Project management in a public transformation change process

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the applicability of project management as a tool and framework for managing a public transformation change process. The studied case concerns a large public merger project occurring between Trondheim and Klæbu municipalities in Norway. The results demonstrate that the Trondheim-Klæbu case effectively applied project management successfully as a tool for managing the change process. We found that basic project management practices from various knowledge areas were vital and employed in a systematic and integrated manner. We especially identify the importance of a fixed goal, a milestone and progress plan, and good communication with stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

This paper concerns the application of project management in a merger project between two municipalities. A merger between two public organizations (municipalities) is a large change or transformation process which is challenging and comprise numerous organizational dimensions and levels.

Several studies have been done on public change management (Van der Voet et al., 2016; Van der Voet et al., 2015; Kuipers et al., 2014; Van der Voet, 2014; Wright et al., 2013). Many of these public management research studies focus on the content and contest of change (Kuipers et al., 2014) as well as on the effects of mergers (Steiner and Kaiser, 2017), instead of on the organizational change implementation process. In addition, Van der Voet (2014) argues that although substantial evidence exists that the implementation of organizational change often fails, there is relatively little evidence regarding how organizational change can be effectively managed in the public sector.

The aim of this paper is to explore project management as a method for managing the implementation of change in organizations. In the project management literature, which mostly focuses on the private sector, Crawford and Hassner-Nahmias (2010) and Hornstein (2015) have highlighted increasing research interest in the use of projects as an effective way in which to institute change in organizations. In the extant literature, a well-established concept asserts that managing organizational change as a complicated, multi-dimensional, context-dependent, and undefined process is possible by implementing project management (Pellegrinelli and Bowman, 1994; Cicmil, 1999; Gareis, 2010; Cowan-Sahadath, 2010; Stummer and Zuchi, 2010).

However, a shortcoming exists in research on public organizational change projects. Consequently, the need exists for more research in which the project management and public change management concepts overlap. In light of this, the current paper emphasizes the need to elucidate project management and its applicability as a method for managing public change projects. Hence, the following research question is addressed in this paper:

- *How does project management serve as a management method in a merger between two municipalities?*

To answer this research question, a qualitative case study is presented and discussed. The case concerns a large public merger project occurring between Trondheim and Klæbu municipalities in Norway.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we review the literature on project management as a concept for managing an organizational change process. We then present the research methodology and the studied project. Next, we discuss the data results and the research questions, and finally, we present a conclusion.

2. Literature review

In this section, we propose a theoretical framework that accounts for organizational change in the public sector and in project management. Organizational change in the public sector can come in various forms, including an emergent and a planned change (Kuipers et al., 2014; Van der Voet et al., 2015; Van der Voet et al., 2016). An emergent change often starts at the bottom is driven by and relies on employee participation. Change can also be implemented through a more planned process. A planned change is top down oriented and management driven. Detailed objectives of the change are then formulated at the beginning of the process. Even though the focus of this paper is on planned change, change, by nature, is subject to uncertainty and modification. Transforming change processes are also multi-level, multi-dimensional, complicated, and somewhat disordered (Cowan-Sahadath, 2010). This means that a high degree of uncertainty and room for emergent requirements and adjustments during the change process can be expected (Pellegrinelli and Bowman, 1994). This uncertainty often results in anxiety, confusion, business disruption, and the temporary loss of productivity. In addition, a transforming change process involves many individuals in various layers of an organization. These individuals are the actual contributors to the change and frequently sacrifice daily and personal benefits to assist with the change (Cicmil, 1999; Kotter, 2007). Therefore, they must clearly understand the change's vision and objectives, as well as what tasks they should perform to support the process. Because many of the change objectives are to be achieved in the future, meaning that there will be hidden, late, or even no personal gain for the people involved, it is reasonable to expect a degree of resistance.

