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Institutional gaps in managing multiple European projects co-funded by public and private institutions

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this paper is to compare perceptions on drivers of managing multiple European co-funded projects among public and private institutions from Romania, and determine which dimensions of multi-project management optimization have the greatest impact on institutional financial stability and organizational learning. Data were collected using an online questionnaire administrated to two convenience samples of 100 public institutions, and 100 private organizations from Romania, involved in managing multiple European co-funded projects. Multi-project management optimization was measured using two dimensions: the relational dimension for governance of multiple projects and the regulative dimension. Data were analyzed by using confirmatory factor analysis, ANOVA and linear regression. In the private organizations sample, relational dimension was the most important predictor of organizational learning, while regulative dimension was the most important predictor of financial stability in the sample of public institutions.

KEY WORDS: multiple project management, financial stability, organizational learning, project management governance

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1. Introduction

The literature on the differences in public and private management of multiple projects outlines several important gaps in what concern the managers' orientation toward financial stability versus organizational learning from past insights. Significant gaps between these sectors are identified at the managerial level and project management team level (Bretschneider, 1990). While significant expertise has been developed within the area of multiple project management, the need to manage ever more varied projects in the same time poses new and challenging issues for both public-funded and privately-owned organizations (Dooley, Lupton, & O'Sullivan, 2005).

There is a gap in the literature on Project Management when it comes to understanding the focal pain points related to simultaneous multi-project management in privately owned companies and public institutions; thus, a challenging question arises: "Which multi-project management optimization dimension (relational or regulative) is the most important predictor of financial stability and organizational learning in privately owned companies and public institutions?".

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The objective of this study is twofold: to identify the factors correlating with success in managing strategic intentions through multiple projects and to find out the gaps of managing multiple European co-funded projects between public and private institutions. In comparison to previous research, we approach the phenomenon with a quantitative approach and thus aim to provide more generalizable results on how organizations can implement strategies successfully through projects.

The remainder of the paper is as follows: Section 2 focuses on the literature review regarding multiple project management peculiarities in privately owned companies and public institutions. Section 3 highlights the quantitative method's applicability to the research framework. Section 4 presents the results based on the ANOVA and regression analyses conducted on both research samples. Section 5 discusses these results and offers conclusions, which cover managerial implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for forthcoming research.

2. Theoretical background

Multiple project management frameworks have been developed in the private sector and often blindly adapted to the public sector (Cats-Baril & Thompson, 1995). Unlike private companies, public administration institutions do not encounter the competitive pressures that drive their managers to think out of the financial stability box, while dealing with multiple projects. The public sector objectives in terms of multiple project management adoption are negatively affected by the bureaucratic structures (Holmes, 2001), due to standard operating procedures, bureaucratic culture, levels of hierarchy and many other factors (Keiser, 2011). Critical success factors identified as relevant for multiple project management optimization to the private sector must be assessed within the relational dimension, while in public institutions, regulative dimension is primordial (Rosacker & Olson, 2008).

Project managers in the public sector face team management challenges such as the incapacity to select project team members based on their expertise, due to the fact that the pool of human resources is rarely shared (Wirick, 2011). In private organizations, sharing best practices for multi-project success with the entire pool of human capital is perceived one of the biggest project management competitive advantage (Kerzner, 2013).

In the case of private organizations, the commitment to achieve multiple project objectives aligns with the strategy to share the project vision all the employees involved in simultaneous projects. In the case of public administration, the professional competencies in the area of multi-project management are influenced to a great extent by the relations with top management, which are connected with political power in many situations (Jałocha, Krane, Ekambaram, & Prawelska-Skrzypek, 2014).

At the level of public administration institutions, the projects have become increasingly complex and difficult to manage as they often require extended deadlines and contingency plans are not always appropriate (Klakegg, Williams, & Shiferaw 2016). In contrast, private company stakeholder management is based on organizational learning sense making and sense giving through effective involvement of stakeholders in the simultaneous projects (Purvis, Zagenczyk, & McCray, 2015).

