

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

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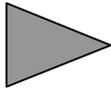
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*This paper represents a bringing together of two significant trends in continuing professional development and our contemporary understanding of the ways in which educational organizations (namely higher education) respond to the competitive edge in present times society. As such, the present material hopes to tackle these issues through identifying and discussing the key issues in individual development in organizational settings and then applying these in a practical example of professional development through project management. I will exemplify with two seemingly different domains which combine and make viable the equation of successful professional development and transferable skills: namely, humanities and project management.*

**Keywords:** continuous professional development, project management, transferable skills

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on Teodora Șerban-Oprescu's MA dissertation *Project Management and Effective Professional Development in Higher Education* presented within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Master Programme "English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics", ASE Bucharest, 2008, having Dr. Cristina Neesham as academic supervisor.



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***Introduction***

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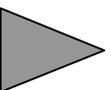
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When referring to continuous professional development in current studies, there are to be identified two main trends:

The first trend refers to professional development itself, more specifically professional development for academic staff in higher education. Although this section will be developed in the next section of the paper, it is a good idea to set the parameters of the discussion. In recent years, the Romanian higher education system has been constantly confronted with the ever increasing demand for quality in education, alignment with the European framework in education and the Bologna process, as well as post EU-accession requirements for improvement in the school system.

The second trend refers to a deeper level of individual and organizational development. It has become a truism to talk about refocusing from content in the curriculum to skills and competencies as a way of coping with rapidly changing times and knowledge. Even those of us in the middle of their careers in teaching have acknowledged the fact that in order to adapt to the new realities, to select a narrow field of inquiry and become an expert in that particular area, does not guarantee professionalism anymore. Today it is impossible to know everything about everything and the necessity for the interdisciplinary is more obvious than ever, and the necessity to combine skills of knowledge acquisition, management and economic sense of imparting information have become an essential good trait in every scholar no matter of his or her field of specialization.

This requires a fundamental shift in the way we traditionally conceived individual development and our relation as academics to the organizational environment in which we are active. It is the shift away from facts and content to skills and processes in organizational settings, and it is not only learning new skills and competencies, but also learning how to apply these skills in an organized, objective focused manner, in short transferable scientific knowledge in a practical, organized manner within disciplines that stress flexibility and logic sequencing of research data.



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***Professional development in Higher Education –  
Romania: overview of current framework***

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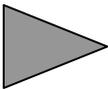
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Romania has made major steps towards the European Higher Education area by reorganizing the entire higher education system. A new higher education structure has been adopted following the discussions that occurred within the National Rectors Council in November 2003 which have shown a general consensus regarding the adoption of this structure. The Declaration of the

National Higher Education Conference released on 5 November 2003 expressed the commitment of all academic representatives (Universities, National Rectors Council and Ministry of Education and Research) to sustain the objectives stated in the Bologna declaration and in the Prague 2001, and Berlin 2003, ministerial meetings. The new legislation of June 2004 (law no. 288/2004) stipulates the reorganization of university studies in three cycles (Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral). Starting with the academic year 2005-2006, Romanian higher education structure will be as follows: First cycle (180-240 ECTS) – Bachelor degree; Second cycle (90-120 ECTS, exceptionally 60 ECTS) – Master degree; • Third cycle (3 years and in special situations 4 or 5 years) - Doctoral degree. All candidates for the title of doctor must be graduates of master's study programmes. According to the new law, the applying of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is mandatory to all universities and these will mandatory deliver for free, including in a foreign language of widespread circulation, the Diploma Supplement, whose content is in conformity with the European provisions, starting with 2005/2006 academic year. The provisions of the law 288/2004 shall apply to the public and private higher education, accredited or temporary authorized, according to the law, starting with the academic year 2005/2006.

In 2008 all of the above mentioned stipulations have already taken effect and, furthermore, quality assurance in higher education became a major issue to apply and observe. Within these lines of ensuring quality assurance in higher education, MEdC has encouraged the universities to increase the international cooperation in research field by disseminating information on European research programmes, including FP 6 programme. Universities can compete for the national research programmes financed by MEdC (AGRAL, VIASAN, BIOTECH etc). The National University Research Council is the main Romanian funding organisation for university and postgraduate research programmes. Since 1995 CNCSIS is organizing selection stages for grants financed by public budget. CNCSIS budget represent maximum 8 % from the total budget allocated to Romanian research. The grant is a special form of financing based on competition for scientific research themes of national interest and distinct originality. The grant, which is non-reimbursable, is given to an individual researcher/coordinator of a research team from an accredited higher education institution, public or private research unit and institution to carry out, in a definite period of time, specific scientific research that may contribute to the development of science. The grant may also fund activities connected to research (the purchase of research infrastructures, publishing or patenting the results of the research, scientific seminars, research scholarships, etc). The grant is based on the evaluation of the research project that has been proposed, of the applicants' previous achievement, and in keeping with the national strategy for the scientific research development, and the strategy of each institution or unit

activating in the field. The grants are approved by the MEdC following the proposal of the CNCSIS.<sup>2</sup>



