Project-Oriented University – Building the Capability for Innovation

Paul DOBRESCU*

Abstract: Global economy is increasingly a knowledge economy, making people’s skills and qualifications more important than traditional power indicators such as territory, geography, natural resources. Globalization imposes new rhythms of performance to every economic or social field. Higher education is no exception to this, since it lies at the interface with the external environment, where skills and qualifications will be used and exploited for economic benefits. Universities are under a two-fold pressure. First, they provide services, knowledge, skills for fast-moving sectors. The knowledge and skills may quickly become obsolete and irrelevant for the economy. Second, universities need to innovate and to adapt to situations of constant change. Both types of pressure force universities to develop their capability for innovation, which becomes a prerequisite for survival. The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of project-oriented university as a type of university that explicitly uses projects to perform processes of medium to high complexity, thus allowing it to deal with the increasing turbulence and dynamics of its environments. This concept is premised on the idea that there is a connection between a university’s maturity in project management and its managerial competitiveness and innovativeness. The concept inherits the conceptual core of the model of the project-oriented company and it comprises

* Professeur des universités, Ecole Nationale d’Études Politiques et Administratives, Bucarest, Faculté de Communication et Relations Publiques, paul.dobrescu@comunicare.ro
two components. The former is concerned with the structural dimensions of project management, “the hard” component – processes, procedures, organizational structures, terminology. The latter is concerned with the social dimension of project management, the “soft” component – skills, attitudes, competences, project management culture. Empirical results are considered representative for the Romanian higher education system as a whole, with due nuances and exceptions.

Keywords: project management maturity, project-oriented university, innovation capability

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**Université orientée projet : construction de la capacité d’innovation**

**Résumé**: L’économie mondiale devient une économie de la connaissance, qui rend les compétences et les qualifications plus importantes que les indicateurs traditionnels comme le territoire, la géographie, les ressources naturelles. La mondialisation impose de nouveaux rythmes de performance à l’ensemble des domaines économiques et sociaux. L’enseignement supérieur ne fait pas exception à cela, car il se situe à l’interface de l’environnement extérieur, où les compétences et les qualifications sont exploitées à des fins économiques. Les universités sont sous une double pression. Tout d’abord, elles fournissent des services, des connaissances, des compétences pour les secteurs qui évoluent rapidement. Les connaissances et les compétences deviennent rapidement obsolètes. Deuxièmement, les universités ont besoin d’innover et de s’adapter à des situations de changement constant.

Ces deux types de pression forcent les universités à développer leur capacité d’innovation, qui devient un facteur de survie. L’objectif de l’article est d’aborder la notion de projet axé sur l’université comme un type d’université qui met en œuvre le management de projet en vue de conduire des processus complexes, lui permettant ainsi de faire face aux perturbations et à l’évolution de son environnement. Ce concept est fondé sur l’idée qu’il existe un lien entre le degré d’élaboration de la gestion de projet et ses avantages compétitifs et en termes d’innovation. Le concept, qui s’inscrit dans le cadre de la gestion de projet dans l’entreprise, comporte deux éléments. Le premier concerne les dimensions structurelles de la gestion de projet, « la composante dure » (les processus, les procédures, les structures organisationnelles). Le second a trait aux dimensions sociales de la gestion de projet, « la composante douce » (compétences, attitudes, gestion de
Project Management – A Contemporary Means to Face Complexity and Change

The environment in which organizations operate today is rapidly becoming more complex than it has ever been before. One of the answers to the challenges of the global context characterized by turbulence and uncertainty is project orientation, or how to deal with competition, change and innovation in a routine way. The meaning of projects has evolved from a rather limited view – construction, IT&C – to a more general one, which underlines the fact that projects should be connected to policy- and strategy-making and implementation. This shift has also implied the idea that projects are multidisciplinary, having multiple purposes, and representing the means to deal with complexity and turbulence. Thus, project management has expanded into a strategic model, a vehicle to implement organizational strategy in a complex environment (Tanaka, 2006). Without pronouncing the name projects, the famous management author Peter F. Drucker forecasts that what will hold multinationals together in 2015 will be strategy, which will entail a totally different kind of top management – what we call project management orientation: “multinationals in 1913 were domestic firms with subsidiaries abroad, each of them self-contained, in charge of a politically defined territory, and highly autonomous. Multinationals now tend to be organized globally along product or service lines. But like the multinationals of 1913, there are held together and controlled by ownership. By contrast, the multinationals of 2015 will be held together and controlled by strategy. There will be ownership, of course. But alliances, joint ventures, minority stakes, know-how agreements, and contracts will increasingly be the building blocks of a confederation. This kind of organization will need a new kind of top management. In most countries, and even in good many large and complex companies, top management is still an extension of operating management. Tomorrow’s top management, however, is likely to be a distinct and separate organ: it will stand for the company” (Drucker, 2002, p. 167).

