

*Let's talk about public projects*¹

OECD Principles of Public Administration and projects²

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Introduction

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an organization that has been working on improving public administration for years. The outcomes of this work include the series of publications known as "The Principles of Public Administration" (OECD, 1999, 2013, 2024). Many countries credit the improved functioning of their governments and public administrations to the efforts of the OECD.

The execution of projects in public administration is a key determinant of the effectiveness of public administration overall. The article addresses the significance of projects in public governance, as well as the role of projects in OECD recommendations concerning the operation of public administrations.

Influencing project management by governments

The endeavors we presently classify as projects – such as constructing buildings, geographical expeditions, and wars – have been carried out since the dawn of human history. They serve as the cornerstone for the functioning of governments and public administrations. Consequently, governments strive to enhance project management within their administrations. As early as 1667, the English Parliament enacted the Rebuilding of London Act 1666 (Parliament of England, 1667), containing elements pertinent to the methods of undertaking work associated with reconstructing London after the Great Fire, which encompassed projects. Since the nineteenth century, the U.S. government has enacted legislation pertaining to the execution of projects of significant national importance (e.g., Pacific Railway, Panama Canal, Boulder Canyon Project, for more details, refer to Gasik, 2023b). The Manhattan Project in the United States (the construction of the atomic bomb) is frequently cited as a paramount

¹ Editor's note: This article is the twelfth in a series related to the management of public programs and projects, those organized, financed and managed by governments and public officials. The author, Dr. Stanisław Gasik, is the author of the book "[*Projects, Government, and Public Policy*](#)", recently published by CRC Press / Taylor and Francis Group. That book and these articles are based on Dr. Gasik's research into governmental project management around the world over the last decade. Stanisław is well-known and respected by PMWJ editors; we welcome and support his efforts to share knowledge that can help governments worldwide achieve their most important initiatives.

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instance of employing modern public project management techniques (Gosling, 2010). Until the 1960s, public administration took the lead in advancing project management knowledge (e.g., Morris, 1994; Archibald, 2008; Lenfle and Loch, 2010; Kwak, 2003). In the United States, the Department of Defense published guidelines for managing procurement effectiveness in 1967, essentially pertaining to projects (USA DoD, 1967). The first legislation specifically addressing the management of public projects was enacted in Iceland in 1971 (Iceland Althingi, 1970).

Presently, governments are employing various means to enhance the execution of public projects within their jurisdictions. Some recommended practices are universally applicable to all public projects (e.g., UK Government, 2018), while others pertain to specific sector projects (e.g., IT projects, Colorado GASC, 2012). Additionally, through legislation, governments seek to ensure the efficient execution of large-scale projects (e.g., Hibernia Development Project, Canada Parliament, 1990).

At the governmental level, institutions are established with the responsibility for efficiently executing public projects and programs, commonly referred to as Governmental Project Management Offices (GPMOs, e.g., British IPA, <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/infrastructure-and-projects-authority>, Lithuania CPMA, <https://www.cpva.lt/en>). Governmental institutions are emerging with the aim of providing direct support for project implementation, especially for those projects at risk of encountering significant challenges (e.g., Australia MPFA, <https://business.gov.au/expertise-and-advice/Major-Projects-Facilitation-Agency>; India Project Monitoring Group, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/project-monitoring-group>). There are teams and institutions dedicated to improving Governmental Project Implementation Systems (e.g., US Program Management Policy Council, USA Congress, 2015; Norway Concept Programme, <https://www.ntnu.edu/concept>). Audit bodies are enhancing their expertise in project audits and releasing guidelines in this domain (e.g., USA GAO, 2016, 2020; Australia ANAO, 2010). Recommendations are formulated, and practices are implemented for processes and areas involved in project execution within public organizations. These encompass portfolio management, stakeholder engagement, project assurance, qualifications of project managers and contractors, and knowledge management. The coherent array of project management practices implemented by the government is termed the Governmental Project Implementation System (GPIS, Gasik, 2023a).

Governments increasingly recognize the significance of efficient project management in the development of their countries.

Supranational institutions and projects

Transnational organizations are increasingly focusing on project implementation. For instance, the World Bank advocates for the Logical Framework Approach as its project management methodology (Practical Concepts Incorporated, 1979). The International Standardization Organization has its ISO/TC 258 Committee (<https://www.iso.org/committee/624837.html>) dedicated to developing a series of project management standards. The Inter-American Development Bank stipulates the enactment of public investment management acts as a prerequisite for providing loans

to member states (e.g., Argentina Congreso de la Nación, 1994; Peru El Congreso de la Republica, 2000). Additionally, the IDB has defined its approach to project management, endorsing the use of Project Management for Results methodology (PM4R, IDB, 2018). The International Monetary Fund has outlined a framework for evaluating the investment capacity of countries (Public Investment Management Assessment, PIMA, IMF, 2018), with significant components including project selection, implementation, and management.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), along with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), established the Network of National Public Investment Systems of Latin America and the Caribbean (<https://www.cepal.org/en/infographics/network-national-public-investment-systems-snip>). One of its primary objectives is to enhance the execution of public projects by exchanging experiences in this field.

These examples illustrate the considerable importance that supranational organizations place on project management.

The role of projects in public administration

Projects and public policies

The interest of governments and supranational organizations in projects stems from their significance in executing public policies. From a management perspective, public policies can be categorized as **project-based, operation-based, or mixed policies**. Project-based policies entail achieving effects through project implementation. One of the prime examples is infrastructure policies. Transportation infrastructure development policies typically involve a program comprising projects aimed at constructing specific elements of infrastructure, such as roads, railways, or airports. Operation-oriented policies yield effects through usually long-term continuous processes (operations), like tax, educational, or welfare policies. Mixed policies incorporate both projects and ongoing operations equally. For instance, military policies encompass projects for constructing military infrastructure elements alongside the continual training of soldiers. Implementing any new public policy different from the previous one necessitates altering the structures or processes within public administration. This change is brought about through project implementation.

