

CROWDSOURCING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

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***Abstract.** This chapter presents the possibilities for using crowdsourcing in the management of local government units (LGU). An attempt was made to determine the gist of LGU success, focusing on the nature of the public sector and relations of the population with local government. The hereto proposed use of crowdsourcing is to improve the quality of planning and implementation of goals by incorporating in the process those inhabitants who are active Internet users. The use of their know-how shall allow for better determination of social needs and for planning some activities to meet the needs of the greatest possible number of people. Corporate experiences clearly indicate that this is the method that results in obtaining more precise information on client needs.*

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1. Success Dimensions of an Organization

In the topic-focused literature, the concept of a success is rarely defined. Typically, the authors confine themselves to explaining this concept by means of dimensions or determinants. The word of ‘success’, based on Polish Language Dictionary¹, has two meanings: the first one is – a successful outcome of some project, an achievement of the intended goal; and the second one – becoming famous, rich, obtaining a high position, etc.. Tokarski² points out that the word is of Latin origin (it originates from the word ‘successus’) and represents a successful outcome of a project, something going right, triumph, achievement, and good fortune. Assuming such understanding of the word success, it should be noted that the latter is the result of a pre-planned sequence of activities, carried out under the conditions of uncertainty to obtain results in view of proper effort, ingenuity and perseverance of the subject. Achievement of the success effects in a feeling of satisfaction, pleasure, or self-fulfillment. Therefore,

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¹ Polish Language Dictionary electronic version – PWN <http://sjp.pwn.pl/slownik/2576536/sukces>

² J. Tokarski (red.) Dictionary Of Foreign Words, PWN, Warsaw 1980, p. 711

an assumption should be made that the success is achieved whenever regardless of any obstacles a project goal is executed in an effective manner.

In the context of an organization, the concept of success may be considered in many aspects. Some scholars point out to implementation of goals related to viability, profitability, gaining profits by owners, or the size of market share. Kay³ puts a lot of stress on opinions expressed by clients and employees. Evolutionists insist that the very survival and the development themselves of the organization stand for a success, and that market difficulties are a natural selection mechanism⁴. Sometimes this term is also associated with innovation and technical efficiency.

The ongoing processes of globalization, easy and quick access to the Internet significantly affect the understanding and the achievement of success by today's organizations. Ashkenas⁵ and co-authors noted already in 1998 a significant change in the factors that condition success of an organization. Such features as: the size of the organization, hierarchy, a clear division of power, narrow specialization and well-designed control system have been replaced by new features associated with organizational knowledge, competencies, and skills. Flexibility, innovation, integration and operational speed have been considered to be the most important features to facilitate the achievement of the organization's success.

Flexibility in operation mostly involves fast and efficient acquisition of knowledge by the organization members through their participation in different types of tasks. Frequent changes in the types and scope of activities being performed are related to the adaptation of an individual to changes in operating conditions. Obtaining a skill of a quick acquisition of knowledge and its further application facilitates gaining an organizational advantage. The existing rigid division of tasks and responsibilities is a barrier limiting the flexibility and hindering the adaptive processes of the organization. Therefore, today's organizations are increasingly moving away from a rigid division of tasks between various positions and form teams whose composition depends on the current scope of tasks.

³ J. Kay, *The base of the success of the company*, PWE, Warsaw 1996, p. 8.

⁴ Por. J. Strużyna, M. Majowska, T. Ingram, *The success of the organization from the perspective of the theory of evolution*, in: the success of the organization. The creature, measuring, conditioning, Work and materials the Faculty of management at the University of Gdańsk, No. 2/1, Sopot 2009, p. 92.

⁵ R. Ashkenas, D. Ulrich, T. Jick, S. Kerr, *Boundaryless Organization. Behind the Chains of Organizational Structure*, Jossey – Bass Inc. Publishers, San Francisco, 1998

A particularly important feature in the context of achieving organizational success is innovation understood as a creative acquisition and use of knowledge to build new solutions to improve business performance. Currently, activities that are based on looking for improvements via control systems, procedures used, methods and the ways of performing current tasks according to the assumed standards are considered insufficient.

