

# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN NATIONAL DEFENCE SYSTEM

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## ABSTRACT

*A high level of maturity in project management involves increasing the capacity of national defence system institutions to manage projects relevant to strategic objectives, which in turn generates a series of necessary and important changes in terms of efficiency and maximum effectiveness.*

*In response to the need to improve the project management capacity, inside the national defence system should exist specialized units – Project Management Units – whose role is to provide advice and assistance in project management, training, mentoring, methodology and tools necessary to conduct activities arising from project management. Organization and operation of Project Management Units is a complex process, based on modern principles, that produces organizational changes by which national defence system institutions define, consistently and programmatically, their processes and activities, delegating tasks and roles, using tools and techniques in order to achieve the goals that they planned.*

**KEYWORDS:** perspectives, projects, project management capacity, Projects Management Unit, national defence system

## 1. Introduction

In order to achieve annual and multi-annual targets, national defence system structures make constant efforts to become more efficient in managing their available funds for activities structured on a project basis. The greater the size and complexity of a project the bigger is the need for formalization, standardization and organization, creating the need for specialized departments for analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. To address this need, the leadership of the national defence system must realize that it

is necessary to strengthen their project management capacity. They also need to understand that project management processes should be implemented consistently across the whole system.

## 2. The Need to Establish an Organizational Unit Specialized in Project Management

One solution to these problems, which began to gain more and more popularity among public institutions in Romania, is given by setting up of organizational units specialized in project

management. But what would be the result of the work of such units? These are responsible for planning, leading, implementation and monitoring of projects in the field of activity of an organization, providing the structure that is necessary in order to standardize practices project management and establishing methodologies for structured, uniform and repeatable processes, thus enhancing both the performance and the degree to which projects can be controlled.

Currently, units specialized in project management are considered a unique and critical tool for successful project activities in any organization. It is almost unanimously recognized that the adoption of such a measure in the organizational strategy for project management can bring added value to the institution that implements it.

An analysis of the capacity of the national defence system institutions to manage project highlights a number of problems: the absence of a specialized structure to coordinate the work of project management, lack of specialized staff in the fields of project management and external funds, absence of a strategy for training human resource in the latest project management practices, internal audit and procurement, lack of tools necessary for enabling efficient management of projects, insufficient funds to co-finance projects supported by financial assistance programs.

Project Management Units create conditions for development and innovation and provide opportunities that can support the interests of the national defence institutions. This is a tool necessary in order to achieve those objectives with maximum efficiency and effectiveness, in conditions of limited resources.

Given that this could influence the operations within an organization, creating a specialized unit in project management can be time and resource consuming but can also offer similar rewards. If the new entity is assigned, since its establishment, a

solid base, a clear vision and well defined responsibilities, it can bring considerable benefits.

An analysis of the most important advantages of setting up Project Management Units shows that they can improve overall project management process by:

- *preventing and reducing risks* by creating a centralized database with common risks and the development of initiatives to combat them;

- *staying within the budget*, through the coordination of resources across the organization and providing resources management on project budget level;

- *completion in the predetermined deadline* by making procedures applicable for all projects, ensuring time management in the project activities;

- *ensurance of projects quality*, by managing project management tools, centralizing communication activities at project level, providing mentoring and training in project management, research on best practices in project management.

### 3. General Aspects Regarding the Establishment of a Project Management Unit

Designing a Project Management Unit is one of the most important decisions of management, being a dynamic process due to the influence of internal and external factors. Therefore, any attempt to establish a new organizational unit must consider the involvement of all stakeholders. As Wirick (2009) said, “project integration consists of the activities and processes necessary for getting the project started, pulling together all of the varied elements of the project into a consistent plan, performing the work of the project, monitoring the work, integrating changes, and closing the project”. To better understand what integration of the new unit within an organization means, we propose a process that consists of four stages as follows:

