"LUCIAN BLAGA" UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU FACULTY OF ECONOMICS

CONTRIBUTIONS OF MANAGEMENT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF ACCESSING EUROPEAN FUNDING FOR PROJECTS

Doctoral thesis abstract

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KEY WORDS: management, projects, finances, European funds, performance, absorption.

To know is to be."

Osho

The science and practice of project management have recently had a spectacular evolution, globally speaking, with a particular impact on all types of organizations, imposing a new way of conceiving in terms of project development, with a focus on developing and implementing coherent development strategies, on planning and organization. This trend is particularly pronounced in the European Union where, under the impact of integration needs, project management tends to become the main form of existence in the economic environment.

This doctoral thesis took shape as a result of the political and economic changes, with social and cultural consequences that occurred as a result of Romania's accession to the European Union. The accession process has entailed a number of advantages that our country would benefit from as a result of integrating in a larger and more highly developed region, such as the structural tools made available to Romania for achieving the economic and social convergence objective.

Each funding period 2007-2013, 2014-2020, and so on, although not completed in the early stages with major performances in the absorption of European funds, are designed to help increase experience in the field. Thus, these periods may be associated with development cycles of six years in which Romania has the chance to improve certain skills, starting from the stage of development of strategic documents that program the funding process, the preparation of administrative structures that will become responsible for managing the funds and to the improvement of skills in project management with a special contribution to the access and absorption of European funds.

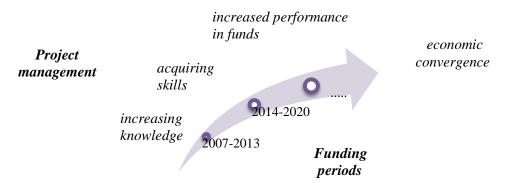


Figure 1 Increasing performance in accessing European funds by increasing knowledge in project management

At the end of each period, particular importance is given to an analysis of the positive and negative diagnosis that led to results obtained. This analysis is intended to help improve the results that Romania could get in the future in this area.

This thesis **assumes** that there is a correlation between the degree of maturity of project management in the Romanian society in general and in particular in the Central Development Region, and results obtained in the management of funds.

The scientific research was directed to priority areas declared by the national strategy. Therefore, the theme fits in the CNCSIS priority areas as follows: **Area 9** - *Socio-economic and humanity sciences*, **Division of Research 9.1** - *New managerial, marketing and entrepreneurial development methods for organizational competitiveness*, **Research theme 9.1.1** - *Knowledge-based management* and the **Research theme 9.1.5** - *Strategies for establishing and capitalizing on the competitive advantages of the companies*.

Given that Romania has committed to build a knowledge-based society open to values and international competition, the current research contributes to the achievement of this objective by identifying the knowledge of project management as well as how it is applied in the company.

Since knowledge is central to determining competitiveness at institutional and implicitly national level, and considering the importance of research for the development of knowledge, the thesis adds to knowledge in the field of project management considered a vital source of welfare gains nationally and internationally.

Professor C. Opran quoted Fortune magazine in 2002 saying that "Project management will become huge in the next decade project management is the wave of the future. Project management is an idea whose time has come, and the future is a promising one." Interest and focus on project management as management system opportunity develops in more and more industries and businesses.

We are in the next decade, and project management is more than the "wave of the future", it has become a necessity in recent years. There is said about a "project company", meaning that the company frequently uses projects and programs to have relatively unique processes, of medium or high complexity; about the need for a **culture of projects** that passes through the Romanian society from the local or central public institutions, to the private sector, to small communities.

In this context, institutions should develop strategies to meet the vision and objectives of development, to encourage creative thinking among employees, generating ideas beyond the formal limits imposed that, against sound knowledge of project management, would provide increased performance on all levels.

The doctoral thesis "Contribution of management on the performance of accessing European funding for projects" aims to identify the degree of maturity central that our country has in the project management by analyzing the access and absorption of EU funds processes from the first period of financing that Romania received since it has been a member of the European Union. Therefore, the research conducted in this thesis was to point out the association of performances in European funds with skills that our country has in project management.

The aim of this thesis is the awareness of stakeholders on the development of projects which, taken seriously and professionally, meet the needs of institutional development and simultaneously implement a series of changes which are really necessary and important for community progress.

The thesis aims to identify the main problems and shortcomings encountered by beneficiaries of projects financed through European funds due to the negative influence of certain categories of factors. These objectives will be achieved through an analysis of the practice of project management in public institutions in Centre Region 7 and how it has resulted in successful projects. The findings of this study regarding the problems encountered in the management of European funds in the period 2007-2013 will find application in the following period, i.e. the period 2014-2020, when Romanian specialists in the projects' field will have to show more professionalism, more efficiency in funds management.