This shows that without efficient project implementation, effective and efficient execution of public policies is nearly impossible.

Projects and public governance

Project governance, delineating the role of projects in organizational operations and the fundamental principles governing their implementation, stands as an essential aspect of corporate governance (Müller, 2009). In the case of countries, determining the place of projects in an organization means determining how projects participate in implementing public policies. Consequently, each government ought to define its

Public Project Governance, much like other organizations define their Project Governance (Gasik, 2023a).

Public governance without defining Public project governance is incomplete.

OECD Approach to public administration and projects

As per the OECD (2005) definition, “governance refers to formal and informal arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and how public actions are carried out, from the perspective of maintaining a country’s constitutional values in the face of changing problems, actors, and environment.” Given that decisions regarding the execution of public projects are a vital area of state activity, their governance should constitute a significant element of public governance.

The recent OECD Principles of Public Administration (OECD, 2023) indirectly affirm the importance of project implementation. According to this publication, “(...) the key purpose of public administrations [is] to be responsive to emerging concerns and deliver for the benefit of the citizens, as well as the main shortcomings in the enlargement countries” (p. 7). Every response to emerging concerns necessitates specific changes in administrative operations – and **the most effective way to implement such changes is through projects and their efficient management.**

Furthermore, OECD (2023) indicates, “Modernising public administrations remains a key concern throughout the enlargement countries. (...) While there is awareness of key reform needs for creating more professional and merit-based administrations overall, more leadership and effort will be needed for improving policy planning, public finance, people management, and accountability.” This provision indirectly underscores the importance of projects and their management. As mentioned earlier, all types of public policies, whether project-based, operation-based, or mixed, rely significantly on project management for efficient implementation. Even operation-based policies, when the operations differ from previous periods or introduce entirely new operations, rely heavily on project implementation.

During a November 2022 meeting of the Public Governance Committee at Ministerial Level, OECD ministers pledged to “continue efforts to build professional, effective, and efficient public institutions, and high-performing leadership and civil servants in support of stronger democracies” (OECD, 2022). Establishing effective and efficient public administration is impossible without organizational-level project management capabilities, and civil servants must possess project management skills.

The OECD emphasizes the necessity for a “whole-of-government approach to reform” (OECD, 2005). Hence, it's crucial to implement a comprehensive Governmental Project Implementation System that encompasses all administrative structures. Implementing horizontal policies across numerous administrative areas might not be efficient if some areas lack project implementation skills, even if they are efficient in others.

Thus, considering social needs, practices implemented in several countries, including OECD members, the pivotal role of projects in public policy

implementation, and the directives of OECD documents, there's a need to define essential principles for executing public projects which are an integral component of every public administration's operation.

The forthcoming section proposes the most crucial principles for implementing public projects.

We suggest that Public Project Management be established as a separate thematic area within The Principles of Public Administration, considering it as crucial a capacity similar to Public Financial Management, Public Service and Human Resource Management, or other thematic areas.

Public project management encompasses two principles: the first describes sub-principles linked to project management at the central administration level, while the second concerns project implementation within public institutions.

These proposals could serve as the basis for discussions at the OECD forum on implementing projects, including in EU countries and those seeking EU membership.

Public project management

Projects serve as crucial managerial tools for implementing public policies. They deliver value to citizens and facilitate the transformation of public institutions and processes. Projects are executed efficiently and effectively, making optimal use of the allocated resources.

Principle 1: The government organizes effective and efficient project management, an essential element in implementing public policies.

- a. The government defines the role of projects and their groupings (programs, portfolios) in executing public policies.
- b. The government holds responsibility for designing effective and efficient project management processes and methodologies within public sector organizations.
- c. At the central level, there exists the Governmental Project Management Office (GPMO), providing support to public sector organizations in project management.
- d. The GPMO, representing the government, establishes and ensures the operation and continuous enhancement of a cohesive Governmental Project Implementation System (GPIS), comprising crucial components such as Project Delivery, Project Governance, and Project Support.
- e. The government maintains and offers public access to a registry of major public projects, encompassing essential data on their impacts, plans, and implementation status.

Principle 2. Public projects meet social needs and are effectively managed.

- a. Public institutions develop and use project management methodologies in accordance with the guidelines developed by GPMO.

- b. Projects have business cases referring to relevant public policies; they may be verified by independent entities.
- c. Projects have specific success criteria.
- d. Stakeholders of public projects have the right to express their views on decisions regarding project initiation.
- e. Projects have implementation plans that include, among others: delivered products or services, approach to implementation, governance structures and processes, budgets, schedules, risks, reporting methods, procurement methods, set of stakeholders and ways of managing these components.
- f. Representatives of public stakeholders, in particular project beneficiaries, are involved in the implementation of projects, in accordance with their specificity.
- g. Project implementation is monitored, controlled, and verified, also by entities independent of the project management team.
- h. An agile approach is permissible, enabling the definition of project parameters during implementation, based on the acquired knowledge.
- i. The methods and effects of project implementation are subject to independent evaluation.
- j. Lessons learned from project implementation are used to improve the project implementation processes of a given organization or GPIS as a whole.

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Dr. Stanisław Gasik, PMP is a project management expert. He graduated from the University of Warsaw, Poland, with M. Sc. in mathematics and Ph. D. in organization sciences (with a specialty in project management). Stanisław has over 30 years of experience in project management, consulting, teaching, and implementing PM organizational solutions. His professional and research interests include project knowledge management, portfolio management, and project management maturity. He is the author of the only holistic model of project knowledge management spanning from the individual to the global level.

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