In Romania, the companies from the private sector are aware that their growth is conditioned by attracting financial resources by means of EU funding instruments. Therefore, they manifest a higher propensity to implement multi-project management methodologies and technologies (Turner, Ledwith, & Kelly, 2010). There is strong evidence that the application of critical chain project planning leads to better results in multiple project management contexts, considering the evidence from several Romanian privately owned companies (Deac & Vrincut, 2013).

European Union has often requested Romanian public institutions to activate a number of specific factors to absorb more funding, strengthening administrative capacity; preparing qualified personnel and avoiding the fluctuation of employees in simultaneous projects and creating greater transparency by providing exhaustive information on project steps and milestones and the elimination of excessive bureaucracy (Zaman & Georgescu, 2009).

Even if the concept of multiple project management is still more theoretical than practical in the Romanian public administration, some new managerial ideas: strategic management and planning, performance-measurement systems, knowledge sharing, etc. were included in their managers' responsibilities (Bouckaert, Nakrošis, & Nemec, 2011).

Despite of all its problems, Romanian public management has made progress in the field of multiple

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project management, as it tried to replicate the best practices learnt from private companies, even if in some institutions the results were not satisfactory (Istrate & Marian, 2012). Romanian public management has improved due to the strategy regarding the acceleration of the public administration reform in order to attract more EU funding, which created a new legislative framework in providing the prerequisites for a better multi-project management, avoiding the corruption and other bad things (Ortansa, 2012).

3. Method

The fast-growing number of EU co-funded projects in Romania requires the multi-project management optimization, in order to provide the greatest impact on institutional financial stability and organizational learning in both public and private institutions.

The current research framework advances the contributions of relational and regulative dimensions for governance of multiple projects on boosting the multi-project management efficiency.

The dimensions for analysis related to the multi-project management optimization are represented by:

- **Relational dimension,** which enables a collaborative project management environment to insure a shared resource pool to the simultaneous projects;
- **Regulative dimension,** which outlines the formal processes and procedures used in monitoring, tracking and evaluating the simultaneous projects.

An empirical study was conducted to address the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the gaps between the drivers of managing multiple European co-funded projects perceived by public and private institutions?

RQ2. Which dimensions of multi-project management optimization have the greatest impact on institutional financial stability and organizational learning?

Sample, data collection and measures

The data analysed in our study are selected from an online survey which took place in the period: 1st of October 2017 – 15th of November 2017. The target was represented by 200 Project Managers divided in two groups of 100, each group belonging to public institutions, and privately-owned organizations. The aim of the online questionnaire was to identify their perceptions about multi-project management optimization, considering both relational and regulative dimensions for governance of simultaneous EU co-funded projects.

Multi-project management optimization measures were adapted from Dye and Pennypacker (2001), Engwall and Jerbrant (2003) and Tsaturyan and Muller (2015). The online questionnaire was composed of 10 items and designed as a Likert seven-point scale:

- **MPMOPT$_1$**: The organization developed a common resource pool for multiple projects management focused on best practices sharing among projects.
- **MPMOPT$_2$**: Priority assignment leads to an effective communication flow among project managers from your institution.
- **MPMOPT$_3$**: The organization introduced Project Management governance mechanisms to facilitate the interactions among the actors of the multiple projects network.
- **MPMOPT$_4$**: The organization implemented a central IT interface to make the interactions of project managers more effective and to avoid a competition between projects.
- **MPMOPT$_5$**: The organization established a balance between the freedom of project managers in the process of administrating their projects and the internal regulations and procedures to foster the collaborative learning.
- **MPMOPT$_6$**: The organization developed a standardized methodology for multiple project management, aligning the procedures for project tracking in different domains.
- **MPMOPT$_7$**: The organization established project control tools to avoid overlapping schedule.
- **MPMOPT$_8$**: The organization implemented a central IT interface to deliver standardized reporting tools for the governance of multiple projects.
- **MPMOPT$_9$**: The organization developed internal procedures to avoid additional bureaucracy in favor of accelerating the execution of simultaneous projects.
- **MPMOPT$_{10}$**: The organization implemented clear procedures to mitigate the risks of "after-the-fact prioritization" between ongoing projects.