Pellegrinelli and Bowman (1994) argue that a project serves as a separate and dedicated organization and that its project management competencies and techniques may provide the needed structure, capacity, and skills to effectively manage the change process. Indeed, project management could also remedy the deficiency of an organization's current work paradigm to manage change. This overview introduces the combination of project and the project manager as a new vehicle for and a driver of change management. A project constitutes a small and temporary unit, which makes it flexible beyond current procedures by transcending the organization's internal and external borders (Pellegrinelli and Bowman, 1994). Project management's basic tools and methods, such as the work breakdown structure, networking, plans, schedules, risk management, budget management, resource allocation, and stakeholder management, are also identified as elements for creating an effective framework for planning and implementing a complicated transforming change process. This framework could simplify the change's disorder through structuring the process so that it becomes manageable. Cown-Sahadath (2010) acknowledges a mature project management methodology that is critical for managing and implementing organizational changes. She also highlights the required integration of the change and project management disciplines. Cown-Sahadath (2010) addresses the complex nature of organizational change, which is subject to anxiety, confusion, and disruption in the organization, through project capabilities to plan, manage stakeholders, monitor and report, communicate, implement, sustain, and learn how to drive change effectively. Cumming and Worley (2009) and Gareis (2010) examine organizational change as a set of sequentially planned actions that can each be managed via a project. Turner and Müller (2003) assert that projects comprise more than what is specified by the classic definition of project management. They highlight that projects are subject to uncertainty, the need for integration, and urgency, which make them suitable for managing endeavours with similar features. Relevant to the change concept, Turner and Müller (2003) suggest the project as an agency for change and resource utilization. This means that a project, as a small and temporary organization, naturally possesses little inertia, and this is advantageous for overcoming the typically high inertia of functional organizations. This perspective recognizes that projects are

flexible and dynamic and that they can accommodate the uncertainties and complexities of change. They also identify a project's advantageous features for managing a transforming change process, including being goal oriented, involved with interrelated activities, time limited, unique, and multifunctional. Other advocates also recognize that project management is appropriate for transforming change, but with some caveats (Cicmil, 1999; Schifalacqua et al., 2009; Parry et al., 2014; Shaw, 2016). Stummer and Zuchi (2010) identify the legitimacy that the project and the project manager role bring to the change process. They assert that a formal and dedicated project manager not only leads and facilitates the implementation of change but also creates legitimacy for the change project in line with the organization.

Pellegrinelli and Bowman (1994) consider two limitations of project management in meeting transforming change requirements. They report that an organizational change process is often achieved through a set of projects within the 'change project' and that project management could fail to understand and integrate interdependence between these sub-projects. Second, they highlight emergent modifications that constitute an inevitable feature of change, as conditions may continually change. Consequently, they suggest project planning and implementing methods that rely heavily on fixed goals, boundaries, and timelines, as opposed to those that require flexibility and room for modification when change is implemented (Pellegrinelli and Bowman, 1994). Parry et al. (2014) contend that a major problem for project management involves managing contextual issues. They argue that projects' performance is affected by both projects' self-features and contextual characteristics, such as the overall organizational culture. This issue, they assert, challenges project managers to assess projects' achievements and to seek potential adjustments and remedies, as many alterations and modifications might be anticipated during the process. They highlight that project management considers isolated projects with narrow constraints, and they question the ability of rigid project management to overcome these modifications (Parry et al., 2014). Engwall (2003) states that regarding a project as isolated indicates management's ignorance of the project's dependency on self- and contextual conditions. This narrow vision constitutes one of a project's major disadvantages. He calls on project managers and organizations to consider an organization's history, current operations and conditions, and future ideas when establishing or running projects. Partington (1996), Schifalacqua et al. (2009), Cicmil (1999), and Engwall (2003) also refer to contextual issues showing that projects, by nature, are not properly associated with their contexts. Cicmil (1999) identifies the need for understanding the behavioural aspects of change processes, which could be challenging for project management to embrace.

