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EMBEDDING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES INTO PROJECT MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM TWO KAZAKHSTANI COMPANIES

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This article presents the results of an empirical study on the integration of sustainable development principles into project management practices within two Kazakhstani companies of different scales. Using qualitative methods such as case study analysis, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and focus groups, the research identifies key barriers and success factors in embedding sustainability into project management. A comparative case analysis between Company 1 (a large telecommunications provider) and Company 2 (a medium-sized services firm) highlights differences in approaches due to organizational size and resource availability. Findings show that while both companies recognize the strategic importance of sustainability, their implementation practices vary significantly. Based on the results, recommendations are proposed to strengthen sustainable project management practices in Kazakhstan.

Key words: sustainable development, project management, sustainable project management, empirical research, sustainability integration.

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has increasingly influenced various industries and disciplines, including project management. As global environmental challenges, social inequality, and economic volatility persist, integrating sustainability into project operations has become an essential concern for contemporary organizations. Project management, traditionally concerned with the "iron triangle" of time, cost, and scope, now faces additional dimensions demanding attention, including environmental responsibility, social equity, and long-term economic resilience.

Kazakhstan, undergoing dynamic economic development and striving toward global sustainability benchmarks, offers a relevant context for examining how sustainable development principles are incorporated into project management

practices. Given the country's commitment to green economy initiatives and international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), understanding the realities of sustainability integration at the project level is both timely and critical.

This research explores the practical realities of embedding sustainability principles in project management processes within two organizations operating under different resource constraints and strategic orientations. Through empirical inquiry, it aims to reveal the successes, barriers, and prospects associated with sustainable project management in Kazakhstan.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration of sustainability principles into project management practices. A qualitative research design was selected to capture the complex organizational behaviors, processes, and perceptions involved in this integration.

The data collection was conducted in two phases. Initially, a detailed review of academic and industry literature was performed to build a theoretical foundation. Frameworks such as the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1997), Sustainable Project Management (SPM) (Gareis, 2010), and the PRiSM methodology developed by GPM Global were critically analyzed. Furthermore, key documents such as ISO 21500:2021 and the "Concept for Transition to a Green Economy" in Kazakhstan were examined to provide regulatory and strategic context.

Subsequently, empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with project managers, sustainability officers, senior executives, and consultants from two selected organizations: Company 1, a large telecommunications enterprise, and Company 2, a medium-sized service company. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were supplemented by the analysis of internal documents, such as sustainability reports, project plans, and monitoring frameworks. Focus group discussions with project team members further enriched the understanding of collective experiences and organizational dynamics regarding sustainability practices. Data triangulation was systematically applied to enhance the reliability and depth of the research findings.

Results and Discussion

The research findings demonstrate that the approach to sustainability integration varies significantly between the two studied companies, influenced largely by organizational size, strategic priorities, and resource availability.

Company 1, benefiting from its scale, demonstrated a more structured and formalized approach to sustainable project management. Sustainability objectives were explicitly incorporated into strategic planning and project execution processes. Dedicated departments, specialized sustainability officers, and allocated budgets for sustainability initiatives were standard practices. Moreover, Company 1 developed key performance indicators (KPIs) that included environmental and social metrics,

aiming to ensure measurable outcomes in their projects. Nevertheless, despite these formal mechanisms, there remained a gap in uniformly embedding sustainability across all projects, with certain initiatives receiving greater attention due to external regulatory pressures or client demands rather than an intrinsic organizational commitment.

In contrast, Company 2 adopted a more flexible but less formal approach. With fewer resources at its disposal, Company 2 relied heavily on the innovation and motivation of individual project teams to integrate sustainability into their operations. Sustainability initiatives were more ad hoc, often driven by personal leadership from project managers rather than systematic organizational policies. While this adaptive approach allowed for the implementation of creative solutions, it also meant that sustainability practices were inconsistently applied and poorly documented. The lack of standardized sustainability reporting and monitoring mechanisms posed challenges in measuring long-term impacts and replicating successful practices across different projects.

Both companies faced similar challenges in stakeholder engagement. While recognizing the importance of involving a diverse range of stakeholders, efforts were often reactive rather than proactive. In many cases, stakeholder engagement occurred primarily in response to emerging risks or external requirements rather than being integrated as a continuous, strategic process throughout the project lifecycle.