Efficient implementation of the organization's goals requires the development of mechanisms enabling the use of various types of activities to carry out current needs. This feature is defined as organizational integration. Thanks to it tasks are assigned to appropriate specialists according to current needs and possibilities, and not, as in the traditional management, in accordance with organizational structure. An important element of such solution is a relatively new employee competence – the ability to cooperate. Thanks to that competence, it is possible to form temporary working groups created for a specific activity as a replacement of permanent teams.

Flexibility and innovation is inseparable with the organization's operational speed. This feature is particularly important in conditions of a highly variable environment. It allows for faster introduction of new products to the market and quick modification thereof. The size of organization, so far regarded as one of the success factors, considerably reduces the organization's response time which in consequence makes the achievement of success more difficult.

Pabian⁶ proposes that organizational success factors should be considered in two dimensions, namely: marketing and managerial. From this paper's point of view, the more fundamental is the managerial dimension being considered in compliance with the four basic management functions, i.e. planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling. According to the concept proposed, the purpose of planning is to develop such activities which eventually lead to the marketing success of the organization. Thus, growth-oriented goals of the organization should be identified and the effective strategy to achieve them should be determined at the planning stage. For the purpose of achieving the goals, it is necessary to determine organizational structure proper for their execution and allocate the necessary resources. Contractors should be delegated with authorizations adequate to their tasks and provided with the necessary knowledge. The manager role should be to provide support and motivate

⁶ A. Pabian, *Determinants of business success on the market*, An outline of the issues, Technical University of Czestochowa, Czestochowa 1998 p. 81

staff. Control shall serve to assess the degree of compliance between deliverables being achieved and earlier assumptions, and it provide a basis for the improvement of the organization's performance.

By adopting such approach, it should be noted that regardless of the type of organization, the tasks performed by it, or its resources at hand, the success of the organization largely depends on the quality of the planning process. Any undetected planning errors impede the attainment of goals, and thus may lead to a situation in which achievement of the success will be impossible. Therefore, the planning process should be considered as one of the most important factors determining the success of the organization.

2. Gist of LGU Success

The PWN Encyclopedia defines local government as the scope of competences established by law to independently settle issues in a given community, represent its interests before the state government authorities, and perform the tasks as specified by legal regulations, agreements, or memoranda of understanding. Owsiak⁷ believes that the gist of the local government is inextricably linked to the decentralization of public finance down to the local level. It is guaranteed by the highest legal act – the Constitution – and leads to qualitative changes in the execution of public tasks. It is also a form of organization of local government, and one of its primary tasks is to manage public affairs. With regard to local government, this leads to the autonomous system of local government bodies, development by the state, and to providing them with power competencies. The basic condition for the establishment of such institutions is the acceptance that the local community interests are the area separate from the state interests, while maintaining common interests of the entire society. This separateness leads to the granting of legal and economic personality to local government units. The local government authorities, therefore, constitute an institution established to independently perform tasks of public administration, equipped with material means allowing for their implementation. Implementation of those tasks is inseparably linked with the relative independence from other parts of the state (government) administration and the possibility of independent development of internal organization, election of representative bodies, and legislative powers to make local law.

⁷ S. Owsiak, *Public finance theory and practice*, Scientific Publishing PWN, Warsaw, 2005, pp. 140, 432-434

Binding since 1 January 1999 in Poland, the system of local government is divided into three tiers: municipal, district, and provincial government. Each of the local government tiers is equipped with different competencies and a different set of goals to achieve. Regardless, however, of the nature of the government level, local government units (LGU) can be considered successful when they have chosen such goals and methods for implementation thereof that will satisfy the needs of the largest possible number of inhabitants. Thus, from the local government's success point of view, proper identification of social needs and then a subsequent conversion of this knowledge into a bundle of objectives and their efficient implementation is the key here.

