

# Why and How Projects in Organizations Differ? the Example of Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Organizations

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A project carried out on the Project Management Course, under the  
supervision of Prof. Paulo Faroleiro

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Lisbon, 7th of January 2015

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# Why and How Projects in Organizations Differ? The Example of Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Organizations

## **Abstract**

This research has as a goal to give an overview of what Project Management is in Portugal. The purpose is not to focus on a small picture, but to understand the broad concept and perception of Project Management in Portugal in two very important sectors: Profit- and Non-Profit Sector.

Both Profit- and Non-Profit project managers have been interviewed, giving an insight of how different projects are in both sectors and why. This paper will be especially helpful comparing the Project Management maturity of Portugal to other countries regarding these two different point of views.

## **Keywords**

Project Management Disciplines, Project Management in NPOs, Project Management Maturity

## 1. Purpose of Project – General Overview

### Introduction and relevance of topics

Plenty of research in the Project Management<sup>1</sup> area is focused on the same facts, success or failure of a project is based on the “Iron Triangle”, which is time, cost and quality but there is much more to project management than just that.

We believe project management is much more and should not be reduced to only some disciplines; this is obviously a weakness of current project management research and should be addressed.

The focus is on one of Söderlund’s (2004) proposed questions in order to address the before mentioned issue. How do projects in organizations differ?

This research is based on Constant’s statement of 1999: “project management must be understood as a situated practice where cultural, social and institutional traits are paramount.”

But why including the Non-Profit sector?

“Given the important social and economic role of these projects and the difficulties of their management, we argue that more attention should be paid to this area.” Golini et al. (2014) p.9

Based on these declarations, the differences of the project management approach in Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Organizations<sup>2</sup> have been analyzed. The purpose is not to focus on a small picture; but to understand the broad concept and perception of PM in Portugal in two very important sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> PM                      Project Management  
<sup>2</sup> NPO                     Non-Profit Organization

## Past Research and Literature Review

As Söderlund (2004) has summarized “Project management seems to be a research field with potentials of bringing different disciplines to focus on a focal phenomenon of study, i.e. projects.

Crawford et al. (2006) made as well an excellent wrap-up saying that: “Project Management as a profession and an area of research, continues to grow and develop. In response to project management being applied in new industries, countries and application areas, the demands on project management continue to change. These changes alter the way project management is perceived [...]”

Most of the PM literature is based on Profit Organizations and only little literature connects PM with the Non-Profit sector. One of the most interesting papers I came across reading was from Golini et al. (2014) where he studies the impact of PM on NGO’s International Development projects. Thus it appears that a major difference between the Profit and Non-Profit Sector is the goal. The Non-Profit sector has as a goal to enhance persons’, environments’ or animals’ life, they are the clients, the ones that will benefit from a successful project. However, they do not contribute financially and as a result, they mostly are not involved when it comes to the initiation of the projects. Unfortunately this often leads to project failures whenever they are executed.

Aligned with this statement, Youker said 2003 in his presentation about “The Nature of International Development Projects” at the PMI that those projects are delivering intangible outputs and outcomes like society empowerment or alleviation of poverty, which makes it more difficult to implement project management tools that are based on metrics and tangible outputs that can be measured.

## 2. Discussion

### Methodology

When the research period started, I knew the basic theory of project management disciplines. Additionally, it was personally important to include the non-profit sector, due to my previous experience in Nova's Social Consulting Club.

Based on this knowledge, semi-structured interviews in both, Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Organizations have been done.

As an international student in Portugal, I had the advantage of not being biased with previous knowledge of the situation.

Depending on those facts, Grounded Theory was chosen as a methodology.

As Glaser and Strauss (1965) suggest, the accounts are based in those of the project managers, working from their categorical worldviews, by collecting data on the perspectives of project managers in their work environment.

The concept of Grounded Theory has as a goal to find a core category, by applying a code to the collected data and integrating all the various aspects of that theory as Strauss and Corbin (1998) are describing the approach.

Since Kohlegger et al. (2009) says that 'Maturity Models are seen as models that reflect certain aspects of reality, often called capabilities, and define qualitative attributes, which are used to classify a competence into one of several clearly defined areas. These classes are typically brought into sequential order.'

