

## SUCCESS CRITERIA AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF CRM PROJECTS IN TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES

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**Abstract.** *The paper aims to fill in the gap of investigating the success criteria and the critical success factors of CRM projects completed in Hungarian telecommunication sector. It highlights the importance of CRM projects aligned with the organization strategy, and introduces, what are the most important success criteria of these projects and what factors have an influence on the successful realization of CRM projects. The paper first gives an overview of the strategic importance of projects and project management. Then project success criteria and factors are discussed. Customer Relationship Management is introduced in order to analyze its role in strategic decision making. In the empirical part of the paper CRM projects at Hungarian telecommunication companies and their information technology suppliers are analyzed. Telecommunication companies are leaders in introducing and applying CRM systems in Hungary. In order to identify project success criteria, and the key success factors of CRM projects, as well as the relationship between them, a questionnaire was developed. Project managers and team members, as well as representatives of stakeholders – suppliers, consultants - of CRM projects at these companies, were asked to fill out the questionnaire by evaluating the CRM project they have worked for or they have been involved in. Experience in agile project management, in innovation, and in CRM system introduction is the characteristic feature of the selected respondents. 90 experts were selected and asked to fill out the questionnaire. Quantitative analysis has been made by using a database of 62 respondents. The importance of the research is that no empirical survey has been made by focusing on success criteria and factors of CRM projects neither in global nor in Hungarian perspective. The Standish Group has been investigating software development projects by applying the project triangle as success criterion and reveals the most important success factors of these projects, however, it provides general information of software development projects but no special attention has been made to CRM projects (Standish Group, 1995-2015). The PMI's Pulse of the Profession survey series also provides useful knowledge of success factors and criteria of projects, but its investigation doesn't give IT- and CRM-related information (PMI, 2012-2018). Furthermore, Hungarian projects don't take part in these surveys' samples. This indicates how our research fills in the gap of investigating the success criteria and the critical success factors of CRM projects completed in Hungarian telecommunication sector*

**Keywords:** *sustainability; strategy, project; success; assessment tool.*

## Introduction

Project management is one of the most dynamic fields of management science and practice. The main challenge of project management is not just how to complete projects successfully, but how these projects contribute to the successful realization of organizational strategic goals as well (Martens et al., 2018; Pinto, 2016; Blaskovics, 2016; Cserhádi & Szabó 2014; Artto et al., 2008).

Customer Relationship Management plays an important role in strategic project management given that CRM systems as an outcome of these projects perform a bridging function between the project owner organization and its customers (Steel et al., 2013). Customer Relationship Management refers to principles, guidelines, tools, and methods used in order to identify, attract and satisfy the organization's customers. It is very important to understand the needs and behavior of customers and respond to the shifts of the customer's desire (Chen & Popovich, 2003; Krasnikov et al., 2009; Peppers & Rogers, 2011). CRM projects aim to develop and introduce CRM systems in order to increase the customer orientation of the organization. According to the Nucleus Research Report (Nucleus Research Report, 2016) companies are increasing their investments in CRM applications because of 4 times higher ROI. And yet, at the same time, C5Insight research shows that CRM projects fail between 30-60% of the time and this low-level success rate hasn't been improving over the last decade (C5Insight Report, 2017).

## Project and project management

The Project Management Institute defines a project as "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result" (PMBOK, 2017, p.4). Turner's definition – "an endeavor in which human, material and financial resources are organized in a novel way, to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by qualitative and quantitative objectives" (Turner, 2000, p.2) – highlights the importance of realizing project goals on time and on budget. Kerzner represents the process-based view by defining a project as "any series of activities and tasks that have a specific objective to be completed within certain specifications" (Kerzner, 2017, p.2).

Project characteristics are as follows:

- Unique;
- complex, complicated, one-time process;
- has a specific objective to be completed;
- limited by budget, deadline, and quality (project triangle);
- consumes human and nonhuman resources (fitness);
- has defined start and end dates (temporary);
- the project is customer-focused (added value);
- aligned with the organizational strategic goals.

Based on the management definition of Griffin (2017), project management can be defined as a set of activities (including planning, decision-making, organizing, leading, and controlling) directed at a project's resources (human, financial, physical, and information) with the aim of achieving project goals in an efficient and effective manner.

## **Project success**

Project success is widely studied and discussed the phenomenon of project management. While some success criteria and factors are common across different project types, there are unique criteria and factors applying only to specific projects (Cserhádi-Szabó, 2014).

