



CENTERIS – International Conference on ENTERprise Information Systems / ProjMAN – International Conference on Project MANagement / HCist – International Conference on Health and Social Care Information Systems and Technologies 2022

What factors contributes to success in an event project? A case study of the learning experiences of students in a Project Management course.

Hilde Nordahl-Pedersen* ^a, Kari Heggholmen ^b

^aHilde Nordahl-Pedersen, School of Business and Economics, The Arctic University of Norway, Havnegata 5, 9480 Harstad, Norway.

^bKari Heggholmen, Institute of Economics and Business Administration, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Inndalsveien 28, 5063 Bergen, Norway.

Abstract

As part of the 2022 Norwegian Skiing Championship, the students at Harstad Business School, UiT the Arctic University of Norway, conducted a successful project event called ‘Sidetrack’ to provide fun and enjoyment for the public and the participants. Our study is based on qualitative interviews with eight students to reveal their learning experiences in relation to factors that contributes to the ‘Sidetrack’ project event being a success. The findings show that in the initial phase of the project it’s important to create support and commitment to the project idea. The implementation of well-planned idea and concept workshop and a report from the process, formed the basis for the activities to take place and are key factors for the success of the ‘Sidetrack’ project event. A further important success factor is the establishment of a clearly defined project organization with a project manager, deputy manager and group leaders for each area of work, where group members can choose tasks and roles based on their experience, knowledge, and skills. The results of the ‘Sidetrack’ project are dependent on factors like good infrastructure that enables effective information and communication flow and regular meetings for status reports, reflection, learning and further progress within and between project groups, related to a well thought out project plan. Common goals and good information, communication and interaction among the project members are factors that created committed, high-performing teams, which also contributed to the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s success.

© 2023 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>)

Peer-review under responsibility of the scientific committee of the CENTERIS – International Conference on ENTERprise Information Systems / ProjMAN - International Conference on Project MANagement / HCist - International Conference on Health and Social Care Information Systems and Technologies 2022

Keywords: Project Event; Success Factors; Idea and Concept Workshop; High Performing Team

1 Introduction

“The goal of the ‘Sidetrack’ project was to create a celebration event and to lift the experience for families and children to a new level. And as far as I can judge, they ought to get top marks for their project!”. Those words were part of the closing speech of the 2022 Norwegian Skiing Championship in Harstad (NM 2022), given by Erik Røste, President of the Norwegian Skiing Federation. As part of this year’s championship, students of project management at Harstad Business School, UiT the Arctic University of Norway held a “side” project event to provide fun and enjoyment for both public and participants. The event included various competitions and shows as well as hiking trails with engaging cultural experiences for children and adults. The

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* Hilde.Nordahl-Pedersen@uit.no

project event was named ‘Sidetrack’, and the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project constituted the students’ final exam in their course. The official Norwegian Skiing Championship (NM) takes place every year in a different part of Norway. Skiers vie for medals in cross-country skiing, ski jumping and combined cross-country and jumping, and the event also offers cultural and nature-based experiences. Implementation of the main event NM-2022 in Harstad was a success. This article will not focus this main event, but only analyze the project event ‘Sidetrack’.

The event industry is popular and has expanded over the past 30 years in Norway and internationally [1]. Events can be defined as planned, spatial-temporal phenomena, involving interactions between the setting, people, and management system, which include design elements and the programme [2]. Shenhar and Dvir [3] argue that project efficiency is one of the main criteria to assess project success. The students implemented the Sidetrack event in a very efficient manner; the activities were performed in the right place at the right time and were well within the budget. In his closing speech for the NM 2022 event, the president emphasized that the students’ goal of creating an NM celebration event with new experiences for families and children had been achieved, and that they deserved top marks for their implementation of the event. That was the best feedback the students could receive from a client, i.e., that the outcomes were achieved with the desired quality and impact on the customer, and in line with requirements for project efficiency [3]. This article explains which factors the students experienced contributed to the ‘Sidetrack’ project event being a success. Success factors in projects can be defined as those elements that can increase the probability of success [4]. We have focused the factors that the students experienced as important for the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s results and highlight the following research questions; Which factors in the initial, creative idea and concept workshop phases have significance for the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s result? Which factors are important for the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s result in the planning and implementation phase?