**a) assessment of the opportunity** (justifying the need, assessing the effectiveness of the initiative by analyzing its application in similar institutions, analysing the possibilities of implementing and adapting it to the specificities of the national defence system, determining the human, material, financial and informational resources needed, conducting a SWOT analysis);

**b) planning** (defining the purpose and objectives, establishing the attributions and responsibilities of unity, appointing the staff, determining the costs associated with creating the new entity);

**c) implementation** (modification/filling of legal and institutional framework, establishing the methodology for project management, project management tools selection and defining its internal procedures);

**d) assessment** (performing a periodic evaluation of the performance of a unit and of the way the project management processes are integrated into the routine work, proposing actions for improvement).

Thinking the creation of a Project Management Unit in terms of stages is an essential success factor. Viewed from this perspective, the establishment of a PMU becomes a project in itself.

Strategic planning has an important role, due to the reason that at this stage are being determined the key elements of the newly established unit. In this regard, we consider useful to define the following issues:

➤ **Mission.** The mission describes what Project Management Unit accomplishes, in what way and for whom. It is a general statement that aligns the new entity to the value it provides. A possible mission can be defined as: *“The Project Management Unit supports the methodology of project management to enable national defence system structures to run projects in an effective and efficient way in a disciplined and responsible framework, with high quality results”*.

➤ **Strategy.** It can be defined as a set of directions outlining how the PMU will fulfill its mission. Defining the strategy facilitates alignment of the Project Management Unit to the overall strategy of the institution.

➤ **Goals.** Goals are concrete statements describing what the PMU is trying to achieve. Goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, realistic and achievable).

➤ **Potential sources of financial grants.** Potential sources of financing are EU programs that Romania benefits as a member state, NATO funds and any other programs which provide grants.

➤ **The institution's own resources.** The objectives of an institution may be accomplished only if there are the necessary resources. Completion of projects have to be done with the help of self-resources. In most cases one of the eligibility conditions imposed by donors is that a certain percentage of the project should be funded by the institution that runs it.

➤ **Skills.** A toolkit of knowledge and skills acquired through learning which have to be held by the defence personnel in order to successfully perform the activities involved in project management. An inadequate level of skills entails loss of time and money, low productivity and lack of results.

➤ **Transition activities.** Activities that need to be carried out for PMU operation. They must be implemented rigorously as the success of PMU depends on them. Among these activities we mention: integration of PMU into existing organizational structure, division of PMU tasks, setting functions and responsibilities of staff, purchase of equipment, staff training etc.

➤ **Plan of Action.** Without a rigorous plan it is impossible to properly, uniformly and effectively implement activities, in order to achieve the expected results.

The results obtained from this process will guide decision makers to determine the

future role of the PMU and facilitate better integration inside the institutions they lead. Without a methodological approach of the design, organization and operation of the Project Management Unit, the task of implementing it would be extremely difficult.

#### 4. The Role and Competences of the Project Management Unit

Depending on the needs and level of expertise of an institution in the field of project management, PMU can perform one of three roles (Taylor & Mead, 2015):

“**Supervision unit**”. In this case, projects are planned independently without PMU exercising authority or influence over the project managers and their teams. Thus, Project Management Unit's role is to monitor the status of projects implemented by collecting data on the manner the projects are executed, data which are provided to the stakeholders.

“**Verification unit**”. This type of PMU establishes rules for project managers and their teams, engaging particularly at the start and the end of each project. In this way, the PMU is partly responsible for the final results of the projects and has the task of assessing the performance of each project.

“**Coordination unit**”. In this case, the PMU has total control over each project, delivering specific orders to project managers and their teams. In this case, the Project Management Unit has the task of allocating all the resources for projects, on the basis of a list of priorities, and writing reports on the performance of each project manager.

By analyzing the three possible roles that a Unity Project Management can hold, we believe that its functioning and organization must be correlated with valuable expertise in project management and related sectors (public procurement, internal audit and control, attracting foreign funds).