Approaches to project success have changed continuously over the past couple of decades from definitions of success and critical success factors to a more strategic, holistic view (Judgev & Müller, 2005).

### ***Project success criteria***

There are several theories focusing on project success criteria. The most used approach highlights the importance of the “project triangle” (Turner & Cochrane, 1993; Agarwal & Rathod, 2006; Fortune & White, 2002; Judgev & Müller, 2005) according to which successful projects are completed on time, on a budget, with all features and functions as initially specified.

However, this conception does not fully evaluate project success, since examining these parameters indicates merely the direct contribution to profit, whereas it omits taking into account whether the project meets all the expectations of the project’s stakeholders (Turner, 2000). Each interest group involved in the project may have different and sometimes conflicting criteria for evaluating outputs of the project (Artto et al., 2008). By evaluation of project success not only project effectiveness, the fulfillment of project triangle, but also project efficiency, stakeholders’ interests need to be taken into account (Deák, 2017; Görög, 2013).

The distinction between the task and psychosocial related criteria reflect the importance of stakeholders’ satisfaction as well (Cserhádi & Szabó, 2014). Task-related aspects are mainly based on the project triangle, whereas psychosocial-related criteria include the satisfaction of customers and end users, as well as the opinion of other project stakeholders (Pinto & Pinto, 1991).

In our understanding project, success criteria can be grouped into three categories as Figure 1 indicates.

The first perspective represents the traditional view of project success. Meeting the project triangle (time, cost, qualitative and quantitative requirements) includes criteria that indicate how effectively the project has been completed.

The next perspective represents the satisfaction of the project owner. It shows to what extent the project meets the owner’s expectations. In some cases, these expectations can be exactly defined already at the beginning of the project life cycle, like in construction industry, meanwhile, in many other cases the expectations and requirements are changing and are being modified during the whole project life cycle, like in case of software development, service development or reorganization projects. Therefore, this perspective is about the subjective evaluation of project success through the lenses of the project owner. It reflects how efficiently the project has been completed.



**Figure 1. Different perspectives of project success criteria**

The satisfaction of other parties involved in the project can also play an important role in assessing project success. End users, suppliers, vendors, consultants, contractors, local residents, as well as project team members have to be taken into account when analyzing the project success from this perspective.

Meanwhile, the satisfaction level of project stakeholders can be measured on a selected scale like on a five-grade Likert scale, the project effectiveness relies on objective data as total cost, the duration of the project and on different parameters of the project outcome. Consequently, empirical studies that evaluate project success by using the project triangle as success criteria provide comparative results, the evaluation of project efficiency is limited to the selected project and doesn't enable to collate them.

### ***Project success factors***

Once the project success criteria are defined, it is important to analyze, how project requirements could be accomplished. The successful project realization is determined by project success factors (Lim & Mohamed, 1999). Early studies (Baker et al., 1988; Pinto & Slevin, 1988) concentrated on revealing factors influencing a project's success or failure. Further publications (Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Lechler, 1997) tried to classify factors and create a consistent model of success factors.

Belassi and Tukel (1996) reviewed the project literature and grouped project success factors into four categories: factors related to the project; to the project manager and team; to the organization; and factors related to the external environment.

Lechler (1997) developed a model of project success factors by creating three main categories: context, participants and functions. Using this framework, Gemünden and Lechler (1997) carried out an empirical survey which resulted in identifying critical success factors as the qualities of top management and project team as well as the communication.

Cooke-Davies (2002) defined project success factors at three different levels: the success of project management activity, project success, and consistent project success. The project management activity's success depends on specifying responsibilities and competences, integrated performance rating and effective risk management. As far as project success is considered efficient supporter and process management are the most important factors, whereas in reaching consistent project success practice of portfolio and program management as well as organizational learning play an important role.

### **Customer Relationship Management (CRM)**

Customer Relationship Management is defined as “process companies use to understand their customer groups and respond quickly—and at times, instantly—to shifting customer desires” (Rigby, 2015). In order to increase competitiveness, organizations have to scan their environment by systematically collecting, storing, analyzing and using information and knowledge. Rapid change in the environment, new customer expectations, new products and services of competitors, technological revolution are examples why CRM became strategically more important.

