning by doing' in a practical blended learning format using distance learning as and where appropriate. The key point is that the training design, although introducing new elements, was also familiar and possible within the constraints of having to work in some difficult locations. Every effort was made to ensure that the training was both competency-based and empowering. The second case involved the successful introduction of a distance education component to a traditionally taught project management course at the Maastricht School of Management in a manner that was appealing to busy development professionals. As the use of technology in learning becomes easier and more affordable in the developing world, blended learning approaches can lean more towards new technologies.

Case Study (3)
Strengthening of ACP Regional Economic Communities' project design and project management skills

Trade.Com was a facility established by the EC to provide and coordinate trade-related technical assistance to ACP countries. One of the key intervention areas of Trade.Com was to build the capacity of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the cooperation with the European Union. In fact, RECs were facing a dramatic challenge. The end of 10th EDF was approaching fast and the physical and financial execution of the Regional Indicative Programs (RIPs) was incredible low. Thus a capacity building exercise oriented to strength the RECs staff project management skills was jointly designed with Trade.Com and implemented by the consulting company, CESOCI. SADC, COMESA, CARICOM, OECS, CEMAC, CEDEAO, ECOWAS, IGAD, EAC, African Union were involved in the project. The RECs decided to use the capacity building program as a tool to prepare Project Identification Fiches that were later be submitted to the European Union Delegation for further assessment by the EC's Quality Support Group (QSG). This was a strategy to boost the weak implementation of the RIPs. The training approach was based in teaching blocks organized around learning objectives. A hands-on approach was critical in to sharing knowledge on how to design projects according to the EC aid delivery methods. The program involved 6 Teaching Blocks, each with specific Intended Learning Objectives. Each Teaching Block involved a practical exercise that would later become a piece of the final outcome of the training Program: a **Draft Project Identification Fiche**. The Training Program covered seven full working days. By the end of the program several PIFs involving tens of millions of EUROS were approved by the QSG and will result in the launch of several projects. This blended learning-by-doing approach strengthened participation and ownership with a practical component conducted on a distance basis. RECs staff not only strengthened their project management skills but also had the opportunity to practice the recently acquired competencies on the design of real projects. Trainers acted also as facilitators of the project design activities – not only in formal classroom setting, the RECs being, nonetheless, always the ones steering the all process leading to the design of a new project. The cost of the capacity building exercise was substantially lower compared to the cost of hiring experts to identify and formulate each of the approved projects.

Case Study (4)
Project and Development Management Executive Training Program at the Maastricht School of Management (MSM)

MSM has been running a 3-week course Project Identification, Development and Management (PDM) for a number of years. The course is very popular amongst development practitioners and is usually fully subscribed. In 2012, MSM implemented a blended learning format for the existing PDM course with part of the education done via distance education while the overall content and learning objectives of the programs remained unchanged. The 2012 program consisted of a distance education module offered in the Moodle platform, a 2-week program in Maastricht, and after-course work with coaching via skype. A main element of the 2012 PDM course was the so-called "Application & Integration Assignment", where participants were asked to apply the concepts and tools to their own projects, in this way making the course more practical and applied.

This assignment was a "red thread" throughout the program, where participants were asked to start applying the tools and concepts to their own project at home – before, during and after the course in Maastricht. The different modules of the program provided the participants with the "Building blocks" for the course. Coaching was made available, to assist participants in applying the concepts and tools of the course to their own projects. After the program ended in Maastricht, participants were asked to work on their projects and within 4 weeks, send their completed assignments to MSM. These assignments were then reviewed by a team of coaches, who contacted the participant – mainly via skype or email - with their comments. Participants then had the chance to revise their work. The (innovative) method of the course worked very well, and seemed to have didactical advantages that the participants already are familiar with the course, the topics and have worked with (part of) the methodology, and can actually apply the learnings to their projects at home, with the opportunity to consult their colleagues. This makes the final effect of learnings much bigger than in traditional classroom only based courses.

Concluding remarks

This paper has traversed some common problems in the management of donor-funded development projects. The central argument is that, in contrast to technical expertise and country-specific knowledge, project management skills are lacking and given inadequate attention in the award of tenders by the multilateral and bilateral donor agencies that fund development projects. This systemic weakness, working at the level of donor organizations, consulting companies and project managers themselves, aggravates bad practices and adds to the prospects of project failures: change is needed at all these levels. The PMI has rapidly emerged as the professional industry standard setter with associated certification and training, but has not in large measure permeated the global system of donor-funded development projects. Also, notwithstanding the promising initiatives discussed in this paper, Higher Education and Training Institutions are peripherally involved and also need to strengthen their own curriculum and quality standards in the project management field. In part, this situation is due to a perceived lack of attention to development-specific variations in project design and implementation and the existence of arguably more complex project hierarchies and stakeholder systems in developing countries. While the principles, tools and techniques of project management do not differ that much in different industries and systems, there are nevertheless important considerations in development management that would warrant modifications, adjustments in training curriculum. Organizations engaged in development project management and multilateral as well as bilateral donor agencies

need to focus to a much greater extent on effective project management and project management skills training than has been the case up until now. The enhanced use of electronic learning environments will greatly facilitate this endeavor.