2 Theoretical approach

To assess whether a project is a success, several key criteria can be used, such as the five main criteria in Shenhar and Dvir’s [3] model: 1. *Project efficiency*, which assesses implementation in relation to deadlines, budget and performance targets (i.e., quality of project deliverables), as well as efficient use of project methodology, management and organization. 2. *Impact on the customer*, which assesses the end user’s experience of the delivery. 3. *Impact on the team*, which deals with the team members’ experiential learning at both individual and team levels in order to develop their core skills and enhance their ability to carry out future projects [5]. This dimension also includes learning about the project manager function, project implementation and project team management. 4. *Outcomes and value creation* deal with the measurable outcomes of the project targets and whether the project deliveries can provide future value creation for the project owner/client. 5. *Innovation and development* concerns whether the project has tested ideas that can lead to new products, services, technology, core skills and learning and thus strengthen an organization’s competitiveness in the market.

Working in projects is widely used as a working method, accounting for value creation in both public and private businesses, by allowing possibility for creativity, flexibility, and efficiency [5]. Project management skills are therefore of great importance, and in the case of event projects, one must also have knowledge of theories and models that can be used as tools in the various phases of the process. In the *initial phase* of a project, the client/owner must clearly communicate the basis for initiating the project, explaining why there is a need for it, the objectives to be achieved and the basis for decisions, which may be crucial for the project members’ motivation and support and thus the success of the project [6]. In event projects, it is particularly important to conduct a good *idea workshop and concept workshop*, because these form the basis for the activities to be performed in the project event itself [1]. An idea workshop must be creative and generate ideas, which presupposes a positive, friendly, playful and humorous atmosphere and a “yes, and” attitude to the suggestions and ideas that emerge [7]. Creativity can be defined as being in a creative process, where something new is created which adds real value to the end users [7]. Through conscious organization and use of methodology, the project manager of the workshop can enable creative collaboration between project members with different skills and experience, leading to problem solving, innovation and development. Creative methodology can guide the participants away from their familiar ways of thinking, helping them to think outside the box and generate new ideas [7]. Various creative methods can be used to generate ideas, such as the *gallery method/brainwriting*, the *flip chart method* [8], the *brainwriting pool* [7], the *talking stick* [9], and the *world café* [10]. After many ideas have been generated in this way, the best ones can be selected to continue to work on; here, it is an advantage if the ideas are at the same level of skill and abstraction. Ideas may be selected based on certain assessment criteria, which may vary with the objective. Several methods can be used to select ideas, such as “scoring choices”, “barometer ranking”, the “marker method” and the “coloured dot method” [7]. The ideas chosen as the best ones can then be further processed in a concept workshop. *Storyboarding* is a useful method to work on ideas. The ideas can be visualized through simple drawings of the entire course of action, as in a cartoon, with close-ups and more general pictures, which can provide new insight and improve understanding of the problem [7]. A *pin-up wall* can also be created, where each concept or project has its own area of the wall where the project material is displayed. The pin up wall with pictures, maps, overviews, and objects provides useful artefacts for communicating ideas among members of a project team [11]. Project meetings in the team or with customers to discuss progress, ideas and decisions can often take place in this setting, which serves as the project team’s common memory, by providing a general view of all the ideas and a timeline showing their development and progress and what the team needs to focus on going forward [11]. When generating ideas, it can be useful to zoom out, where you move from focusing details and individual parts to see overall pictures and connections [11]. In this study

it's interesting to highlight which factors in the initial, creative idea and concept workshop phases that have significance for the result of the 'Sidetrack' project.

In the *detailing phase*, the project organization must be established, with a division of responsibilities and tasks. In the *implementation phase*, the project will be implemented in line with the goals and activities in the project plan [6]. A good planning process can be decisive for a project's result, where the purpose of the project, goals, structure, and management tools must be clarified, and rules of interaction for the team must be established [6].

As a minimum, the project organization must include a project manager, project team and project owner. Project work is complex and according to recent research the project manager ought to emphasize processes that can contribute to upgrade the skills of the team members, in order to achieve goals [12]. Effective interaction and coordination require a clear meeting structure and culture; some projects have a coordinator to improve communication and information flow. A new form of organization that has received increasing attention in recent years is "heterarchy", where members take turns to lead the project. What is most important is the task to be solved, and any member with the necessary expertise and information can exercise leadership [13]. This form of internal management structure can increase creativity and lead to innovative solutions [6].