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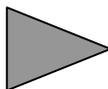
### ***Assessing reform in Higher Education***

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The conclusions ensuing from the above facts are related to the idea that what goes on in schools and particularly higher education in Romania is a way of addressing the twin issues of updating the curricula and making the activity of academia more relevant to the world of work. As a result, ARACIS and CNCSIS were created as agencies that focus on more generic skills for teachers and the recording of achievements of these through various portfolio and records of achievement. This is a framework designed to enable academia to cope with the rapidly changing scene of work. It is also recognizing the fact that education is not only an essential set of information and knowledge about a certain field but “is part of the socio-economic fabric itself, generating ideas and being a ‘child of his time’ alongside other aspects of contemporary society. We thus have a parallel and symbiotic relationship between education and the commercial world rather than a linear one”<sup>3</sup>.

Once with the shift away from only information-based focusing on research skills towards more practical and generic-based experience, the debate on professional development for academic staff in education is taking proportions. Together with it, there came naturally an infusion of managerial and management skills at every level of academic professional development.



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### ***Trends in education and management***

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Upon a short glance at management theoretical history, one may notice that complex analyses and concepts have been transferred to models in professional development. Examples are Peters and Waterman (1982) – excellence, Hammer and Champy (1993) – reengineering organizations, Morgan (1986) – creative organizational thinking, Deming (1983) – quality, Bennis and Nanus (1985) – leadership, Belbin (1981) – teams and personalities within teams, Mintzberg (1994) – strategic planning and Handy for many of the above mentioned concepts. Many of the aspects discussed and theorized in organizational behaviour have been transferred and adapted to educational settings, elegantly

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<sup>2</sup> All the information is provided from national reports from 2004,2005, the Bologna report – towards the European higher education area: [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2005/National\\_Report\\_Romania\\_05.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2005/National_Report_Romania_05.pdf) . the years have been especially chosen at the beginning of the implementation of these directives in order to observe the clear shift towards structure and quality in accordance with European and international standards.

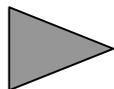
<sup>3</sup> West-Burnham John and O’Sullivan Fergus. Leadership and Professional Development in Schools. Prentice Hall: Great Britain 1998.

transforming the way we perceived and conceived personal professional development for scholars.

On the other hand, the education environment and its developments in modern times have also theoretically portrayed the shift towards a more practical and organized approach to professional development and structured research in higher education, while ensuring quality<sup>4</sup>. We have the examples of Fullan (1982) – change, Barr and Tagg (1995) – from teaching to learning, Schlechty (1990) – school in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Hopkins (1994) – school improvement etc. Research projects, management of funds and resources, assessment and dissemination, team consultancy are all part of the new model of measuring professionalism in education, especially higher education.

So, the most prominent trait of modern professional development in higher education would be the change of focus from pure, academic research to a flexible structure combining organizational skills such as project management and research that does not narrow the subject or the field, but, furthermore professes multidisciplinary topics of analysis and integrates academic research in the framework of the learning organization<sup>5</sup> which contributes to society.

In order to better understand the mix between academic environment and specific components of what we traditionally call management – more specifically, project management, I chose to discuss a project designed and implemented within an higher education environment, which proves to be an example of professional development, through project management at university level.



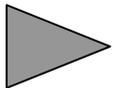

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### ***Contextualizing the case study***

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### ***Background***

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The project entitled: Romanian Cultural Space in Transatlantic Perspective. From Postcommunism to Post-EU accession” was initiated in 2007, as part of the wider national framework of research development in Romania, at the initiative of the Romanian Ministry for Education and Research, National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education (CNCSIS).

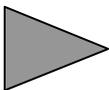
As such, this project analyzes the modulations of Romanian identity in the post-communist period and after accession. using methodologies from the field of

<sup>4</sup> Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Laura Mureşan coursenotes

<sup>5</sup> Aside domain works, the concept of the “learning organization” has also been treated and discussed about in education related works in Romanian literature of the field. Standing proof, Mureşan, Laura. 2004. *Monitoring Professional Development in an Educational NGO*. Bucharest: Punct Publishing House.