Projects have gained this type of perception and recognition only recently as a realization of the fact that “the more traditional, well-established industrial age principles and methods for managing classical functional organizations (involving ongoing, repetitive operations) do not work well for planning, controlling, and
managing projects, seen as unique, complex undertaking to create new products, facilities, services” (Wideman, 2006). The accelerated emergence of ad-hoc – *adaptive* – organizations (Toffler A., 1984) has triggered the subsequent ascent of project management as a popular organizational methodology.

Depending on the organization’s size and complexity, multiple and interacting projects may be managed simultaneously. Groups of interrelated projects sometimes result in a *program*, while the whole collection of an organization’s projects and programs constitute a *portfolio*. Having established project management practices as routine practices in an organization increases its chances for successful projects, programs, and overall achievement of financial and strategic goals. For example, a study of 300 companies conducted by *CIO* magazine and Project Management Institute revealed that establishment and maintenance of a standard project management methodology is critical to the achievement of both financial and strategic goals (Foti, 2002). A cross-sectorial survey of 200 firms from thirty countries carried out by Price Waterhouse Coopers consultants examined how companies were using projects in their business (www.pwc.be). These 200 companies were running a total of 10,640 projects a year worth in excess of US$ 4.5 billion. Approximately 25% of the companies included in the sample companies were running more than 100 projects every year. The survey revealed great diversity in the usage of projects as an organizational form. 73% of the firms had projects to implement IT change initiatives. 57% of firms had performance improvement projects; 49% were conducting software development projects. 45% had projects for new product development, 43% for strategy deployment, 31% for construction and 15% for research.

The research shows that these types of projects – no matter how varied – all relate to innovation, be it technological, business or organizational. This is why, concern has grown around the link between projects and innovation, the role of projects in innovation, taken broadly to include not simply technological innovation, but organizational and other forms of innovation as well. Projects and project management have been discovered as a new source of growth and competiveness.

Projects and project management have been discovered as new sources of growth, competitiveness and innovativeness. In this context, marked by the evolution of project management from an engineering technical function to an organizational methodology that can be embraced successfully by communities, associations, municipalities, government agencies, big companies and even societies as a whole, the concepts of project-oriented company and project-oriented society gain ground. In simple terms, project-orientation means that project management is an explicit and routine process of an organization. The premise underlying research into project maturity is that there is a competitive advantage of companies through project-orientation, that there is a correlation between the maturity of a project-
oriented company and its managerial competitiveness (Gareis, 2005). Project-oriented organizations are more and more frequent worldwide and, interestingly enough, the trend towards greater maturity in project management can be noticed in some large Romanian companies, too (Petrom, Rompetrol, BCR, Romtelecom). In Romania and elsewhere, project-oriented organizations have already proven their competitive advantage over other organizations, as being more competitive, more innovative, and more proficient in dealing with the new, the complex, and the turbulent.

**Project management maturity models**

Just like the individual project managers, organizations need to become more competent, develop the necessary skills, knowledge and attributes, evolve and mature in order to conduct, manage and support their projects effectively and successfully. The organization’s ability to effectively manage programs or projects, to support those projects in their operational environment and to effectively apply best practice project management principles, processes and techniques, influences the success of projects and the ultimate realization of the organizational goals and objectives. Therefore, the more competent an organization is in the management and support of projects, the more likely it is to evolve, mature, develop, and be more successful.

In the light of the recent preoccupations of project management professionals, we may say that there is a significant concern for both the theoretical and practical potential of project management maturity models. As an immediate consequence to this, there is an increasingly active debate amongst members of the project management community on the importance of maturity models for project management. Some theoreticians consider that maturity models can be a very useful methodological tool assisting organizations in performing strategic planning for project management, and that they can, ultimately, lead to achieving excellence in project management⁸. Others consider that project management maturity models are indispensable to the development of organizations as it is reflected in their project orientation maturity and “in order to identify an organization as a project-oriented organization, the management of projects and programs, as well as the strategic, structural and cultural prerequisites for their performance must be considered” (Gareis, 2005, p. 25). Moreover, the strongest associations of project management have developed their own project management maturity models. PMI, for example, has its own model, which is widely employed – OPM3 (Organizational Project Management Maturity Model). Some of the largest corporations – such as IBM – and local project management associations – German Project Management Association, for example – have elaborated their own organizational maturity models (which are more or less derived from the PMI’s or IPMA’s standards in
project management), and, thus have proposed a specific way in which organization could assess the maturity of individual projects (Cooke-Davies, 2002).