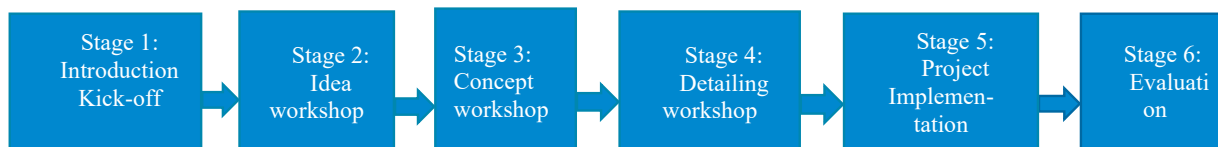
A project team is a group of people with a common goal and understanding of what is expected of them. There are certain criteria for membership of the team, which is time-limited [12]-[14]. A well-functioning project team can cooperate, integrate the skills of its members, coordinate activities, adapt to each other and improvise [15]-[16]. Further, it must communicate effectively and openly, and the members must be willing to learn from one another [17]. High-performing project teams are motivated and set high goals that make the team work more effectively [18]. Research shows that in addition to goals defined by the client, project teams should also be encouraged to set their own targets, as this will further enhance their motivation and performance [18]. A project team may have both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated members. Extrinsic motivation is based on external rewards, such as praise, money, promotion, but not the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation is based on inner rewards such as enjoyment, interest, and work satisfaction [19]. Extrinsic motivation can be an important force for performing simple tasks where quantity is the key factor [19]. However, for tasks that require quality, creativity, understanding, learning and development, intrinsic motivation is highly important [19]. One element of motivation is self-efficacy; here, the project members have faith in their ability to achieve the project's short- and long-term goals through effective cooperation and communication [20]. Research shows that a team's self-efficacy is an excellent indicator of its effectiveness [21], which can be crucial for project success [12]. It is important to learn lessons from project work and its various phases [6]. Based on an experiential approach, learning can take place through reflection and shared knowledge, which leads to changes in mindset and behaviour [22]-[23]-[24]-[25]-[26]-[27]-[28]. It will be interesting to analyze which factors in the planning and implementation phase that was significant for the result of the 'Sidetrack' project.

3 Methodology

This case study is based on qualitative interviews with eight students who completed the practical project management course at Harstad Business School, UiT The Arctic University of Tromsø, in the spring of 2022. Practical project management is a part-time course with adult students from both private and public sector.

The participants were a random sample [29] from a cohort of 20 students. Before the interviews, both authors observed the students' implementation of their NM event, which provided insight into the content and organization of the project, the interaction between the students and the experience of the public. We used an interview guide, which was related to the various phases of the project. The one- to two-hour interviews took place in an office and were audio recorded with the participants' consent. One of the authors had taught classes related to the creative idea and concept workshops, and therefore mainly acted as an observer during the interviews, while the other author was the main interviewer. This was a conscious choice to reduce possible influence from the teacher, and we found that the students gave honest answers to our questions. The transcribed material was read many times, and we created meaning condensations around key topics related to our research questions [30]. We both made a conscious attempt to prevent our pre-understanding, after many years of experience as teachers, examiners and supervisors in project management, from affecting our analysis of the data [29].

The project management course provides students with in-depth knowledge of how various project tools can be used to start, plan, implement and end a project. [Figure 1](#) shows the model of the course syllabus, which is based on Pettersen's [31] main principles of teaching methodology for project work, and a milestone approach with decision gates.

Figure 1: Model of the course syllabus of Practical Project Work

In stage 1 there was a presentation of the project that the students would conduct, including the visions and general ideas that form the basis of the project. The students were presented with NM 2022 as the setting for their project by the project manager of the NM in Harstad in 2022 (the client). *In stage 2* an idea workshop was held at the university's creative learning centre, including instruction in the use of creative methodology for idea development and subsequent generation of ideas for the content of the project. Examples of creative methods used were the gallery method, the flip chart method, the idea bank, the world café, the talking stick and "twisting methods" [7]. The best ideas were selected based on the client's selection criteria: 1) attracting the public, 2) fun and enjoyment for public and participants, 3) feasible regardless of the COVID-19 situation by using the "scoring choices" method [7]. *In stage 3* a concept workshop was held in the creative learning centre at UiT, campus Harstad. Here, the best ideas from stage 2 were processed, developed, and linked to certain concepts. The methods used were storyboarding, zooming out, prototyping and visualizing ideas through roleplay, good stories, etc. [7]. The concepts selected were presented to the client in an interim evaluation. The client explained which of the concepts should be pursued further, which constituted the first milestone and portfolio submission for the students. *In stage 4* a detailing workshop was conducted, where the concepts selected were accommodated to feasible production and implementation, based on the described aims and outcomes. An action plan was prepared for who does what, based on information provided in previous courses on project management and organization [6]-[31]. The students chose a project leader and a deputy and divided up into different groups, each with its own area of responsibility. They wrote a project plan that included the project organization, objectives, and implementation, and drew up rules for interaction in the groups. *In stage 5* the project was implemented based on the written project plan and the attitude that all group members were jointly responsible for the result [31]. Teachers of project work were available for advice and guidance, and the implementation of the project event constituted the second milestone and portfolio submission. *In stage 6* the project with its various phases was evaluated against goals and results, which was the third portfolio submission. The final assessment in the course constituted the third milestone; it was based on the three portfolio submissions and the grades awarded were pass or fail.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Which factors in the initial, creative idea and concept workshop phases have significance for the 'Sidetrack' project's result?