Principal component analysis

The results achieved after the application of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with rotation VARIMAX

Table 1. Results of PCA application - Rotated component matrix

(KMO: 0,821; determinant: 0,008; Barlett's test of Construct sphericity (significance level : 0,003)	Dimension for analysing the governance of simultaneous EU co-funded projects	
	Relational	**Regulative**
$MPMOPT_1$	0,502	0,341
$MPMOPT_2$	0,747	0,202
$MPMOPT_3$	0,727	0,313
$MPMOPT_4$	0,758	0,186
$MPMOPT_5$	0,726	0,336
$MPMOPT_6$	0,396	0,785
$MPMOPT_7$	0,211	0,823
$MPMOPT_8$	0,283	0,868
$MPMOPT_9$	0,337	0,865
$MPMOPT_{10}$	0,365	0,795

emphasize a bi-dimensional structure of the multi-project management optimization assessment scale, considering the relational and regulative dimensions for governance of simultaneous EU co-funded projects (Table 1).

The statistical indicator Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) enables the assessment of the factorial analysis validity; the high values (between 0.5 and 1.0) prove the necessity to apply the factorial analysis. Bartlett sphericity test is used to examine the existence of correlations among the variables included into the factorial.

In the current research design, the value of KMO (0.832) reveals the necessity to perform factorial analysis, while the significance level of Bartlett sphericity test (under 0.05) highlight the strong correlation of the variables embedded into the research framework.

After the preliminary exploratory phase, PCA results were computed into confirmatory factor analysis in view to validate the ten constructs research framework, without deleting any construct. The values associated to CFI (Comparative Fit Index), NFI (Normed Fit Index) and IFI (Incremental Fit Index) more than the critical threshold (0.9), validate the research framework. This validation is also confirmed by the very low value (0.0386) of the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

The internal consistency of the measurement scale is confirmed, as the Cronbach' Alpha coefficients assigned to all analyzed items overcome the 0.7 recommended threshold. According to Fornell and Larcker criterion, the discriminant validity is confirmed (Table 2).

The **independent variable** of the research model is the multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT), while the **dependent variables** are financial stability and organizational learning.

4. Findings

According to the results of one factor variance analysis (one-way ANOVA), we observe a significant difference between Romanian public institutions and privately owned organizations regarding their project managers' perceptions of multi-project management optimization at the level of the proposed dimensions: relational and regulative (Table 3).

The results of ANOVA analyses done on an item-by-item (Table 4) outline that the score associated to nine items from ten overcomes the threshold 5, proving

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Table 2. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis

Dimension	Item	Squared multiple correlation	Standard error	Critical ratio	Cronbach' Alpha ∞**>0.7**	Composite fidelity ρ (A)>**0.7**	Convergent validity ρ_{vc}**>0.5**	Discriminant validity ρ_{vc}>r_{ij}^2(0.728)^2
CFI= 0,931; NFI= 0,946; IFI=0,965; RMR=0,086; RMSEA= 0,0386								
Relational	$MPMOPT_1$	0,511	0,721	10,857	0,868	0.909	0.598	0.598>0.520
	$MPMOPT_2$	0,658	0,679	9,436				
	$MPMOPT_3$	0,509	0,634	8,022				
	$MPMOPT_4$	0,512	0,763	9,526				
	$MPMOPT_5$	0,537	0,758	8,624				
Regulative	$MPMOPT_6$	0,802	0,904	12,318	0,826	0.864	0.748	0.748>0.520
	$MPMOPT_7$	0,613	0,819	12,156				
	$MPMOPT_8$	0,625	0,736	11,185				
	$MPMOPT_9$	0,592	0,752	9,958				
	$MPMOPT_{10}$	0,654	0,682	9,825				

Table 3. Project managers' perceptions of multi-project management optimization, according to one factor variance analysis

		Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	Sig. level
MPMOPT relational dimension	Between groups	21,246	1	21,246	26,172	0,002
	Within groups	174,754	195	0,812		
	Total	196,000	196			
MPMOPT regulative dimension	Between groups	14,682	1	14,6822	16,942	0,004
	Within groups	181,318	195	0,828		
	Total	196,000	196			

a positive appreciation of the main part of the factors affecting multi-project management optimization.