The comparative analysis highlights that larger organizations are better positioned to institutionalize sustainable practices due to greater resource availability and formalized governance structures. However, medium-sized enterprises demonstrate notable agility and the potential for innovative practices, though they require targeted support to overcome structural and resource-related barriers.

The research further revealed that the absence of systematic sustainability reporting mechanisms in both companies hampers transparency and accountability. Without standardized reporting aligned with international frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the SDGs, it remains difficult for organizations to accurately assess their sustainability performance and communicate their achievements to stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the successful integration of sustainable development principles into project management requires a comprehensive strategic approach, consistent resource allocation, and an organizational culture that prioritizes sustainability as a core value rather than an external requirement.

For large organizations, the challenge lies in ensuring that formalized sustainability frameworks are applied uniformly across all projects, rather than selectively. For medium-sized enterprises, the focus should be on institutionalizing flexible yet standardized sustainability practices that can be scaled and replicated without overwhelming available resources.

Enhanced stakeholder engagement, robust sustainability reporting, and continuous training and development of project management staff emerge as critical enablers for advancing sustainable project management practices.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that organizations develop integrated sustainability strategies that are aligned with project governance frameworks from the outset. Sustainability KPIs should be incorporated into project planning and execution processes and monitored regularly. Investment in capacity building for project management teams should be prioritized to equip staff with the necessary knowledge and skills for sustainability integration. Finally, organizations should adopt internationally recognized sustainability reporting standards to ensure transparency, comparability, and credibility in their sustainability performance communication.

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ЖОБАНЫ БАСҚАРУҒА ТҰРАҚТЫ ДАМУ ПРИНЦИПТЕРІН ЕНГІЗУ: ЕКІ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ КОМПАНИЯНЫҢ ДӘЛЕЛДЕРІ

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Бұл мақалада әртүрлі ауқымдағы екі қазақстандық компанияның жобаларын басқару тәжірибесіне тұрақты даму қағидаттарын біріктіру бойынша эмпирикалық зерттеу нәтижелері берілген. Жағдайларды талдау, жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттар, құжаттарды талдау және фокус-топтар сияқты сапалы әдістерді пайдалана отырып, зерттеу жобаны басқаруға тұрақтылықты енгізудегі негізгі кедергілер мен сәттілік факторларын анықтайды. 1-ші компания (ірі телекоммуникация провайдері) мен 2-ші компания (орташа қызмет көрсететін фирма) арасындағы салыстырмалы жағдайды талдау ұйымдық өлшемге және ресурстардың қолжетімділігіне байланысты тәсілдердегі айырмашылықтарды көрсетеді. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, екі компания да тұрақтылықтың стратегиялық маңыздылығын мойындағанымен, оларды іске асыру тәжірибесі айтарлықтай

ерекшеленеді. Нәтижелер негізінде Қазақстанда жобаларды басқарудың тұрақты тәжірибесін нығайту бойынша ұсыныстар ұсынылады.

Кілт сөздері: тұрақты даму, жобаларды басқару, тұрақты жобаны басқару, эмпирикалық зерттеулер, тұрақтылықты интеграциялау.

ВНЕДРЕНИЕ ПРИНЦИПОВ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ В УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ПРОЕКТАМИ: ДАННЫЕ ДВУХ КАЗАХСТАНСКИХ КОМПАНИЙ

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В данной статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования по интеграции принципов устойчивого развития в практику управления проектами в двух казахстанских компаниях разного организационного масштаба. В исследовании использовались качественные методы, включая анализ кейсов, полуструктурированные интервью, обзор документов и обсуждения в фокус-группах, для изучения глубины интеграции устойчивости. Сравнительный анализ кейсов между Компанией 1 (крупная телекоммуникационная компания) и Компанией 2 (средняя сервисная компания) иллюстрирует значительное влияние размера организации, ресурсного потенциала и стратегических приоритетов на принятие и операционализацию практики устойчивого управления проектами. На основе собранных данных определяются ключевые проблемы и факторы успеха, что приводит к практическим рекомендациям для организаций, стремящихся улучшить свои стратегии устойчивого развития в контексте управления проектами.

Ключевые слова: устойчивое развитие, управление проектами, устойчивое управление проектами, эмпирические исследования, интеграция устойчивого развития.