

European Projects: a nightmare in management¹

The European Parliament has set several programmes that promote cooperation between European organisations. The main programmes in the field of educational and vocational training are Socrates and Leonardo (see http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/programmes_en.html).

Both programmes are a nightmare in terms of project management for the following reasons:

1. Most of the partnerships are formed by organisations of different countries that have never worked together before
2. Is very difficult (almost impossible) for the coordinating organisation to reduce the budget or exclude by the partnership the partners that don't work properly
3. Is very difficult to switch significant amount of budget between different cost categories²
4. All the coordinating activity is made mostly at a distance. Usually only one meeting a year is organised
5. In Italy the National Agency in charge of Leonardo has recently started asking a bank guarantee to all the coordinating organisation that are not public bodies. As you know under a bank guarantee the National Agency can claim back at will all the funding, including the funding handled by the Italian coordinator to foreign partners. Due to different trade regulations of different European countries to claim back money from different countries is very lengthy and costly (sometimes impossible). For this reason the Italian coordinators risk to give back to the National Agency also money they handled to the other partners and that are unable to recover.

Whilst the project partnerships can be blamed for points 1 and 4, the pitfalls at points 2, 3 and 5 depend on how the programmes are structured and by the behaviour of National Agencies, and should be changed.

So, if you are thinking to submit a proposal on Socrates or Leonardo, beware!

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² Points 2 and 3 require a previous authorisation by the National Agency in charge of the programme. The authorisation is given very seldom and usually after a long time.