Meaning that using a Maturity Model would allow following the approach of Grounded Theory by applying a code to the data, which has a specific category as an outcome, in our case, a score.

A Maturity Model usually measures the PM maturity of a company, however, this system has been adapted to measure the maturity of specific PM disciplines within both sectors.

According to the Capability Maturity Model (CPM) that has been developed by the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie-Mellon University, organizations advance through a series of five stages to maturity.

**Figure 1: The five levels of Project Management Maturity**

<b>Level 5</b>				
Continuous Improvement	<b>Level 4</b>			
	Benchmarking	<b>Level 3</b>		
<b>Process Improvement</b>		Singular Methodology	<b>Level 2</b>	
	<b>Process Control</b>		Common Processes	<b>Level 1</b>
		<b>Process Definition</b>		Common Language
			<b>Basic Knowledge</b>	

source: Demir et al. (2010)

Based on Kerzner's (2001) explanation of the different levels, they have been adapted to the main PM capabilities/disciplines. Zero means unaware and five means a fully integrated process that is constantly optimized. [Appendix I](#) shows the detailed explanation of each score.

For each of the PM disciplines, numerical scores are obtained based on a range from zero to five, to be able to establish a radar comparison. However the descriptive answers are kept too, to understand the roots and causes of the results.

PM has a wide variety of disciplines, of which each discipline has a lot of different factors that influence it and those factors have their origins usually due to some internal or external circumstances.

This makes it a challenge to judge how mature the PM approach is of each sector, meaning that each discipline can be seen in many different ways and aspects.

The maturity of eight PM disciplines has been measured trying to vary to get a good overview.

The disciplines are a mixture of more traditional disciplines like the “Iron Triangle” disciplines, Cost-, Time- and Quality Management same as Scope Management. The other half are more modern disciplines like Leadership-, Communication-, Stakeholder- and Risk Management.

To better analyze the maturity of each discipline, the most important factors for each discipline have been defined based on three famous PM books.

Turner’s *Handbook of Project Based Management*, which is based on all major PM disciplines, Kerzner’s *A System Approach to Planning, Scheduling* that is based on the PMBOK, the base for PMI certification and Controlling and Longman’s *The Rational Project Manager* that gave an overview on how to implement PM processes in a more practical approach.

Each discipline gets a score that is the average of the scores for four influencing factors.

In the results part you will be able to see the whole process for one of the disciplines.

## Sample

All in all, the sample contains twenty-two interviews. Those have been conducted with Project Managers of Portuguese companies, twelve on the Profit side and ten on the Non-Profit side.

Most companies did not want to be named, so only the different sizes and industries that the companies are working in are being used.

Please see appendices II – IV to get an overview of the company size and different industries of the interviewed companies. Especially the distribution of industries varies a lot, which gives us an excellent overview.

As a measure of size, the threshold of the European Commission for SME's has been used. Companies exceeding the threshold of a medium sized company have been denominated as a "large size". To see the specifications of the different thresholds please see appendix V.

## Comparison of Profit and Non-Profit Organizations

As a qualitative approach, the data is being used for explanatory purposes, giving an interesting hint on the differentiators of PM and how it is perceived from project managers.

Furthermore it gives the possibility to draw the line between Profit and Non-Profit Organizations, giving an idea, which PM disciplines are the strength of each sector and which PM disciplines are being neglected. The Portuguese outcomes globally differ a lot compared to the outcome of an interview made at the Swiss branch of a global company. Based on the interview outcomes, a radar graph has been established to visualize the gaps between the project management disciplines in Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Organizations

The example of Time Management is used to illustrate how the methodology, that has been previously explained, was translated into action and to show how the scores of this radar have been obtained. For all other disciplines the same approach has been used.

### **Time Management Example: Comparison of Profit and Non-Profit Sector**

Time Management belongs to PM literature since its very beginning. The most basic step to undertake, is to have a timeline which shows when has to be done what. You need to know when a work element starts, when does it end and its duration.

For each project should be recorded when an activity is planned to start and when it actually starts, eventually as well if there is any flexibility between each activity that comes along.

