

"LUCIAN BLAGA" UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS

PhD THESIS
SUMMARY

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

Ph.D. Professor DĂNUȚ DUMITRU DUMITRAȘCU

PhD STUDENT

Eng. DANIELA VÎRVOREA (married POPA)

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**PERFORMING PROJECT MANAGEMENT –
ESSENTIAL SOLUTION FOR OPTIMUM
MANAGEMENT OF SMALL AND MEDIUM
ENTERPRISES**

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*"The wisdom of life is simple:
do that, where you've been, to be better than before. "*

Nicolae Iorga

The field of SMEs and their management has become of great interest, in recent years, because of the importance of this sector in all world economies. SMEs are subject of government policies in many EU countries and worldwide. We can state that their overwhelming importance in contemporary society is being recognized, especially on economic and political realms. This reason is a good argument on the need to study SMEs. Another argument is the current tendency to drop large enterprises for their fragmentation into smaller units, close to the small and medium sized enterprises model. The occurrence of separation actions of basic and auxiliary activities and their transfer to specialized companies impose the necessity of studying SMEs in terms of management activity (generally, strategic projects).

In the European economy small and medium businesses account for 99% of all enterprises and account for over 54% of jobs. Romania has a relatively small number of SMEs, about 23 enterprises per 1000 inhabitants, the EU average being 64. Starting from the idea that in our country in the future will see an upward trend in the number SMEs relative to the average number of common people in Europe, we believe that there is a need of studies regarding the management of SMEs, their policies and strategies, their development, and project management as a result of European integration. Most existing works in literature and results from doctoral studies are based on researches on small and medium businesses in Romania before the EU accession, consistent with the trends of the time.

Development of SMEs is a priority target of the Romanian economy in the context of EU accession. Therefore, any study that has focused on this issue and trying to find viable managerial solutions for further development of this sector is of critical importance. The issues nuanced by SMEs management are diverse, being multifacets that customize the practice of management for small and medium business, different to other types of organizational management.

In particular, we can see that most management plans and attempts to obtain funding lines are based on the development of viable projects and coordination of activities in

accordance with specific requirements of project management. For this reason it is important to develop appropriate tools to popularize these methods and, moreover, to customize the methods and techniques of preparation and coordination of projects specific for the activities of SMEs in Romania. It is essential to know the methods to develop projects and ways of management and coordination of resources from these projects to meet the indicators imposed by quality, time and delivery of value.

The theme proposed for research, "***Performing project management - essential solution for optimum management of small and medium business***", is part of the field of management of small and medium sized companies. Management methods and techniques of project management are scientifically based management tools, promoted in the organizations to streamline operations and optimal management of projects proposed and implemented by them. There is a growing concern of specialists in this field at national and especially international levels. But concerns must be intensified as a result of globalization and integration of Romania in Europe. Moreover, in the context of the ongoing global financial and economic crisis, we believe that this "motor" composed of SMEs is able to contribute to the country's economic recovery.

The need for this thesis results mainly from the following aspects worthy of attention from the management:

1. It was not yet determined the extent to which Romanian SMEs managers know the characteristics and peculiarities of the general management and strategic management. However, this level of knowledge is the first condition to be met for applying performance management.
2. The relationship *European integration - capital flow and labor - market opportunities - increased competition*, seen in the current economic and financial crisis, has still many unknowns. Viewed in the context of project management, this relationship arises many questions. Is there a project management in Romanian SMEs? If so, how does it work? To which direction it is heading? Would it emerge victorious or defeated in battle with depression?
3. The dynamics of the business environment is constantly growing. The degree to which Romanian managers want and can get information about change is not only essential for the competitiveness of organizations they lead, but even for their survival. Currently, both

specialists and managers recognize that lack of information, coupled with fear of failure, are among the greatest enemies of Romanian SMEs in the field of management. It was not attempted to quantify the "force" of these enemies, to see who they first measure the forces of modern management methods and techniques with and then determine which of them can handle the confrontations.