#### ***Importance and functions of CRM systems***

Since 1993, Bain & Company has surveyed executives around the world regarding the management tools they use and how effectively those tools have performed. The results of the global survey show that CRM has become one of the most important strategic management tools executives use. The last survey revealed that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is the most used management tool regarding the executives' preferences (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2015).

Chen and Popovich (2003) and Fickel (1999) stress that CRM technology application has a key role in linking the front office functions (sales, marketing) and back office functions (operation, logistics, HR, finance) with the “company's customer touch points” like Internet, e-mail, social media, stores, kiosks, call centers.

Chen and Popovich (2003), and Goldenberg (2000) point out that CRM is not only a kind of technology but rather a “cross-functional, customer-driven, technology-integrated business process management strategy that maximizes relationships and encompasses the entire organization” (Chan-Popovich, p.673).

CRM systems are integrated, data-driven solutions. CRM systems offer various functions to be used in strategic decision making. These functions may include but not limited to:

- contact management that allows to segment contacts into groups to organize them;
- sales and sales related functions that help organizations to acquire new customers and to improve the sales processes;
- reporting functions with dashboards where users can view statistics using customized reports and dashboards including real-time data updates and a platform that can be accessed from various portals;
- customizable user interface;
- sales analytics;
- sales force automation that allows automating certain aspects of sales including outgoing calls, follow-up campaigns and the organization of data for more effective campaigns;

- sales forecasting that helps organizations to know a benchmark by which they can determine whether their results are actually on par with their efforts;
- workflow and approvals;
- sales performance management;
- creation of test environment;
- third-party integrations;
- case management (selecthub, 2015).

All of the above features are supporting the interaction with customers, customer service activities, sales support activities, customer care activities as well as finance and operations with automated solutions resulting in the modernization of operation and processing bulk amount of data (microsoft.com, 2017).

### ***Advantages of CRM systems***

The implementation of modern CRM systems offers a wide range of benefits. CRM system functions significantly improve the efficiency of operation and foster the interaction with customers. One of the biggest advantages includes collaboration. Even in small organizations, the entire customer lifecycle is typically too complex to be managed effectively by one person, but the use of CRM platforms supports the management of these complex systems. Besides, it is important to highlight other benefits as data storage, analytical functions, and the visualization toolset. Increased accountability can be achieved by logged changes of every activity resulting in improved customer experience (Robles, 2015).

### ***The role of CRM in Telecommunication***

CRM systems aim to provide agile and dynamic solutions resulting in the most effective customer serving activities. According to Deloitte's assessment from 2017, there is a higher tendency in the past few years in the telecommunication industry of adopting CRM systems (Wigginton, 2017). The reason for the dramatic increase is behind their needs for an efficient way of working with good quality. It is a high priority for companies working in this industry to be as fast as they can in order to serve the customers' increasing needs. In addition to this, the product portfolios of telecommunication companies change even faster than the environment. They must align their processes to this accelerated speed of changes. It is not only important because of their aspirations of becoming the leader of the market, but to stay alive there.

### ***Empirical study***

#### ***The aim of the research***

The study aims to fill in the gap of investigating the success criteria and the critical success factors of CRM projects completed in Hungarian telecommunication sector.

The main research questions are as follows:

- What does project success mean for CRM projects in Hungarian telecommunication sector? What are the success criteria of CRM projects based on which the success of CRM projects is evaluated?

- What are the key success factors that have a significant influence on the success of CRM projects in Hungarian telecommunication sector?
- What is the relationship between success factors and success criteria of CRM projects in Hungarian telecommunication sector?

### ***Methodology***

Telecommunication companies are leaders in introducing and applying CRM systems in Hungary. The three biggest telecommunication companies – Telekom, Telenor, and Vodafone -- and two of their partners, big-sized information technology suppliers – Virtusa and Amdocs - were selected.

CRM projects at these Hungarian telecommunication companies and two of their big-sized information technology suppliers were analyzed.

In order to identify project success criteria, and the key success factors of CRM projects, as well as the relationship between them, a questionnaire was developed. Project managers and team members, as well as representatives of stakeholders – suppliers, consultants - of CRM projects at these companies, were asked to fill out the questionnaire by evaluating the CRM project they have worked for or they have been involved in. Experience in agile project management, in innovation, and in CRM system introduction is the characteristic feature of the selected respondents. 90 experts were selected and asked to fill out the questionnaire. Quantitative analysis has been made by using a database of 62 respondents.

