

# PROJECT MANAGEMENT ON THE EXAMPLE OF MARATHONS AND TRIATHLON EVENTS

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## **Abstract**

The analysis of the world of sports may show the growing importance of amateur participation. However, some sports events (marathons and triathlon events) possibly should be seen as at least semiprofessional due to their difficulty and the necessity for intense trainings. In the last several years the number of running and triathlon events has been dynamically increasing. The popularity cannot be understood as a mere fad as the effort required within preparations for such contests is extraordinary. Such participation entails a new life style and amounts to a sign of a major change of people's habits.

The article deals with two closely interrelated topics – the quality of sports events and participant satisfaction.

The article shows the principles of project management (including sports events) and presents the research conducted in a focus group whose aim was to define the key factors for a successful sports event (a long-distance run, a triathlon contest).

**Key words:** project management, quality management in sport, marathon organization, triathlon organization, risk management in sport.

## **1. Introduction**

The growing popularity of running and triathlon events is reflected by the growth of these events. This situation may be observed in the USA and the Western Europe, but the biggest dynamics in this regard can be seen in the Central and Eastern Europe. Marathons and triathlon events have become products of which participants expect a specific ever-growing organizational level. Moreover, the participants of such events are not to some extent occasional sportspeople (amateurs) as substantial preparations and financial resources are required to complete a marathon, a half IronMan or a full IronMan. That is why the participants of these events demand a given level of competition. Furthermore, the organizers' attitude also indicates their interest not only in satisfaction, but also in financial profits.

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The emotional character of the runs along with the awareness of the necessity to treat the events as a product, or an undertaking, which requires relevant regulations and entails some organizational, business and other objectives. Hence, the legitimate attitude to the abovementioned problem is the one that involves proper consideration of the quality of service – a running event – as well as of the measurement of customer satisfaction.

Customer (participants' of sports events) satisfaction is an obvious condition for assuring the sports event's success on the market. Therefore, the present article touches upon the area of project management in the context of sports events. In addition, the paper analyzes the determining success factors for such undertakings. The research approach in this regard assured collecting information from both organizers and participants of marathons and triathlon events.

The topic appears to be valid, in particular for a very insignificant number of publications related to this matter, mostly of non-scientific character. Numerous measurements of satisfaction fail to be grounded in research methodologies related to the necessity of defining the research problem, putting forward hypotheses, defining the sample and population, selecting the research method and finally to conducting the research in a way that aims at verifying the proposed hypotheses. The only source of knowledge of running and triathlon events are Internet portals, which present results of biased surveys. Under no circumstances may it become the basis for conclusions or shaping the quality of this type of products within future events and other undertakings. This source may be seen merely as a subjective evaluation of perceiving selected aspects of a given event.

Within the time period between January and March 2015 research aiming at identifying success factors for sports events was conducted. The aim of the research was defined as follows: the identification of success factors for a sports event and participant satisfaction factors.

The results of conducted focus research allow us to carry out full research related to the quality of sports events. Undoubtedly the results in the case of triathlon and running events will differ. However, due to the significant effort required by the two disciplines it seems to be justified to assume that interviews among the participants of marathons or only triathlon events will allow us to acquire the full array of success factors for these disciplines.

## **2. Characteristics of the subject matter**

Marathons and triathlon events amount to a part of athletics. The first covers the following distances: 42 km 195 m.

The marathon since the first modern-era Olympic Games has been a discipline which has attracted the biggest emotions and recognition.

Triathlon is a comprehensive discipline which combines swimming, cycling and running. A participant swims, cycles and completes the contests with running.

Contests cover various distances. The shortest distance is sprint, but the Olympic distance (1,5 km of swimming, 40 km of cycling, 10 km of running) also should be noted (Trew, 2012). However, the most popular distances are IronMan 70.3 (1,9 km of swimming, 90 km of cycling, 21 km of running) and IronMan (3,8 km of swimming, 180 km of cycling, 42 km of running) (A. Brownlee, J. Brownlee, 2014).