Therefore, the importance of the study stems both from the timeliness and importance of this issue and the fact that it is intended to supplement the existing theory and practice in these areas that are interrelated: European funds, project management, institutional development, convergence, areas where there is need for research and studies that would bring their contribution to raising the level of performance.

Project management, a relatively new but current filed should not be viewed only as a fundraising tool for achieving cohesion, but a way of institutional development, a new way of thinking and acting that can increase personal and organizational performance. Institutions should adopt project management to achieve a certain level of organization, enabling strategic objectives to meet current change and innovation needs.

European funds should be regarded as an important source of financing that can lead to the modernization of Romania, and project management as a tool that can make this progress possible. An important role in this process is played by the state's capacity to channel effectively and efficiently the funds to users and appropriate investment that lead to the economic growth expected.

Using project management as a tool for attracting European funds is an increasingly more debated topic. One reason is negative, i.e. the rate of absorption of structural funds, which is 23%, of which 12,82% is repayment, the difference being represented by pre-financing which have not been fully approved by the European Union. These results put a warning on the low performance in the field of projects.

These European funds can make at the moment an important contribution to the growth strategy of Romania. In this uncertain economic climate, EU funded projects is an important driver of economic growth. It thus appears imperative to improve the absorption rate of European funds, this constituting itself as the first argument of **the need to develop the thesis.**

The thesis thus meets some timely needs, the need for it also resulting from the following unknowns:

- Lack of studies that focus on the degree of knowledge held by potential beneficiaries of European projects in project management techniques and their correlation with the results achieved by our country in the absorption of European funds;
- The multitude of problems encountered in accessing and absorbing European funds are highly debated, but there are still large unknowns in terms of their causes, the contribution that environmental factors have on European projects, causing major imbalances in the foreign capital absorption needed for the development of the country;
- Other unknowns refer to arguments that influence the potential beneficiaries of a decision not to access European funds, and investigating how best to spend European funds to provide jobs and improve living standards of the Romanians.
- Another aspect that justifies the need for the thesis is related to the specificity of European projects in the public domain, the low number of studies to identify the skills and the use of project management in this sector, knowledge and methodologies applied to a project

Table no. 1 shows the objectives of each chapter of the thesis and methodology of the study, facilitating the identification of determinant causes of phenomenon.

Table 1 Specific objectives of the thesis

PART I		
CHAPTER 1	• theoretical and practical outline of the concept of management in general from the	
	perspective of specialists in the national and international literature;	
	 highlight and analysis of specific elements of management functions with implications for running a project; 	
	 definition of knowledge-based management and highlighting the importance of implementing the concept in organizations; 	
	• identifying the implications and the ways in which the concept of knowledge-based management is involved in the process of management.	
CHAPTER 2	 addressing the theoretical foundations of the concepts of project and project management; 	
	 highlighting the importance of certain concepts: vision, projects, issues and systems in project management; 	
	 project management approach as a strategic advantage and managers' ability to manage projects as strategic skills; 	
	• presenting a new vision of project management that brings changes in approaches to	
	project manager, his knowledge, project planning, project and program success;	
	• clarifying how knowledge management can be utilized in organizations working on	
	projects or which are organised on projects.	
CHAPTER 3	Identifying the funding opportunity of investment projects through European	
	programs;	
	• Presentation of the European funding framework for the period 2007 - 2013, the	
	budget for this period and its structure on financing programs;	

Identifying the specific grant projects; An analysis of funding programs in order to identify the current status of projects submitted and payments to beneficiaries; Making a comparison between funding programs regarding the status of payments submitted to the beneficiaries in terms of the degree of absorption of European funds until 31 May 2011. PART II **CHAPTER 4** Identifying the elements of project cycle management (PCM) in general, which is kept in PCM of European projects; Defining risk in the projects, and identifying the main categories of risks that may arise in projects in general and particularly in European; Highlighting the main characteristics and constraints of the projects funded from grants; Highlighting the specific European projects regarding the attributes of a grant program or clarifying some elements of project planning; Identifying the main problems that were encountered by beneficiaries of projects financed by European funds in the definition, planning and implementation of the project; Identifying and analyzing barriers affecting certain important processes of project management such as: partnerships, knowledge transfer and communication. CHAPTER 5 Identifying internal and external environment factors influencing the institutional performance; Presentation of the implications of organizational culture elements on the intitutions' low level of performances in accessing European; Demonstration of environmental uncertainty in which the projects are carried out; Identify the main categories of stakeholders of the projects in general and of European funded projects in. PART III **CHAPTER 6** Highlighting the need and importance of research; Detailing the specific steps of the research process; Setting objectives and research hypotheses in relation to the issues identified; Highlighting features and importance of qualitative interview-based research on the context of the investigation conducted; Identifying the main directions the issues identified in the interview take and from which the quantitative research is; Correlation of results obtained with the assumptions made in the research methodology; Developing conclusions and formulating recommendations for both institutions managing funds (the demand) and potential beneficiaries in order to increase performance in European projects. CHAPTER 7 Specifying the premises that led to the investigation; Highlighting the importance of the investigation in the context of the research; Emphasizing the methodological aspects outlining the investigation; Correlating the results obtained with the hypotheses and conclusions and recommendations towards increasing the degree of accessing European funds.