A key finding is that an important success factor in the initial phase is to create support and enthusiasm for the project idea. The findings show that all those involved were inspired and motivated, and found the project idea to be exciting, challenging, and innovative. Informant 3 said: "I was really keen on the idea, I thought it looked very exciting and interesting". Informant 6 pointed out: "It was exciting but frightening at the same time. Exciting because it's a national event and lots of well-known people are involved. There were high expectations, but it was also frightening because we've never done anything like that before. And there's a COVID-19 situation in the world, and there was some doubt about whether the project could be carried out". Another important finding is that well-planned idea and concept workshops, followed by a written report available to all project members, are a key success factor for the implementation of an event project. The findings also show that idea and concept workshops are key settings for creating a good feeling and atmosphere in the entire project team, with a strong focus on humour, play, laughter, trust and a positive attitude to each other's ideas and suggestions. Informant 2 explained: "You don't have time to be busy in the start-up phase. You MUST plan, that's absolutely vital. (...) Using creative methods... that's brilliant..., getting everyone involved, engaging the whole lot, right from the start, so that everyone gets a feeling of ownership". The students found that the work they did during the idea and concept workshops formed a crucial basis for the activities to be performed later during the project event itself. Informant 5 said: "Everything that came out of the one or two hundred ideas was used... we worked on it so it would fit our activity trail. (...) All the types of methodologies pointed us towards so many different ways of thinking... and helped to bring out so many different ideas that you could twist and adapt based on the methodology you used. (...) So that was fantastic". Informant 5 stressed that the flip chart method with different roles was particularly useful for eliciting ideas from various perspectives, and made the students laugh. Informant 4 said that the students' commitment was at its peak during the idea development phase. "That was maybe the phase we liked the most. You can come up with so many different things... there are no limits to what you can... imagine. And then of course actually doing what you've been thinking about like crazy, and then seeing afterwards that it turned out great... because of it [the idea development phase]". Informant 2 described the idea- and concept workshops as follows: "Well, it was actually the best thing I've ever done in my

education. It was just incredibly brilliant! I was sorry when it was over, because what I'm best at is ideas, at work too. (...)". Informant 6 said about the workshops: "I reckon they was very good. My experience was that it's helped me not only in my education, but also in my work." Informant 3 felt that the storyboarding method was very useful "(...) because it kind of gave us a visual impression of how to think about things. And then we also learnt to listen, because that's good training as well... with the talking stick method. But the one that taught me a lot, the one I remember from the first session, that was 'Yes, and', I thought that was very nice". The students found that the use of different creative methods generated a wide variety of ideas, and that it was important to summarize all the ideas in an idea development report, which they actively used in their later work. Informant 5 said: "Yes, we used it (...) I used it a lot. Because I was in the creative activity trail. (...) Because then you've got something to go back to that's specific to what you've been working on".

