Strategic Development in Secondary Education – A Quality Management Framework for Hybrid and Digital Educational Projects

Diana-Victoreta Croitoru[1]

Abstract: The main objective of this study is to analyse the applicability of previous project management research and conceptual frameworks, in implementing digital and hybrid educational projects for secondary schools. Through strategic actions that open the organizational environment to dialogue, transfer of knowledge and interaction with the external stakeholders identified within the academic and socio-professional communities, digital and hybrid educational projects significantly contribute to institutional growth. Their long-term impact affects the quality of curricular learning outcomes, as well as the organizational culture and climate, therefore constituting an unquantifiable variable of the institutional development process. The present article describes a theoretical approach to project management in education, analysing the relationship between previous reference frameworks and the phenomenon of digitalization. The relevance of this research is demonstrated by the continuous change of perspective, reflected by educational policies and reforms, and it benefits from a comprehensive scientific literature that synthesizes multiple theoretical approaches to project management. The article outlines the change of paradigm in education and the profound impact that the transition towards new learning approaches manifests in relation to the strategic management of schools.

Key words: digitalization; project management; philosophy of education

1. Introduction

The educational process, the actional component of educational curriculum, represents a continuous process of planning, projection, synthesis, re-contextualization, redefinition and osmosis of contents, didactic strategies,

---

[1] Professor, Dimitrie Cuclin Arts High School, Galati, Romania, Address: 97-99 Domneasca Street, Galati 800215, Romania, Tel. 0236415414, dianacroitoru@yahoo.com

educational resources, value systems and socially accepted attitudes, that uses the conceptual framework of formal, non-formal and informal education, with the specific goal to form and develop human personality, according to the demands of contemporary society. In this conceptual framework, didactic design and planning, pertaining to hybrid teaching activities, evinces at micro-educational level, through extrapolation, the necessity of a strategic projection of the organizational development process, that positively influences institutional identity, organizational prestige and specificity, as well as the social impact of the implemented educational activities. In *The Development of School Organization*, the educationalist and pedagogue Simona Marin-Alecu observes the cyclical aspect of the reciprocal influence concerning the social systems and education: "The development of the Romanian school organization in the contemporary education system is characterized by an extended degree of quality services, that overcome its borders, influencing other organizations, community and society, in general." (Alecu, 2007, pp. 36-37). This systemic and functional interdependence, inherent to the pluri-valent concept of education which encompasses the temporal dimension of human evolution, as well as the relational dimension of social interaction, results in the necessity of correlating diverse forms of education – formal, non-formal, informal, traditional and hybrid – and extending the interacting sphere of the organization, at a social level. The socio-pedagogue Emil Păun, in his work *School – A socio-pedagogical approach*, identifies the following typology of projects within the educational field: *educational projects*, that orientate from an axiological perspective, the action-outcome learning; *pedagogical projects*, centred on two of the components of the instructive process: teaching and learning; *institutional projects* - approaches that assure systemic coherence and the progress of the school organization. Regardless of the traditional or hybrid strategies used in implementing such managerial interventions, the relationship of implicit hierarchical inclusion becomes obvious, as it is determined by the relevance of the institutional impact and the scale of the implemented projects.

Total quality management of educational services, applied to traditional and hybrid processual frameworks, demonstrates the relevance of the definition presented in The *Reference Guide of Project Management*, elaborated by Project Management Institute Pennsylvania, in 2003, a work that highlights the role of projects, programmes, organizational portfolio and good practices, in creating a sustainable strategy of institutional development and obtaining superior performances[1].

---

[1] "Organizational project management (OPM) is a strategy execution framework utilizing project, program, and portfolio management as well as organizational enabling practices to consistently and

According to the quoted reference Guide, the project represents an action-oriented approach, temporally defined, whose purpose targets the creation of a product, service or unique result, of tangible or intangible nature (PMBOK, 2013, p. 3). The results of organizational projects have a direct impact on the interest of beneficiaries and may be affected by operational errors that include: overloading the implementing team - in order to comply to the clients' quality criteria - or superficial evaluation of the products and the increase of risks related to qualitative inadequacy (PMBOK, 2013, pp. 227-228). In the revised edition of *Project Management Manual* (1997), elaborated by Harvard Business School, the project management process is analysed as an efficient equilibrium between the extent of the project, its temporal planning and the distribution of available resources, with an emphasis on the importance of efficient resource distribution, in order to assure optimal results for the implemented project (Harvard Business School, 1997, p. 28). The circumspect perspective, promoted by the prestigious educational institution, correlates the optimization of the balance between identifiable, complementary parameters that define the project, with a rigorous process of evaluation, prevention and defence against the risk factors that endanger the final results (Harvard Business School, 1997, p. 31). For online and hybrid educational projects, the equilibrium of the strategic management relies on efficient marketing, the quality of the available digital resources, synchronization and expertise, as logistics may become considerably simplified.