PART IV		
CHAPTER 8	• Identifying the share of each environmental factor influence on projects to allow them	
	a hierarchy;	
	• Highlighting the negative effects of factors on projects developed by the social actors	
	in Region 7;	
	Illustrating the positive and negative influence that stakeholders of a project may have	
	on its development;	
	Establishing a European project management model focusing on its key elements.	
CHAPTER 9	 Highlighting the main results and personal contributions obtained in this thesis; 	
	Making recommendations that can help increase performance in the studied field;	
	• Formulating future research directions that can capitalize the results obtained from this	
	thesis and may contribute to the current knowledge for the discipline and practice of	
	project management.	

In terms of **research methodology**, the thesis begins with a survey of **secondary sources** that combines a number of methods and techniques adapted to the objectives. The first part contains a bibliographic study conducted by scientific documentation and covers several steps such as: information on sources, data collection, study documenting sources and their grouping, evaluation and in-depth study to achieve the goal of knowledge of the studied field. The last step was the use of scientific documentation sources, which involved preparing the use of documentation information for conducting the research itself. The main method used is the content analysis. Another method used is the comparative method used to highlight features of certain concepts and notions analyzed.

Scientific documentation is combined with direct documentation which turned into practical reality analysis providing information on areas that integrate the theme explored. Data analysis and interpretation that characterizes the practice of the analyzed field has outlined the problem underlying the construction of the thesis.

Since documentation is a necessary step not only for research, but also important for understanding the scientific experience of the research, secondary research was based both on electronic sources (databases available on different specialized websites, institutional web pages) and on printed sources (books, studies, guides, magazine of reference). In the first part of the thesis, the research of secondary sources is represented mainly by recent study conducted mainly in books, studies and research published in the field and continues to accessing current information on the practice in the field on various specialized portals and sites. The second part of the thesis focuses more on collecting and analyzing information on the European project management practice in our country.

The research conducted in this part of the scientific approach enabled a reordering of existing knowledge on the topic addressed on certain concepts, definitions, hypotheses, awareness of deficiencies in the previous approach to the sector under investigation and suggesting new areas of research.

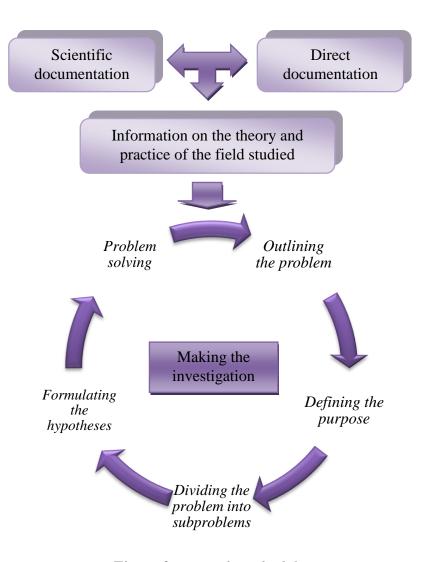


Figure 2 Research methodology

The third part contains research from **primary sources**. The research itself was a cyclical process that began with outlining the problem, defining the purpose, dividing the problem into sub-problems, offering solutions through hypotheses, collecting, organizing and analyzing data, and finally addressing the recommendations and solutions, invalidation or confirmation of hypotheses.

The research combines exploratory qualitative, interview-based research methods and quantitative questionnaire-based research methods. The data were processed by means of statistical methods such as frequency analysis, correspondence analysis and correlation analysis of the independent variables with the dependent variables.

The research of primary sources is intended to provide information and know today's practical phenomenon; its high quality provides insights to contribute to correcting, improving and increasing the theoretical dowry of science.