Introduction of methods of project management in the small business is a new and bold attempt in the context of Romanian management. But it is essential to learn these methods and techniques for developing and coordinating projects leading to sustainable development of SMEs in Romania. Project management is a fairly new concept in Romanian managerial act, especially for business of smaller size. It should be noted that this type of business organizations are those most in need of expansion and sustainability of business and need funding to support this phenomenon. Entrepreneurship is the key to national economic development through economic initiatives it develops, through ingenuity and maintain market penetration, the relentless search for new niches can be exploited to increase revenues organization. All these actions involving entrepreneurship are reflected in economic and management projects to be coordinated and implemented. Hence, here are the strong links with project management concepts and methods and techniques used by it. From all these aspects derives the special importance of the proposed theme in this thesis, and the results can become extremely useful information and methods that can be capitalized on the economic environment in the new context, the knowledge and innovation based economy. Providing elements to customize how the project management can be used in SMEs and methods to determine the development of this sector based on innovative management solutions highlights the scientific importance of the chosen area for one of the basic sectors of Romanian economy.

In terms of SMEs there were identified several needs:

- a. determined by the current context of the external business environment:
 - provide more support for entrepreneurship by local authorities;
 - reduce legal and administrative uncertainty
 - increase the confidence of entrepreneurs in non-reimbursable or partially reimbursable grants;

- improving the dissemination of information on accessing funding and identifying funding requirements in general
- b. on the strategies implemented in small organizations:
- specific elements of policy formulation in SMEs;
 - establishment of strategic groups so SMEs to withstand the competition of the single market;
- c. on projects development:
- project management role and place in SMEs;
 - increase skills related to writing, submission and coordination of projects;

The thesis aims to develop a research which is aimed at raising awareness of SMEs importance and their performance in the Romanian economy, as well as increasing their knowledge in management in the context of transition to knowledge-based economy. The thesis is divided into five parts, each of which is in relation to the type of research used. Thus, the information presented in this paper are the results of more researches from secondary sources (selective bibliographic research) and primary sources, based on questionnaires.

Research of *secondary sources* was conducted to determine the current context of SMEs, both scientifically and economically, but also to highlight the need to study this issue. Besides these, another role of the secondary research sources was to demonstrate that this subject has been treated before and is a topic of interest for management and economics. Research of secondary sources consists actually of three separate researches. Thus, the first was a selective bibliographic research and had the support mainly from scientific literature regarding the SMEs and their management in Romania. Its role was to highlight the degree of scientific knowledge and the need to study this sector. This initial research is the starting point of the whole approach of this thesis. The second research, also based on secondary sources was done by trial and review of various reports, statements and documents on development and economic performance of SMEs, both in Romania and the European Union in recent years, having the role to emphasize their importance and contributions of social and economic environment to support and motivate efforts whose results are presented in this thesis. The third research of secondary sources was based on various reports and statements on the existence of grants terms and conditions for their access and access results among SMEs, this time in the Centre region. Its aim was to highlight the existence in our country, programs that

come to support and help this sector, and the extent of developing through projects of the SMEs that benefit from these programs.

Research from primary sources was conducted in two parts. The two questionnaire-based researches aimed at identifying the existence of strategic actions in SMEs, respectively the implementation of these actions through development through projects. The first research of primary sources tried to identify the application of strategic management, policies and strategies in SMEs to highlight the reality of awareness and use of specific elements of strategic, long-term development trend of change in organizations. This research first brought out the immediate need for research as the existence of strategies and development policies, calls for their implementation through projects, and to achieve higher efficiency and effectiveness in business, there is a need of good management. The second primary source-research sought to identify the degree of knowledge of project management in SMEs and the use of different methods and its specific tools. Furthermore, this research aims to determine the situation of accessing European funds and the reasons why the managerial staff of SME decided to access or not these funds, to highlight the relationship proposed by the title of the theme, namely optimal management of the activities in SMEs as a result of the use of performing project management.

In the research methodology, we used the methods and techniques of qualitative and quantitative research and data collection was carried out by literature research, field research and discussions with managers of SMEs. The steps followed in the questionnaire-based research were: literature review, the effective realization of the questionnaires, determining the size and structure of the sample under investigation, checking understanding of potential future questionnaire among respondents, distribute and collect questionnaires, information processing, analyzing and interpreting information, drawing conclusions. Questionnaires were assigned the appropriate samples, predetermined to obtain relevant conclusions, and in the process of analysis we used SPSS, an useful software for processing information.

The overarching objective of the thesis is to determine the dependence between the application of project management in SMEs and the generation of performance in management of all activities.