American studies and literary studies. The purpose of this project is to create a theoretical framework that is adequate for the changes and negotiations to which Romanian cultural space is subjected in a global and transnational context. This project identifies the American sphere of representation as a significant medium of reflection for Romanian identity, and looks at images of Romania in diasporic writing and in the writing of American authors, as well as at the reception of American culture in Romania. Special mention is made of the reaction of Romanian intellectuals to the culture wars unfolding in the USA. Given the role of the USA in shaping the processes of globalization, the transatlantic perspective offered by this project brings Romanian cultural space in dialogue with the culture of globalization, allowing an evaluation of the mutual impact of one upon the other.

Having as a starting point the very scientific and research based content of the project, I will demonstrate how disciplines from apparently different fields: humanities and management, correlate and lead to professional development for the researchers taking part at the project.



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### *Projects - overview*

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What do we generally understand by the term “project”?

In general, organizations perform different kinds of work by means of operations in detail and projects in a larger sense. According to the Guide to the Project Management – Body of Knowledge 2000<sup>6</sup>, “operations and projects do share some characteristics, which, sometimes intermix”. Among the characteristics that both projects and operations involve, are: both are performed by people, they are constrained by different and limited resources, and a strict control is maintained over execution and completion of the two.

Projects are often implemented in order to achieve an organization's strategic plan. Operations and projects differ mainly in that operations are ongoing and repetitive while projects are temporary and unique. According to the guide to project management<sup>7</sup>, “a project can thus be defined in terms of its distinctive characteristics—a project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service”. *Temporary* means that every project has a definite beginning and a definite end. *Unique* means that the product or service is different from all other products or services. For many organizations, projects are a means to respond to those requests that cannot be addressed within the organization's normal requirements as, for example, an educational institution.

Projects are initiated at all levels of the organization. They may involve a single person (as, in our case, projects for young researchers), or teams involving a department in an institution or several partner institutions. Their duration ranges from a year to more than five years. In more general lines, outside educational

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<sup>7</sup> Project Management Body of Knowledge Guide 2000. PMBOK 2000

frameworks, projects may involve a single unit of one organization or may cross organizational boundaries, as in joint ventures and partnering. Examples of projects include:

- Developing a new product or service.
- Initiating a change in structure, staffing, or style of an organization.
- Developing or acquiring a new or modified system.
- Constructing a building or facility.
- Building a water system for a community in a developing country.
- Running a campaign for political office.
- Implementing a new business procedure or process.

*Temporary* means that every project has a clear beginning and a clear end. The end is reached when the project's objectives have been achieved, or when it becomes obvious that the project objectives will not or cannot be met, or the need for the project no longer exists and the project is terminated. Temporary does not necessarily mean short in duration; many projects last for several years. In our case study, the project has two main objectives:

1. To identify American space as one of the possible spaces of reflection in which and in relation to which Romanian culture can define itself

In this sense, the project is centered on two directions of research:

a) The representations of Romania in a series of literary texts which have so far been ignored or marginalized, yet, with a high potential of reflecting and constructing the image of Romania in America, both from the perspective of Romanian intellectuals located in the US and of American writers. Thus, we will analyze a corpus of texts including memoirs, (auto)biographies, interviews, travelogues, essays by US writers and intellectuals (with special attention given to the Romania Diaspora). Simultaneously, we will study the reception of these texts in the American space.

b) The reception of the US culture, mainly of “culture wars”, by Romanian intellectuals at home and or as part of the Diaspora. Here, we aim at observing the reaction of Romanian intellectuals and the consequences of these reactions for the Romanian cultural space in relation to conceptual approaches of cultural identity and to the redefinition of the US cultural space. All this comes into view by relation to concepts such as multiculturalism and cultures of globalization, cosmopolitanism, post-national and post-ethnic identity.

2. To create a conceptual framework which facilitates the interpretation of Romanian phenomena in accordance with the internationally circumscribed academic dialogue.

The multitude of cultural paradigms associated to Romania can be regarded as a source of confusion that can be solved, according to Adrian Miroiu, by defining a theoretical framework which can adequately describe and analyze the problems of this vague position of the Romanian culture. For our project, the opening towards

the American culture and towards the field of American Studies, as well as the confrontation of Romania with the American mirror represents the source of theoretical tools for discussing our country's vague position at this historical moment when, by having accessed to the European Union, Romania redefines itself as a multicultural, pluralist society, open to the global world.

