

# Project Management in Non-Scientific Activities in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Poland

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The article presents the problem of managing projects by administration departments at higher education institutions in Poland. Changes in the higher education sector raised the need to increase efficiency in administrative work. One solution may be to implement project management standards. The main objective of the study was to check whether administration departments at higher education institutions in Poland use project management in their work. The author's questionnaire was used as a research tool to conduct the study. The questionnaire was addressed to the Chancellors. 13 universities from 10 cities in Poland participated in the study. Eight of the universities declared to have regulations on project management activities in organizational documentation, while ten out of thirteen universities have project offices.

**Keywords:** project management, higher education institutions, administration

## Introduction

In the contemporary world organizations are facing challenges connected with increasing competition, fast technological progress and limited financial and human resources. One of the strategies of coping with such challenges is the implementation of project management that enables more flexible and individual approach to the problems (Trocki, 2012). Dynamic changes are also taking place in the sector of higher educational institutions. First of all within the past year a demographic depression has been recorded. In 2011 the number of students (including foreigners) amounted to 1,764 m (Central Statistical Office in Poland, 2011), whereas this academic year 2016/17 it reaches 1,349 m students, which indicated a 24% drop. The drop in the number of students is also noticeable in the net coefficient, which

reflects the ratio between the number of students aged 19–24 and the population size of the same age. In Poland the factor was steadily increasing till the academic year 2010/11 and since then a downturn has been recorded. Nowadays it stands at 38% in Poland, which is the same level as 10 years ago.

The data are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Net “scholarization” coefficient in Poland within 1990–2016**

Academic year	1990/1991	1995/1996	2000/2001	2005/2006	2010/2011	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Net “scholarization” Coefficient	9.8 % ↑	17.2 % ↑	30.6 % ↑	38 % ↑	40.8 % ↑	40.2% ↓	38.6% ↓	37.8% ↓	37.3% ↓

Source: Author’s own based on Szkoły Wyższe i ich Finanse 2015, Central Statistical Office in Poland.

The second problem that universities are struggling with nowadays is the growing competition reflected in diversified educational offer. The number of majors at undergraduate and graduate studies, postgraduate studies is increasing along with the number of certified courses and trainings as well as MBA programs. Consequently, higher schools are forced to tailor their strategies to the dynamically changing environment (Strojny, Baran, 2013). One of the possibilities of measures to be taken in the implementation of project management that could improve the processes of project management and, as a result, contribute to the growth in successfully completed projects. According to Mary Pretz – Lawson, the Director of the Office of Planning and Project Management at Carnegie Mellow University, in the world of business there are numerous elements applicable at universities, therefore, they should be used and taken advantage of (Clark, Nuturing, 2008).

Meanwhile, the analysis of the literature on the subject indicates that although the importance of project management is growing steadily, it is still of marginal importance in the sector of higher schools. They allocate neither sufficient amount of time nor financial resources for the development of project management (Austin, Browne, Kenyatta, Zulueta, 2013). And in professional literature there are only fragmentary researches based on the experience of individual higher schools.

## The research objective

As it has been stated above there is a gap in knowledge about the current level of project management at higher schools in Poland. The lack of complex

knowledge concerning the practices applied impedes the knowledge transfer and exchange of experience and providing recommendations for further actions to be taken by universities in order to enlarge the number of successfully accomplished projects. In the article the attempt to fill this gap has been made through investigating whether project management is applied in non-scientific activities of higher schools in Poland. The detailed objectives of the article have been to address several questions: is the project management at higher schools regulated in formal documents; are there any project offices or similar units; are the administration staff trained in the area of project management and whether and how the knowledge on project management is acquired. On the basis of the findings of the findings as well as identified restraints of the research, further directions of the research subject have been recommended.