Partington (1996) challenges the 'bureaucratic' nature of project management. The author opposes such a feature as an organizational change characteristic and concludes that the two concepts are incompatible. He states that project management could cause the change process to become bogged down with too much bureaucracy, which might reduce the needed agility, be viewed as inconsistent with the existing organizational paradigm, and result in resistance. Shaw (2016) introduces three sets of dualities between project and change management, demonstrating that project management is an insufficient tool for managing a transforming change process. These three dualities include: 1) the project needs to be free from distractions while also engaging stakeholders; 2) there needs to be tight governance of the project along with the governing of all change sub-projects; and 3) one must focus on achieving the project's objectives while acknowledging that various stakeholders may define the project's success differently. Zink et al. (2008) highlight that the objective and subjective dimensions of change must be integrated when one is considering change initiatives. According to the authors, project management could lack the required psychological fit in the change process and therefore be unable to completely implement the change. Stummer and Zuchi (2010), who investigated

change roles in organizational change projects, explored the project shortages associated with roles. They argue that project managers might lack some essential managerial competences for managing change, and therefore, they suggest that the project manager is only a building block of organizational change roles and is the one responsible for the content of change project work (this is addressed in the next section). The final significant criticism targets a predefined project lifecycle that specifies a definite end, as the transforming change process is expected to produce its actual results sometime after 'completion'. Organizational change constitutes more of a 'becoming' process (Winch et al., 2012), and its actual end cannot be predetermined in how the project is characterized. From another perspective, if there is a conclusion to the transforming change project, it is necessary to determine how and when the project's success can be evaluated.

3. Research method and case description

3.1 Design, data collection, and analysis

The case study methodology is especially useful for exploratory research, in which an in-depth knowledge of a phenomenon in its context is desired (Yin, 2009). When one is exploring how project management could be an optimal tool for transforming a public change process, the search for meanings calls for an interpretive approach. An interpretive paradigm therefore seems best suited for achieving a rich and detailed understanding of a transforming change project based on respondents' practical experience and insight.

We selected the Trondheim-Klæbu merger case for our study using information-oriented (purposeful) sampling (Patton, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The case was selected due to its expected capacity for information and knowledge about the use of project management in a public transforming change project. The Trondheim-Klæbu case provides a broad base of merger practice. The case involved the study of two main organisations: the Trondheim and Klæbu municipalities.

In-depth interviews following a semi-structured approach were employed as the main data-collection method. Seidman (2006) argues that collecting personal experiences, opinions, and meanings from those intimately involved with the topic is the only method for obtaining the complete truth. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were chosen due to this method's flexibility (Drever, 1995). This method also allows for a degree of standardization (Gilham, 2000). Six people were interviewed in total—three from Trondheim municipality, two from Klæbu, and one from the local county governorship—as listed in Table 1. Two representatives were interviewed twice. Most interviewees were selected from the project group. The type of qualitative interview we used is the one-on-one interview (Patton, 2002). The duration of each interview was between 1 and 2 h. The same researchers conducted all of the interviews to assure consistency. The interviews were performed face-to-face, and when necessary, follow-up emails were exchanged to discuss unclear data. Each interview was documented as soon as possible after the interview to preserve accuracy. In addition to the interviews, a review of several relevant documents related to the merger was performed. One such document is a major guideline prepared by the ministry of local government and modernisation.

Table 1. Overview of interviews.

Interviewee	Ordinary position	Date of interview	Location
Central project group member	Adviser – Trondheim municipality	15 Feb. 2017 4 May 2017	At Trondheim city hall By phone
Central project group member	Senior adviser – Trondheim municipality	15 Feb. 2017	At Trondheim city hall
Project manager	Chief administrative officer – Klæbu municipality	20 Feb. 2017 3 May 2017	At Klæbu city hall By phone
Central project group member	Political secretary – Klæbu municipality	20 Feb. 2017	At Klæbu city hall
Municipal manager	Trondheim municipality	14 March 2017	At Trondheim city hall
Merger advisor	Senior advisor – local county governor	24 March 2017	At the local county governor's office

For this study, we employed a content-analysis approach, as data needed to be analysed and interpreted (Patton, 2002). Then, relevant data were sorted, and broad categories were manually narrowed down to more focused concepts targeted at the research questions. During this process, we studied and interpreted the data, and we examined them for differences, nuances, patterns, and similarities. The research questions constituted a major driver and provided the direction of the analysis as an interplay between the empirical findings and theoretical concepts.

The validity of the study has been addressed in a number of ways. First, the respondents were invited to check the collected data from the interviews. Second, the use of multiple respondents from different organisations is an advantage of qualitative research. However, the study also has limitations. Although the research was carried out with the intention of making it replicable, it must be acknowledged that a different researcher with different participants on a different occasion may uncover different results.

