Quality and Sustainability of the NICE Network
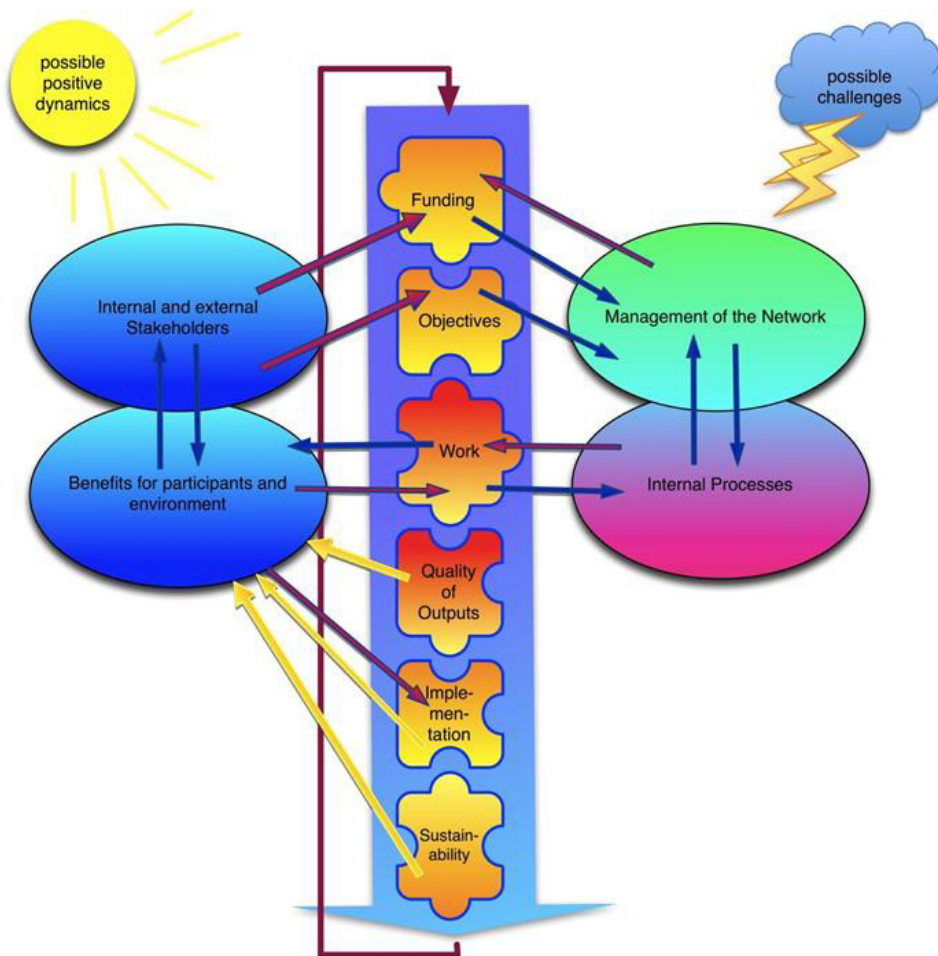
by Monika Petermandl

The working group "Network Quality and Sustainability" comprises Monika Petermandl (AT), Sif Einarsdottir (IS), Jukka Lerkkanen (FI), Peter Weber (D) and Czeslaw Noworol (PL) and as an external mentor and evaluator, we have now won Alexander Schmidt (AT) as part of our team. We started our work with a kick-off meeting in April 2013. We understand our role as a supporting one: to develop sustainability and quality of our network co-operation in NICE 2.

With this article, we want to introduce our understanding of what makes NICE as a network successful (our Quality Model) and explain the system of strategic objectives, the accomplishment of which we want to monitor throughout the lifetime of the NICE 2 project. In the last part of the article, we want to offer an overview of the findings from our first quality survey, which we conducted in December 2013 and offer an outlook to our future activities.

The Quality Model

Our first step has been to create a Quality Model as a basis for all of our considerations and further actions. This model is on the one hand theory-based and derived from empirical findings on what makes networks strong. On the other hand, the model draws on our experiences from NICE 1 and the explicit goals of our network. The Quality Model distinguishes between the so-called "backbone", the process how we produce outcomes and implement them in our network, and internal and external conditions, which influence the quality and sustainability of our outcomes. It is important to look at both of these aspects, if we want our network to be successful.