In LGU management – as in other public sector entities – economic goals are of a relatively lower importance compared to the socially-oriented goals. This *dichotomy* of *goals* does not mean, however, the possibility to give up pro-effective ways to use public resources. In this case, managing local finances requires then to obtain adequate incomes and revenues and allocate them in those assets components that will ensure the implementation of strategic and operational objectives of the local government unit and constitute its success. Proper financial management is, therefore, a prerequisite for proper implementation of the local government tasks, in particular in the area of⁸:

- funding of socio-economic development;
- coverage for losses and providing financial support for activities performed by enterprises subsidiary to local government authorities;
- coverage of the costs of public services rendered free of charge or for a partial payment;
- securing safety;
- maintenance of the local government structures etc.

Effects of the process of administering resources-at-hand (completion of tasks), being measured by the level of satisfaction of the local community needs in given environmental conditions, are therefore a reflection of the management process quality. This results from a well-known (from the management science theory) phenomenon of equifinality, effecting in achievement of different results under the same conditions and using the same resources. In the local government common practice, this phenomenon is often associated with – resulting from the *public choice*

⁸ Rudzka-Lorentz Cz., Sierak J., 2005, *Financial management of local government units. /in:/ Zalewski a. (ed.), the new public management in the Polish Government. SGH, pp. 96-97.*

concept – tendency to spend excessive financial resources⁹. The weakness of social and political control, as well as of the mechanisms of representative democracy, causes at the same time a decline in effective management of the resources that are at the disposal of a given local government unit (LGU), and consequently makes it more difficult to achieve satisfactory results.

The correctly defined decision-making process begins with the formulation of tasks aimed at implementation of the LGU main goal, i.e. to satisfy long-term complex needs of the local communities. It is then confronted with the possibilities and conditions of financing, as well as, the ability to obtain new sources of fuelling the budget. These activities commence by using appropriate instruments, which through application of money measurements, improve the decision-making process and the effective use of limited resources. The hereto presented dependencies allow for specifying the following functions of financial management at LGU, namely¹⁰:

- to develop the structure of capital and assets;
- to allocate financial resources owned;
- to influence the level of risk associated with decisions being taken;
- to currently assess the local government's financial and assets standing, which allows for evaluating the compliance of the progress of the current, investment, and financial course of activities with the assumptions made;
- to assess the impact of external factors on investment and financial decisions;
- to formulate proposals for financial policy, taking into account the strategic objectives;
- to set out (build) a financing strategy.

The correct definition of these functions requires recognition of the specific needs of the population, which determines how particular objectives and tasks that LGU is facing are executed. Thus, the operational effectiveness of the entire local government unit is conditioned by¹¹:

⁹ Wojciechowski E., *Management in Local Government*, Difin, Warsaw 2003, p. 210.

¹⁰ Por. Filipiak B., 2004, *Directions of financial management in the units of local self-government and the problems of maintaining liquidity*. *Municipal Finances*, No. 3, p. 24; Dylewski M., Filipiak B., Gorzałczyńska-Koczkodaj M., 2006. *Local government finances. Tools, decisions, processes*, PWN, Warsaw, p. 56.

¹¹ Por. Perechuda K. (red.), 2000, *Management of the future. Concepts, models, methods*, Placet, Warsaw, pp. 66-67.

- ability to make a proper assessment of the organization and its environment;
- ability of individual employees and their teams to merge into the background of the organization and expand the organizational and managerial space;
- ability to create procedures serving the development of the organization;
- integration of events and processes;
- implementation of innovations and innovative attitudes among members of the organization;
- ability to create intangible values of a given LGU (e.g.: organizational culture image etc.).