Being able to plan this time schedule accurately is dependent on what you are taking as a base for time estimation. It is certainly an important skill that a project manager needs to have, being able to estimate the duration of an activity.

This is mainly dependent on two things:

1. The amount of time it physically takes to do the work involved,
2. Which in turn is dependent on the number of people available to do it and the lead-time, or waiting time.

Time Management includes as well knowing, which resources you need for each activity so that a resource profile can be calculated. A final important factor is controlling; the critical path needs to be observed in order to make sure that the project ultimately can be completed. That means that if a work package is delayed, we can immediately put remedial actions into place.

To know when a remedial action is needed, it needs to be clear what are the thresholds or triggers.

Usually, if a project is well scheduled and its process accordingly executed, time delays should occur only rarely and if they do, a corrective plan is already waiting so that the outcome of the project is not jeopardized.

In this case it makes sense answering the following four questions:

1. Is a detailed time line set, with start date, end date and duration? Tools used?
2. Does a baseline exist? Do they keep track of what should be and what actually is?
3. Do we know all resource requirements? Is overtime recorded? How detailed are they?

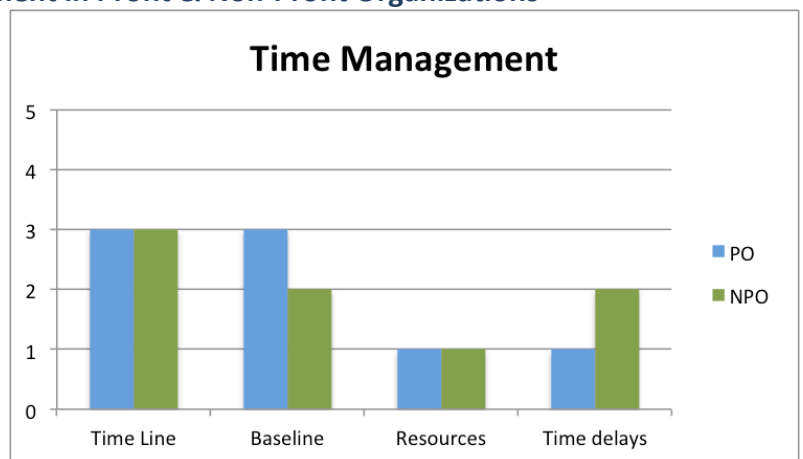
Basis of set-up (previous experience, estimation,...)?

4. Frequency of time delays? How regular do they appear? Are they analyzed? During which occasions & activities does it happen?

Based on the data of the interviews for both sectors, Profit and Non-Profit, the following results come up:

**Figure 2&3: Time Management in Profit & Non-Profit Organizations**

Time Management		
	PO	NPO
Time Line	3	3
Baseline	3	2
Resources	1	1
Time delays	1	2
Sum	7	6
Average	1,75	1,5
<b>Radar Value</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>



1.

In this case the final result for both sectors is 2. Yet looking into each question separately, they still differ. Both sectors use time lines yet the reason why the scores aren't higher is that the time lines should be more detailed. For example using Gantt Charts as a tool would make time management more efficient.

Additionally both sectors are aware of baselines, however in the profit sector they are being used more often as a tool to see if the project is on track. In the Non-Profit sector, organizations have a notion of what initially was planned and what the actual situation is, however baselines are not yet integrated into the time management process.

As Figures 2&3 show, the worst results come from resource requirements.

Both sectors have actually a very good notion of which resources they require but according to the interviewees, they have trouble to get the resources approved. Most of the resources come from different departments and most of the companies have a rather functional organization, meaning that project managers often know their resource requirements but aren't able to get them because the functional managers don't approve. Ergo, resources cannot be managed accordingly by project managers due to the lack of leadership being conferred to them. In the end, it is less leading a project but more reacting, instead it should be acting and leading proactively.

Consequently, time delays occur rather often due to flaws in the time management process, as well, triggers and thresholds are mostly unknown. Meaning, time delays aren't being spotted early enough and resource requirements cannot be fulfilled due to disagreement with the functional staff.

Yet, an interesting fact is that, even though time delays occur regularly, neither client nor company considers time as a major problem.