The departure point of our project is represented by the idea that a suitable theoretical language and conceptual approach would contribute to the understanding of the dynamics characterizing the Romanian cultural space, as it is suggested in relation to the American cultural space in James Davidson Hunter's book *Culture Wars: the Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

In addition, *temporary* does not generally apply to the product or service created by the project, as, in our case, the outcome of the research would fill-in a gap in present documents analyzing post 1989 cultural context. From this perspective, the impact of the project far outlasts the undertaking itself and creating a lasting result. To offer a more detailed view of the result that this project intends to arrive at, a glimpse at the impact will give a better account. This project aims to establish a new area of research. Given its inter- and trans-disciplinary character and its object of research, given the transatlantic perspective and the creation of a new theoretical structure, the project represents a case of exploratory research at the borderline. The special attention given to the present-day development of trans-border structures on the basis of yet incipient processes in which our country is engaged by relating to the more advanced experience of other countries, represents the essential premise for an innovative research which will play an important role in the structural and functional molding of theories that have a future in Romanian research.

In accordance with its objectives, this project means to unify diverse expertise areas, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and scientific methods, to offer opportunities for heightening the level of training in the case of the PhD candidates and of experienced researchers engaged in the project, to develop communication practices in view of establishing a long-lasting academic network. Furthermore, this project promotes the development of local (Eastern European) knowledge and research networks and the transatlantic cultural dialogue.

On this basis, we consider that the deployment of this research project will have a considerable impact on how Romanian culture is perceived and analyzed. It will also contribute to increasing the visibility of the Romanian cultural space and of Romanian intellectuals who have disseminated certain patterns of Romanian identity. Moreover, the knowledge achieved during the research period will lead to the creation and improvement of courses which are taught within the program of American Studies (undergraduate, graduate Masters and PhD levels) and to the elaboration of didactic materials and methodologies which are harmonized to present-day international tendencies. In prospect, provided that the project is

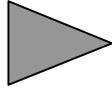
successful, the accumulated experience and the established contacts can lead to an interdisciplinary cooperation for sustaining the Master and PhD level study in the area of cultural dynamics.

Year	Phase	Objective	Activities/Operations	End of Phase	Liverables per phase
2007	Unique	1. Preliminary Documentation	1.1. Delineation of research area	15 december 2007	Report on the up to present information on the researched area and opportunities for development
			1.2 Establish research methodology		Report on research methodology
			1.3 Select information sources		Complete bibliography with primary and secondary sources
		2. Putting together logistics necessary for research	2.1. Acquire technical support for research		Improvement of existing research infrastructure
			2.2. Put together information channels (monthly subscriptions, specific research area scientific works)		Enlarge information support available for the research team

**Objectives** of projects and **Operations** are two fundamentally different concepts. For example: see above chart.

In the same conceptual line of *temporary*, the project team, as a team, seldom outlives the project most projects are performed by a team created for the sole purpose of performing the project, and the team is disbanded when the project is complete. In our case, the team of the project comprises 6 members: there is a project director, 3 established scholars and 2 beginning scholars. Each one of the members brings into the project own area of expertise which should be closely related to the research area of the project as essential requirement for quality

assurance within the undergoing study, and, aside from this, the Director of the project is required to make proof of managerial skills from previous experience. All of the above are essential points in the eligibility phase of the project. So, from the start, a mix of management skills and scientific research is required in order to initiate and develop the project.



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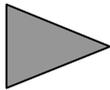
***Unique product, unique service, unique result***

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Projects involve doing something that has not been done before and which is, therefore, unique. The same requirement is to be observed in academic research projects. It is one of the essential items to be observed in the framework of the National Development Plan (PNII)<sup>8</sup> for higher education in Romania. A product or service may be unique even if the category to which it belongs is large. For example, to take just one aspect of the project under scrutiny in this paper, there have been written many studies on Romanian diaspora from America. But there is a noticeable gap in the studies on Romanian diaspora post Cold War period. If we are to talk about projects in general, the same elements are valid. The presence of repetitive elements does not change the fundamental uniqueness of the project work. For example:

⇒ A project to develop a new car may require multiple proto types.