The use of commercial sector experiences creates a requirement to take actions listed below to achieve adequate production potential that determines the ability to deliver the right quality and quantity of public services and the financial standing of the local government¹²:

- to provide information for the decision-making process, in particular by current monitoring and analyzing the operational effects and a situation in the LGU environment;
- to plan a cash flow distribution in time and ensure both long-term and short-term financial liquidity;
- to take actions that mitigate the operational risk of LGU;
- to determine the demand for financial resources required to attain its assumed projects and attract those funds; this is also the basis of the process to establish relationships with capital suppliers and plan cash flow;
- to do planning that ensures rational use of capital under the financing structure, this is done by minimizing the cost of capital and by maximizing the effects of their use;
- to allocate the resources owned among the most effective current and investment projects;
- to financially control the completion of the tasks initiated.

The extent of the problems that LGU has to face when planning makes it difficult to correctly conduct the entire process in view of the limited human resources available. Therefore, it seems to be reasonable to include residents in the planning process at LGU. In practice, such actions are carried out as part of public consultations.

¹² Por. Rutkowski A., 2007, *Zarządzanie finansami*, PWE, Warsaw, pp. 16-17.

The process of defining the organization's objectives begins with determination of the needs and conditions to ensure the operation and development of the organization. The specificity of the organization and the impact of various factors, determining the implementation of the main goal may, however, result in a so-called “*autonomisation of goals*”, defined as the phenomenon of detachment of the primary functions of the organization as a result of striving for survival and development. It is associated with the ability to identify and execute the interest of the organization as an entity being independent and excluded from its environment. With regard to LGU, it can be seen when introducing a partial or overall payment for public services being offered, which aims to enhance their offer within the financial resources available and as a result increase the potential and competitiveness of those organizations¹³. LGU can be supported in this area by including the inhabitants in the decision-making process on the selection of services, partially payable, and on the extent to which those services are to be co-funded by the citizens.

Ensuring that the local government unit operates and develops – namely its success – is related to the cooperation, as well as to the search for and the use of certain advantages. Modern conditions of the LGUs operation clearly indicate that their activities require replacement of less proficient and serviceable parts of the system with more efficient and effective ones. Also at the same time, providing options for action in the long term and a continuous improvement of the public services offer are related to the maximization of government budget revenues that determine the acquisition of the necessary resources.

Generally known, the universal functions of planning under the LGU operational conditions serve the quantification of goals, assigning the responsibilities, and setting the deadlines for measuring the progress in implementation of tasks, and preparing LGU for potential socio-economic problems. Not without any significance is also a need for prospectiveness, which requires that activities shall be planned in the local government units not only in the form of annual plans, but also in the long-term.

Efficient management at LGU requires not only a well-run planning process but also a proper performance of subsequent management functions. When performing public tasks, the important component of the process is the involvement of citizens in the entire tasks implementation process. The residents-support should apply both to verification whether resources have been allocated correctly and to a support from private

¹³ Por. A. J. Kożuch, *Budżetowanie jako instrument zarządzania finansami jednostki samorządu terytorialnego*, PWN, Warsaw, 2012.

resources for the public ones. The inclusion of residents in the delivery of public services raises the motivation of the LGU management and contributes to the increased staff motivation. And verification of the operational quality of managerial staff by the residents of the LGU facilitates any corrections of the actions taken so far and an objective assessment of residents' satisfaction from delivery of public services. A possibility, and in some cases, the need for citizen participation in decision-making processes makes it seem appropriate to use cooperation of the LGU authorities with the locals as a permanent common practice. One of the applicable forms of participation is a crowdsourcing method, well-known from the practice of business organizations. It assumes participation of corporate clients as a know-how resource at all stages of products development. This method allows for drawing on the knowledge directly from those people who are interested in the product being delivered by the organizations. In case of local government units, all residents are interested in operation of the units and their respective services provided.