## Tools and researched group description

To conduct the research the Authors used their survey questionnaire as the research tool. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part concerned general information about a higher education institution: the structure of students at the university, the structure of employees considering the age structure and educational background of the administration staff. The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at gathering information on the standards of project management applied by the university administration. The survey was especially examining whether at the university project management is regulated by internal set of rules or any other official document, whether the administration staff are trained on project management and whether the universities accumulate the project knowledge. The survey questionnaire included 20 questions, and the time to respond to them was 30 minutes. A letter requesting participation in the survey and explaining the research objectives was enclosed with the survey, addressed to Chancellors of the higher schools. Under the Law on Higher Education the Chancellor of a university “administers the school within the scope stipulated by university statute and its rector” (Journal of Laws 2005, No. 164, Item 1365). Therefore, the Chancellor is the one in charge of operational management of the administration department in higher educational institution and has unquestionable knowledge in this area. The research was done within October–November 2015 and the survey was delivered to forty Chancellors of universities in Poland. The questionnaires were distributed by e-mail, during personal meetings with the Chancellors and through leaving them in the Chancellor’s offices. 13 higher schools from 10 cities in Poland took part in the research. Since anonymity of the respondents was assumed in the survey, the universities had symbols: U1,

U2, ..., U13 attributed to each of them. The symbols are now used for presenting the research findings. The symbols are randomly attributed, and the table below shows the characteristics of the higher schools involved in the research.

**Table 2. Characteristics of universities participating in the research**

	University profile	Total number of employees	Share of administrative staff in total number of employees	Number of all undergraduate and graduate students
U1	Medical University	2141	16%	2544
U2	Higher Pedagogical School	92	37%	1260
U3	Medical University	2665	20%	8989
U4	University	7095	21%	38827
U5	Remaining Higher Schools	58	34%	1137
U6	Public Higher Vocational School	186	42%	1739
U7	Public Higher Vocational School	208	34%	2279
U8	Public Higher Vocational School	110	27%	1206
U9	Public Higher Vocational School	144	21%	1666
U10	Medical University	2188	22%	7488
U11	Higher School of Economics	1264	41%	10725
U12	Public Higher Vocational School	156	31%	1001
U13	Higher School of Arts	356	13%	738

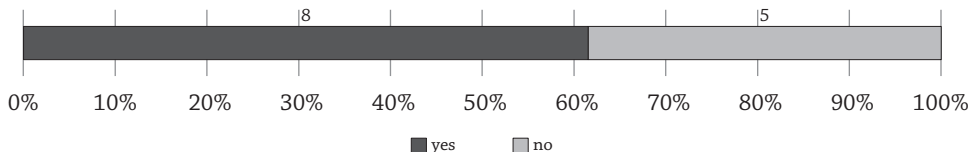
Source: Author's own.

Within universities surveyed administration employees account from 13% to 42% of all employees, which is an average of 28% (SD = 9%) of all employees.

## The research findings and conclusions

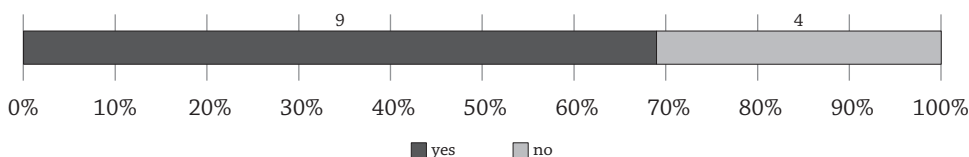
The research conducted proves that eight out of thirteen surveyed universities have a set of regulations or an official document concerning project management, and at each of them there is a project office or analogical unit. Additionally, one of the universities (U5) does not have official regulations on project management, but there is a project office in it.

**Chart 1. Project management regulated by official documents at the universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