3.2 Project case

The case is a change project in the form of a merger between two municipalities in Norway, Trondheim and Klæbu, which are both located in Trøndelag County. The case is a political project, meaning it is significantly politically influenced. The merger will result in a new municipality as a community, along with a merged municipal organization to administer the new municipality. The two communities, in numerous dimensions, have quite different situations compared with each other. Trondheim municipality, with 188,000 inhabitants, comprises 60% of the total population of Trøndelag County. Klæbu, on the other hand, is home to only 6,000 inhabitants. Obviously, the merger project in this paper focuses on the two municipal organizations' union, which will create a new municipal organization.

In 2014, the government of Norway submitted a proposition to the parliament applying for the acceptance of a municipal reform plan in Norway. The major reasoning for this proposition was to build stronger municipalities with sufficient competencies and capacities to safeguard inhabitants' welfare both today and in the future (Regieringen.no, 2017). Other overall goals included providing quality and equal services to inhabitants where they live, developing communities, approaching more sustainable municipalities, achieving a better economy, and building a strengthened democracy (Regieringen.no, 2017). The parliament agreed with the proposition and initiated a municipal reform program nationally in June 2014. To support this program, the ministry of local government and modernisation developed a 'governmental recipe' containing laws and regulations, circulars, advisory documents and guidelines for the merger, and some seminars and conferences. The local county governor of Trøndelag assumed

a central role in implementing the reform and started the primary processes in the county in July 2014. Several meetings and conferences with the stakeholders occurred for the purpose of exchanging information and facilitating negotiations. Trondheim and Klæbu followed the governmental recipe and performed the negotiations and studies, ultimately reaching a municipal agreement in 2016. Both municipalities agreed that the newly merged organization will remain the current Trondheim organization, meaning that Klæbu will be merged into Trondheim's existing structure. This merger will directly affect Klæbu's organization, specifically 50 to 60 managers and employees who work in the Klæbu city hall. Other employees belonging to the Klæbu organization, such as health and school personnel, will continue in the same jobs and locations, just in the new structure.
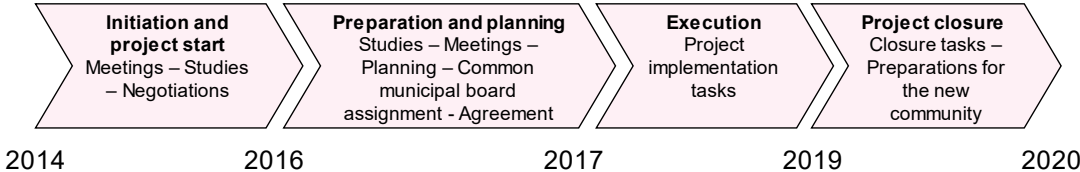
Initiation and project start Meetings – Studies – Negotiations	Preparation and planning Studies – Meetings – Planning – Common municipal board assignment - Agreement	Execution Project implementation tasks	Project closure Closure tasks – Preparations for the new community

| 2014 | 2016 | 2017 | 2019 | 2020 |

Figure 1. The merger project's timeline.

The merger project's timeline is illustrated in Figure 1. In the initiation phase, through several informative gatherings and conferences that the local county governor spearheaded, Trondheim and Klæbu began to study their municipalities' performance and situations in various dimensions. At the conclusion of this period, by performing studies, developing documents, and engaging in political negotiating, the two municipalities agreed to merge in June 2016. In May 2016, Klæbu called for a referendum, and approximately 56% of the inhabitants voted, which resulted in 67.3% votes in favour of merging with Trondheim. After the municipal agreement, the formal preparation and planning phase for implementation began in the two municipalities. In February 2017, the municipalities appointed a common steering committee as the merger project's overall decision body, in addition to the municipalities' own city councils. During this phase, several important documents were developed, including the project's milestone plan, progress plan, communication plan, transformation agreement, and other reports and documentation for the implementation phase. According to the schedule, the implementation phase will be mainly finished in 2018 and 2019, and the merger project will be completed prior to 2020. The project's budget is 35 million Norwegian kroner.