Besides, three personal interviews were carried out in order to validate the results of the quantitative survey as well as to get a deeper understanding of the relationship between success factors and criteria of CRM projects. The interview partners represent the key strategic areas of CRM projects: marketing, IT development and consulting:

- Telenor SOHO segment value manager represents the marketing perspective of CRM projects.
- Telekom Lead Solution Architect represents the IT development perspective of CRM projects.
- BCA Hungary Lead Consultant represents the consulting perspective of CRM projects.

### **Research results**

In this chapter, the paper concentrates on success criteria and key success factors as well as the relationship between factors and criteria of CRM projects based on the quantitative survey. In the discussion part of the paper, we use the outcomes of the interviews with representatives of different stakeholders.

#### ***Success criteria of CRM projects***

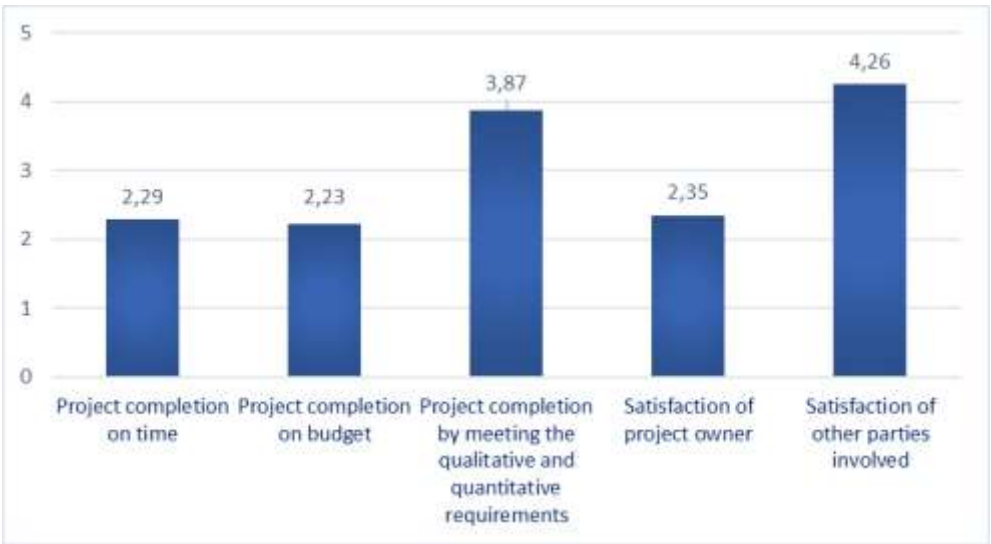
Respondents were asked to list and rank the criteria based on which the success of CRM projects are evaluated at their organizations. The questionnaire itemized the success factors as follows:

- Project completion on time
- Project completion on budget
- Project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements
- Satisfaction of project owner

- Satisfaction of other parties involved

Respondents had to determine the importance of each of these success criteria on a five-grade Likert scale where “5” indicates a very important and “1” a non-important success criterion.

Figure 2 shows the importance of project success criteria based on their average values.



**Figure 2. The importance of the success criteria of CRM projects based on their average values**

According to the survey, the most important success criterion of CRM projects is the satisfaction of other parties involved, followed by the project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements. Project completion on time and on a budget, as well as the satisfaction of owner organization play less important role in evaluating the success of CRM projects.