### **3. Project management (triathlon, maraton)**

A marathon or a triathlon event is a complex undertaking. The preparations of a run last approximately a year as they begin just after a given event finishes and to a great extent are based on the acquired organizational experience. That is why they include a significant dose of uncertainty.

One of the leading methodologies of project management is PRINCE 2 which ensures compliance of project objectives with the objectives of the organization. The method amounts to a system approach consisting of processes, components and techniques relevant to all projects independently of their type and scope. PRINCE 2 emphasizes the following areas related to a project: the project's influence on the organization, the influence on the customer and product user, the management of the connection of the project with the organization, communication processes between the project and the organization, resource management involved in the project's realization, the leadership's ability to participate in managing the project, the monitoring of compliance with the rule of business justification, maintaining risk at a proper level (Kasperek, 2011).

A project in compliance with the project management methodology owns a temporary, but standard organizational structure in which the role of the project's board is assigned to the Steering Committee which should represent the interests of users, suppliers and the business itself.

The organizational structure of the project of such a shape assures the representation of the leadership in managing the project as well as the methodology requires the leadership's involvement in the project, especially in quality issues (Kisielnicki, 2011).

The representation of product users and business clients related to the project in Steering Committee allows full attention to the customer and to fulfilling customer requirements. The requirements linked with the project product are defined by the Main User and confirmed by the Steering Committee. It guarantees the balance between the user interests, the realization capability of suppliers and the economic party represented by the Project Executive. Similarly, potentially necessary changes of the project are proposed to the Steering Committee.

The standard organizational structure of the project ensures the possibility of the occurrence of optional elements, such as Project Monitoring. Project Monitoring is a control and audit element which essentially supports the Steering Committee within the scope of researching the quality of project management. Project

Monitoring conducts control activities within the scope of the Steering Committee, but the responsibility for project management and for the effects of the actions carried out within Project Monitoring lies upon the members of the Steering Committee (Kozłowski, 2010).

The Steering Committee recommends the direct project management within the scope of generating management and essential products to the Project Manager. The Project Manager consults the project objectives with the Steering Committee and acquires the resources necessary for making the product as well as establishes the rules of communication, reporting and managing the modifications during the realization of the project. The Project Manager prepares the project plan, plans of individual stages, and, in cooperation with Task Team Managers, plans of individual teams functioning within the project. The Project Manager arranges and carries out regular reviews of work development by providing reports to the Steering Committee at established intervals based on materials collected through Project Monitoring and prepared by the Project Manager.

The process of strategic project management is related to the term of the management stage. Within this method projects are divided into stages which are distinguished by decision points at which the Steering Committee makes the decision about continuation, suspension or closure of the project. The decisions are made on the basis of the result evaluation of a given stage (review) and the plan of the next stage prepared by the Project Manager as well as on the updated plan of the whole project. In the case of the threat of failure at achieving objectives on time, with the use of available financial resources or in relation to the quality of main products the Steering Committee may evaluate the situation and its influence on achieving the project objectives as well as can make the decision about halting and interrupting the project. It enables limiting the losses and avoiding the situation in which the project is realized despite the fact that all reasonable limits have been exceeded. Management stages may also be established as the result of occurrences, which significantly affect the course of the project. In such situations a special kind of review is conducted on the basis of which the Steering Committee decides about further actions (Stabryła, 2006).

This method allows the process management of projects by identifying all management processes in the standard way, by documenting their inputs and outputs, by requiring quality management documentation and records as well as by enabling reviews, internal and external alike. PRINCE2 does not impose a quality management system for technical and management products, but in the case of the absence of such a system it proposes its own mechanisms to be introduced in the enterprise (Roszkowski, Wiatrak, 2006).