The merger project's organization is presented in Figure 2. The various roles and responsibilities are described as follows. The steering committee consists of 13 members, and it constitutes the top political organ for making decisions for the new organization. The stakeholder group is made up of six politicians and five employee representatives from the two organizations. They express their statements to the steering committee in all cases associated with employers' and employees' issues.
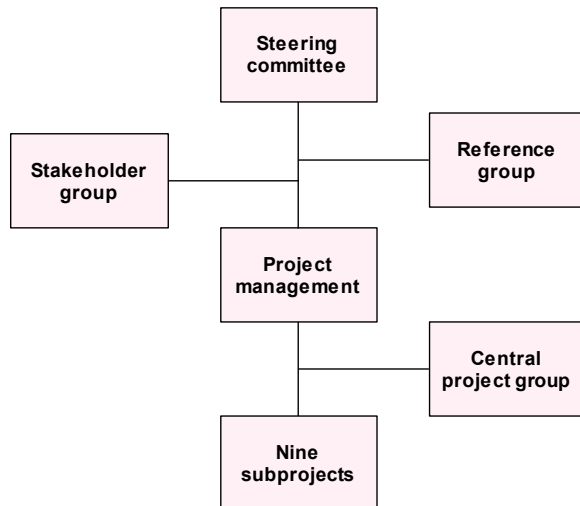
Figure 2. The merger project's organization.

The reference group comprises politicians from both municipalities, who provide input and suggestions throughout the merger process and follow cases related to the new organization's political body. The project management consists of two project managers (one chief municipal administrator each from Trondheim and Klæbu) and their new leader group in the merged municipality. The central project group is represented by employees whose tasks are primarily related to the project's progress. Finally, the project moves forward through administrative managers in nine sub-projects. The responsibility for leading these sub-projects is given to six functional managers in Trondheim. Under these sub-projects, several smaller projects exist with various characteristics.

4. Data results and discussion

In the merger case between Trondheim and Klæbu, data reveal that a project management framework was especially used to initiate, plan, and implement the change process. This public project's internal characteristics, which were complicated, demanding, and broad, and which possessed special contextual characteristics (Engwall, 2003; Parry et al, 2014), were well considered, according to the project manager, when project management was chosen to be applied. The project manager described the project as a flexible way of working—one that provided a framework for the merger process, prevented employment problems, and facilitated the use of organizational resources when they were needed.

The project was divided into several phases, including initiation, preparation and planning, implementation, and closure. By agreeing to merge, Trondheim and Klæbu began negotiations, studies, analyses, and case preparations in the initiation phase, following the governmental recipe's guidance concerning the initiation and preparation phases. The suggested timeline from the ministry of local government and modernisation specified the time constraint for the project and guided the two municipalities through the preparation and planning phases. The municipalities decided to establish a steering committee and an administrative project management group to lead and implement the transforming project. The sub-project areas were specified as six organizational functions, which included the people who were finally responsible for making the change happen. The project organization adopted what the

governmental recipe had laid out, with an emphasis on early and proper project management formation.

The project involved gathering needed skills and competencies across the organizations, and interview participants described this method of organizing required human resources as an intelligent choice. We argue that the Trondheim-Klæbu merger's project organization was completely driven from the top of the line organizations, for example, a top-down and management-driven change process (Kuipers et al., 2014; Van der Voet et al., 2015; Van der Voet et al., 2016). Indeed, project leaders were the top administrative chiefs of the two municipalities, and project group members, who supported the project leaders, were also mostly advisors or managers from line organizations.

The data collected show that this was a public project in which many political papers and decisions had to be in place so that the project management could perform the project tasks. According to the project manager, some worried that the merger project would be a rigid and bureaucratic organization as Partington (1996) discussed. However, instead, the project manager commented that the project framework provided the necessary flexibility and agility to manage the process successfully.

According to the empirical data, several project management tasks and activities were performed in the initiation and planning phases. The tasks included facilitating, coordinating, collaborating, and managing stakeholders; analysing risks; and planning budgets, times, scopes, and communication. In the same period, the project management performed various analyses, and many documents and reports were prepared, according to the project manager. More specifically, following the overall milestones for the project, a project plan, progress plan, communication plan, risk plan, and several other reports were created. This is in accordance with the guidance of the governmental recipe for organizations (Telemarksforsking, 2016). Specifically, they started as early as possible in the process and prepared a project progress plan that was then deemed a precondition for obtaining the needed elements and for devising other necessary plans, such as a project budget.