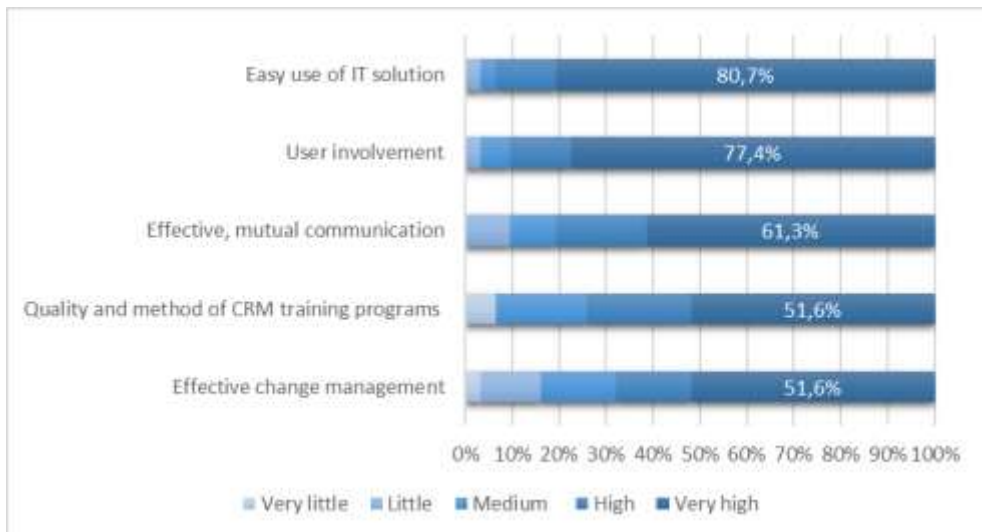
**Success factors of CRM projects**

Based on previous empirical surveys on project success factors, a long list of factors was created. Respondents had to evaluate all items according to the extent they have an effect on the success criteria of CRM projects. A 5-grade Likert scale was used where “5” indicates a very high and “1” indicates a very low extent of influence.

**Satisfaction of other parties involved**

Figure 3 shows what factors have an influence on the satisfaction of the other parties involved in the CRM projects.

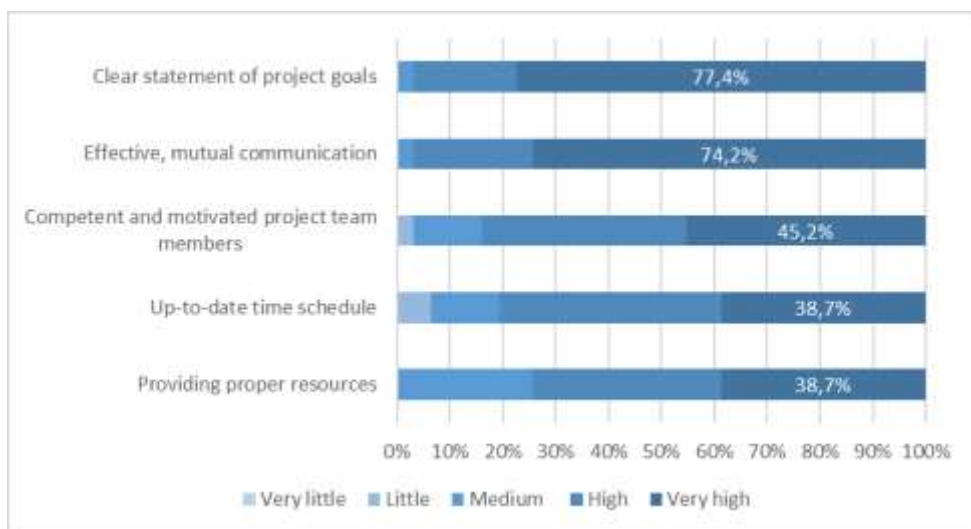




**Figure 3. The effect of success factors on the satisfaction of the other parties involved**

According to the survey, the *easy use of IT solution* is the most important factor that influences the project success from the perspective of other parties involved. More than 80% of the respondents stated the highest level of influence of this success factor, followed by *user involvement* (77,4 %) and *effective, mutual communication* (61,3%).

#### ***Project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements***



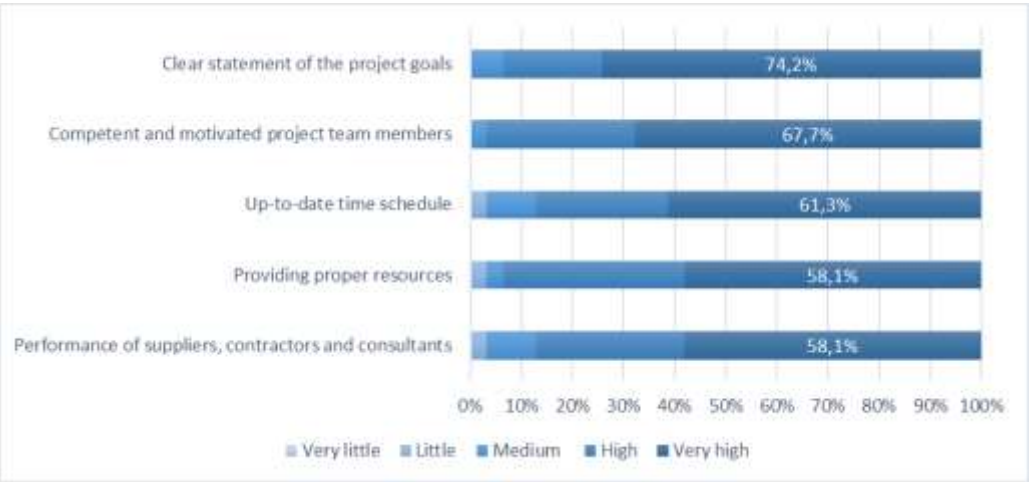
**Figure 4. The effect of success factors on project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements**