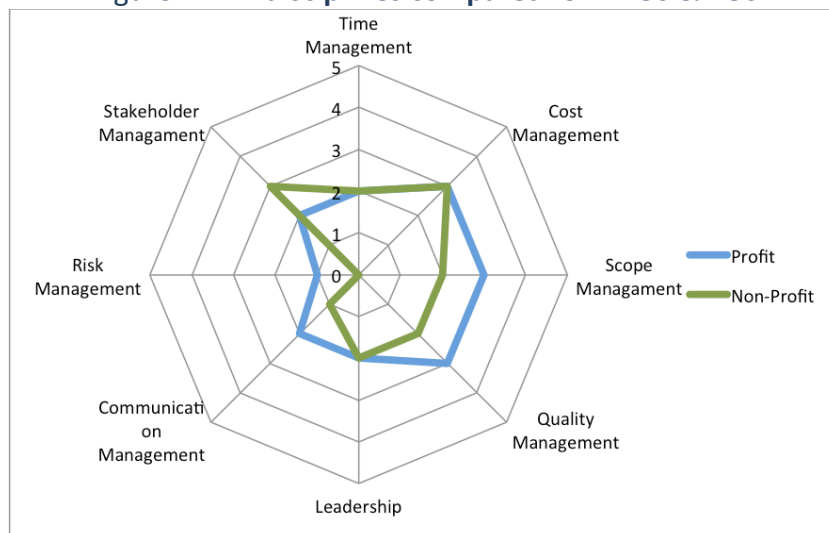
Hereafter we want to explain the results that are displayed in Figure 4. For an explanation of each score of each sector and discipline, please refer to the Annex document. For each discipline the composition of each score can be retraced in the annex document. The document will help to understand what the most influencing

factors for each discipline are and how good or bad each sector came off in each discipline based on each of those factors.

### 3. Conclusion and Outlook

This section shows the main differences and similarities of PM disciplines. For some disciplines conclusions could be drawn of what the roots of those scores are and for some of them clues are given which can be used for further research or studies.

Figure 4: PM disciplines compared for NPOs & POs



#### Similarities

Even though a both sectors might have the same score doesn't mean that the root of the score is the same for both sectors. Usually, even though the end score is the same, the roots differ. Inside each discipline the same concept was followed, it was analyzed if there is common ground and then the differences have been concluded. Not all of them differ or have similar ground. The radar shows that actually only 3 disciplines are similar in the Profit and Non-Profit Sector.

The first interesting similarity that both sectors have is the rather low score of 2 in the concern of **Time Management**. The Profit, same as the Non-Profit sector score equally low in their usage of Time Management within projects. Both sectors already know from the beginning on that they will have time delays and they accept it most of the times. Considering the same interview with a Global company, under this global context this would be considered an unacceptable behavior.

According to the interviewed project managers, they agreed that in terms of Time Management both sectors are worse off due to the economic crisis. For the Non-Profit sector, they suffer since in times of crisis the first thing that the population cuts are donations and as for the profit sector, the client has more power because companies have to rely on every client they are able to get and often cannot risk to lose them, so they have to adapt to all wishes

Yet, according to the data of the interviews, the source of the low score has different origins in both sectors. The Non-Profit sector usually only has Time Management problems if there is a shortage of money or if they don't get as much funds as they would need.

As for the Profit sector, Time Management problems come mostly due to the client, because clients change their minds on what they want to have as an outcome of the product/service. In this case the companies need to cope with this change, which leads to delays, ultimately this influences disciplines like Risk Management and Change Management, which gives a great idea on how integrated all disciplines are.

Nowadays a broadly discussed topic is **leadership**. In this case, the Profit and Non-Profit sector don't differ and both score a 2. Even though both sectors have the same score, they have it due to different roots.

Leadership in the Non-Profit area is a sensitive topic. In this area, the work is usually very emotional because it is related with a cause that they care about which can have an enormous influence on peoples' performance. Moreover, in the Non-Profit sector, a lot of different cultures have to work together, which makes the role of the project manager a very delicate one. For this kind of leadership, continuous training and experience is needed, however the younger NPOs don't have the experience or the money for appropriate training. Simultaneously the board members and/or founders of these organizations usually don't have business background since the reason to found a NPO usually is due to personal involvement with the cause. This has a big impact on how the company is led and how decisions are being taken.