A maturity model is a conceptual framework, with constituent parts, that defines maturity in the area of interest (OPM3, 2003) – in this case, organizational project management. In some cases, a maturity model may also describe a process whereby an organization can develop or achieve something desirable, such as a set of capabilities or practices. This process may result in a more mature organization. In other words, organizational project management maturity can be defined as the degree to which an organization practices organizational project management as a routine process.

In order to get a clear view on the attributes of project management maturity, let us briefly outline some of the project management maturity models that are most frequently used:

- **Organizational Project Management Maturity Model – OPM 3**, issued by Project Management Institute (Organizational Project Management Maturity Model – OPM 3, 2005). This elaborated model, developed by a team of 200 some volunteers over a five-year period and building on the widely used PMI PMBOK Guide®, consists of four levels (standardizing, measuring, controlling, continuously improving), and relates the five PM process groups identified in the PMI PMBOK Guide® (initiating, planning, controlling, executing, and closing) to each of three levels of application: projects, programs, and project portfolios;

- **Maturity Models in the U.K.** In the United Kingdom the Association for Project Management APM Group accredits and assesses the capabilities of training organizations, trainers, consultants and practitioners and their organizations in various areas of project management, on behalf of the UK government's Office of Government Commerce (OGC) and its PRINCE2 and other project management initiatives (http://www.apmgroup.co.uk);

- **Maturity model included in P2M.** Project and Program Management – P2M was developed by the Engineering Advancement Association of Japan (ENAA) with funds provided by a research grant from the Japanese Government Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Nowadays, this maturity model is promoted by Japan Association for Project Management;

- **Project Oriented Company Mature and Project Oriented Society Mature by Roland Gareis.** This model assumes that the maturities of project oriented companies, industries and nations can be measured and benchmarked by applying maturity models designed for each the different social systems. At the same time, knowing the maturity of a project-oriented system is the basis for further developing it;

- **Project Management Maturity Model – PMMM by Harold Kerzner.** PMMM is composed of five levels, each of which represents a different degree of maturity in project management. The levels are: Level 1 – Common language, Level 2 –

Structural Changes in Higher Education

So far, research into project management maturity has not been extended to the higher education system, which operates with the traditional distinction between Humboldtian and entrepreneurial universities. However, recent literature on education shows that the Humboldtian university is considered inadequate in the global landscape of higher education. Its inadequacy is mainly triggered by the fact that this model described the teaching and research activities of a university in a static environment, which, needless to say, is not the case anymore (Brătianu, 2007).

Universities across the world, similarly to many other complex organizations, struggle to survive under circumstances of constant change. In order to “stay alive”, universities need to find ways to escape the pressure of globalization. The external political and economic pressures drive universities to innovate and to come up with strong institutional responses related to innovation. Globalization and the accompanying phenomena – emergence of the knowledge-based economy, rapid obsolescence of knowledge, fight over talent, emergence of a global education market place education at the heart of development and competitiveness processes. According to Quinn (2001), there are four economic trends pertaining to the contemporary world and having huge implications at all levels: the shift from a materials to a service- and knowledge-based economy, the preeminence of intellect, innovation, technology, and software – not capital or products – as economic drivers, the globalization of technology and economic activity in all fields, the explosion of knowledge generation, innovation and technological progress rates.

Global economy is increasingly a knowledge economy, making people’s skills and qualifications more important than traditional, hard power indicators such as territory, geographical position, and natural resources. Surviving, performing and thriving on the global market largely depend on the quality of the education system. As we have already underlined, globalization imposes new rhythms of performance to every economic or social field. Higher education is no exception to this, since it lies at the interface with the external environment, where skills and qualifications will be used and exploited for economic benefits. There are authors who see things even in a more dramatic manner, considering that “higher education witnesses the greatest amount of global influences, cross-national traffic, newest communication technologies, and interdisciplinary problem solving, thus rendering it, in some way, a microcosm of a global society” (Bash et al., 2007, p. 15).
Universities are under a double-fold pressure. First, they provide services, knowledge, skills for fast-moving sectors. The respective knowledge and skills may become easily obsolete and irrelevant for the economy. As underlined by L. Bash and others, “with the increasing complexity that accompanies globalization, there is an imperative for colleges and universities to adapt to a fast changing world as they prepare their students for the demands of the global economic, political and social world that awaits them” (Bash L. et al., op. cit., p. 16). Second, university itself needs to innovate and to adapt to situations of constant change. Both types of pressure force universities to develop their capability for innovation. They do not merely have to come up with new products, services or management models; instead, they need to “build a deep, enduring capability for innovation – one that consistently […] enables the organization to maintain a competitive advantage over the long term” (Skarzynski and Rowan, 2008, p. 5).