3. Crowdsourcing as a management method at LGU

The notion of crowdsourcing was first used by Jeff Howe¹⁴ in 2006 in relation to the process by which an organization delegates the tasks previously performed by its employees (professionals) to a unidentified, usually a very large group of people in the form of an open call. The term is derived from the English words: crowd – lots of people, and outsourcing – the use of external sources. This process is conducted via the Internet and usually enables all its users to participate in the tasks. While the term itself is relatively new, then its idea, on which it is based, is at least 300 years old. In 1714, the British government announced a competition to develop a practical method to accurately determine the longitude position of a vessel at sea. Each citizen was able to take part in the competition, and the prizes offered were worth between GBP 10,000 and 20,000.

The factor facilitating the use of crowdsourcing is the developing information society which, thanks to easy and quick access and a high-level activity in the computer network, can serve as a source of know-how required for problem-solving. The fact that the use of the Internet in all areas of activities is now becoming widespread speaks for using this source in the public sphere. From the process itself point of view, the nature of the

¹⁴ J. Howe, *The Rise of Crowdsourcing*, Wired, June 2006 <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html> (lecture as of 12 March 2013)

problem to be solved is not essential. It is important, however, what characteristic attributes are those of the potential participants in the process. Brzozowska Woś¹⁵ indicates that the following features of the Internet community are useful from the crowdsourcing point of view:

- strong activity in chat rooms and discussion forums;
- free use of email for professional, personal, and the public affairs purposes;
- preference of electronic communication with politicians and representatives of local communities;
- subscribing newsletters, e-bulletins and using RSS feeds;
- motivating friends to use the Internet by sending useful information, making recommendations on discussion forums;
- common use of Internet browsers, price comparison sites.

It is worth emphasizing that active Internet user can also run a blog or a photoblog, and the user is inspired by reading and commenting on other people's blogs which enables access to multiple sources of readily available knowledge, and therefore in public affairs the user is often willing to speak out on topics related to the needs of and the provision of public services by LGUs. Thus, the Internet user is an ideal partner to jointly solve problems of any local community. Not without significance is the fact that active Internet users are usually very involved in projects undertaken in the network, which further motivates them to search for the best solutions.

Jeff Howe when defining Crowdsourcing has distinguished eight key stages¹⁶:

- defining the problem;
- publication in the net;
- referral of a request to the community to provide solutions;
- solutions sent by Internet users to the general forum;
- verification or rejection of the solutions proposed by the Internet users;
- rewarding those authors whose solutions have been highlighted;
- implementation of the selected solutions;
- gaining profits.

Thus understood the crowdsourcing process seems to be a good tool for planning and execution of the LGU public tasks. The inclusion of

¹⁵ Por. M. Brzozowska-Woś, Crowdsourcing, a komunikacja z konsumentami w L. Kiełtyka (red.) *Technologie informacyjne w funkcjonowaniu organizacji*, Towarzystwo Naukowe Organizacji i Kierowania „Dom Organizatora”, Toruń 2012, pp. 43-44.

¹⁶ J. Howe, *The Rise of Crowdsourcing*, Wired, June, 2006, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html> (lecture as of 12 March 2013)

citizens into decision-making and execution processes makes them better understand the gist of how the public sphere operates, and they take their share of responsibility relating to public tasks implementation and thus actively support the local authorities. In addition, in their own community they promote actions to be taken, the ones that they have actively assisted with. From the LGU point of view, the process may be a tool that allows for raising ideas or opinions of residents in a relatively short time about their needs to be satisfied and possible forms of doing it. What is important in public affairs, the use of crowdsourcing does not need to imply additional costs, since a growing number of residents want to co-decide on the actions taken by LGU and do not expect for that any remuneration.

The professional literature on that subject identifies four basic forms of organizing the crowdsourcing:

- microtasks;
- macrotasks;
- crowdfunding;
- competition.

The microtasks form is used in situations where an organization is to implement a project consisting of many components. Some of these elements are transferred to the Internet community in the form of small tasks to be performed. Often, a small rather symbolic remuneration is granted for completion of those tasks, and the prestige of being one of the authors of a major project is the prize proper.