#### **4. Attitude towards measuring customer (running event participants) satisfaction**

By observing the market in Poland and many other countries we may take notice of an extremely dynamic growth of the number of participants. The reasons for this phenomenon are among others: a more significant, in comparison with the past, tendency among Poles to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle, popularity of running in western countries, and the growing availability of high quality footwear, clothes and accessories for runner, and the growing number of sizable running events, and relatively low costs of training, and the lack of strictly established requirements related to arenas. In the last several years the number of running events in Poland has increased every year (look at table 1) even by 20–25% (Waśkowski, 2014).

The measurement of customer satisfaction is inextricably connected to the standard of services. Therefore, it is necessary to take notice of the quality of a service – in this case organization of a running event – and to define its clients. It may be seen as an oversimplification to assume that participant satisfaction evaluation is one of the objectives, however, in a broader perspective we may include sponsors, VIPs, invited guests, family of participants and viewers in the group of clients or stakeholders. Defining these problems is related to establishing the research objectives, as we do not conduct the research for its own sake. In all cases the objective amounts to the basis for shaping a running event's quality.

The organizer, in order to meet customer expectations, at the initial stage of preparation is obliged to identify potential recipients (possible buyers, users and beneficiaries). At the next stage, it is necessary to define the recipients' needs and requirements. The gathered data is utilized in order to create a product (service) for the fully knowledgeable client. With the view to verify if the actions undertaken are effective, the customer satisfaction measurement ought to be conducted.

Planning entails development of a running event's conception with its full specification. Accomplishment is the realization in accordance with the initial assumptions, which is followed by verification of its compliance with the model as well as by a proper analysis, in particular of the weakest elements. Moreover, it is significant to plan the next edition of the run. It is also important at each of the aforementioned stages to put emphasis on the client.

In general terms an external client is a person who is influenced by a product (service) created by an organization. An external client is not a member of the organization responsible for providing services (manufacturing the product). It also must be indicated that it is necessary to satisfy external clients, i.e. organizers and volunteers, possibly along with contractors (time measurement, photographic services).

**Table 1.** Number of Participants in the Biggest Marathons in Poland

Name of the run	2011		2012		2013	
	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year
Maraton Warszawski	4 061	22,25%	6 797	67,37%	8 506	25,14%
Maraton Poznań	4 629	19,52%	5 426	17,22%	5 678	4,64%
Maraton Wrocław	2 773	37,47%	3 900	40,64%	3 501	-10,23%
Maraton Kraków	3 201	32,44%	3 014	-5,84%	4 415	46,48%
Maraton Dębno	806	-17,42%	1 091	35,36%	1 340	22,82%
Maraton Łódź	494	-	1 011	104,66%	1 016	0,49%
Maraton Katowice	695	26,36%	729	4,89%	829	13,72%
Maraton Gdańsk	587	26,24%	630	7,33%	739	17,30%
Koral Maraton	439	44,41%	485	10,48%	514	5,98%
Maraton Toruński	585	12,93%	450	-23,08%	663	47,33%
Total	<b>18 270</b>	×	<b>23 533</b>	×	<b>27 201</b>	×

Source: Polish Association of Running.

It is obvious that research in customer satisfaction should serve as a way of constant self-improvement of the organization (as a means to achieve the assumed objectives) (Kozielski, 2011). Increasing the quality of services by improving various areas frequently does not bring expected results. It is so, because enterprises often are not able to identify factors which are significant for clients. The modification of the factors entails the increase in their satisfaction. The dilemma is linked with the running events often organized by administrative units, sometimes by commercial organizations in cooperation with administrative structures. It is of no importance who organizes the event, as we deal with a product on the market. It amounts to a serious problem for the administration, because of the specificity of its functioning as well as due to insufficient preparation for providing commercial services. On

the other hand, we should remember that, in contrast with the dominating private sector, public sector institutions do not have the comfort to choose or focus on their “favorite” clients (treating them as the target group), both of which bring the most sizable profits. Public administration must take proper care of the whole society, which causes its readiness for providing services for undiversified clients not divided into the better and worse ones.