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***Progressive elaboration***

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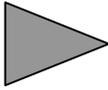
Progressive elaboration is a trait of projects that integrates the concepts of *temporary* and *unique*. Because the product of each project is unique, the traits that would distinguish the product or service must be progressively elaborated. Progressively means "proceeding in steps; continuing steadily," while elaborated means "worked out with care and detail; developed thoroughly"<sup>9</sup>

These distinguishing characteristics will be broadly defined early in the project, better said in the proposed draft of the project, which enters in the open competition to be financed and will be made more explicit and detailed as the project team develops a better and more complete understanding of the product.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.cncsis.ro](http://www.cncsis.ro)

<sup>9</sup> PMBOK 2000




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### ***Project management***

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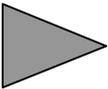
One possible definition: “project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements.”<sup>10</sup>

Project management is accomplished through the use of the processes such as: initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and closing. The project team manages the work of the projects, and the work should typically involve:

- Competing demands for: scope, time, cost, risk, and quality.
- Stakeholders with different needs and expectations.
- Identified requirements.

It is important to mention again that many of the processes within project management are iterative in nature. This is due to the existence of and the necessity for progressive elaboration in a project throughout the project life cycle; i.e., the more you know about your project, the better you are able to manage it.

The term project management is sometimes used to describe an organizational approach to the management of ongoing operations. This approach, more properly called management by projects, treats many aspects of ongoing operations as projects and applies project management techniques to them.




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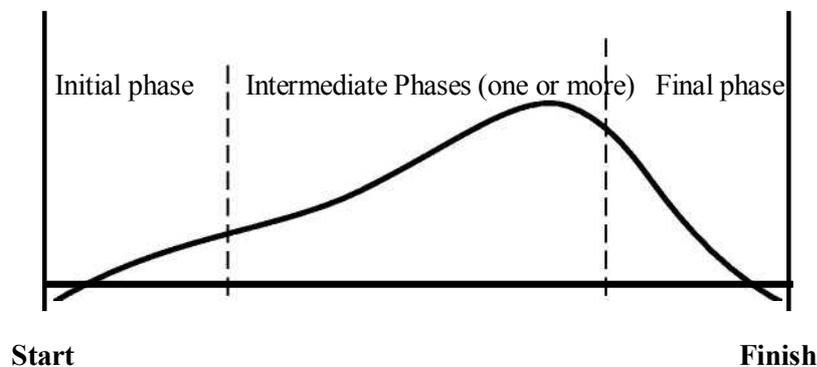
### ***Project phases and the project life cycle***

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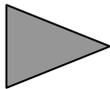
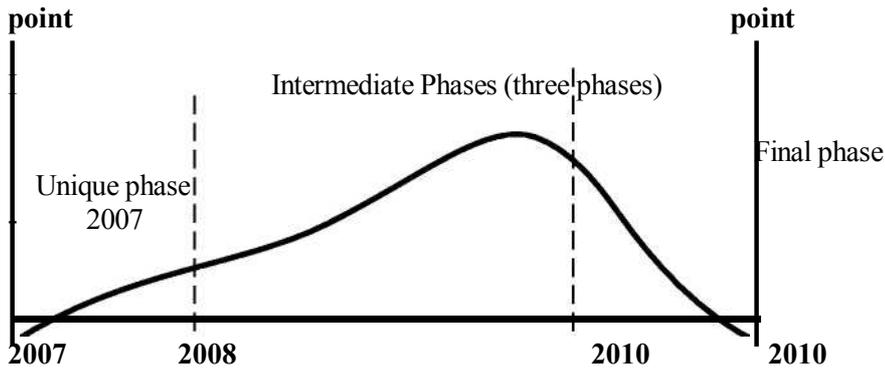


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Because projects are unique undertakings, they involve high degrees of uncertainty. Organizations performing projects will usually divide each project into several project phases to improve control over management and provide indications on the ongoing operations of the project. Traditionally, the project phases are known as the project life cycle.



<sup>10</sup> PMBOK 2000



***Characteristics of project phases***

Each project phase is marked by completion of one or more deliverables. A deliverable is a tangible, verifiable work product such as a feasibility study, a detail design, or a working prototype of some sort, depending on the industry involved in the project. The deliverables, and hence the phases, are part of a generally sequential logic designed to ensure proper the product or result at the end of each phase or at the completion of the project. For our, project, each year, constitutes a different phase in the project. Per total we arrive at 3 phases, each one of them geared with own objectives, associated activities and results. Although separated per years, the results work together progressively towards the two main objectives envisaged as main results at the end of the project in the year 2010.