In the Profit Sector's leadership model, project managers know how and when to adapt to the situations. They see themselves usually more as motivators than as a boss. Which means that their role is to keep people committed to the project and which means as well that they let go of very stiff hierarchical leadership.

Yet their biggest challenge is that often the type of leadership within projects contradicts the leadership style of the rest of the company. This is as well the reason that holds the Profit Sector back to get to the next level.

Almost 80% of the project managers reported that in higher ranks of the company, the importance of PM is neglected. So the more horizontal PM team is in constant friction with the rest of the more functional company.

For **Cost Management** the score obtained is a 3. That means both sectors do a very extensive Cost Management. One major flaw that both sectors share concerning Cost Management is that usually no reserves are available, meaning having a reserve to deal with unforeseen events. This is due to the fact that both sectors struggle to cover the costs that will appear during the project and this doesn't allow them to account for reserves, which again has an influence on Issue Management and Change Management. The Non-Profit Sector often prepares a Cost Management plan to apply for funding or get donations and additionally they do a Project Plan. Meaning that they have to have very accurate plans since the sponsors want to know exactly what they are spending their money for. This makes Cost Management by far one of the most important disciplines, which can cause problems sometimes. NPOs that are surviving from donations oftentimes have to deal with Moral Hazard, the Non-Profit Sector is relying on external funding and the companies regularly try to take advantage of this. Bottom line, companies don't just donate money anymore for the sake of it but want to have something in return. So some NPOs need to decide between accepting money and eventually risking that a sponsor is abusing this fact for his own sake.

For the profit sector on the one side, it usually has to struggle with the customer's changing ideas. Even though they have an excellent cost management plan since they have a restricted budget, it regularly is destroyed because the companies have to be flexible if the client wishes to change scope. Companies cannot afford to lose a client, so they have to go with the change in plans and in some cases even have to bear the extra costs themselves. In the end, the client has the negotiation power in his hand.

## Differences

As we can see in [Figure 4](#) five out of eight disciplines differ from each other, even though each discipline differs at most one score from each other.

As for **Communication Management**, the Profit Sector scores a 2 and the Non-Profit Sector a 1.

Especially the Non-Profit Sector has a lack of communication processes, for most project managers it is not a priority, additionally teams are much smaller, so for project managers, a communication plan doesn't make sense.

Many times, project managers have as part of their role to work directly "in the field", in those cases time is lost due to inefficient communication because several calls and emails have to be replied to, answering the same questions to different stakeholders.

The Profit Sector on the other hand has several communication plans however not all integrated into one process. Here the biggest challenge comes from the stakeholders, since the team working closely with the project manager usually communicates very effectively, but the other people belonging in one way or another to the project don't know where to find which information. The results of the data showed that often communication between the stakeholders differs a lot, which makes it confusing for everyone to know where to find what.

Another outcome was the excellent **Stakeholder Management** of the Non-Profit Sector with a score of 3 whereas the Profit Sector only scored a 2.

NPOs invest a lot of time into getting to know stakeholders, analyzing them, trying to know them and continuously improving and updating their database on the stakeholders. Stakeholders are chosen very carefully and only after a lot of

consideration. In this sector, a big part of the projects is analyzing stakeholders. This comes through the fact that the NPOs are dependent on external funds, so they need to know exactly whom they are dealing with to know how to find ways to get donations and funds. Only by knowing the stakeholders it is possible to continuously find new ways to collect money. However this sector not only relies on the stakeholders' money but as well on their commitment. This represents the biggest challenge that NPOs have to deal with, getting stakeholders to commit. Even though people and companies like the idea of volunteering often they are not dedicated enough and prioritize other things. As for the Profit Sector, they would like to invest more time into analyzing stakeholders yet, they cannot because the client often pressures a lot and wants to have results and actions the fastest possible. This fact makes it difficult for companies to thoroughly analyze the stakeholders and consequently as well to get them involved into the process. Additionally, having stakeholders committed is challenging because clients are often trying to push down prices, so some stakeholders might suffer due to low profit margins and therefor are less committed.