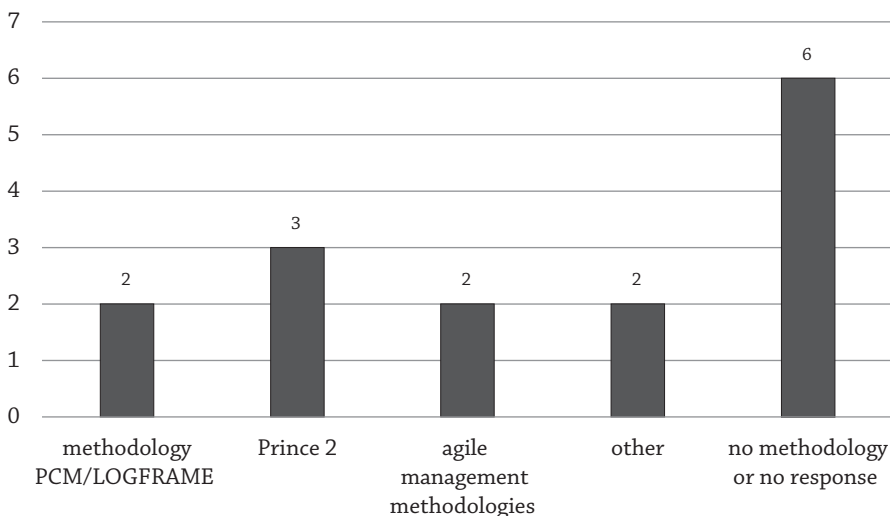
**Chart 2. Project office or analogical unit at the universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

Despite the fact that eight of the universities surveyed declared that they have regulations on project management, only four of them apply the regulations in the methodology of project management. Overall, seven out of thirteen higher schools stated that they benefit from methodology of project management, two of which indicated two kinds of methodology. The chart below presents the methodologies of project management used by the schools.

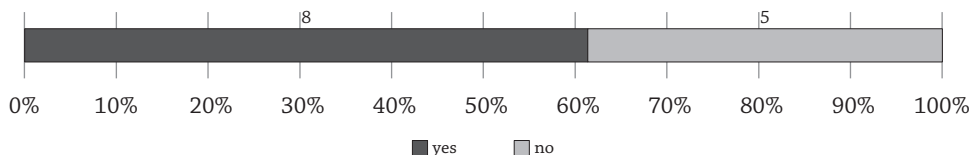
**Chart 3. Project management methodologies at universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

At the universities surveyed eight of them conduct training courses in project management their administration staff. Only one of the universities, (U9), that has training courses, does not have a project office.

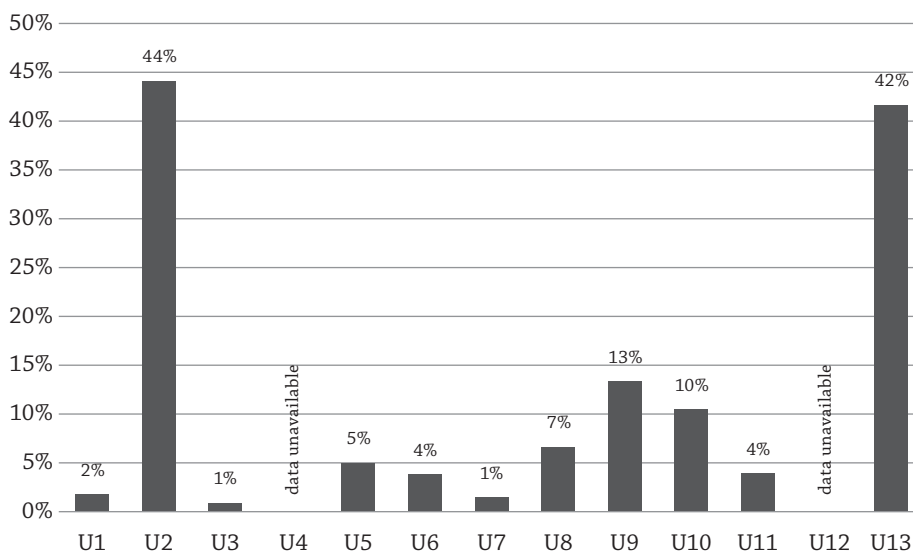
**Chart 4. Trainings on project management for administration staff at the universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

Employees of the universities taking part in the research are very much diversified in terms of being trained in project management. The conducted research finds out that the share of the administration staff that have been trained in this area fluctuates from 1% (U3) to 44% (U2).

**Chart 5. Share of administration staff trained in project management at universities surveyed**

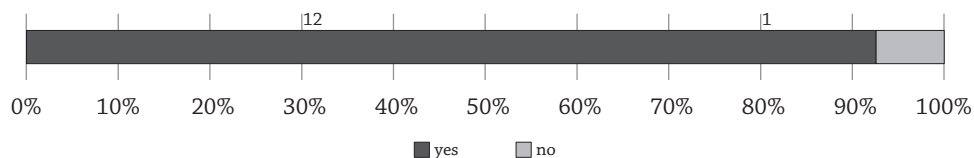


Source: Author's own.