There are some structural changes in the higher education and research field that call for a different approach in universities, what we consider to be the project-orientation approach. Changes are mainly related to the changes in the process of knowledge production. For example, the practices of research have changed radically. Currently, research is by definition interdisciplinary and it is done in partnerships. The characteristics of knowledge production processes (intensity, rapid obsolescence, shortened life cycles of products, services, and ideas) demand that “research must go beyond the intellectual curiosity of the investigator; scholars should push their ideas to application and ultimately to the market; thus, universities and their faculties need to think further than the acquisition and development of new knowledge and pay attention to the transmission of this knowledge and the challenges of technological innovation (Mohrman et al., 2007, p. 150). Research implementation appears to be the greatest priority and the dissemination of the knowledge created. Therefore, research and knowledge production have become increasingly complex processes retaining features of uniqueness, with specific objectives, carried out over a clearly cut period of time by dedicated teams and with limited resources (including financial ones). The current way of producing knowledge – which includes new phases such as knowledge implementation and dissemination – makes project orientation most adequate since the very definition of projects mirrors the above mentioned characteristics: complexity, uniqueness, clear objectives, determined duration and limited resources of all kinds.

The concept of project-oriented university is rather new and research dedicated to it is at the beginning. In our opinion, the concept could ground a new model for higher education institutions, a model that views maturity in project management as a means of enabling development and of increasing organization’s (i.e. university) chances to cope with multiple transformations in the external environment.
Why would a project-oriented university model be more suitable to face the current reality than other models? Mainly because the core idea underlying the project-oriented university model is to describe how the university can adapt itself to changes and thus stay competitive on the global education marketplace. The aim of the model is to provide the university with the necessary means of conceiving a coherent response to external inputs. This reaction must fulfill the three-fold requirement of the project management view concerning the organization’s capacity to adapt to change and to engage in the competitiveness race: there must be a quick answer to global challenges; the answer must be innovative; finally, the answer must be methodologically grounded.

The project-oriented university model has the advantage that it exploits the solid theoretical framework of project management maturity models. This framework lends it the necessary tools to build on a consistent proposal that fulfills the above-mentioned requirements and moreover sets up the strategy that universities might use to successfully cope with current changes.

The Concept of Project-Oriented University

In what follows, we will explain the concept of project-oriented university by referring to its consistence with the project-oriented organization related concept. Furthermore, we will focus on three Romanian universities and outline our major findings in analyzing their project orientation.

Project-oriented university is a concept that senses the particularities of higher education institutions to which project management as an explicit organizational strategy is applied. From now on, we will refer to Romania and to Romanian academic environment as evidence for theoretical assumptions. We envisage that Romanian universities are no exception, and that they fit a general frame to which universities from other countries may belong, too. We do not have yet the necessary data in order to make claims concerning the project-oriented maturity of some of the European universities, not even concerning the Romanian universities, apart from the three at which we looked closely. However, as far as the Romanian universities are concerned, we dare to say that their degree of maturity as project-oriented is very low and that three universities under scrutiny are rather representative.

Let us go back to the core concept of project-oriented university. What makes a university project-oriented? We might conceive a two-fold answer that comprises both the “hard” (concerning the structural dimension of project management, skills, attitudes, competences) and the “soft” components of the concept (the soft components related to project management). Here are some remarks on these two components:
The “hard” part refers to the following aspects:

- project management is an explicit organizational strategy, applied both to internally or externally-funded projects;
- project management and program management processes are formalized and documented into working procedures;
- a Project Management Office exists, which is responsible for the coordination of all running projects;
- there are expert pools (which provide project teams in situ and know-how transfer from one project to another);
- a common project management terminology is consistently used across the entire organization;
- clustering of projects into programs takes place and project portfolio management is performed, in order to create synergies among discrete projects and steer them so as to fulfill organizational strategy.

The “soft” part consists of:

- there is a consistent project management culture across the entire organization;
- people are trained and developed in project management, there are clear career paths for people involved in projects;
- there is a favorable climate for continuous improvement of project management methodology.

At this point, we should make a clear difference between project management in universities, project management taught in universities, on the one hand, and project management orientation of universities, on the other. The first item refers to the project management courses that are taught in universities (such as it is the case in NSPSPA), while the latter deals with project management maturity, meaning both formal (e.g. work in terms of projects and programs, organization of the PM Office, elaboration of templates and project plans, the settlement of Project Management Expert Pools etc.) and soft aspects (e.g. accountability and empowerment of project managers, tools for project team management, marketing efforts toward further promoting project management as an explicit organizational strategy etc.).