The conclusion of a project phase is generally marked by a review of both key deliverables and project performance to date. In our case, after careful consideration of the results and initial draft of the project proposal, the Ministry of Education decides:

- a) if the project should continue into its next phase and continue funding
- b) detect and correct errors effectively and, again, continue funding.

These phase-end reviews are often called “phase exits”, “stage gates”, or “kill points.”(PMBOK, 34). Each project phase normally includes a set of defined deliverables designed to establish the desired level of management control. The majority of these items are related to the primary phase draft and are subject to minor changes along the development of the project.

## II. 2 Characteristics of the Project Life Cycle

The project life cycle defines the beginning and the end of a project. For example, in our case, the initial phase was determined by the opportunity to fill a gap in present research. After a review of what has been done so far in the field of the project, and a needs assessment, a proposal has been forwarded to an Evaluation commission.

In the initial proposal, already the team of the project has a view on the project life-cycle. The team will also determine which transitional actions at the beginning and at the end of the project are included and which are not. In this manner, the project life-cycle definition can be used to link the project to the ongoing operations in the field and brings in the novelty of the endeavor.

The phase sequence defined by most project life cycles generally involves some form of technology transfer or requirements to design, construction, and operations, or design to manufacturing. Deliverables from the phase are usually approved before work starts on the next phase. Within the same lines our project follows the exact pattern: every phase has specific objectives, along with associated activities and deliverables. If at the end of the phase, not all the deliverables mentioned are obtained, approval to get to the next phase is not granted, or, worse, the project is terminated due to lack of total completion. However, some of the activities from a subsequent phase are sometimes begun prior to the actual initiation of the subsequent phase, in order to ensure completion of all objectives/deliverables in due time. This practice of overlapping phases is often called “fast tracking” (PMBOK, 47).

Project life cycles generally define:

What technical work should be done in each phase (e.g., what is the logistics of each phase, and which are the operations associated with each phase?).

Who should be involved in each phase (e.g., each member of the team has a specific role in the project. In our case, aside from all of the team members’ essential characteristic of researchers, each member also has a well defined administrative function, e.g., secretary, book-keeping for the project, etc).

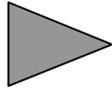
Most project life-cycle descriptions share a number of common characteristics:

If in traditional project management, cost and staffing levels are low at the start, higher toward the end, and drop rapidly as the project draws to a conclusion, in our case study project, a SWOT analysis is performed at the beginning of the project, which accounts for the necessity of a certain number of team members, certain costs. Throughout the development of the project, these numbers have to remain even in order to demonstrate the correct initial evaluation in the proposal.

If a traditional guide on project management would tell us that “the probability of successfully completing the project is lowest, and hence risk and uncertainty are highest, at the start of the project” (PMBOK, 12), in the case of a research oriented

project, the probability of successful completion has to have from the beginning real grounds to be stated.

The ability of the stakeholders to influence the final characteristics of the project's product and the final cost of the project is highest at the start and gets progressively lower as the project continues. This project mantra is also transferable to our case in point. After the proposal is submitted for evaluation, the Ministry of Education-through its experts-decides whether the project deserves to be financed, and if so, there can be brought adjustments to the total sum of finances proposed by the team of the project.



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### ***Key general management skills***

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General management is a subject dealing with every aspect of managing an ongoing enterprise. Among others, it includes:

- ✓ finance and accounting, sales and marketing, research and development, and manufacturing and distribution;
- ✓ strategic planning, tactical planning, and operational planning;
- ✓ organizational structures, organizational behavior; personnel administration, compensation, benefits, and career paths;
- ✓ managing work relationships through motivation, delegation, supervision, team building, conflict management, and other techniques;
- ✓ managing oneself through personal time management, stress management, and other techniques.

From a single glance at the above categories, it is obvious that general management skills provide much of the foundation for building project management skills and for building project teams and managing them. They are often essential for the project manager. On any given project, skill in any number of general management areas may be required.

This part of the paper describes general management skills that are likely to affect most projects.

These skills are well documented in the general management literature, and their application is fundamentally the same on a project, as case in point with our project.

#### 1. Leading

Kotter (4) distinguishes between leading and managing while emphasizing the need for both: one without the other is likely to produce poor results. He says that managing is primarily concerned with "consistently producing key results expected by stakeholders," while leading involves:

- Establishing direction—developing both a vision of the future and strategies for producing the changes needed to achieve that vision.

- Aligning people—communicating the vision by words and deeds to all those whose cooperation may be needed to achieve the vision.
- Motivating and inspiring—helping people energize themselves to overcome political, bureaucratic, and resource barriers to change.