In the surveyed group twelve out of thirteen declared that they accumulate the project knowledge. As many as eleven universities use the method of holding

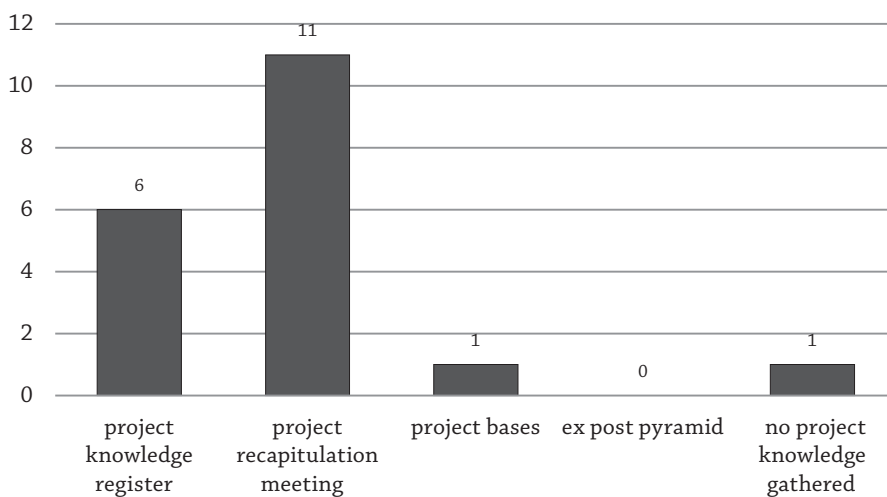
meetings recapitulating the project, and for six of the universities surveyed such meetings are the only way of accumulating the acquired project knowledge. The other most often applied method of accumulating the knowledge is the register of project experience use by six of the universities surveyed. Only one out of the thirteen universities (U3) stated that it makes additional use of the project base. U7 university does not accumulate any project knowledge.

**Chart 6. Project knowledge accumulation at the universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

**Chart 7. Methods of project knowledge accumulation at the universities surveyed**



Source: Author's own.

## Further research directions

While conducting the research, it was a limited access to the group surveyed that was the research major impediment. Chancellors of higher schools constitute quite a limited – in terms of size – group in Poland. Moreover, establishing any contact with them very often appears to be difficult and – in case of this particular research – despite initial willingness to respond to the survey, a part of the

Chancellors abandoned the idea. Therefore, the findings presented in the article are primarily of cognitive value.

The research has revealed the need for carrying out a further, profound analysis of the issue of project management in the sector of higher educational institutions. First of all, the analysis of the research findings indicated that Polish universities make use and take advantage of project management. Therefore, it is recommended the scope of the research should be extended and the level of universities project experience should be investigated. To this end, it is necessary to construct a tool that – on the one hand – could enable unbiased evaluation of the level of project management and – on the other hand – will be tailored to the specifics of universities. And then a detailed analysis of project management at universities would allow to provide recommendations in order to improve the practices applied.

It seems also necessary to enlarge the sample population to attain the finding statistically relevant. It would be also advisable to establish co-operation with the institutions of higher education, e.g. National Centre for Science or the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, in order to reach the larger group of universities. In the future, the sample surveyed should be extended with the Chancellors of foreign universities. Such a possibility would provide a benchmark on the way projects are managed at universities in Poland and abroad.

## Conclusions

In the article the aspects of project management by administration departments of higher schools have been presented. A dynamically changing situation in the sector of educational services triggers the necessity of seeking solutions that would increase the effectiveness of the work of the administration departments. One of the solutions could be the implementation of project management standards. The objective of the article was to present the findings of the research on project management at universities. The research covered Chancellors of 13 universities in 10 cities in Poland. The responses provided by them prove that majority of higher schools at least to an insignificant extent make use of project management. The research, however, was only of cognitive value and in the future the confirmation of the cognitive worth on a larger sample population is recommended.



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