Specific objectives were structured as follows:

In the first part of this work, "*The current state of management of SMEs - features and perspectives in the context of the knowledge based economy*" is aimed at nine objectives, namely:

1. Identifying entrepreneurship as a key element in stimulating economic performance;
2. Determining the present relations between economics and entrepreneurship;
3. Highlighting SMEs as a pole of economic growth and potential sustainable development source;
4. Identifying prospects for management development to SMEs in the knowledge based economy and management.
5. Determining the specificity of management functions in SMEs;
6. Highlighting Knowledge-based Management functions as a basis for increased performance in SMEs;
7. Determining the role and importance of strategic management in managing activities and performance enhancement of the SMEs;
8. Determination of modern management solution for capitalizing the opportunities and achieve objectives of SMEs by using project management;
9. Identifying the degree of interest in terms of research on SMEs - in recent years in Romania.

The second part of the thesis, "*The current context of SMEs*" is based on seven objectives, as follows:

1. Determining the current state of SMEs in the European Union;
2. Identification of national strategies on SMEs as a framework to be considered in setting organizational strategy;
3. Identify SMEs development in Romania;
4. Highlighting management elements specific to SMEs in different national contexts;
5. Identifying grants for SMEs in Romania;
6. Identifying the position of accessing funds in the "Centru" region by the SMEs;
7. Determining the cause-effect relationship in using project management as crucial element in increasing the performance of the organization.

The third part of the paper, "*Strategic perspective in SMEs - condition for their performance development through projects. Selective research on current policies and strategies developed in SMEs*" focuses on four objectives as follows:

1. Determining the influence of business environment as a fundamental element in identifying opportunities and establishing strategies in SMEs;
2. Identifying the use of methods and techniques of strategic management in the SMEs;
3. Identifying a set of indicators that can be used to assess the performance of SMEs;
4. Promotion of strategic management in SME development.

Part Four of the paper "*The role and importance of project management in increasing the performance of SMEs*" focuses on four objectives:

1. Identifying the knowledge of project management concepts by the managers of SMEs;
2. Determining the utility of methods and techniques of project management in SMEs;
3. Identifying the relationship between performance in SMEs and the use of specific methods and techniques of project management;
4. Identifying the positive effects of using project management in resource, processes and functions management within SMEs.

The thesis consists of 12 chapters, divided into five parts. These were determined based on the grounds that to study SMEs, one must first identify their level of knowledge and economic environment (Part I), then it is necessary to highlight the current context and economic importance (Part II) and then it can be addressed the broader economic sector (Parts III, IV and V).

Part I "*The current state of management of SMEs - features and perspectives in the context of the knowledge based economy* " consists of two chapters and presents general concepts characteristic of entrepreneurship, small and medium - sized enterprises and their management in the transition to knowledge-based economy. This section presents the theoretical point of view, the current context of the economic environment and of the SMEs. The main role of this part, and of the chapters that compose it, is to identify the extent of scientific knowledge and the need for thorough study of this sector of the economy.

Chapter 1 "*Considerations regarding the development of entrepreneurship and SMEs in the context of the knowledge based economy*" provides an overview of

entrepreneurship and small and medium - sized enterprises, highlighting the role and importance in the development of current economic performance but also the future economy, namely, the knowledge-based economy. This chapter is the result of an incursion in the literature on knowledge-based economy, entrepreneurship and SMEs to identify their dependency relationships, the effects of the economic environment in sustainable development, creating new business opportunities and performing economic growth. The information presented shows the place and role of SMEs to achieve economic progress through the efficient use of project management, relationship not addressed so far in the current literature. To address the theme of this thesis is necessary to identify, first, the background knowledge the current economic environment, which is shown in this chapter.

Chapter 2, "*Particularities of management in SMEs - Realities and Perspectives*" highlights management features that define its characteristics in SMEs. It offers a broad vision of the specific management functions in SMEs, the specificity of new features based on the transition towards the knowledge company and management, and a number of peculiarities of strategic management and project management in SMEs. The focal point of the thesis is SMEs, and to study them thoroughly, identification is required prior to the current state of scientific knowledge on management. Starting from these considerations the second chapter of the thesis arose.

Part II of the thesis, "*The current context of SMEs*," gives an image of the reality of SMEs in different national contexts and in Romania, opportunities and prospects of SMEs development through the project management approach in our country. Due to the complexity of this sector in the current context, this part consists of four chapters whose main role is to highlight the importance and necessity of studying SMEs and actions to be followed to increase their performance and development. This part is the bridge between the theoretical part and the theme of the doctoral thesis.