On a project, particularly a larger project, the project manager is generally expected to be the project's leader as well. Leadership is not, however, limited to the project manager: it may be demonstrated by many different individuals at many different times during the project. For example, in our case study project, each member has his/her own responsibilities. One is in charge with equipment and logistics solicitation, another in charge with the budget and money allocation, another with managing team meetings, and keeping all project documentation updated. In their turn, each of the team members take charge and draw the attention of the team towards a specific activity that needs to be completed before moving on with the project.

## 2 Communicating

Communicating implies exchange of information. Every general scheme of the communication process would follow the same ritual: the sender is responsible for making the information clear, unambiguous, and complete so that the receiver may receive it correctly. The receiver is responsible for making sure that the information is received in its entirety, understood correctly, and giving feedback stands proof of that.

Communication displays several dimensions:

- Written and oral, listening and speaking.
- Internal (within the project) and external (to the customer, the media, the public, etc.).
- Formal (memos, reports, briefings, etc.) and informal (on-spot conversations).
- Upward and downward (up and down the organization) and horizontal (among peers and with partner organization).

Communication is a larger subject and involves a substantial body of knowledge that is not unique to the project context, for example:

- Sender-receiver models—feedback loops, communications barriers, etc.
- Choice of channel and media—when to communicate in writing, when to communicate orally, when to write an informal memo, when to write a formal report, etc.
- Writing style—active versus passive voice, sentence structure, word choice, etc.
- Presentation techniques—body language, design of visual aids, etc.
- Meeting management techniques—preparing an agenda, dealing with conflict, etc.

Project Communications Management is the application of these broad concepts to the specific needs of a project—for example, deciding how, when, in what form,

and to whom to report project performance. In the same lines, it is very important to observe and respect basic notions of good communication between the members of the project. What good would it be if each one of them would successfully accomplish their assigned chapters of the project, if they wouldn't communicate between them for better correlation and achievement of project objectives in a certain phase?

### 3. Negotiation

Negotiating involves conferring with others to come to terms with them or reach an agreement. Agreements may be negotiated directly or mediated. Negotiations occur around many issues, at many times, and at many levels of the project. During the course of a typical project, project staff is likely to negotiate for any or all of the following:

- Scope, cost, and schedule objectives. (if team members decide that some of the activities designed for the beginning of the project are better suited for a second phase, they may make changes in the initial plan).
- Assignments. (while doing work on their respective chapters in the project, team members may find out that they are better suited for other chapters, and changes may again ensue).
- Resources available/or not. (for example, in our project, more financial resources in the mobility chapter have been assigned in the first phase of the project, as there were contacts to be established with scholars in the US).

### 4. Problem Solving

Problem solving usually implies a combination of problem definition and decision-making.

Problem definition requires distinguishing between causes and symptoms. Problems may be internal (one of the team members joins another project) or external (a mobility scheduled in a certain period of time does not take effect or is delayed). For example, looking into our project case study, one of the researchers was supposed to leave for mobility in US, at the end of February 2008. Due to VISA complications, the scheduled leave was postponed till March 15<sup>th</sup>). Problems may be technical (differences of opinion between team members regarding the division of activities associated with each phase of the project), or interpersonal (personality or style clashes between the director of the project and the others, or among team members themselves).

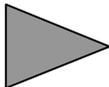
Generally, decision-making requires analyzing the problem to identify possible solutions, and then making a choice from those. Decisions can be made or obtained (from the customer, from the team, or in our case study, the only valid signature and thus responsible for ultimate decisions is the Director's of the project). Once made, decisions must be implemented. Decisions also have a time element to them the "right" decision may not be the "best" decision if it is made too early or too late. Much of this relates back to another management aspect – the MIS or

Management by Exception – which bears as core concept the idea that all information is not necessarily best information and related to Information Overload, the “right” decision is the “best” decision made with the information “at hand” at that particular moment.

#### 5. Influencing the Organization

Influencing the organization refers to the ability to "get things done." It requires an understanding of both the formal and informal structures of all the organizations involved the performing organization, financial sponsor partners, and many others.

Influencing the organization also requires understanding both of power and, especially in our circumstances, bureaucracy. Power here is used here in its positive senses. Pfeffer (5) defines power as "the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise do." In similar fashion, when talking about “politics” in the domain of project management, and in this sense, Eccles et al. (6) say that "politics is about getting collective action from a group of people who may have quite different interests. It is about being willing to use conflict and disorder creatively. The negative sense derives from the fact that attempts to reconcile these interests may result in conflicts and discussions that can sometimes take on a thoroughly unproductive life of their own.