Graph 1: **Quality and Sustainability Model for NICE**, developed by Monika Petermandl, Sif Einarsdóttir, Nelica La Gro, Jukka Lerkkanen and Peter Weber (April 2013)

The Quality Strategy

The quality model has been decisive for the definition of long-term, medium-term and short-term strategic goals of the working group. Our long-term goal is to develop the sustainability and quality of our cooperation in NICE and our results. Our medium-term goals are expressed in the following statements:

1. Management is a dynamic process, everybody is appropriately involved

2. Backbone: Network and members are supported to achieve outcomes and implementations

3. Internal processes: creating a fruitful collaborative culture

4. Benefits: The outcome has added value for network members and stakeholders and the network members benefit from participating in the network process.

Exemplarily, some of the short-term strategic goals are named in the following list.

Related to management:

- Information is available (clear, easy, complete)
- Communication channels are available and used effectively
- Management ensures that all groups are agreed on work procedures and structures
- Quality group feeds back frequently to management, steering group and work-package groups

Related to the "Backbone":

- The outcomes from Nice 1 and also the current outcomes from NICE 2 are used for developing the work-packages
- Ensure that the outcomes and the quality of outcomes is visible

Related to internal processes:

- Each group has defined their shared norms about their work and collaboration
- All groups make us of the process cycle to set up their work

Related to benefits:

- The network increases the contacts between members and organizations
- When groups plan their work, they consider the benefits for all stakeholders (who are the stakeholders, what are their benefits?)

Support of Quality Assurance

Many of these short-term strategic quality goals have already been put into practice by the network's steering committee, coordination, and the different working groups. We have supported these efforts, particularly by providing the different teams with "Guidelines at the Starting Point" and encouraging them to make use of the process (illustrated by the "Backbone") and to define "shared norms" of their working group.

Monitoring through Quality Surveys

A particular service of our group is the monitoring of whether and how the quality objectives are achieved through periodical quality surveys.

The quality surveys are carried out with a questionnaire, which is addressed to all members of the NICE network, who are participating in NICE 2. The questions focus on the above mentioned short-term strategic quality goals. In particular they relate to the involvement of partners in the networking process, the organizational structure of the network, the communication processes and media, the planning instruments being used in the working groups, the partners' perception of the networking process, the outcomes and benefits of our cooperation, and the quality of leadership and management.

The first survey was carried out in December 2013. The second was conducted in July 2014, and its results will be presented at the Canterbury Summit in September.

Results from the First Survey

About 50% of the registered members contributed to the first survey. This is a quite high quota, considering that many members participated on behalf of their teams, and the steering committee members did not participate in the first survey. In the following, we have summarized the main results:

- A clear majority of the respondents play an active role in the network. The highest involvement of the participants happens in the working groups and at the international conferences. At the time of the survey, Basecamp was only being used by a part of the respondents.

- The organizational structure of the network is considered transparent and useful. But the information flow between the different working groups and between the working groups and the management/steering group might be intensified (with view to a fruitful networking process among the different groups).

- Clarity concerning the working methods, tasks and processes, and the connection of the working groups to the overall NICE 2 work-plan seems to be satisfying.

- The majority of the respondents are content with the available communication media, Basecamp included. Nevertheless, the benefits of Basecamp are not fully acknowledged so far, especially concerning its use in discussions (need of a moderator?). Few members communicate that they are not familiar enough with the tool yet, in order to assess its value and functionality.

- The working groups obviously use and appreciate the planning instruments, which have been offered to them by the Quality Group (guidelines at the starting point, materials for the development of shared values). Some groups have also worked out a roadmap, as suggested by the Quality Group (an open question is whether the roadmaps ought to be disseminated within the network, or whether they are only

meant as a working agreement for the relevant teams).

- A clear majority of the respondents appreciate the networking and co-operation process so far.
- Many state their active participation in monitoring, developing concepts, and providing feedback on the work of others. However, at the time of the first survey, only few activities have been dedicated to research.

- As the working groups are still in the middle of their way, it is not amazing that the satisfaction with the outcome is not yet overwhelming.

- The satisfaction with the leadership and the organization is high.

- Most of the NICE 2 members already participated in NICE 1. A fourth of the respondents state that they are leading a working group or have another leading function within NICE 2.

Outlook to the Future

A summary of both surveys will be presented at the NICE Members Workshop in Canterbury on September 5th, 2014. It will be especially interesting to analyse the development of the cooperation in NICE. Based on the survey results, we will derive a list of open questions and suggestions for quality improvement, which shall be discussed in face-to-face sessions.

How to promote the sustainability of the NICE network will be a central question, which our working group will address in the future – particularly through the development of a proposal for establishing NICE as a sustainable network.

INTERESTING INFO

- ✓ Check out our website:

  www.nice-network.eu