Furthermore stakeholders often don't know the importance of PM, which makes Stakeholder Management very demanding. Especially for the Profit sector, other departments often don't understand what PM does or is, that makes them more resistant to give their resources, which consequently has a bad influence on HR Management.

As for **Scope Management** the profit sector scores of 3, giving it a good idea what the project's objectives are, what needs to be accomplished and what kind of resources they need.

Yet, the reason why the score isn't higher for the Profit Sector, according to the interviewees, is that even though Scope Management seems to work rather fine in theory, however Profit Organizations suffer due to the fact that clients change requirements regularly. They are often forced to acquiesce and change details of the project in order to not lose a client, so they have to change scope more often than actually feasible, which consequently influences Change Management.

On the other hand for Non-Profit Organizations, that score a 2, they have a rather good Scope Management with strict rules, activities and resources well planned and a clear project objective however they are dependent on external sponsors that have different goals and opinions. Even though the process of setting objectives, goal and requirements is well defined, sponsors often queer the pitch.

A score of 3 for the Profit Sector and a score of 2 for the Non-profit Sector for **Quality Management** have been obtained. Both sectors are aware of the importance of this discipline but still haven't figured out yet the best way to measure the qualitative outcome of their projects. Both sectors are measuring the quality based on customer satisfaction through surveys or conversations.

In the Profit Sector, the measurement of quality is often subjective and only some best practices exist, as well the tools being used are rather simple. However they are searching intensively for quality measurement tools and elaborating an integrated quality measurement process.

For the Non-Profit Sector quality measurement is more of a challenge because the output of the projects is usually intangible, which makes the impact difficult to measure and consequently as well very subjective. Though this sector also puts a lot of effort

into finding ways of how to better measure and manage quality, unfortunately best practices don't really exist yet.

**Risk Management** on the other hand is yet a discipline that will have to be elaborated in the Portuguese Profit and Non-Profit Sector. None of the sectors have an actual process in place to manage neither risks nor are risks being categorized or assessed.

For the Non-Profit Sector Risk Management is close to non-existent, which is why they score a 0. The NPOs usually don't keep issue logs; the method to deal with issues and risks is solving them in the moment they happen. Additionally, the organizations cannot put aside a reserve to deal with risks and issues since they have tight budget constraints, putting extra money by side is simply not feasible.

As for the Profit Sector, which scores a 1, companies are a step further, they do recognize the need for a more extensive risk management and usually, companies try to have a plan B in case of emergency, but yet again, there is close to no space for reserves due to tight budgets.

According to most of the interviewed project managers, risk management is not seen as a priority within projects.

All in all, reviewing the results, it becomes clear that most disciplines are closely related to each other and often share the same roots for their problems.

## **Propositions**

Based on those findings we are able to give propositions and directions, which can enhance the PM approach. Additionally, as Gioia et al. (2012) are giving a final dimension of the analyzed data in their paper about Grounded Theory, basically

summing everything up. The same will be done for each sector by describing between which 2 concepts they are struggling.

For NPOs, especially the concern of leadership can be handled more effective if the decisions would be taken more in a business point of view, which is understandingly very difficult but could push them forward, which will ultimately support the cause they are fighting for.

NPOs should be basing some things more on how usually business is done, acknowledging the more bureaucratic side of PM, which often can be solved with a simple PM tool. Yet not losing focus on what they are fighting for.

This sector is stuck between 2 concepts Idealism and Professionalism. Currently they are more on the idealistic side but have the possibility to find a position more in the middle between both, by improving the before mentioned flaws.

The concept of the profit sectors is finding a middle way between Perfection and Pragmatism.

In theory, everybody knows how the process of a project should be yet, regularly, this well planned process is overruled by a spontaneous reaction to the environment. Mostly when it comes to sudden changes or when decisions have to be made. This is where Risk Management and Communication can play a decisive role. Certainly the economic crisis makes it difficult for companies to play their cards as planned yet, if PM would be more integrated into the sector and everyone would understand the importance of it, this will give the company more negotiation power.