The core of all experiential learning is reflection [22]-[23], and to learn successfully in project work, it is important to set aside time for reflection, and be aware of interactions and systems that support learning [24]. The students' recollections and reflections on their learning in the various phases of the project demonstrated their awareness of the importance of creating enthusiasm, support, commitment, and ownership of the project in the initial phase and in the idea and concept workshops in order to achieve project success. The client for the NM event succeeded in selling the project to the students, which motivated them [19] to contribute an event project. NM is a large, national sporting event, highly popular and strongly supported by the people of Norway, and a recognized bearer of healthy, sporting values in line with the guidelines of the Norwegian Skiing Federation. Supporting this type of event can foster prosocial motivation and altruistic thinking, i.e., the use of time and energy on a project because it is perceived as the right thing to do to benefit others [19]. At the same time, the students had intrinsic motivation and engagement [19] because they could provide a type of event project that had never previously been performed during an NM, which they found innovative and challenging. A further motivating factor was that the students were given a free rein to create the content of the project. An important lesson the students learned from the idea and concept workshops is that everyone can be creative, and that the session must encourage creativity. This is in line with Lerdahl [7], who emphasizes that creativity can be learned, practised, and trained with the right attitude and practical methods and techniques. Creativity can be compared to a muscle; the more you exercise the muscle, the stronger it becomes [7]. The students' stories and reflections show that the idea and concept workshops created a relaxed, playful atmosphere, with a "yes, and" attitude to idea generation and the project itself. The students reflected on the importance of thoughtful planning to enable many ideas to be generated. Lerdahl [7] states that idea development processes must be carefully planned, and the process leader must guide the processes well. The students realized that the idea workshop created many ideas. Participating in idea development processes led to experiential learning, where the students found that the use of different creative methods could generate many ideas and that the use of various role cards and different stimuli such as pictures and music could lead to further ideas when they seemed to be running dry. One advantage of using creative methods of idea development is that the participants can be led away from their familiar ways of thinking to generate novel ideas [7]-[11]. The students also realized that the facilitators could use their organizational and methodological skills to enable creative interaction between project members with different competencies and experience, and that knowledge and use of this type of project tool can be crucial for project success. In the concept workshop phase, the ideas from the idea workshop were arranged into some general concepts [7]. The students found storyboarding very useful in this phase, after using the scoring method to choose the ideas they wanted to continue working on. The students visualized the different ideas in general concepts, by drawing various actions related to the solution, as in a cartoon. Here, they created close-ups and more general pictures to show how the public would be involved in the activities to be included in the 'Sidetrack' event. Zooming out was another method used; this involved an alternation between focusing on individual parts and details, and to see connections in a larger overall picture [11]. The students found that the use of both close-ups and more general pictures could provide new insight and improve understanding of a problem. One important success factor was that all the work from the idea and concept workshops was included in an idea generation report, which was regularly used in the planning and implementation phase. This report formed the basis for the remainder of the work in the event project and must be seen as a key artefact for sharing project information, in line with previous research [1]-[6]-[11] and success key criteria one in Shenhar and Dvir's [3] model.

In summary, to create support and enthusiasm for the project idea in the initial phase was an important success factor throughout the project period. The idea development and concept development phases can be seen as important success factors for the 'Sidetrack' project's result, where the activities in the event were developed and the good team interaction was strengthened, which provided important guidelines for the further work in the detailing and implementation phase.

4.2 Which factors are significant for the 'Sidetrack' project's result in the planning and implementation phase?

Our findings show that an important success factor is that all project members had a common purpose and goals as a guideline for their project work. Informant 8 said: "If you set goals and objectives, then you're on the right path. Then you have a kind of direction where you're going". Another main finding is that the establishment of clearly defined project organization, with an explicit division of responsibilities and tasks, is an important success factor for an event project. The students emphasized the benefits of organization with the project manager at the top, the deputy manager and group leaders for each work area. Informant 7 said: "We got organized quite early on into three groups (...) finance, communication and... the trail group". Informant 4 emphasized that the project organization "(...) worked very well". The students found it motivating that project members could choose the tasks and roles they preferred and were thus able to use their skills and personal qualities. A further important success factor was to clarify expectations about each other's roles and responsibilities in each project group and to be aware of the