In the case of public institutions, the highest score (5,92) was assigned to the item $MPMOPT_6$ (the organization developed a standardized methodology for multiple project management, aligning the procedures for project tracking in different domains), followed by the item $MPMOPT_8$ (the organization implemented a central IT interface to deliver standardized reporting tools for the governance of multiple projects: 5,32) and $MPMOPT_7$ (the organization established project control tools to avoid overlapping schedule: 5,21). We notice that these three highest score correspond to regulative dimension of multi-project management optimization. We also remark that only $MPMOPT_2$ (priority assignment leads to an effective communica-

Table 4. Results of ANOVA item-by-item application

Item	Average score Public institutions sample (n=100)	Average score Private organizations sample (n=100)	F Test (Fisher)	Sig. level
$MPMOPT_1$	**5,02**	**5,96**	21,258	0,002
$MPMOPT_2$	**4,62**	**6,23**	21,203	0,000
$MPMOPT_3$	**5,02**	**6,34**	23,106	0,001
$MPMOPT_4$	**5,10**	**5,09**	20,348	0,002
$MPMOPT_5$	**5,14**	**6,78**	26,685	0,000
$MPMOPT_6$	**5,92**	**5,29**	35,416	0,001
$MPMOPT_7$	**5,21**	**5,62**	21,221	0,003
$MPMOPT_8$	**5,32**	**5,11**	22,816	0,001
$MPMOPT_9$	**5,18**	**5,08**	21,912	0,001
$MPMOPT_{10}$	**5,12**	**5,29**	23,068	0,000

tion flow among project managers from your institution) is under the threshold 5.

In the case of private organizations, the highest score (6,78) was assigned to the item $MPMOPT_5$ (the organization established a balance between the freedom of project managers in the process of administrating their projects and the internal regulations and procedures to foster the collaborative learning), followed by the item $MPMOPT_3$ (the organization introduced Project Management governance mechanisms to facilitate the interactions among the actors of the multiple projects network) and $MPMOPT_2$ (priority assignment leads to an effective communication flow among project managers from your institution: 6,23). We notice that these three highest score correspond to relational dimension of multi-project management optimization.

It is also proved that there is no significant difference between the project managers' answers from both samples in what concerns the item 4 (the organization implemented a central IT interface to make the interactions of project managers more effective and to avoid a competition between projects: 5,10 in public institutions versus 5,09 in private organizations).

To identify the multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT) dimensions that provide the highest contributions to financial stability and organizational learning, four linear regression analyses were conducted (two in each of the public institution and privately owned companies samples) with financial stability and organizational learning as the dependent variables and the two dimensions of multi-project management optimization (relational and regulative) as the independent variables.

Tables 5 and 6 outline the results for public institutions sample. For the first regression with financial stability as the dependent variable (Table 5), the adjusted R-square was 0.768, which indicates that the two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization explained 76,8% of the variation in financial stability. The two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT) highlights a significant effect on financial stability; in order of importance, these were:

- MPMOPT regulative dimension (β=0,685);
- MPMOPT relational dimension (β=0,586).

Remaining in the context of public institutions sample, for the second regression with organizational learning as the dependent variable (Table 6), the adjusted R-square was 0.396, which indicates that the two dimensions related to multi-project management

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Table 5. Regression analysis with financial stability as dependent variable (public institutions sample)

	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	T test	Sig. level
MPMOPT relational dimension	0,529	0,042	0,586	11,282	0,001
MPMOPT regulative dimension	0,728	0,058	0,685	15,164	0,001
Adjusted R-square = 0.768; F = 142.311; Sig. = 0.001					

Table 6. Regression analysis with organizational learning as dependent variable (public institutions sample)

	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	T test	Sig. level
MPMOPT relational dimension	0.319	0.069	0.282	8.173	0.001
MPMOPT regulative dimension	0.293	0.073	0.341	10.182	0.001
Adjusted R-square = 0.396; F = 118,317; Sig. = 0.001					

optimization explained 39,6% of the variation in organizational learning. The two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT) highlights a lower effect on organizational learning; in order of importance, these were:

- MPMOPT regulative dimension (β=0,341);
- MPMOPT relational dimension (β=0,282).