From a philosophic perspective, the Romanian socio-pedagogue Emil Păun describes two specific dimensions of the projects, in the educational field of expertise: "the symbolico-expressive or anticipative-ideational dimension, and the technico-instrumental or the efficacy dimension" (Păun, 1999, p. 152). The *symbolico- expressive* or *anticipative-ideational* dimension of educational projects reflects their impact in consolidating the value system of the school organization, by promoting an organizational philosophy that stimulates a proactive ethos through the improvement of the organizational climate, while it extends the scope of the organizational prestige and consolidates the members' cognitive and affective identification with the institutional mission. Associated with this structural dimension, the *Project Management Manual and Methodology*, elaborated by Henry Loo and Michael Dick, Goldsmith University of London, enumerates multiple strategic advantages - which create new organizational

---

predictably deliver organizational strategy producing better performance, better results, and a sustainable competitive advantage." (PMBOK, 2013, p. 7).

development options - and intangible benefits, that impact on public perception of school organizations (Loo & Dick, 2011, p. 85). The *technico-instrumental* or the *efficacy* dimension of educational projects assures the functional management of the project and regardless of the final target of the project, simultaneously ameliorates the performance indicators of the institutional efficiency. The impact of this component is revealed by material and financial benefits, according to the *Project Management Manual and Methodology* previously quoted, advantages which can be identified as a reduction of costs or as supplementary revenues (Loo & Dick, 2011, p. 85). Hybrid and online projects respond to the long-term objectives of the evolving school organization, by extending the area of influence and expertise of its members, by adding a growing impact to the continuous efforts of transforming and modelling communities, by redefining standards and performance criteria.

Services and products quality management represents an intrinsic component of the hybrid educational projects' implementation process, a defining stage in creating the identity of the curricular products and enhancing operational efficiency. The *Project Management Manual and Methodology* integrates the quality management stage during the implementation process (Loo & Dick, 2011, p. 57), as a pivotal strategy preventing potential risks, inadequacies, and facilitating change and performance optimization. According to Harvard experts, the *Project Management Manual* describes the optimization of the implementation parameters of the project (the quality management stage) as a subsequent phase that is inherent to planning and the operationalization of the project objectives (Harvard Business School, 1997, pp. 29-31). As mentioned in the previously quoted Harvard reference manual, the quality management stage implies a systematic and creative strategy for reorganizing resources and processes, therefore being defined as the essence of project management. The hybrid approach in designing and implementing educational projects integrates continuously quality parameters and evaluation criteria, as a processual and structural framework, therefore pertaining to the pragmatic perspective of a continuously changing educational environment.

Among the techniques and instruments of quality assurance, concerning institutional projects, as they were identified by the Project Management Institute, Pennsylvania, the following measuring instruments present a high degree of relevance: cost-benefits analysis, quality costs analysis, the seven instruments of quality assurance (7QT) - the cause-effect diagram, flowcharts, check sheets, the Pareto diagram, the histogram, control charts, the scatter diagram - benchmarking, design of experiments (concerning the analysis of the effect produced by

perturbing factors, over the variables), statistical sampling (PMBOK, 2013, pp. 235-240). The above-mentioned research emphasizes several means for quantifying the results of quality management: the quality management plan, process improvement plan, quality metrics, quality checklists, project documents updates – stakeholders registry, responsibility assignment matrix, work breakdown structure, etc. (PMBOK, 2013, pp. 214-242). The digitalization of most analytical processes increases the fluence of the work procedures and the communication flux, sustaining efficiency and performance.

The scientific research methodology, applied in determining the appropriate optimization techniques for the educational infrastructure, the viability of educational resources, the impact and relevance of modernization projects regarding the school buildings' design and functionality, includes the qualitative analysis of the managerial documents. This method that originated in the social and administrative fields of research, has been described by the sociologist Raluca Gârboan, as follows: "While analysing the existing data base, the researcher may elaborate performance models concerning a specific program and its impact on particular groups and communities. The information that contradicts the resulting model, determines its revision, especially when data considered relevant, mismatches the results" (Gârboan, 2007, p. 40). The described research paradigm has been analysed and presented in the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research*, edited in 2003 by Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, and it defines *documents analysis* as a mixed research method, which includes characteristics of the qualitative research as well as attributes that pertain to quantitative analysis (Gârboan, 2007, p. 36). *Electronic document analysis*, as an investigative instrument, part of the electronic document management system, has been successfully applied in relation to the development and implementation of infrastructure projects, that improved the performance and systemic impact of secondary education institutions. The financial reports of hybrid educational projects' monitoring and implementation stages, describe the benefits of the Erasmus+, POR and POCU projects as the most profitable investments for the development of post-communist European regions. Non-repayable funds and digitalization remain a solution for pauperized regions, where resources are considerably limited by the state budget deficit and local educational policies. Digital education projects imply strategic actions that open the organizational environment to dialogue, transfer of knowledge and cultural values, interaction with external partners, identified within the academic and socio-professional

communities. Their long-term impact affects the quality of learning results, as well as the organizational culture and climate, therefore constituting an unquantifiable variable of the institutional development process.

References

Alecu, Simona (2007). *Dezvoltarea organizației școlare: managementul proiectelor/ School organization development: project management*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House.

Dick, Michael & Loo, Henry (2011). *Project Management Manual and Methodology*. Goldsmiths University of London.

Gârboan Raluca. (2007). Metode de cercetare utilizate în evaluare/ Research methods used in evaluation. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 20/2007. pp. 33-51

Harvard Business School (1997). Project Management Manual. *Harvard Business Review*.

Păun Emil. (1999). *Școala: o abordare sociopedagogică*. Polirom. Iași.

Project Management Institute, Inc. (2013). *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK® Guide) – Fifth Edition. Pennsylvania.

Tashakkori Abbas & Teddlie Charles. (2003). *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research.* Sage Publications. California.