All in all, it became clear throughout this research that PM is not yet very common in Portugal. Looking at the results, it is more prevalent in the Profit Sector than in the Non-Profit Sector but still both sectors have a lot of room for improvement, especially for Risk Management

## Epilogue

A last comment is important to mention. Only to one question the same answer has been obtained from 90% of the interviewees. To the question: “What is a main lesson learned as a project manager?” The answer to it was twenty times: “How different each person is and how different persons react to incentives. Some you can convince only with very rational facts and others with a more emotional speech.”

Often, you expect that everyone functions the same way than yourself and responds the same way to different things and only when you lead a team, you realize that this is not the case.

This makes you realize how important it is that you understand your team and what influences each person. The better a project manager knows all the stakeholders, the more he can guide them towards the goals he has set.

Ultimately this shows that all the disciplines are interrelated and if one doesn't work well, this has an impact on the other disciplines and most important, people are controlling those disciplines, so if they are not motivated, again the PM process will not function as it is supposed to be, no matter if Profit or Non-Profit sector. This reaffirms the statement of the beginning of this paper; PM should not just be reduced to some disciplines.

## 4. Appendices

### I. Explanation of Scores

**0. Unaware Level:** importance of discipline isn't recognized

**1. Initial Level** means that the importance of the PM discipline is recognized and awareness is present.

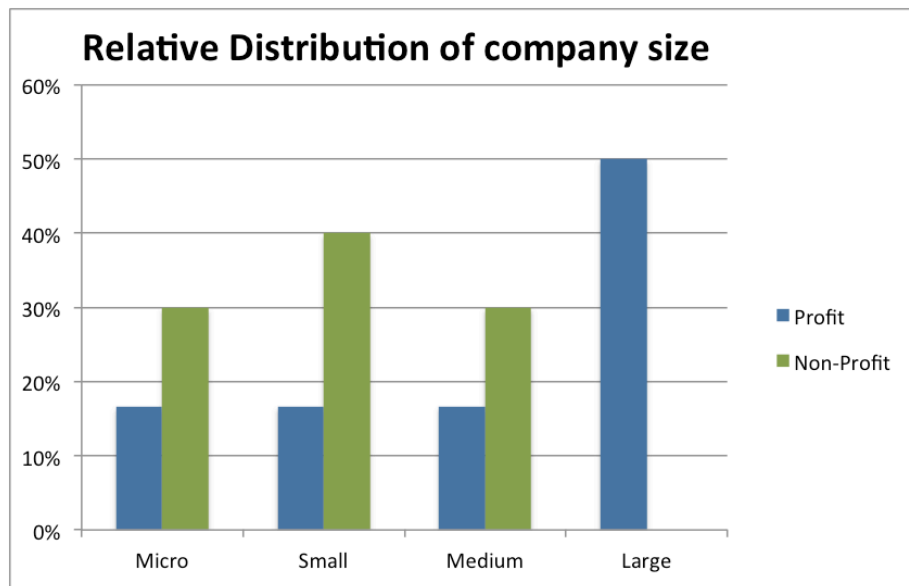
**2. Repeatable Level** is reached when the need for common processes for a successful implementation of the PM discipline is recognized.

**3. Defined Level** is whenever those specific processes are actually implemented and several methodologies are synergized into one methodology

