PROJECT MANAGEMENT – A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING THE PERFORMANCE AND COMPETITIVENESS OF MILITARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT
Performance and competitiveness of Romanian military education are determined by the ability to adapt to the requirements of a modern, open and constantly changing society. From this perspective, in carrying out their assignments regarding education and training, military education institutions should develop mechanisms that operate similar to those of the partner states in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

The educational context shows a continuous increase of the requirements of the beneficiaries and of the EU and NATO standards in terms of quality of education and training. Under the pressure of these requirements, military educational institutions are looking for elements to support them in their efforts to align to Western standards. In the context of the challenges that are specific to the current economic and social environment, we believe that project-based approach is fully compatible with this goal. Project management should be viewed as a strategic tool for attracting new resources, for generating and supporting performance and development from an institutional point of view.

KEYWORDS: project management, performance, competitiveness, fundraising, military educational institutions

1. Project Management: a Major Priority in the Development of Educational Practices
In a constantly evolving and reforming society the social ideal requires an implicit transformation of the educational ideal. The problems in the education system are determined both by multiple changes of the society and the inability of actors to adapt and accept these changes. The need to solve these problems occurs as a result of Romania’s access to European labor market and EU requirements to align the Romanian education system to the European standards.

A major factor in increasing performance and competitive development of the Romanian...
education system, both civilian and military, is the ability of leaders to promote an organizational culture based on creativity and innovation. The success of any organization depends to a large extent on the methods and techniques used by it to perform its functions. Identifying ways to streamline the reforms in the educational system for optimal resource management should be a main factor in any modern educational organization.

Optimizing the process of European and national educational policy implementation is a key issue for the Romanian educational system, which attracted the interest of decision makers and experts in educational management to develop appropriate methodological and operational tools.

Project management is, at present, a model of successful management in the educational system, and the developing of elaborating, implementation and coordination skills of educational projects is a strategic objective of the efforts to increase the number of projects, especially those with European funding.

Project management is not just a management strategy, but also a way of survival of organizations in the new European context. No one denies that today one of the key factors of the successful integration into the European Union is the project management. Projects tend to be, at present, effective instruments for attracting resources and supporting performance. From this perspective, European integration in education and research explicitly requires the introduction of modern management methods in the military schools.

A comprehensive approach of project concept ensures the premises of a configuration of culture of projects. The emergence of a project is usually associated with the existence of a need to solve a problem. Generally, it is considered that any project brings an innovating element, a change in the existing situation. The project is not an end in itself but a modern and efficient working method, whereby an organization can create added value. More broadly, the project term designates the instrument by which a facilitating activity is undertaken, which embodies an anticipatory approach at system or process level and which engages in order to achieve the established objectives, a set of strategies, resources, methods, techniques and procedures for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Analysis of project concept in the field of education highlights its various meanings, whose clarification is useful for understanding the managerial meaning of the term. In the educational system the main meaning relates to teaching, but in this case it has different teaching connotations: learning method based on the principle of “learning by doing”, curricula tool or assessment method.

The educational project comprises a set of general intentions aimed at individual developing of a group, an educational organization or institutional networks.

As a managerial term, educational project designates “a set of related, organized, anchored activities in order to achieve clearly defined goals and objectives by specific strategies and resources, aspect which highlights that this is a tool for change, development of educational establishment on a structural and functional level”.

Be it European projects, national or international educational partnerships, research projects, teaching projects or projects at the micro level (planning, curricula, projects for educational training or didactic projects, etc.), project management offers added value and anticipation of the directions that need to be followed in education.

Among the main benefits of using project management we note: focus on results, better management and better control of resources, increasing organizational efficiency through decentralization of decision, cost reduction, quality services, risk management, actions accomplished in shorter time periods.
and a methodology that can be the object of audit. Also, the application of project management can significantly contribute to fostering exchanges of information and experience by facilitating contacts with educational institutions and experts, facilitating the training of professional managers, improving the quality of relations between the organization’s staff by setting up project teams, raising satisfaction and motivation level of the staff involved in the project, learning by doing, and increasing the competitiveness of the organization as a whole.

The application of project management as a modern managerial method is a dynamic process because of the fluctuation of internal and external influence factors. Therefore, before taking any action that involves projects one should consider the possibility to implement project management within the military school, following a series of steps: understanding the method and its application analysis in a similar organization; adapting the method to the specific military school organization; involving of senior management; training of professional project managers; training of human resources involved in this activity; assessing the effectiveness of the method.