An examination of project orientation in three Romanian universities

The Romanian academic environment was crossed by rapid changes after 1989, and there was little time to adapt to new circumstances before these changed again. Things have evolved, though, and the Romanian academic environment tends to become more stable than before mid ‘90s. Nonetheless, universities and other higher education institutions have not escaped the external pressures. In fact, they are currently facing the challenge of being competitive and innovative in the context of European Union integration and, more generally, in a very demanding global society. Given the European integration and globalization trends, survival is less
valued, and even less safe, than evolution. Therefore, in order to “stay alive”, universities have to move fast and to reinvent themselves accordingly. We believe that the project-oriented university is a model that could provide the necessary basis for further evolution of universities, as a particular type of organizations. A university that is project management mature, i.e. where all the requirements listed above are overtly and explicitly met, could easily adapt to changes in both the internal and external environment. As a consequence to this adaptation, it would be easy for the university to become a stronger actor in the battle for competitiveness and innovation.

This section of the article presents the findings of an investigation of project orientation in three Romanian universities located in Bucharest. The three universities differ in their specialisation. Thus, we have examined a university specialised in social sciences (National School of Political Sciences and Public Administration), another one that offers programmes in business and economics (Academy of Economic Studies) and a technical university (Technical University of Civil Engineering).

We have applied a questionnaire made up of 12 closed questions to people responsible with academic research and institutional development from each of the three universities. We have also conducted semi-structures interviews with three professors in order to further asses the project management maturity of their respective institutions. First, a separation between internal and external projects of the university has been drawn. Respondents were asked to indicate how many internal and external projects are currently implemented in their university. We used the label “internal projects” in order to describe the projects whose objectives concern only the university (its growth, its popularity, its organisational strategy); the internal projects are funded mainly by the university (from its own funds or from loans). Internal projects could be described as marketing initiatives. On the contrary, by external projects we referred to those actions by which the university contributes to the development of a product or a service which is not entirely its own. External projects are funded by national or international donors (such as public or private companies, the Romanian government, the European Union, the World Bank etc.) preoccupied with education and/ or research. The implementation of an external project requires the university to act in compliance with the objectives of the funding institution.

Secondly, we have tried to see how different specific project management tools and techniques are used in the implementation of both internal and external projects of the university. We haven’t sought to exhaustively investigate the project management methodology applied; instead we have focused on the fundamental, “classical” techniques that should be used in any project implementation process (e.g. project organisation chart, project roles and responsibilities, project objectives
Finally, the study encompassed a dimension concerning the project management culture and the way universities preserve this culture and exploit its potential in order to successfully manage project complexity. We started from the premise that a sound project management culture lies at the basis of a project-oriented university. However, in order to assess the level of the project management culture of a university many aspects must be taken into consideration and a consistent research must be carried out. We haven’t had here the time or the means to embark in such an undertaking; our purpose was to only to check if the three universities examined meet at least the fundamental requirements for being considered as inchoate project-oriented universities, and if they show signs of project orientation in their organisational strategy. The findings of the investigation of each one of the universities will be presented below, and a general conclusion will be drawn.

**National School of Political Studies and Public Administration**

This is a university whose main field of specialisation is social sciences. In order to adapt to the constant changes on the market and to face the challenges of the changing Romanian society, National School of Political Studies and Public Administration (NSPSPA) has continuously adjusted its educational offer by proposing new academic programmes (MSc or MAs) and modules of specialisation (BA). NSPSPA is a young university; it was founded in 1990, and since then it has continuously sought to break down the traditional divide between academia and practical issues. Perhaps more than other Romanian university, NSPSPA has been forced to cope with the rapid changes in the academic environment after 1989, and there was little time to adapt to new systems before these changed again. Things have evolved, though, and the Romanian academic environment tends to become more stable than before mid ’90s, at least as far as the governmental matters are concerned. Although much more unknown than other Romanian universities, NSPSPA has managed to rapidly overcome this inconvenience succeeding in placing itself amongst the most famous universities in Bucharest.