Research in customer satisfaction should lead to gaining customers’ trust as well as it ought to introduce new adequate solutions taking into account customer needs and expectations. Consequently, it will result in shaping and improving the administration’s image. The research itself appears to be extremely difficult, though. The most significant roadblock is the fact that satisfaction is not a static phenomenon, but evolves in time. Furthermore, satisfaction is frequently the result of both customer experiences and subjective impressions before, during and after the satisfaction is measured (Zarządzanie satysfakcją klienta, 2008). The research problem in this aspect must be focused not only on the results, but, which is more important, on understanding the quality of the service provided by the organizer, comprehending the differences between people observing the quality as well as it must concentrate on the adequacy of research methodologies.

## 5. Focus team – research objectives

Ten people from Poznan sports team were invited to cooperate. These people are involved in the organization and trainings related to the preparation for participation in marathons, IronMan 70.3 and IronMan. Six of them are competitors, four are coaches and co-organizers of one of the triathlon cycles taking place in Poland as well as of a marathon. Within the time period between January and March 2015 research aiming at identifying success factors for sports events was conducted. The research was carried out in three sessions in which the team members participated in person or via video-conference. The materials created during previous stages were sent to all members between sessions.

The aim of the research was defined as follows: the identification of success factors for a sports event and participant satisfaction factors.

In the analyzed case the stress may be put on evaluating customer satisfaction in reference to a single running event or the whole cycle of such events. It is important to define the client – first and foremost we are interested in researching the satisfaction of a running event’s participant. Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider whether we may treat all participants as one body, assuming that their expectations are identical or at least similar. This is obviously a big oversimplification, because it simply does not reflect the reality. Runners’ motivations differ. This fact was presented among others in a documentary entitled *The Spirit of the Marathon* from 2007. In the movie each of the six runners – the main protagonists – presents a different motivation for their participation in the run.

Despite all the above mentioned a classical participant of such a demanding event as a marathon or a triathlon is a determined semi-amateur. This person devotes a great deal of material resources for equipment and trainings. They also devote a lot of time to the event (1–3 hours a day). In light of the abovementioned participants have growing expectations towards themselves and the event alike.

In a sense, the very location of the run allows us to assume common expectations of participants, but not utterly and not in relation to all events (e.g. local events vs. international renowned marathons). Within this scope, it necessary to be aware of variables, as well as of essential solutions at the stage of research planning.

Therefore, it is crucial to put forward research objectives, theses and hypotheses. If this condition is not fulfilled, we are not able to select the proper methodology, which will allow us to verify the three elements.

Moreover, it is also important to be aware of the fact that selecting only one research method may be insufficient in the face of the research objectives, if treated in a broad and serious manner.

## 6. Research results – success factors for a sports event

On the basis of professional literature and experience, the first set of criteria related to running event participant satisfaction was developed. The criteria were verified especially in order to eliminate the ones that are inadequate in reference to the analyzed event.

There was appointed a 10-person team comprising representatives of organizers, participants and researchers dealing with the problem of quality management in sports. The aim of the undertaking was to identify the characteristics of the event and a runner's participation, which at further stages of the research will be assessed in order to grant them the importance status.

Participant satisfaction factors were divided into the following categories: organization of the run, infrastructure, costs of participation, achieved results, packages and medals, self-organization of runners, communication, others.

Within a given category there was a multisession identification of satisfaction factors conducted with the use of Ishikawa diagram:

- organization of the run: accessibility of information, beverages, catering in the finish area, track marking, accessibility of volunteers, deposit, toilet accessibility, organization of the start area, organization of the finish area, time measurement, photographic/video services, possibility of finishing the run with a child, attractiveness of the course, number of participants hindering the run, available beverages and available energy food on the course, information about the completed distance, information about the time;
- information: accessibility of the information about the run on the Internet website, information about the completed distance during the run, information about