Chapter 3, "*SMEs in an international context*," addresses issues of the SMEs and their management in different countries, focusing on information about these businesses in European context. It summarizes the numerous information identified by selective bibliographic research on management and characteristics of SMEs in different countries and information on developments and their importance in the European Union. This chapter

derives from the need to highlight the importance of SMEs in the economies of all countries, coupled with their low level of study.

Chapter 4, "***SMEs in Romania***," provides an overview of SMEs in our country, both their evolution in recent years, the number of persons employed, etc., as well as their economic performance by the turnover and contribution to the economy. This chapter presents the importance of SMEs in our economy to highlight the need for thorough study of this sector.

Chapter 5, "***European grant funding - opportunities for developing performing SMEs in Romania***", makes a foray into the operational programs designed to highlight opportunities for SMEs offered by the Romanian economic environment. This comes to support the information presented in the previous chapter, showing on the one hand the importance of SMEs in the economy - by creating non-reimbursable grant programs for their financial support and on the other hand implications of these opportunities in the performance SMEs.

Chapter 6, "***New Perspectives on project management in Romania***," addresses two different research directions which condition each other. Thus, the first part gives an image of the real level of access to funds among SMEs in the "Centru" region. Based on these data, another research was started, based on interviews, regarding the managers' opinion on project management characteristics in SMEs in Sibiu. This chapter presents the causes and effects of two problems identified in the research, namely, "non-use of project management in SMEs" and "low level of access to non-reimbursable European funds." The role of this chapter is determined by much information identified and presented, which is the starting point of the researches presented in the following parts of the thesis.

Part III of the thesis, "***Strategic perspective SMEs, condition for developing their performance through. Selective research on current policies and strategies developed in SMEs***," provides an overview of the applicability of strategic management and development policies in the analyzed small and medium sized enterprises. Its necessity is evidenced by the relationship of dependency between performance through projects and the existence of long-term strategies and plans in organizations.

Chapter 7, "***Theoretical and methodological elements on selective scientific research and methods of implementation***," is a synthesis of the approached research methodology,

showing how scientific research was done, sample size determination and analysis of the collected information, through SPSS.

Chapter 8, "***Determination of policies and strategies developed in SMEs based on selective research on opinion-makers in these organizations,***" presents results of a research-based questionnaire providing information on the respondents' opinion on the various elements of strategic management dealt with the analyzed SMEs. This extensive research has as a starting point bibliographic study undertaken in the first two parts of the thesis, after which it showed the need for development strategies and policies, whose implementation can be achieved by using efficient management of projects for growth and efficient development of SMEs. Thus, this chapter aims to identify existing strategic actions in the analyzed companies for their correlation with their performance, using project management methods and techniques.

Part IV of this work, "***The role and importance of project management in increasing SMEs' performance,***" shows an overview of awareness and use of project management to achieve organizational performance.

This part is the result of a questionnaire-based research that has two major objectives, and therefore was divided into two chapters, which together present the opinion of the decision makers of the analyzed companies, regarding the importance of project management in developing efficient and effective SMEs with positive economic effects.

Chapter 9, "***Selective scientific research on the identification of awareness and use of project management in SMEs in Sibiu,***" presents the results regarding the opinion of people active in SMEs in Sibiu County, on the role, importance and usefulness of project management to improve performance of the analyzed organizations.

Chapter 10, "***Determining the awareness level of non-reimbursable European funds for SMEs,***" shows the results on awareness and application of project management in SMEs in terms of identifying the knowledge and access to grants, regarded as environmental opportunities.

Part V, "***General summary of the main conclusions, opinions, recommendations and personal contributions,***" highlights the most relevant conclusions of the whole research activity. It comprises two chapters that highlight, in our opinion, the applicability of performing management of projects for optimal management of the activities of SMEs.

Chapter 11, "*Performance in SMEs – by using project management*," presents a mathematical model and a matrix for determining the level of performance in business directly related to the applicability of strategic management and project management.

Chapter 12, "*Conclusions and personal contributions*," is a summary of the findings of all work, the author's personal contributions and recommended future research directions.

The theme of the PhD thesis addresses a topical field, aiming to contribute to the currently existing theory and – through the information from the investigations, and the proposed models for determining performance - to demonstrate the importance of performing management of projects in the efficient developing of the SME sector.

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