Our analysis of the NSPSPA in terms of its project orientation has revealed that it is still at the beginning of acquiring project management maturity. The university is truly characterized by a sensible dynamism. On average, it comes up with a new “product” – the most usual type of product being a masters’ program – every two years. The launch of a new masters’ program qualifies as a typical example of a project for an academic institution. It periodically organizes national and international conferences and events, endeavors that are, again, typical examples of
projects. It has many investments – in education facilities, equipments, laboratories, campuses etc. The scale of these investments, in terms of money and strategic importance, would make them excellent candidates for processes organized in a project form. The university has attracted considerable external funding (by “external” we understand outside of the university) – from the EU, the World Bank, CNCSIS (the National University Research Council). The funding has been granted both for research projects and for projects seeking to establish new educational units or formats (such as the Virtual University of Business). NSPSPA offers educational programs in formats that need permanent update according to the market needs and demographic trends (e.g. online courses, videoconferencing system used for the distance courses). This process of updating can be organized and managed in a project form.

NSPSPA has not reached enough project management maturity to distinguish between internal and external projects. In fact, none of its internally funded endeavours that could qualify for the term “project”, to which project management could apply, is treated that way. The interview with one of the professors involved in project management and institutional development has revealed the fact that NSPSPA has actually some internal projects (e.g. construction of a new building, launching of new academic programmes, organisation of national and international conferences), but these initiatives are not viewed, labelled and managed as projects. This situation could be explained at least in two ways: either there is no common and correct understanding of the term “project”. This idea is very plausible, as the term project is widely used incorrectly in the Romanian language, as we have explained elsewhere (Bârgăoanu et al, 2007a).

With respect to external projects, NSPSPA seems to perform better. NSPSPA has implemented and currently implements a series of projects funded mainly, if not exclusively, from external sources (mostly from the national budget, the UE, and the World Bank). The university runs many research projects commissioned and funded by the National University Research Council and it concentrates its organizational resources on their implementation. This may be the consequence of the fact that universities are somehow urged by the Ministry of Education and Research to submit proposals for research projects funded by the Council. The number of research projects implemented is one of the criteria for promotion and acknowledgement within the university. These externally funded projects are not included into the project portfolio of the university and no common project management methodology is applied to them.

Finally, the project management culture is rather poorly represented within NSPSPA, and this conclusion follows easily from what have been said above. The analysis of the filled in questionnaires has shown that the university lacks a Project Management Office and project management is not an explicit organisational
strategy to be used and valued. The people who are in charge of projects are not formally assigned as project managers and the role of the project owner is not explicitly performed.

Academy of Economic Studies

The second university that we have included in our study is one of the largest higher education institutions in Romania. Academy of Economic Studies (AES) attracts annually hundreds of students who wish to embark on a business career. AES has continuously grown and now it comprises not only specific departments in fields such as economics, management or finance, but also specialisations in public administration, marketing etc. We did not have the possibility to investigate project management use at all levels of the AES; we have only managed to make inquiry into the use of project management methodology in one of the AES’s departments (Business Administration Department, Centre for Research on Intellectual Potential). Although the investigation was not carried out in more than one Department of the AES, we chose to discuss it nevertheless. From this point on, we will refer exclusively to the activity of the Centre for Research on Intellectual Potential (CRIP).

The analysis of the questionnaires applied and the discussion with the director of the Centre have shown that the overall impression over the activity of the CRIP regarding its project management maturity shares many similarities with the situation that we have met in the case on the NSPSPA. CRIP lacks an authentic culture of project management. Although the question concerning the existence of a Project Management Office has been answered affirmatively, we have discovered that in fact there is no PMO, but an office that formally gathers information on each of the projects run by the Centre. As for other components of a project management culture, the CRIP lacks know-how transfer between project managers; it also lacks expert pools (who could provide project teams in situ and know-how transfer from one project to another). Moreover, no clustering of projects into programs takes place and project portfolio management is not performed, in order to seek create synergies amongst discrete projects and steer them so as to fulfill organizational strategy.

Apparently, project management tools and techniques are used in project implementation within the CRIP. This could be a plus and a sign that the centre is relatively prepared to meet the project-oriented formal requirements. But, as shown before, it is not clear if the project management methodology is accurately and constantly used for all projects run by the centre. Thus, the CRIP has no internal projects (e.g. the organisation of a conference is not seen as a project) As far as the external projects are concerned, the portfolio of the centre comprises only research
projects funded by the National University Research Council. The remarks on this type of projects mentioned in the case of NSPSPA entirely apply to the CRIP, too.

Last, project management is mostly seen as a subdivision of the management field and management is one of the main specialisation area provided by the AES. The director of the Centre emphasized that the development of a project management culture requires setting up specific values of project management in the first place. He also mentioned that Romanian universities are quite far away of that stage if we take into account that “anti-management” is actually the guiding idea of governmental institutions that coordinate and supervise the quality and competitiveness of the Romanian higher education system.