The implementation of project management in military school is directly influenced by the adaptability and openness to change of its members. The military organization operates in a constantly changing environment, given the challenges of an increasingly diverse world. The manager at all hierarchical levels has a major role in promoting and implementing the change. The military leadership at all levels of the organization must take into account all the developments in the society, overcome the psychological barriers that stand in the way of change, show flexibility and creativity where necessary and promote innovation.

2. Opportunities to Increase the Performance and Competitiveness of Romanian Military Education

The need to study and to use the latest developments in science and in the managerial practice is determined by current and future interests of the Romanian military education. Introduction of project management as a subject in training programs of military educational institutions is a clear signal that the military organization management is in line with the importance of this phenomenon.

Military education is considered a strategic priority area in the Ministry of Defense. Subordinated to MoD there are military educational units like high schools and colleges, universities and training schools/centers/training bases, which have as goal permanent learning.

Military educational institutions are similar to the civil educational system because they face a number of shortcomings, regarding the endowment with educational means and infrastructure and also regarding educational policies which aim at the transit from a classical system theory to a modern educational system, supported by modern tools such as the ICT. Among the main problems of the military education system we note:

– Limited access to advanced educational resources due to underfunding;
– Lack of educational logistics elements necessary to the academic community;
– Insufficient software tools necessary for increasing the efficiency and competitiveness of teaching activities and scientific research;
– Lack of initiatives for building networks, including virtual networks, partnerships and cooperation deals between schools, research centers, including communities that practice teaching and scientific research;
– Insufficient endowment of laboratories.
Considering the current situation, reflected in part by the aforementioned aspects it becomes a priority to cover the difference between funding needs and resources available to military educational institutions. An activity of particular importance in the process of project management is the fundraising. In a society where competition and speed of response are key drivers of the economy, raising funds through projects is a strong indication of success. Fundraising by implementing projects in education and scientific research can be focused on a broad range of development directions: increasing the quality and relevance of educational offer, development of quality and innovative educational products and professional training and linking it to labor market, validation of learning outcomes in formal and informal learning, facilitating reintegration of military personnel on labor market after completing military service and the training of highly qualified human resources for excellence research, development of management practices, modernization of the equipment base in education and scientific research by developing laboratories, experimental installations and computer applications at the level of current training requirements.

Given the importance and need for full integration of Romania into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures the strategy of fundraising by using project management should be based on the use of all methods of collaboration with foreign partners. The opportunities for international cooperation created by Romania’s entry into NATO and EU offer favorable conditions for the development of sustainable partnerships with key players in the Euro-Atlantic area. International cooperation in education, training and scientific research can target the following:

- Partnerships with European universities and military academies;
- Participation in European Commission learning programs;
- Participation in European Initiative for the exchange of young officers – military Erasmus;
- Integration into international associations and educational bodies, as well as internationally recognized expert networks;
- Joint organization of international events (scientific sessions, roundtables, symposia, conferences, exhibitions);
- Participation in international civil and military scientific research programs;
- The sharing of resources used in education and scientific research.

The development of cooperation between the Romanian military education and European or international academia requires alignment to their standards and practices. These are designed to ensure compatibility which enhances trust between entities that collaborate in order to achieve a common goal and to create an appropriate framework and a fair competition.

The partnership is a very common tool in the management of EU funded and international projects and the experience has shown that initiating and maintaining partnerships has ensured, most of the time, the success and sustainability of projects. Projects implemented in partnership have the advantage that they can bring added value to the project through both the specific expertise and contacts held and the amounts needed for project co-financing.

Creating an alternative source of funding and reducing the fiscal effort in fulfilling the mission of high school and university military education and continuous professional training can be a pillar for continuing the reform process and the capitalization of its potential. To guarantee the success of the initiatives, in order to obtain funding, a coherent vision and correlated appropriate steps between military educational institutions are very important for developing joint projects.
Conclusion

In the context of modernizing the military education system, implementation of project management at school level must be one of the highest priorities in the development of educational practices. Promoting a culture favorable to project management and implementation of strategies for effective training of human resources in this area are prerequisites for institutional development and increasing the quality of education and training system. Managers of educational projects play a fundamental role in schools because through projects, principles and values they promote they can turn them into modern institutions, aligned to EU and NATO standards regarding competitiveness and performance.

Military education institutions have a high potential to attract resources through the use of project management. Their training in this area should be seen as aimed at attracting all types of resources that can bring progress. In this respect, it is necessary the creation of a regulatory framework and methodology that lies at the core of the project management application in military educational institutions and also facilitates the planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling the size of resources attracted.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY