



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Preliminary Report

TPK4500- Specialization Project

Department of Production and Quality Engineering

“Application of Root-Cause Analysis as an Early Warning System”

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Background

In order for projects to achieve success, they need to start well. Initiation processes are necessary to ensure that the project will be successful in future. Also, Because of the rapid changes in the environment, ever-quicker implementation is in demand. In environments like this there is no room for failure. Managers are seeking ways which help them in implementing projects in a shorter time, and reducing the risk of delay in projects. This means project management needs new tools in project management which are more suitable than traditional ways. Traditional tools are not a fit for today changeable environment anymore.

According to Ansoff, considerable surprises will not appear suddenly, there are some “weak signals” and symptoms of issues which appear much earlier than the issues themselves. In 1975 Igor Ansoff mentioned this theory of weak signals. He claims that weak and small signals in each project will become bigger and stronger if preventing actions are not conducted. This indicates the importance of forecasting future and anticipating weak signals early enough. Decision making and implementing preventive actions take time, it shows the importance of recognizing signals as soon as possible.

In Nikander(2002) literature of project management it is mentioned that some approaches which are recognized as the sources of early warning are risk analysis, stakeholder analysis, performance measurement and so on. One more tool which is indirectly related to this topic and can be investigated is the root-cause analysis approach. Root- cause Analysis is used to find out what has happened, why it happened and how to prevent them from happening again. In another word, according to Root-cause analysis, the root cause of current problems is found and is used to not let the problem happen again in the future. Finding a reason for a problem is not an easy task because usually a problem has more than one reason. In addition, cause-effect network is usual in projects, an effect of a cause will lead to other effects. This chain will continue and a network of causes and effects will be shaped. So, recognizing the causes of effects and anticipating them by early warning signs may help in success achievement of projects.

Problem statement

There are some papers under Early warning signs topic discussed the theory of Igor Ansoff and definition of early warning and elements which are contributing in recognition of these signs. According to Ilmari O Nikander and Eero Eloranta`s article some of the authors believed that early warning signs are too weak to be recognized on time (?) while some emphasizing that always there are some signs that can be recognized. Generally the concept of early warning signs is underrepresented. What is lack within project management literature about early warning is that only few number of studies paid detailed attention toward how to find the weak signs and why sometimes these signals are not recognized on time (?).

On the other side, it seems that traditional project management methods are not adequate for predicting problems before happening and new tools are needed (?).The first step in developing new methods for managing early warning signs is identifying shortfalls of traditional methods of project management and the reasons they are not appropriate for dealing with problems (?)

In this study, it will be tried to answer following questions:

- (1) How Root-Cause analysis and its results can be used as a new early warning system?
- (2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the approach?

Objectives and Scope of work:

This paper will be conducted through a literature review on the area of early warning signs of projects. The main sources of theoretical information are scientific papers, books, published case studies and the Project Management Body Of Knowledge (PMBOK®). Due to time limitation and difficulty of finding companies this project includes no case study, just theoretical issues will be investigated qualitatively. Therefore, the source of data required for this project will be collected from different papers and books. The study does not focus on specific project types.

The main objectives of this research are covering following issues:

- Why traditional ways of project management are not suitable in project success
- How to recognize early warning signs and why often they are not seen in projects
- Discuss if Root- Cause analysis approach can be used as a suitable early warning system

Research approach:

The aim of this project is to conduct a theoretical and qualitative research about a new suggested approach in project management which is “Application of Root-Cause Analysis as an Early Warning System”.

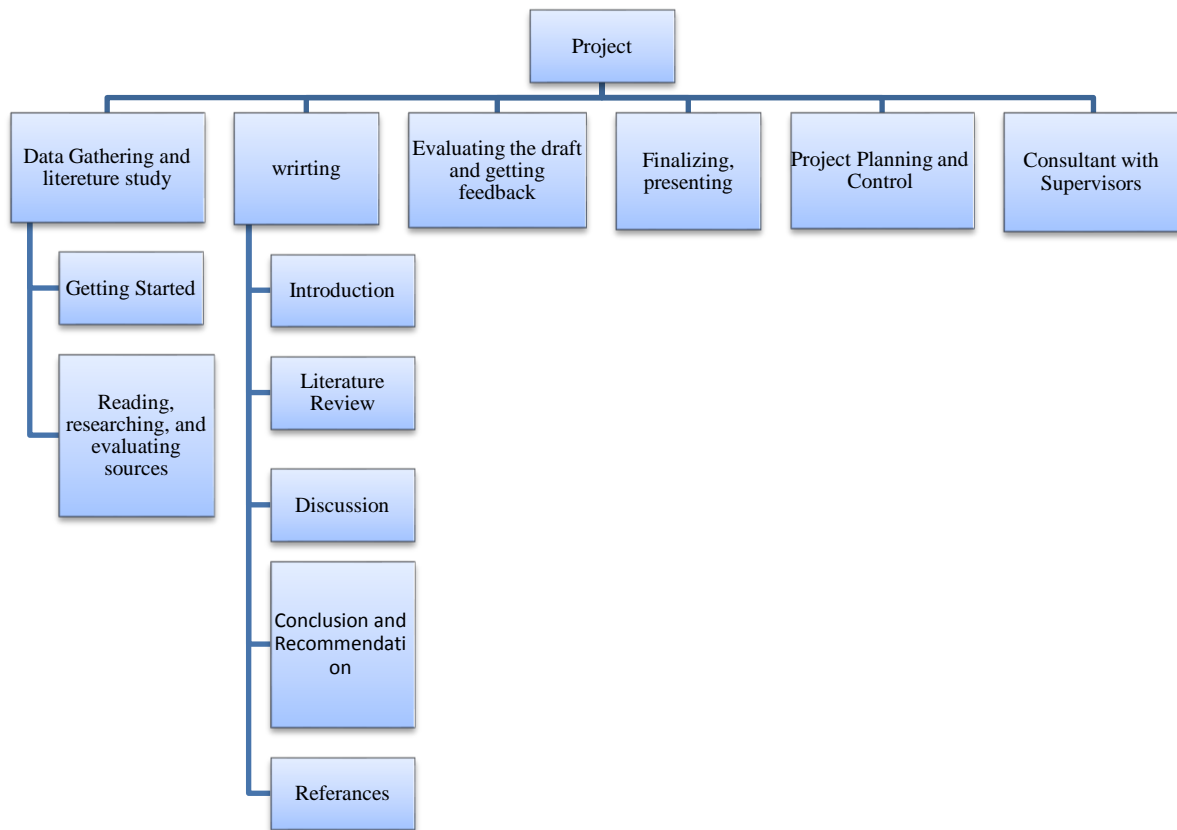
At first, scientific databases will be searched in order to find relevant articles, books, journal papers and published case studies. Next, the theory of weak signals will be developed and then the failure reason of traditional project management methods in recognizing early warning signs will be pointed. In the next step the theory of cause-effect analysis will be developed according to the literature study. Afterwards, the research questions that are expected to be answered will be discussed. Finally, a conclusion would be made according the finding from literature research and discussion part of the paper. The whole paper will cover the research goals.

Master Plan for the work:

A work breakdown structure has been developed in order to fulfill the objective of this project. Besides, the activities that should be done with approximate estimated duration are shown in the attached plan. In addition, Project main milestones and deliverables have been identified in this plan.

The project will contain some progress reports including the status of actual work in comparison with what has been planned and deviation reports.

Work Breakdown Structure (WBS):



It should be mentioned that only main activities are shown in the above Structure, the deliverables are mentioned in the attached time schedule (plan).

References:

- 1) Ilmari O. Nikander. (2002). Early Warnings a phenomenon in project management.
- 2) Ole Jonny Klakegg... [et al]. (2010). Early warning signs in complex projects.
- 3) Ilmari O Nikander and Eero Eloranta. (1997). Preliminary Signals and early warnings in industrial investment projects. (international journal of project management)
- 4) Ilmari O Nikander and Eero Eloranta. (2001). Project management by early warning, (international journal of project management)

APPENDIX