According to the merger advisor from the county government, the merger's use of project management to run the change process delineates what the governmental recipe advises municipalities to follow when realizing a merger process. The county governor, who has a state-level overview of merger projects and possesses a great deal of experience from previous comparable projects, considers applying project management to this merger project to be an excellent solution. Former merger experiences have shown very good results, and the Trondheim-Klæbu case is expected to have similar results. According to the merger advisor, Trondheim and Klæbu have applied effective processes so far compared with other merger projects in the county. Specifically, the preparation of a detailed milestone plan, progress plan, risk plan, and communication plan were identified as particularly exemplary. He even stated that the project's milestone plan and progress plan were detailed and superior compared with those of other merger cases in the county.

Locke (1996) claims that project members perform better when they have a specific and fixed goal to work towards. Essentially, clear and demanding goals result in improved performance. In other words, the more demanding a goal is, the greater the level of joy one feels when the goal is achieved. The process is most effective when feedback is given concerning the progress. Moreover, the highest commitment to the goal is obtained when the individual is convinced that: (1) the target is important and (2) the goal is achievable (Locke, 1996). In the studied

merger project, the goals were defined based on time, budget, and deliverable-quality constraints. All of the interviewees regarded this application positively. In addition, the project manager stated that the project goal served as a guide that provided directions for working and making decisions. Nevertheless, the data also reveal a level of confusion and anxiety among the change targets in lower levels of the organization. Interviewees described this by signifying poorly defined "sub-goals" for the change within the nine sub-projects or functions. Within various functions, an insufficient understanding of the larger aims of the functions made the organization's day-to-day productivity and the project's progress vulnerable. We argue that this issue shows that the failure to define and establish specific and fixed goals for lower levels of the organization caused the project to deviate from its overall objectives, at least to some extent. This is again in accordance with Locke's (1996) suggestion to include specific and fixed goals to improve a project's performance.

Papke-Shields et al. (2010) demonstrate that project management practices are practiced in projects with various consistencies and magnitudes. Areas related to a project's time, cost, and scope triangle are often most practiced, whereas human resources and procurement (softer factors) are less utilized. The reason for this could be, according to Papke-Shield et al. (2010), the importance of the triangle, for example, its role as a fixed goal and its ease of measurement. On the other hand, softer elements, such as human-related matters, are often more difficult to measure and quantify and are thus less practiced. Papke-Shield et al. (2010) suggest that the usage of project management practices is mainly influenced by the project's nature, context, and size. For instance, larger and more expensive projects employ more practices focused on control, scope, and quality management. Because of this merger project's special political nature and the fact that the project management included non-professional project managers who worked only part-time, it is not surprising that the studied project suffered in some project management areas. The collected data also reveal that the merger project did not apply a pure project management practice. This means that some project management knowledge areas (PMI, 2013), tools, and methods were not fully implemented and used. Specifically, even though Trondheim and Klæbu employed a project management framework, its application was offered, guided, carried out, and limited to the two organizations' capacities, along with the materials that the government made available to them. For example, the interviewees stated that for performing project management processes and activities, no special project software tools were used. In fact, only simple and common tools (such as Microsoft Word or Excel) in both organizations were used to plan and control the project's progress. According to the project manager, this issue was discussed at the project management level, and it was decided that no specific project software tools would be used. Here, we highlight some reasons that could explain this situation. First, none of the project management members had a professional project management background (educated or experienced with such a process). Consequently, the project manager argued that this would necessitate a great deal of training, which would set the project back financially and timewise. Second, the public and political nature of the project could have diminished some parts of the project management framework because they were not needed (legal specifications, political constraints, etc.). We think it is understandable that each project with different characteristics and contextual requirements would benefit from the discipline differently. In the municipal sector, numerous tasks and processes are predetermined or performed fairly similarly, and the human dimension of the tasks is often in focus. For this 'merger project', considering the guidance of the governmental recipe and the organizations' capacities, it can be clearly seen that the Trondheim-Klæbu case defined the merger project and lifecycle, established the project's organization, and developed its required project management processes through project management practices. Another reason could be the project's lifecycle, which is quite long to navigate with smooth agreements and integration. This differs

obviously from a merger process between two private companies, which would perhaps be accomplished as quickly and concretely as possible to optimally increase efficiency. However, it should be noted here that one of the interviewees expressed worry about when the project's agreements and actions would begin to be accomplished. This person also expressed that maybe specific software tools for controlling the scope would be necessary. The absence of basic planning and controlling software tools could cause situations in which the project management might overlook or neglect critical requirements in such a long and complicated process.