importance of contributing to other project groups when needed. Informant 6 said: “What I thought was very good was how we managed to distribute the work according to what people were able to do. Based on their skills, abilities... we’ve placed people... the right person for the right job. We did that and it helped a lot, so then we had more control over what we had to do. And if you needed help, it was easy to ask for it. So, I feel that we had good dynamics in the whole group in the implementation and planning”. Our findings show that good project management and a good project plan are crucial for efficient implementation of an event project. Informant 4 emphasized that the project manager and sub-project manager for the ‘Sidetrack’ event were “excellent leaders... and they led us in the same direction... and we got regular updates”. The students emphasized that it was of great importance for the project results to create an overall project management plan that included a milestone plan, activity plan, timetable, responsibility map, stakeholder analysis and risk analysis. Informant 4 mentioned that Excel was used in the preparation of a more detailed and specially designed milestone plan, and that students found it motivating to have this kind of overview of the various activities. The fact that the students developed their own planning tool for the project meant that they felt ownership of a plan that was adapted to the nature of the project. Informant 4 said: “(...) there are advantages to having tools you’ve sort of developed or designed yourself (...). The advantage is that you can make it exactly the way you want”. The students also emphasized the importance of clarifying expectations within each project group. Informant 6 explained: “In our group, we had very good processes. We started our work by making a group contract (...) and agreed on how often we should meet, how we should work and who would do what. And it was very important to clarify this early in the group”. Another crucial success factor was the establishment of a good meeting structure, with fixed dates and times for meetings within and between project groups as well as between the NM team (the client) and a representative of the ‘Sidetrack’ project. Informant 1 said that the regular meetings enhanced progress in the project: “We had meetings on Teams, because not everyone lives here in Harstad, so it worked very well”. Informant 5 found that the regular meetings and the good infrastructure for sharing artefacts on a common digital platform improved the flow of information and communication: “It was very straightforward to send messages and write things on Teams. There were loads of questions there”.

Another main finding is that all the informants underlined the successful interaction in the team and found that the students’ motivation and commitment were at their peak during the implementation of ‘Sidetrack’. Informant 3 described the interaction as follows: “Yes, it was excellent. We helped each other when we could”. Informant 2 said: “(...) we were just so incredibly enthusiastic!”. Informant 4 stated: “(...) even though I’m sure there were some conflicts, in the big picture there are incredibly competent people in that group and there’s great diversity. (...) We have different backgrounds, and we do very different kinds of work. So we have different expertise in a way, and that variety makes everything better, I think. So, during the implementation, I felt that most people were where they wanted to be. Even if they were not, we fixed it as we went along”.

Our findings show that all the students were highly motivated during project implementation. This can be linked to high goals, which included both the client’s goals and those developed by the teams. To take part in arranging an event project with the Norwegian Skiing Federation for the NM in cross-country skiing in Harstad, creates ambitious goals and thus a high degree of motivation. Durham et al. [18] argue that project teams that are engaged to solve complex tasks should create their own goals in addition to those of the client. In ‘Sidetrack’, the NM event provided direction for the choice of concept, but the students also set their own goals, which appeared to enhance their interaction in the implementation phase. Our findings show that the students were very satisfied with their efforts during this phase, which suggests self-efficacy as an important motivational factor. Bandura [20] states that self-efficacy is important for goal achievement, in terms of short- and long-term efforts, cooperation and communication.

According to Shenhar and Dvir [3], sound project organization is an important success criterion (1). Our findings show the internal organization of Sidetrack was systematic, with a clear division of tasks and roles. According to Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar [6], both external and internal organization are important factors in project organization, and to ensure a good flow of communication and information between the project groups in ‘Sidetrack’ and the external client, one of the students was appointed coordinator. The students felt that their project was clearly organized, with a project manager, deputy manager and three project groups, each with a leader. The students pointed out that it was crucial for the project’s success to be able to choose tasks and roles based on individual competencies and interests. The project team also emphasized that good planning was a crucial success factor in the implementation phase. In the detailing phase, the students worked hard to develop their own planning tools, where they integrated the milestone plan, activity plan and risk analysis, which gave them ownership of their project management tool. In this context, they found responsibility maps to be a useful tool in the planning and implementation phases of the project, in line with Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar [6]. Through good planning, the students gained a common understanding of tasks and how to solve them, in line with Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar’s [6] view of the purpose of planning. It’s also an important success criterion for project efficiency [3]. The students were highly motivated in the planning phase since the plan was easy to communicate and implement. They became enthusiastic, with a strong desire to solve the tasks. Their milestone plan helped them to maintain motivation, coordinate their efforts and enhance their understanding of the project as a whole, as also found by Eisenstadt and Tabrizi [26]. Their motivation was strengthened by the possibility to choose activities and tasks based on their knowledge and skills, and they experienced considerable autonomy in performing the tasks. This concurs with Ryan and Deci’s [19] self-determination theory, which states that autonomy, competence, and relatedness create intrinsic motivation.