The macrotasks form is similar to the implementation of a project using the microtasks method, provided that those involved in the project have full access to comprehensive information on the activities being implemented or the problems being solved. In general, the implementation of tasks using this method is accompanied by higher rewards, and which quite frequently results in establishment of permanent cooperation between the organization and the authors of the best solutions.

Crowdfunding is an alternative to taking loans for implementation of the tasks. In this case, members of the community support implementation of a given project usually with small amounts. The project provider defines the scope of activities, the funds required, and time of their collection. If following a scheduled time, the required amount is not collected, the project provider must give the funds accumulated so far back to the donors. This method can successfully be used by LGU to support the funding of activities for which there are no funds available in the local budget.

Competition is the form that allows for selecting and awarding the best solution. Thanks to this approach, one can get many solutions, and

only the winner receives remuneration. The application of this form can be useful, e.g. when developing LGU strategy.

One noteworthy feature of crowdsourcing is its innovativeness and democratic character, reflected in the fact that no solution is favored because their creators are not formally affiliated within the organization. Many researchers underline that there is an exceptionally high compatibility between goals of the organization and the consumer needs. Thanks to that the solution found is acceptable to the customers and thus leading directly to the success of the organization.

Blattberg identifies five forms of knowledge acquisition through social networking sites¹⁷:

- cloud labor – virtual work – the form of recruitment of employees provided with the knowledge and equipment necessary to carry out their task; the workers who due to their place of residence or other obstacles are not able to work in the organization. The work of those people can be provided free – then most often the reward is the opportunity to test prototypes; or payable labor – in such case, the organization does not bear any costs related to organizing the workplace;
- crowd creativity – social creativity – engaging the Internet community for the development of original products, ideas, projects. The most often this form is used as a competition. Currently, this is the most widely used form in the process of knowledge acquisition from social networks;
- crowdfunding – social financing – originally used to support charity projects. Nowadays, it takes the form of donations, philanthropy, sponsorship, crediting, or an investment;
- distributed knowledge – know-how sharing – the form of exchange and acquisition of knowledge on any topic. Knowledge acquisition involves asking questions on sites of respective portals and waiting for a solution. Wikipedia is the example of such solution;
- open innovation – the method serving the use of knowledge to develop and improve the existing solutions. The network provides info on what and how the community would like to improve.

The idea of crowdsourcing still raises some controversy. The resulting solutions are delivered in the way that is open to all and therefore

¹⁷ E. Blattberg, *The five Crowdsourcing Categories Ranked Popularity in Social Media* electronic file <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/editorial/the-five-crowdsourcing-categories-ranked-popularity-in-social-media/10176> (lecture as of 12 March 2013)

they are also a source of information for the competition. Also, concerns arise about the number and quality of solutions, the methods and ways of managing social networks, and the honesty of the crowdsourcing organizers. In Poland, crowdsourcing is still a novelty and it is used occasionally both in the economic and the public areas.

4. Summary

The basis for the success of any organization is to have knowledge of customer needs and the opportunities of meeting them. The use of crowdsourcing in the public sphere allows you to gain such knowledge. In case of LGU, and besides acquiring accurate information about the needs of residents, it will additionally allow for including the residents into the decision-making process and support the development of a civic society. The involvement of citizens in the process of setting goals and monitoring their implementation will further improve the assessment of the LGU activities in the opinion of the residents.

The increase of public awareness makes people want to decide on the actions taken by LGU. Repeatedly, they evaluate the local government actions through a mirror reflecting their own needs, forgetting that the LGU's role is to meet the needs of the greatest possible number of residents.

The use of crowdsourcing will raise awareness of inhabitants about the tasks and possibilities of their implementation by the local government, yet it will make them realize the needs of other people. This knowledge may contribute to more effective and efficient implementation of public tasks, and thus to the achievement of success.

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