In the thesis the deductive method was addressed, from general to particular, used to verify the hypotheses made from studying the literature in the field.

From the structural point of view, as observed in table no. 1, the thesis is organized into nine chapters grouped into four parts. **The first part**, called "*Current state of scientific knowledge in the field*," has three chapters and outlines the theoretical concepts of management, project and project management using a rich bibliography that includes studies of renowned authors both in our country and from the international literature.

The first chapter, "State of scientific knowledge of the general management elements with implications in the project management" is based on scientific and theoretical research of concepts, techniques and general management models that find application in project management. The chapter identifies the specific functions of general management and stresses the importance of their use in project management. The chapter highlights the project management as part of the modern conception of organization's management.

The second chapter, "Studies and research on project management", completes from the theoretical point of view the information on project and project management, consulting multiple documentary sources and synthesizing information whose application can be tested through research. A contribution of this chapter is to deepen the theory on knowledge management and identify the applicability of elements of knowledge management in the field of projects.

By means of chapter three, "State of scientific knowledge on European projects" the introduction of the issue of European funds is achieved, by addressing the political and legislative context of the European project and identifying funding opportunity. This chapter highlights the specific elements of European projects and their typology. The chapter's contribution is that after analyzing the funding programs, the problem which underlies all research conducted in this thesis was identified, namely a low absorption rate of European funds.

The second part, entitled "Elements of scientific knowledge in European Project Management" includes two chapters and highlights the peculiarities of European projects, trying to include them into the broader concept of projects. The research aims not only to improve literature in the field of European projects, but of any kind of projects that can contribute to the institutional or even national development.

Chapter four, "Specific elements in European project management" fathoms the information outlining the characteristics of project management of EU funded projects.

The chapter complements the knowledge in the field by outlining the specificity of the life cycle of a European project, specific risks, as well as the distinctive features of a grant program. The chapter also focuses on the identification of problems, difficulties, mistakes that can occur at different stages of projects and which can be interpreted as negative effects of the environmental factors analyzed in chapter five. Another contribution of this chapter lies in outlining the problems that potential beneficiaries of EU funds may face in accessing and implementing European projects, providing the scientific research directions.

The current state of knowledge in the field has enabled the identification of difficulties, problems that can be the starting point of an investigation. The research of secondary sources continued in the second with identifying the effects of these deficiencies on the target group, namely the social actors of Region 7 Centre.

Chapter Five, "European project context analysis", contains a study that identifies the internal and external environmental factors that may influence the development of European projects. This analysis aims firstly to outline possible negative effects they can have on projects. The chapter also analyzes the categories of stakeholders of European projects and levels of involvement they approached about the project.

Part Three, "Research on identifying the influence factors on European project" contains two chapters and has as main objective to identify the factors with negative influence on the projects. The thesis continues inherently with the practical part, namely the primary source research that identifies causes underlying the problems. Trying to identify and remove some of these causes represents an important step in the effort to solve some of the weaknesses identified, which contributes to the attenuation of the problem in terms of low degree of absorption of European funds.

Chapter six, "Research on identifying the influence factors in project management practice in public institutions in Region 7 Centre" has as its starting point the problem identified in the first part of the thesis, namely a low absorption rate of European funds. Considering that access to funds is related to the practice of project management, the multitude of problems outlined in chapter four could also derive from poor project management application. Thus, the main objective of the investigation conducted in this chapter is to identify the causes of low degree of absorption of European funds in Region 7 Centre. The target group investigated considers only the social actors from Region 7 Centre, the public domain representing a key element of social progress, but also one of the main eligible beneficiaries of European projects. The investigation considers confirming the problems encountered in chapter four of the thesis and identifying the negative factors that gave rise to them.

Chapter seven, "Research on identifying the causes of the low degree of accessing European funds in Region 7 Centre" continues the research started in chapter six by identifying the causes of the low degree of access to finance in the Region 7 Centre. The premise that gave rise to this research lies in the research results made in chapter six and refers to the fact that there still are in Region 7 Centre institutions that have not accessed European funds. This conclusion was the starting point for a new research to identify the causes of low degree of accessing financing projects.

Part IV, "Final conclusions, the main contributions of research, opinions, solutions," complete this process by analyzing the results of investigations carried out and formulating the final conclusions and recommendations. Previous investigations and analyzes were designed to contribute to the

environmental analysis by providing the information needed to identify the factors, variables and forces present in the environment in which potential beneficiaries of European funds operate.