Regarding the project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements, the most determining success factor is the *clear statement of project goals* as more than 77% of the respondents stated the highest level of influence of this factor. Not significantly differs from this high level of influence the role of *effective, mutual*

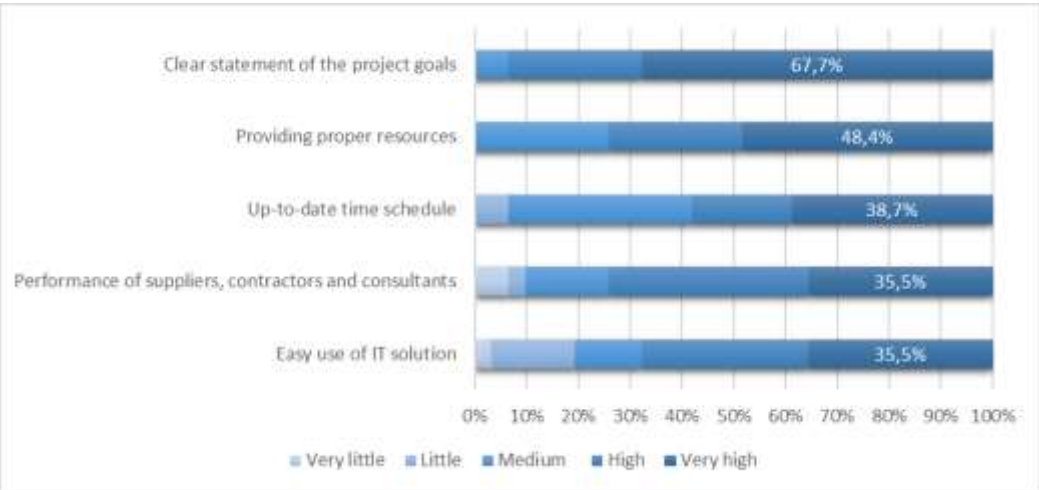
communication (74,2%), meanwhile, other factors have a medium level effect on the qualitative and quantitative requirements.

***Project completion on time, on a budget, the satisfaction of the project owner***

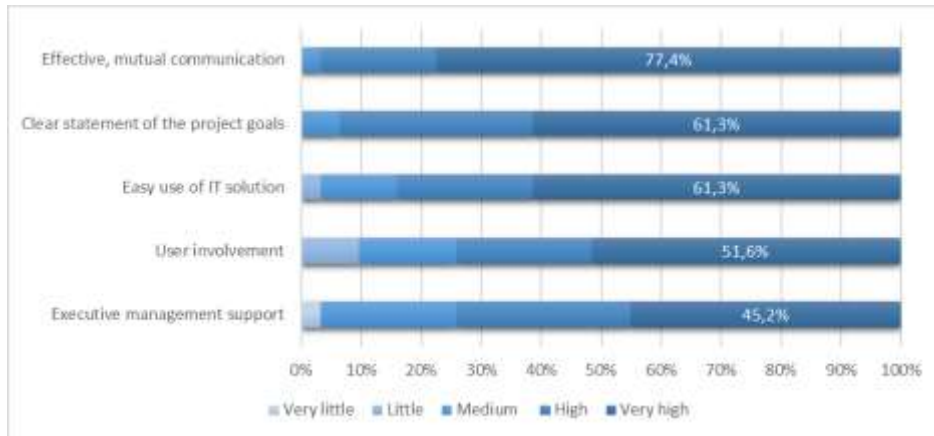
The following three figures illustrate what are the most determining factors of project completion on time, on a budget, and on the satisfaction of the project owner. Although these criteria have lower priority in evaluating project success of CRM projects, it may be beneficial to identify their effects.



***Figure 5. The effect of success factors on project completion by keeping the deadline***



***Figure 6. The effect of success factors on project completion by keeping the budget***



**Figure 7. The effect of success factors on the satisfaction of the project owner**

A clear statement of the project goals, as well as an up-to-date time schedule, are the decisive factors on keeping the deadline and the budget, while *competent and motivated project team members* appear as success factor of keeping the deadline and *providing proper resources* is a key success factor of keeping the budget. As far as the satisfaction of project owner concerns, *effective, mutual communication*, a *clear statement of the project goals* as well as the *easy use of IT solution* are the most decisive factors.