**Technical University of Civil Engineering**

The Technical University of Civil Engineering of Bucharest (TUCE) was founded in 1994 as the only Romanian university specializing in civil engineering. Our study has shown that it is quite mature in its project orientation. It’s true that there are important dimensions of project orientation that still need to be explored and assimilated, but this is reachable within reasonable time limits.

In order to examine the project-orientation level of TUCE we have applied questionnaires and have interviewed one of its academics involved in several projects currently implemented in the university. The questionnaire, which was used as an interview guideline, served as a structured analytical tool meant to ease data collection. In January 2009, 11 projects are run by TUCE: seven internal projects and four external projects. Internal projects consist of four research projects, two investment projects related to infrastructure, and one institutional development project. All these projects have a high degree of visibility in the university. Internal projects seem to be understood by most stakeholders as well structured projects, with a start and an end, engaging a specific number of resources, and being committed to achieve measurable goals. External projects consist of two research projects expected to deliver innovative intangibles, such as patents, and two consulting projects implemented at the benefit of the Romanian public administration. As it may be easily noticed, this is the only university from the three similar institutions we have examined that accurately distinguishes between internal and external projects.

However, the distinction between internal and external projects may have been altered by some confusion caused by the meaning of research projects in Romanian universities. There is a growing trend in Romania to fund academic research only through external non-reimbursable opportunities, such as the Structural Funds available for Romania from the European Union until 2013. No or little internal
funding – such as funds from tuition fees or bank loans - is granted by Romanian universities for their research projects. In project management theory and practice, external funding means that an organization is mobilized to implement projects for an external client that agrees to invest money and trust for the achievement of the project goals. This commits the implementing organization for an effective project management that would guarantee that resources are used in the most effective way. Most research projects implemented by Romanian universities are managed as internal projects, even though the project management theory would describe them as external projects. This is not only a matter of terminology, but also a matter of responsibility and ownership of project results. We may assume that a project-oriented university would tend to make a clear difference between external and internal research projects. External research projects are a key for economic competitiveness of the university, while internal research projects would be a laboratory for new ideas, a nutritious field for the germs of innovation leading to long-term development of the society as a whole.

Project management methodologies seem to be largely used by TUCE in both internal and external projects – under the limitations resulting from the perceived difference between these two types of projects. In the project initiation phase, TUCE uses the formal project assignment, the project organization chart, the description of roles and responsibilities, and internal project norms on a regular basis. The communication plan is used only in some projects. In the project planning phase, several key project management tools are always used, such as: the plan of the project goals, the Work break-down Structure (WBS), the milestones plan, the Gantt Chart, the resource allocation plan, the cost plan, and the risks analysis. The Critical Path Method is rarely implemented.

In all cases the project logo and the project name are created to identify the project, which is a proof that we may discuss about a defined project culture in TUCE. Furthermore, project coordination activities are well defined, too. The assigned project manager attends coordination meetings with the University’s Senate, with the project team members and key stakeholders. Also, the project plans are largely used as communication tools. Project controlling methodologies are implemented in most TUCE projects. Project reporting seems to be kept at a rather official or formal level. Except for technical and financial progress reports, which are a must, some other reporting tools, such as meeting minutes, are not very popular. This may be a result of the fact that, in project management terms, TUCE deals with external projects – funded by European Union or the Romanian Government – where financial and technical reporting must be done for the funds to be received. Project closing is formally done, with a special focus on planning the activities that will follow after the project ends.
It is reasonable to state that project management tools mentioned in this analysis are not necessarily actual signs of TUCE project management maturity, but rather a symptom of the norms and rules imposed by funding entities. From this perspective, one may differentiate between project rules and project management maturity. TUCE is a university that applies project rules and norms. There is not enough evidence that TUCE is a project-oriented university that implements project management as an explicit organizational strategy. This statement is backed up by some evidence gathered during the: TUCE does not have a Project Management Office, which means that there is no project portfolio coordination, no unitary tools and no explicit project management methodologies; TUCE does not understand project management as an organizational strategy, as a means for creating competitive advantage, flexibility, and innovation.

The statement that TUCE is oriented rather towards project rules than towards project management is further backed up if we take a closer look to the field in which this university is specialized. Buildings and engineering have always been associated with projects. If we look back to the early 60’s, the first project management standards were developed for civil engineering, aeronautics, and defense industry. In Romania, before 1989 and even in the early 90’s, the term “project” meant technical documentation for buildings. Furthermore, engineering activities were based upon very strict rules. Engineering as a discipline was seen as highly standardized. It is somehow natural that civil engineering, in general, and TUCE, in particular, is inclined to implementing its projects by using a complex set of tools and methodologies. But this does not mean that TUCE is a project-oriented university, namely that it fulfills the three-fold requirement of the project management view concerning the organization’s capacity to adapt to change and to engage in the competitiveness race: an innovative, quick, and methodologically grounded answer to global challenges.