Chapter eight, "The analysis of the results regarding the factors of influence on European project", contains an environmental analysis of the European projects through which the degree of influence of stakeholders in European projects was examined, and the frequency with which the internal and external factors set their imprint on them. This analysis is intended to provide a more complete picture of the changing conjuncture of how European projects in Romania evolve.

Chapter nine, "Final conclusions, opinions, solutions" contains a summary of the main results and contributions made in the thesis, and a series of recommendations for improving management practice of European projects in order to achieve higher performance both at the institutional level and nationally by increasing the absorption of European funds. In the chapter there are also formulated possible directions for future research that may contribute to development of the approached field.

The thesis aims to make important contributions to the current state of knowledge in the field, completing significantly the issue related to European project management and beyond, meeting a current stringent need of the Romanian society, which is unable to cope with the management of the funds made available by the European Union for the period 2007-2013 and most likely of future funding from 2014-2020.

In conclusion, project management is a specialized field of management and modern working method that meets the need for change, whose importance is growing, as evidenced by the extent its approach has in the specialized literature and its rising popularity of the last decade.

This scientific approach was intended to draw attention to the link that exists between development and project management, the power of innovation that this concept has. Since the target group of the research in this thesis was represented by the social actors, public institutions in particular, the contribution that can be made by the use of an effective project management in community development should be emphasized.

The current state of project management research revealed a growing interest in this area from a growing number of academics and researchers in the field. From a theoretical perspective, project management is designed as an institutional development engine, which gives the institution a strategic advantage.

The combination of projects and European funds meant to help improve the project management practices based on the experiences made in the field by the social actors from Region 7 Centre. Achieving maturity in project management contributes to the development of the capacity to face the dynamism and complexity of the environment in which we live and operate.

Sustained advertising made for the Structural Funds is not necessarily the best way to inform potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities, but it creates expectations on the immediate impact of the funds. But accessing European funds triggers a lengthy process and the effects are also long term.

Training institutions in the project should be seen as aimed at attracting European funds, but to attract any fund designed to bring progress. No European fundraising does not end in 2013, but starts again with the debut of the new funding period, 2014-2020. For this period become more profitable for our country's important contributions and achieve an adequate spent. It is the responsibility of each country to link all directions investing in an adequate policy to hasten the modernization process through a strategy that provides a new horizon and a different perspective of recovery of funds.

Training institutions in the project management domain should not be seen as aimed at attracting European funds, but to attract any fund designed to bring progress. Also, European fundraising does not end in 2013, but starts again with the debut of the new funding period, 2014-2020. For this period to become more profitable for our country, an important contribution is also to achieve an adequate spent of the money. It is the responsibility of each country to link all investment directions in an adequate policy to hasten the modernization process through a strategy that provides a new horizon and a different perspective of recovery of funds.

The recommendations take into account the whole community of the projects analyzed in the scientific approach, namely: project developers, institutions managing European funds in Romania and other stakeholders (state, consulting firms, etc...):

- Awareness of funding opportunity and hence the development that European funds at the institutional and national level offer, a condition of progress and modernization of Romania;
- Formulating and defining an investment policy in line with the strategic development coordinates established by institutions to materialize in projects financed by European funds (eligible);
- Training and professional training for the personnel involved in public institutions to build skills on several levels, including project management;
- Adopting a high level of professionalism at the institutional level and particularly in the field
 of project management through rigorous methods and techniques depending on the
 requirements of each project;
- Identifying ways to motivate employees to improve institutional performance, an example could be the development of career management or charting a clear professional path for those working on projects;
- As projects in the public area show an increased risk being developed in a hostile environment, it is vital to anticipate preliminary analysis of potential negative factors that can affect the success of the project and to identify means to counteract the general risk factors;

- Decentralization of state institutions by reducing bureaucratic regulations and rigid hierarchical structures to help document workflow flexibility implied by the project management cycle;
- Simplification of procedures for accessing European funds to facilitate access to a growing number of institutions both in the public and private sector that would benefit from support and aid throughout the project;
- Increasing the level of professionalism in negotiating investment priority areas by covering investment real needs of our country;
- To reach a level of maturity in society-wide projects, the contribution made by each institution whose specific activity allows the organization on projects is very important, but very important is the support of state institutions, which carry the most complex projects, can provide examples of good practice and may involve private organizations in project implementation.

This scientific approach has opened new perspectives for research by highlighting the importance project management holds in the current period as a science and profession that allows integration by identifying existing opportunities of personal and organizational changes in projects, ensuring a high level of development in a society which endeavours to develop a genuine projects culture.

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