Further, the students spoke positively about the meeting structure, which contributed to a good flow of communication and information, progress, and goal achievement. Collaboration and coordination often take place through meetings, and project success will often depend on a good meeting structure and culture [6]. Our findings show that regular meetings in the individual project groups and in the entire project team on online platforms such as Teams encourage learning and reflection, as also found

by Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar [6]. In addition, the use of physical co-location, with face-to-face sessions as part of the course, was important elements to improve coordination and the activities to be prepared and performed as part of the project, in line with Vaagaasar [6]. The students also used infrastructure tools such as experts who circulated between the various project groups, in line with Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar [6], as coordinators and knowledge bearers to update the groups about general progress in the project [23]. The students gained useful experience during their project about the infrastructure tools selected. One of the tools they highlighted was the use of a digital media/information platform, which served as a common online project room, where all important project information was shared. Such structures ensure quality by enabling all members to find and receive the same information during the project and can be seen as useful elements for sharing experiences and experiential knowledge [28].

All the informants emphasized that the project manager fulfilled her role successfully and were pleased that she had a good overview and ensured progress and goal achievement by exercising leadership. This also applied to the leaders of the project groups. An important role for the project manager is to emphasize processes where the team members can use and develop their skills to achieve goals [12]. Our findings reveal that establishing roles for different tasks and areas of responsibility provided structure that made it easier to manage the project. Project teams can be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. According to Ryan and Deci [19], intrinsic motivation is linked to the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and our findings suggest that the team was predominantly intrinsically motivated. Allowing the students to use their competence and having the right person in the right place provided a high degree of motivation, while those who wanted to challenge their competence were able to do so. The students had great trust in each other and a high degree of autonomy in their project work.

We also found that the organization of ‘Sidetrack’ was changed in line with the pace of change in the tasks. Changing the structure during the project shows that the students were dynamic, and that their interaction allowed for considerable improvisation. It appears that the project also had elements of heterarchy, where leadership is shared instead of having one strong leader [13]. Which member is the leader at any particular time will depend on the task to be solved and the person’s expertise and access to information; such factors make it easier for different members to agree to take the role of leadership. This type of internal structure increases creativity, according to Skyttermoen and Vaagaasar [6], and can be seen as an important success factor for projects such as ‘Sidetrack’, that require creative solutions.

A main finding is that team interaction was vital for successful implementation. In the implementation phase, the project team had a common understanding of the goals and had several characteristics of a high-performing team, which also is an important success criterium (3) in Shenhar and Dvir’s [3] model. The members of the project team integrated their respective knowledge and skills, showed good cooperation by coordinating activities and improvising as needed, in addition to communicating openly and being willing to learn from each other, in line with other research [15]-[16]-[17]. According to Heggholmen [17], high-performing teams have a common understanding of how to distribute and solve tasks and the team members have a high degree of trust in each other. Further, high-performing teams are motivated [18]. The project team seemed to have a high degree of self-efficacy, which is a very good indicator of team effectiveness [21]. The team’s effectiveness during implementation was a key factor in the project’s success, as also found by Hoegl and Gemundsen [12]. The project members were highly committed and motivated. The core of all experiential learning is reflection [22]. The students had firm trust in each other in their project work; they were not afraid to ask questions and ask each other for advice and help, and they learnt from each other’s good and bad experiences. Nonaka and Takeuchi [27] argue that these are important conditions for learning and reflection to take place, through the sharing of different perspectives and knowledge.

In summary, important success factors for the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s result was that the work in the detailing and implementation phase was characterized by the project group functioning as a high-performing team, which used and developed appropriate project management tools. At the same time, the project management’s exercise of leadership and a dynamic and flexible organizational design were important for the ‘Sidetrack’ project’s success.

5 Conclusion and implications

According to previous research, our findings show that there are several elements that needs to be present for project success, like clear goals and purpose, clearly organized and planned activities, in addition to high performing (project) teams. Thus, the students’ learning experience from a project event also shows that the initial phase with idea and concept workshops are key factors for project success. The ideas and concepts developed in the first part of the project laid the foundation for the activities to be performed during the ‘Sidetrack’ event. The results from the idea and concept development phase provided guidelines for the organization of the ‘Sidetrack’ project, its goals and objectives and the development of planning tools and supported a positive atmosphere that characterized the work throughout the project period. The findings suggest that event projects require particularly well-planned idea and concept development processes at an early stage. The study implies that it is important to emphasize creative methodology in project management courses, and in continuing education for people involved in the experience industry, in addition to other project management tools. To innovate, knowledge and skills in the use of creative methodology are clearly important, but for event projects they may be a vital success factor. It would be interesting to see further research on the use of creative methodology in the implementation of event projects.