Table 1. gives an overview of the most important success factors of CRM projects at Hungarian telecommunication companies.

**Table 1. Summary of the results regarding the effect of key success factors on project success criteria**

No.	Satisfaction of other parties involved (4.26)	Project completion by meeting the qualitative and quantitative requirements (3.87)	Satisfaction of project owner (2.29)	Project completion on time (2.29)	Project completion on budget (2.23)
1	Easy use of IT solution	Clear statement of project goals	Effective, mutual communication	Clear statement of the project goals	Clear statement of the project goals
2	User involvement	Effective, mutual communication	Clear statement of project goals	Competent and motivated project team members	Providing proper resources
3	Effective, mutual communication	Competent and motivated project team members	Easy use of IT solution	Up-to-date time schedule	Up-to-date time schedule
4	Quality and method of CRM training programs	Up-to-date time schedule	User involvement	Providing proper resources	Performance of suppliers, contractors and consultants
5	Effective change management	Providing proper resources	Executive management support	Performance of suppliers, contractors and consultants	Easy use of IT solution

## Discussion

As indicated in Figure 2, the evaluation of CRM projects' success is based primarily on the satisfaction of other parties involved. The most important stakeholder is the client who is, at the same time, the end-user of the project outcome. Projects must satisfy the needs of the client by fulfilling all the requirements it specifies. However, in many cases, the client is not able to define all the requirements of CRM projects already at the beginning of the project. This is why agile project management is spreading rapidly in ICT projects. Agile approach embraces change even in the development or execution phase of the project lifecycle. The project life cycle is divided into short-term development phases, for what project and product requirements are defined. At the end of each cycles, results are controlled, assessed and activities, requirements for the next cycle are determined. Given the time-frame and the budget, requirements are adjusted during the project life cycle. The latest issue of Chaos report by Standish Group (2015) revealed that the success rate of software development projects using agile project management is 3-times higher than of traditional waterfall projects. Taking into account that many CRM projects (and almost all in the sample) use agile project management, keeping the deadline and the budget are of less importance when evaluating project success of CRM projects.

Project success factors are those factors that determine the project success. In order to manage CRM projects successfully, we have to identify them properly.

The most important success criterion of the CRM projects is the satisfaction of other parties involved. This is why factors that influence on this criterion are considered to be key success factors of CRM projects. Easy use of IT solution, user involvement, and effective, mutual communication are on top of key success factors of CRM projects followed by factors such as a clear statement of project goals, competent and motivated project team members, up-to-date time schedule and providing proper resources.

This finding is on the one hand aligned with the results of the Chaos Report (Standish Group, 2015) where user involvement, clear business objectives, skilled resources are among the most important success factors of software development projects. On the other hand, our study reveals additional, sector-specific success factors as easy use of IT solution, effective, mutual communication and up-to-date time schedule. CRM projects involve new IT solutions and the success depends on how easily these CRM systems can be used. The nature of CRM projects requires effective, mutual communication among the development team, consultants, users and other groups of stakeholders like suppliers, marketing experts. Interviews revealed that in the case of CRM projects the time-to-market is the center of attention. For this reason, up-to-date time schedule has to be managed.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that identifying the success factors and the relationship between factors and criteria is crucial because of the high level of complexity of CRM projects. Risks can be effectively managed only if concentrating on key project success factors. CRM projects' success or failure have an impact on organizational strategic goals. These facts highlight the relevance of our study.

### Limitations and further research direction

The results show a comprehensive view of CRM projects at Hungarian telecommunication companies. The selected companies cover a great part of the Hungarian telecommunication sector. Respondents and the interview partners have demonstrated considerable experience in managing CRM projects. Despite all of these facts, there are many other companies in the Hungarian telecommunication industry dealing with CRM projects. Besides, the three biggest telecommunication companies have been applying well-established project management standards by using their international experiences; consequently, these results do not reflect the real Hungarian case. Further investigation should focus on CRM projects at small- and medium-sized enterprises in order to discover success factors and criteria of CRM projects at these companies that enables a comparative analysis by differentiating success factors and criteria by size and by organizational project management maturity.

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