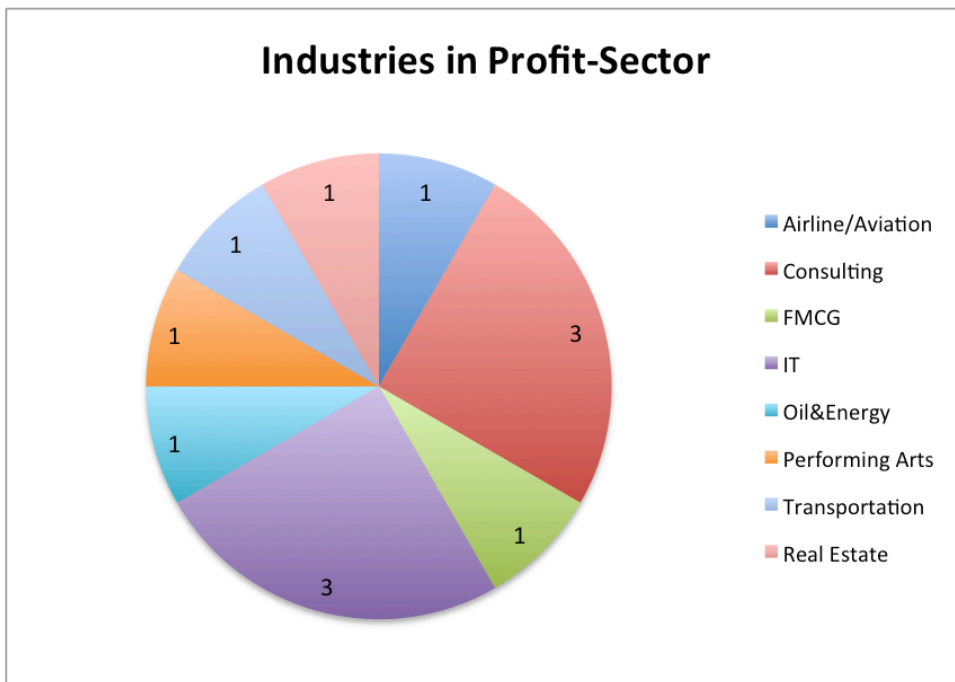
**4. Managed Level** takes place when people realize that constant improvement of processes is needed to stay competitive. They start to search against whom to benchmark and what.

**5. Optimizing Level** when the obtained benchmark information is used to analyze whether this will enhance their methodology or not.

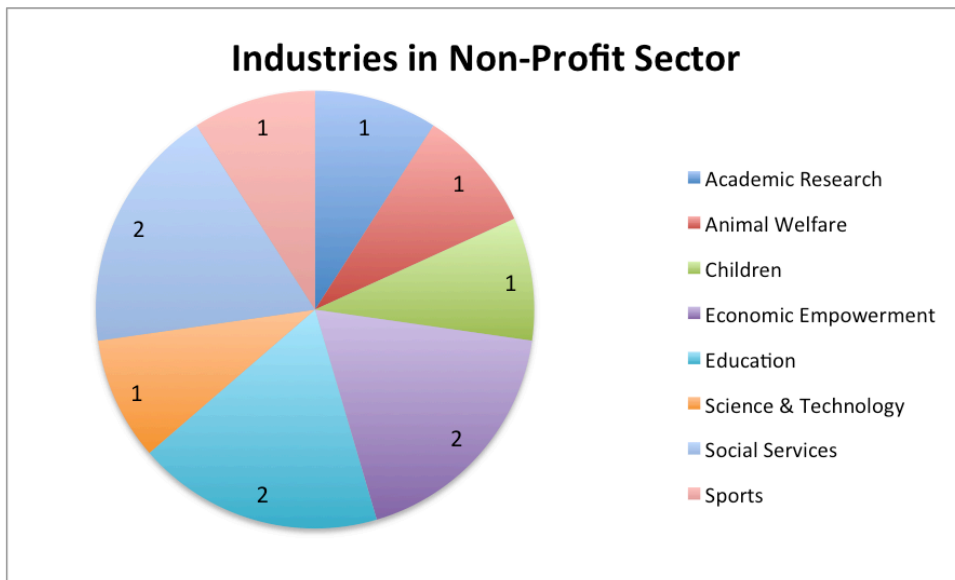
### II. Relative Distribution of the Company Size



### III. Industry Distribution of Interviews on the Profit Side



### IV. Industry Distribution of Interviews on the Non-Profit Side



## V. EC threshold for SME businesses

**THE NEW THRESHOLDS (Art. 2)**

Enterprise category	Headcount: Annual Work Unit (AWU)	Annual turnover	Annual balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ €50 million <small>(in 1996 € 40 million)</small>	≤ €43 million <small>(in 1996 € 27 million)</small>
Small	< 50	≤ €10 million <small>(in 1996 € 7 million)</small>	≤ €10 million <small>(in 1996 € 5 million)</small>
Micro	< 10	≤ €2 million <small>(previously not defined)</small>	≤ €2 million <small>(previously not defined)</small>

source: European Commission

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