- the time during the run, information about the time at the finish line, contact with the organizer;
- participation costs: admission, traveling costs, costs related to the necessary outfit, accommodation costs before and/or after the run;
  - packages and medals: a start package, the price of the package, a rich package, a rich package/reasonable admission, a bib, a medal, designing the medal;
  - achieved results: achieving desired results, beating one's personal best, overcoming other participants;
  - infrastructure: assuring protection from unfavorable weather conditions, possibility of taking a shower, a parking lot;
  - self-organization of the runner: support from measurement devices (e.g. a watch, a heart rate monitor, a pedometer, GPS), mood and attitude (independent of the run), listening to music during the run, adequacy of outfit for the weather conditions, using mobile applications during the run, using energy gels, using isotonic beverages, diet prior to the run;
  - others: satisfaction from the preparation of the run, conscientious realization of the training plan, presence of relatives, favorable weather, festive atmosphere, big number of participants, popularity of the run.

Selection and adequacy evaluation of factors related to the quality of the running event and participant satisfaction amounted to a basis for creating a questionnaire and conducting a research which aims at the detailed evaluation of the given phenomenon. However, the future research will be related to participants in long-distance runs – marathons and triathlons – and will have the international dimension.

All of the members of the research team mention diet and sport food as an important factor for assuring satisfaction of runners.

Unfortunately, as the available analysis of the diet of the majority of the amateur runners shows, their everyday practice is not as optimistic as the declarations. The dietary habits of the average runner leave a lot to be desired. Food supplements for athletes seem to be a solution of this problem in some scope, especially in their opinion. That is why they are more and more popular not only in Western European countries, but also in Southern and Eastern Europe ones as well.

## 7. Summary

The extraordinary dynamics of sports events' growth (runs and triathlon) has become typical of the Central and Eastern Europe. This phenomenon fosters the discussion about participant satisfaction which encourages the debate over success factors for an event. The article touches upon the key factors, which decide about the success of a sports participation (a marathon, a triathlon event).

A team of experts within the moderated focus team has identified factors, which build the quality of a sport event. The research results will amount to a start-

ing point for investigating specific events. Separate research in relation to IronMan 70.3 and marathon are being prepared. The results of the research allowed us to identify specific success factors and divide them into groups. It amounts to a good introduction to the preparation of research in evaluating separate sports events. The categories of characteristics will determine the approach of the research planned in 2016.

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## ZARZĄDZANIE PROJEKTEM NA PRZYKŁADZIE MARATONÓW I TRIATHLONÓW

### Streszczenie

Analiza zróżnicowanych źródeł dotyczących świata sportu ukazuje rosnące zainteresowanie treningami i startami w imprezach sportowych przez zawodników amatorów. Niektóre sportowe wydarzenia (biegowe i triathlony) powinny być postrzegane jako co najmniej pół-profesjonalne w związku z ich trudnością dla uczestników i wymaganą od nich intensywnością przygotowań. W ostatnich latach liczba zorganizowanych wydarzeń triathlonowych oraz biegów maratońskich znacząco wzrosła. Ich popularność nie powinna być rozpatrywana wyłącznie w kategoriach mody, gdyż udział w takim przedsięwzięciu wymaga wiele wysiłku od uczestników, a także organizatorów. Udział ten związany jest często z istotną zmianą stylu życia i zazwyczaj staje się podstawą organizacji dnia, sposobu spędzania czasu wolnego.

Niniejszy artykuł dotyczy dwóch wzajemnie powiązanych tematów – jakości zorganizowanego wydarzenia sportowego oraz satysfakcji jego uczestnika. Artykuł ukazuje główne zasady zarządzania projektami (także wydarzeniami sportowymi) i prezentuje wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w grupie focusowej, których celem było zdefiniowanie głównych aspektów udanego wydarzenia sportowego (na przykładzie biegów długodystansowych oraz triathlonów).

**Słowa kluczowe:** zarządzanie projektem, zarządzanie jakością w sporcie, organizacja triathlonów, organizacja maratonów, zarządzanie ryzykiem w sporcie.