References

- [1]. Prebensen, N.K. (2016). *Fra idé til suksess. Om å samskape verdifulle eventer*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- [2]. Getz, D. (2008). Event tourism. Definition, evolution, and research, *Tourism Management*, 29: 403-428.
- [3]. Shenhar, A.J. og D. Dvir (2007). *Reinventing project management. The diamond approach to successful growth and innovation*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- [4]. Turner, J.R., F. Anbari & C. Bredillet (2013). Perspectives on research in project managements: The nine schools. *Global business prospectives*, 1(1):3-28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40196-012-001-4>
- [5]. Karlsen, J.T. (2020). *Prosjektledelse - fra initiering til gevinstrealisering*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- [6]. Skyttermoen, T. og Vaagaasar, A.L. (2021). *Verdiskapende prosjektledelse*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- [7]. Lerdahl, E. (2007). *Slagkraft. Håndbok i idéutvikling*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- [8]. Forsth, L.R. (2021). Hentet fra <http://www.kreativtnorge.no/KreativeMeotderTeknikker.htm>
- [9]. Umbreit; M. S., Coates, R.B. og Vos, B. (2003). Community justice through circles, *Contemporary Justice Review* 6 (3): 265-278.
- [10]. Senese, M. (2002). Verdenskafeen – aktiv involvering gjennom meningsfulle konversasjoner. I: Levin, M. & Klev, R. (2002). *Forandring som praksis. Læring og utvikling i organisasjoner*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- [11]. Carlsen, A., Clegg, S. og Gjersvik, R. (2012). *Ideawork*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- [12]. Hoegl, M. and Gemuenden (2001). Teamwork quality and the success of innovative projects. A theoretical concept and empirical evidence, *Organizational Science* 12 (4): 435-449.
- [13]. Aime, F.S. Humphrey, D.S. Derue and J.B. Paul (2014). The riddle of heterarchy. Power transitions in cross-functional teams, *Academy of Management Journal*, 57 (2): 327-504.
- [14]. Pollack, J. and P. Matous (2019). Testing the impact of targeted team building on project team communication using social network analyses. *International Journal of Project Management*, 37 (3):473-484.
- [15]. Beckhy, B.A and G.A Okhuysen (2011). Expecting the unexpected? How SWAT-officers and film crew handle surprises, *Academy of Management Journal*, 54 (2): 239-261.
- [16]. Cuhna, M.P., P. Neves and A. Reggio (2015). Tales of the unexpected: Discussing improvisational learning. *Management learning*, 46 (5): 511-529.
- [17]. Heggholmen, K. (2014). *Fra drittdårlig til lærende lederskap*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- [18]. Durham, C.C., D. Knight og E.A. Locke (1997). Effects of leader role, team-set goal difficulty, efficacy, and tactics on team effectiveness, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 72 (2): 203-231.
- [19]. Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist* 55 (1).
- [20]. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action. A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- [21]. Gully, S.M., K.A. Incalcaterra, A. Joshi and J.M. Beaubien (2002). A Meta-analysis of team-efficiency, potency, and performance. Interdependence and level analysis as moderators of observed relationships, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(5): 819-832.
- [22]. Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: the theory of inquiry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- [23]. Kolb, D.A., I.M. Rubin og J.M. McIntyre (1986). *Organisasjons- og ledelsespsykologi. Basert på erfaringslæring*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- [24]. Keegan, A. og J.R. Turner (2003). *Managing human resources in the project-based firms*, Long Range Planning, 35 (4): 367-388.
- [25]. Cicmil, S. and D. Marshall (2005). Insights into collaboration at the project level. Complexity, social interaction and procurement mechanisms, *Building Research and Information*, 33 (6): 523-535.
- [26]. Eisenhardt, K.M. og B.N. Tabrizi (1995). Accelerating adaptive processes. Product innovation in the global computer industry, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40 (1): 84-110.
- [27]. Nonaka, I. og H. Takeuchi (1995). *The knowledge-creating company*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [28]. Ayas, K. og N. Zenuick (2001). Project-based learning. Building communities of reflective practitioners, *Management Learning*, 32 (1): 61-76.
- [29]. Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (2007). *Qualitative Research for Education: An introduction to Theory and Methods* (5th Edition). ISBN13:9780205482931.
- [30]. Bell, E., Bryman, A. og Harley, B. (2019). *Business Research Methods. (Fifth Edition)*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-880987-6.
- [31]. Pettersen, R.C. (2005). *Kvalitetslæring i høyere utdanning: innføring i problem- og praksisbasert didaktikk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.