Tables 7 and 8 reveal the results for private organizations sample. For the first regression with financial stability as the dependent variable (Table 7), the adjusted R-square was 0.695, which indicates that the two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization explained 69,5% of the variation in financial stability. The two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT) highlights a significant effect on financial stability; in order of importance, these were:

- MPMOPT relational dimension (β=0.711);
- MPMOPT regulative dimension (β=0.622).

The second regression in the private organizations, with organizational learning as the dependent variable (Table 8), outline the value of adjusted R-square (0.628), which indicates that the two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization explained 62,8% of the variation in organizational learning. The two dimensions related to multi-project management optimization (MPMOPT) highlights a significant effect on financial stability; in order of importance, these were:

- MPMOPT relational dimension (β=0.805);
- MPMOPT regulative dimension (β=0.583).

These results reflect clear differences between Romanian public institutions and privately owned companies regarding the issues of multi-project management optimization that provide financial stability and organizational learning. While MPMOPT relational dimension is primordial in the private organizations, being the predictor of organizational learning in the field of simultaneous projects, MPMOPT regulative dimension proved to be essential in the case of public institutions, being the predictor of financial stability.

5. Conclusions, managerial implications, limitations and further research

The objective of this research was to identify key success factors in managing multiple projects within Romanian public institutions and privately owned companies. The framework focused on the predictors financial stability, respectively organizational learning, was tested empirically. The key success factors were built upon the perceptions of project managers from both samples regarding

Table 7. Regression analysis with financial stability as dependent variable (private organizations sample)

	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	T test	Sig. level
MPMOPT relational dimension	0.682	0.031	0.711	14,263	0.001
MPMOPT regulative dimension	0.701	0.038	0.622	16,118	0.001
Adjusted R-square = 0.695; F = 112,962; Sig. = 0.001					

Table 8. Regression analysis with organizational learning as dependent variable (private organizations sample)

	Unstandardized coefficients	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	T test	Sig. level
MPMOPT relational dimension	0.724	0.019	0.805	16.132	0.001
MPMOPT regulative dimension	0.474	0.023	0.583	14.137	0.001
Adjusted R-square = 0.628; F = 128,310; Sig. = 0.001					

the relational and regulative dimensions of multi-project management optimization.

Most of the findings of this study are aligned with prior studies representing relevant body of knowledge in managing multi-project contexts, revealing a stronger project management strategic focus of public institutions on financial stability, whilst private organizations' strategic focal point is on learning from past insights.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies primarily in the fact that the study sheds light on factors that are crucial for financial stability, respectively organizational learning, influencing the quality of decision making, specifically in a multiple project environment, being in line with the findings reported by Caniels and Bakens (2012).

The results of this study provide valuable insights into project management practices in contrasting types of organizations: public vs. private organizations, with totally different organizational cultures. Furthermore, the findings serve as grounds for further qualitative research on implementing EU projects in a multi-project context. In addition, the results of the study can be applied to the development of strategic guides, able to change public institution managers' mind-sets, while operating in multi-project environments.

The findings of this study provide a useful decision-making support for managers from both private and public organizations, in order to better understand the degree to which multiple project management practices can be optimized to better tailor to stakeholders' needs, and to identify the dimensions of MPMOPT that determine financial stability and organizational learning in each type of organization.

Finally, this research encourages practitioners from both Romanian public and private organizations to strengthen their capabilities regarding multiple project management and to strive to continue their efforts to obtain top management support, considered a key enabler of multiple project management effectiveness by Elbanna (2013).

The most significant limitation of this study is the use of a convenience sample. The results may therefore not be representative of the perceptions of the whole population of project managers from Romanian public and private organizations. Further research should be conducted to validate the results of our study by using larger samples.

Future studies, based on the current research framework, should be replicated in other countries, as different cultural, social and economic environments will certainly lead to significant gaps in what concern project managers' perceptions on the improvement of simultaneous EU funded projects practices. Another research avenue should be the application of QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) method on the research samples used in this study, to explore alternative configurations of causal conditions which can lead to financial stability, respectively organizational learning.

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