This was also highlighted by one of the interviewees, who stated, 'We have a project management controlling problem', which refers to dilemmas in the dimension of the management of a project's overall scope. One such example is that some functional leaders engaged in different activities of which the project management was not precisely aware because the activities were not presented to them properly and frequently. This not only endangered the management of the scope of the project but also it created financial consequences that challenged some of the budgeting procedures. Another one of the interviewees stated that it would be useful to bring a few functional leaders onto the project management level. Because this was not done, she mentioned that project management found it difficult to be aware of the status of completed or ongoing processes in different functions. Therefore, even considering the political nature of the merger, which may affect what project management practices could or should be employed, the theoretical argumentation above indicates that the merger necessitates employing vital practices from various knowledge areas.

Loo's (2002) study can shed additional light on the merger's discussed project management usage. He categorizes project management practices as technical and people oriented. His findings demonstrate that the most important technical areas from which projects could benefit include an integrated project management system, scope management, project planning, scheduling, controlling, and contract management. The most essential people-oriented themes are identified as a high-capacity team, stakeholder involvement, internal and external communication, and client contact. Compared with Loo's (2002) findings, we found that project planning is achieved by devising an overall (not detailed) project progress plan and milestone plan in which communication is well considered and practiced strongly, stakeholders are valued and communicated with optimally, and stakeholders, such as clients, are encouraged to become as involved as possible. However, the use of an integrated project management system that is sufficiently mature to embed a project's important requirements is identified as deficient and could represent an area for improvement. This is the collection of processes that ensures that various elements of projects are efficiently coordinated. Based on Loo's (2002) findings, we argue that the project management benefited from an integrated project management system to coordinate processes, such as project planning, scheduling, controlling, and contingency planning. Other areas concerning improving project management practices might include the management of the scope, budget (to assess and meet financial consequences stemming from weak control), resources, and control. Therefore, we also highlight that in accordance with Cown-Sahadath (2010), who acknowledges that a mature project management methodology is critical for managing and implementing organizational change, the merger project could have progressed more effectively had it been based on the merger's unique self- and contextual requirements, and had its relevant vital project management knowledge areas been identified, emphasized, and practiced.

By observing how this merger project applied and performed the project management discipline and coped with associated dilemmas, we assert that each project would benefit from project management practices differently based on its particular characteristics and context. However,

essential project management practices must be employed. Based on this new dimension that the case identified, we conclude that project management must not only implement a transforming change process but also ensure the use of vital project management practices.

5. Conclusion

Data analysis has shown that the Trondheim-Klæbu case favourably used project and project management as a tool to perform the merger project. We found that basic project management practices from various knowledge areas were vital and employed in a systematic and integrated manner. We especially highlight the importance of a fixed goal, a milestone and progress plan, and good communication with the stakeholders. We also identified that a project's internal characteristics, as well as its contextual nature, could influence the project management practices that the management uses or needs. We found that the political nature of the studied project and the lack of professional project management influenced how and which practices were used in the merger project. However, we could also still clearly find that the lack of 'important or essential' project management practices resulted in some substantial negative consequences. Overall, the studied case showed a reasonable, but perhaps not optimal, use of available project management practices.

We furthermore determined that the merger's project management practices were more focused on certain areas of knowledge, such as time planning, budget management (partially), and stakeholder communication, whereas a relative lack of attention was paid to proper scope management and controlling methods in particular. We also concluded that the merger project could have benefitted from focusing more on establishing standard project management practices; improving the scope management; extending the budget management; and establishing integrated control methods, resource management, and more effective planning and preparation. We believe that the findings of this study provide guidance that can be used to optimize every transforming change project.

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