

Project narrative

Introduction

The project narrative is the first substep in the ESTEEM methodology. The aim of the substep is to make the history and present status of the project explicit¹. This narrative is used as a basic reference that ensures that both interviewers and managers, and any other actor involved in the interaction, are in consensus on main details. The form in which it is presented is that of a chronological story-like text, a narrative.

Process

The main input for writing the project narrative is a single interview with the project manager. Prior to the interview the consultant should carefully prepare it through consulting existing and available literature on the project, including, for example, flyers, brochures and tenders. The result of this preparation is to give the consultant a first general idea about the project story (to be tested during the interview) and a set of questions to be clarified during the interview.

Additionally, this preparation should allow the consultant to form a better understanding of the level of project experience and awareness of the project manager they will interview. It may also answer questions which the consultant intended to ask, with the added benefit of saving the project manager time.

After the interview the consultant rewrites the notes taken during the interview into a coherent, 2-3 page narrative, which will be sent to the project manager for checking. The project manager can suggest changes to the narrative such as names, timing, additional information etc.

In a second interview the project narrative is used as frame of reference to construct the context table*, the defining moments table, and the actors table. Some of the questions below already anticipate this function of the narrative.

¹ see Appendix 1 for further details on the structure of narratives, the role of the narrative in the wider Create Acceptance process and for an example of a narrative

* the context table list the socio-political opportunities and barriers in the environment of the project see vocabulary of terms for further definition

Writing a narrative is not an easy task and requires an external person who is relatively new to the project, *i.e.* the consultant. If a project manager wants to go through the ESTEEM process without a consultant, he might ask a colleague not involved in the project (or any other outsider) to perform the role of consultant. Being new to the project is important, because someone who is not yet part of the project history can be more reflexive and critical towards the project history. The person producing the narrative is required to have, in particular, good interviewing and writing skills.

Interview questions for constructing a narrative

The interview is performed in a semi-structured way. A semi-structured interview consists of a two-way communication process using a fairly open list of topics and general questions as a framework. The following list can assist in getting the right information for drafting the narrative. Note that the questions do not necessarily have to be asked in this particular order. In many cases actors and defining moments come up during the chronological descriptions of the project's history, which enables the consultant to go into details of a specific actor or event. Note also that maybe not all questions are relevant for a particular project.

Initial idea of the project and chronological development:

- When was the idea of the project born?
- Who thought of it?
- What was the immediate reason to come up with the idea of the project?
- Was the idea fed by specific literature, other projects or events?
- What happened next and why?
 - o Was the idea patented?
 - o Did the original idea owner contact others?
- When did this happen?
- Who was involved?
- Was there opposition? if so why, if not why not?
- Could the project manager have taken different steps?
- If so, which steps could have been taken?
- What would have been a possible outcome of these different steps?
- What is the current status of the project?
- What are the major barriers / opportunities?

- Which developments are planned / expected the coming month?
- ...

On the involvement of actors:

- Who is the project manager and what is his role in the project and relation with other partners?
- Who became involved during project development?
- Why did they become involved?
 - o What is their role?
 - o Did their role change during project development?
 - o What reason does the actor have to participate?
 - o Does the actor agree with all the objectives of the project?
 - o Does the actor disagree with (some of) the objectives?
 - o If so, which objectives does the actor disagree with, and why?
 - o Where disagreements overcome? If so, how?
- How important is their participation to project development?
 - o Can the actor be replaced easily?
 - o How dependent is the project on the actor's resources?
 - o How important is the actor outside the project?
- Did their participation in the project change the project design or objectives?
- If so, how did their participation change the project or objectives?
- How did the project manager react to the changes in the project design?
- Did anybody else oppose the development of the project?
 - o Why did they oppose the development of the project?
 - o How important was their opposition to project development?
 - o How did the project manager react to their opposition?
 - o Did it change the development of the project?
 - o Could the project manager have reacted differently?
- Which actors have not yet been mentioned but have been important to project development?
- Which actors have not yet played a role but might become involved in the future (i.e. NGO's, civil society, consumer organizations, ...)?

On defining moments and important events:

- Where there any events that crucially affected the development of the project?
 - o *i.e.* that affected the design of project in general terms
 - o *i.e.* that affected the design of the technology itself
 - o *i.e.* that affected the involvement of actors
- What kind of events were these?
- What was the cause of the event?
- Was this caused by internal project developments or by external developments?
- How did those events change the development of the project?
- How did the project manager react to those developments?
- Could the project manager have reacted differently?
- Did the events also have implications outside the project?
- Do these events still influence the project actively (apart from the earlier changes),
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