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### *Conclusions*

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At the beginning of 1990, higher education reform in Romania was mainly intended to facilitate access to higher education studies. Under the pressures of the competitive edge imposed by the market, the new realities brought about the accomplishment of new goals for the reform in the sense of improving the quality of education and of scientific research, of encouraging university and social partnerships. The development strategy of Romanian higher education, as stipulated by CNCSIS (Council for National Research in Higher Education) defined for the period 2002-2010, is focused on ensuring compatibility between Romanian higher education system and the European system.

The shift and re-assessment of values in higher education stress the importance of the relationship between organizational learning and individual learning. Universities begin to adapt to a society in which the student is perceived as a customer with ever increasing demands and the labor market requires individuals who are able to adapt and be flexible in job rotation due to a set of skills acquired while in university and based on a content knowledge oriented towards practice. After signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999, concepts like quality assurance, qualifications, reorganization of the teaching process, promotion of the integration of Romanian higher education system within the European framework and international co-operation have been key points envisaged by Romanian

programmes and projects. Progress has been made, but there is still much to be done in order to internalize the changes that the Romanian system is undergoing.

The University perception of itself as a learning organization implies learning individuals willing to commit to change and willing to get out of the mind pattern which preaches that being a scholar means reading and lecturing to students and this is the end of the teaching-learning process and the end of the duty of being a university scholar. The essential characteristics of the school as learning organization may be summarized under:

- a public commitment to the learning of every individual;
- creating a beneficial partnership with all stakeholders;
- using management processes to the benefit of the educational process;
- systematic review and improvement of existing systems and procedures.

In the examples given throughout the paper it has become obvious the opening of the Romanian educational mind frame to the challenges of the new requirements, at least, in research at university level. The scholar is not required anymore to just acquire as much information as possible and then pour it into his/her and students' minds alike, but to make practical use of this information and acquire managerial, accounting and project management skills.

Bottery's<sup>11</sup> (1994: 116-17) analysis of the characteristics of professionals produces the following criteria:

- ✓ the existence of a certain, systematic body of knowledge;
- ✓ requirement of technical skill;
- ✓ period of training;
- ✓ the need to reflect on and improve practice;
- ✓ ability to cope with and respond to complex situations;
- ✓ there is one authoritative professional body;
- ✓ discipline is exercised by profession;
- ✓ a crucial social service is provided;
- ✓ the occupation provides social prestige;
- ✓ there are issues of ethics involved.

If we are to take each of these criteria one by one and correlate each one with our project case study, the conclusion is self evident. Thus, we have:

- ⇒ the existence of a certain, systematic body of knowledge; i.e. management and project management theory;
- ⇒ requirement of technical skill; a university scholar needs to acquire accounting skills, administrative skills, management of operations skills etc.;
- ⇒ period of training; many of the project proposals are not "winners" on a first trial bases; amendments and improvement lead to better results and the know-how for good project proposals;

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<sup>11</sup> Bottery M. (1994) *Lessons for Schools*, London: Cassell

- ⇒ the need to reflect on and improve practice; obvious when project proposals are refused and it is back to the drawing table;
- ⇒ ability to cope with and respond to complex situations; every project, especially the ones developed in partnerships, acquire at one point or another complex features that need to be dealt with;
- ⇒ there is one authoritative professional body; there is one authoritative professional body; Ministry of Education and Research, National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education;
- ⇒ discipline is exercised by profession; project management by objectives, with ensuing phases, clear time and financial resources delimitations ensures discipline;
- ⇒ a crucial social service is provided; The National Development Plan started in 2007 envisages national development through research and education as one –if not the only- way to integrate Romania in the European and international systems;
- ⇒ the occupation provides social prestige; directly deriving from the strategy for National Development Plan;
- ⇒ there are issues of ethics involved; in the initial project proposal every project has ethics as one of the issues to be observed and conformed with.

If the Romanian higher education is to move in step with the changes it has in view, than the artificial dichotomy between university professor as researcher and university professor as manager has to disappear. Or, as Darling-Hammond (1997: 139) underlines:

*Teachers learn just as their students do: by studying, doing and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students, other teachers and their work; and by sharing what they see. This kind of learning cannot occur solely in college classrooms divorced from engagement in practice or solely in school classrooms divorced from knowledge about how to interpret practice.*

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For more information on the organization and supervision of national research framework see <http://www.cncsis.ro/>

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