Even if it still lack a solid project management culture, TUCE seems to be the most advanced university from the three examined in this paper to reach maturity in its project orientation. Once the technical aspects have been set up, the procedures put forth and the project methodology put in place, the university needs to constantly update its organizational strategy by assessing the importance of project management.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the three universities in terms of their project orientation has revealed that they are at the beginning of acquiring project management maturity. They are truly characterized by a sensible dynamism and they are very active and proficient in undertakings that have to do with the new and the innovative. A similar
conclusion cannot be drawn as to their proficiency in project management, which ends up in a paradox that we have explained elsewhere (Bârgăoanu et al, 2007b), that of having projects, but no project management.

The analytical grid explained above allows us to come up with some major findings regarding project management maturity of the three Romanian universities. They run many processes that potentially could qualify as projects and be organized accordingly – for example, design and launch of new educational programs, of new educational formats and delivery systems, such as the videoconferencing system, construction of a new headquarters; yet, there is no formal process or procedure of project definition (investment proposal, investment decision, project proposal, project decision, project assignment); these types of endeavors are not explicitly defined as projects and are not run using project management methodologies.

The term “project” is reserved mostly for externally funded undertakings, such as research projects funded by the National University Research Council, while internally-funded ones are not even referred using this term; this creates the widely spread misperception that projects refer solely to external undertakings, thus missing out the very basic merit of internal projects as vehicles for organizational update and process reengineering.

There are no formal procedures of assigning project managers and project team members to projects; the roles of project manager and project team members are not formalized, and the overwhelmingly important role of the project owner is not documented or performed. There are no explicit procedures for project implementation that should organize and formalize the project management subprocesses of initiation, coordination, control, and close-down. A Project Management Office, that should provide support for projects by means of templates, best practices, standard forms etc., does not exist or if it exists with such a title, it does not perform its project coordination and steering role. There are no websites for the coordination of the university project portfolio which should act as catalyst for project management efforts, from which the potential project managers could download implementation guidelines and standard forms, where they can communicate and share experience with other project managers.

We consider that this applies to many – perhaps most – Romanian universities, allowing for the generalization that the academic field as a whole is not very mature in its project orientation. One finding deserves particular attention: the fact that the term “project” is reserved mostly for externally funded undertakings, such as research projects funded by the specialized institution. People in the academia think that it is enough to apply for funding (by means of application forms) and, fortunately to get these project proposals funded. Enough for projects and project management! Getting a project proposal funded does not entail running the
respective project according to a specific project management methodology. This leads inevitably to a misperception of projects and project management, respectively, and to the unsafe “strategy” – that of having projects, but no project management.

Apparently, many Romanian universities have understood that they have to attract funds and have as many projects as possible, but regardless of their relevance for the strategic development of the organization. Perhaps this is too strong of a claim; however, it is not entirely improper to characterize Romanian universities in this perspective. The most important aspect of the project-oriented university model – the use of project management as an explicit organizational strategy – has not penetrated this type of organization yet. Our investigation has revealed the fact that there are no internally funded undertakings that are defined as projects and managed accordingly. Meaning that the universities – in spite of having lots of undertakings that could qualify as projects – miss the opportunity of using this organizational strategy, known as project orientation, for the purpose of increasing their competitive advantage in the Romanian academic environment and their readiness to embrace new and innovative trends. The fact that these processes are not organized and dealt with in a project form does not mean that they end in complete failure, or that they do not deliver results. It means that, sometimes, money and time is wasted, quality is not always met. And, most importantly, the organization as a whole is not ready to cope with changes, new developments, opportunities, challenges and risks in a routine way. This might have as a consequence an inability to find the best way of reaching competitiveness and innovativeness.

Changes on the global society have shed light on the timeliness of switching to a new university model, designed to successfully face the challenges of the future. It seems that the model of the Humboldtian university has become more and more unsuitable for helping develop the university under the pressure of globalization. Time has come to look into another way, and project management field may offer a direction to follow. The theoretical framework of the project management maturity model has contributed to the emergence of the new concept: the project-oriented university. There is still time to change the attitude of universities towards the strategic advantages of implementing project management as an explicit organizational strategy. Let us imagine a situation where the Romanian universities would be told as the British universities had once been told: swim on your own, or sink. Hopefully, they will strive to remain on the surface and manage to do so by resorting to the right swimming style – project management orientation.
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