Thus, we believe that if the experience of project managers is limited, and the staff is not familiar the project-based work, the PMU should act as a “coordination unit” closely monitoring projects at all stages and offering advice and support to project managers. To establish this type of PMU, contracting external experts in project management are used, both to control the development of projects as well as to ensure knowledge transfer.

As project management culture is based within the organization, PMU becomes a “verification unit” and sets the direction of each project, assists project managers and their teams in their work and monitors the project. “Supervision Unit” is the appropriate solution only if project management is adequately integrated into the institution's activity.

Whatever role the new unit will fulfill, it is essential that its activity be based on principles such as legality, transparency, impartiality, accountability and efficient use of resources.

In order to achieve its duties, the Project Management Unit will need to have both qualified personnel from the structures of the national defence system, as well as specialists with expertise in complex activities involved in project management. The organization's management must integrate the expertise of specialists in various areas of development. The experts will provide technical assistance, while the Head of Project Management Unit will facilitate their action.

Projects Management Unit can be created in order to provide a narrower or broader set of services, as needed. However, to achieve the purpose for which it was created, the PMU must achieve a number of main activities:

➤ **Methodologies and tools for project management.** The PMU will develop and implement procedures to support a standardized project management process and will select the appropriate tools which will be available to the organization

personnel involved in working with projects. Establishing and implementing a common set of project management processes and common terminology will help launched projects to be completed faster and with less effort, while facilitating communication between project staff and leadership of the organization. Following the adoption of a methodology, the PMU task will be to a permanently update it accordingly to the needs for improvement and to the best practices in the field. It also will assess the progress of projects, centralize experiences and lessons learned in order to be presented to management and implementation teams and used in the administration of future projects.

➤ **Training and mentoring.** Once the methodology has been selected, the PMU should help the organization integrate common processes. This first step can be achieved by training and mentoring.

PMU must provide the staff depth knowledge of project management, helping them to become professional project managers. In this regard, PMU will develop training materials and will facilitate the delivery of training programs in project management and related fields. Project management is a vast field, with a diverse range of trainings that can be organized in various formats and methods of transmitting information. In this regard, we believe that we must consider a number of steps: determining training needs (assessment of skill levels of staff that will be trained), identifying the types of required learning courses, developing of the strategy and the training plan (establishing the way the training is developed), setting up the curriculum and training.

Mentoring refers to individual working with project managers or project teams in order to transfer knowledge and skills. Mentoring is different from training because it is less structured and usually involves discussions regarding concrete situations by

which project management techniques can contribute to its success.

➤ **Advice, assistance and inner support.** PMU has the mission to provide staff with advice, assistance and support in managing all the undertaken projects. PMU will provide advice to project managers, giving them examples of best practices. It will also assist project teams, thereby preventing errors which may be caused by lack of experience in this field. This approach aims to ensure the success of each project, creating a culture of delegation, initiative and accountability. According to Kassel (2010), “an organizational culture of openness, transparency and trust can motivate project teams to work efficiently and effectively”.

➤ **Monitoring, assessment and supervision.** Projects Management Unit has the mission to oversee, monitor and assess all ongoing projects. In this regard, PMU monitors the current situation of all projects and provides consistent information regarding the results. PMU also monitors the achievement of objectives, assesses the impact that they generate and aims to ensure their sustainability.

➤ **Project managers base.** In some cases, the PMU will provide not only the necessary means for project management, but will also represent a structure from which professional project managers will be assigned to projects as needed. It also will be involved in the allocation of human resources, by identifying the employees that are most suitable for the roles in each project.

➤ **Funds absorption.** Applying this principle aims the following objectives: coordinating the activity of identification of opportunities for non-refundable financial assistance in order to meet the absorption requirements and the capacity of the national defence system institutions, consulting in the development of feasible and eligible projects in order to meet the conditions imposed by institutions that



ensure financing and, not least, increasing the visibility of the national defence structures as institutional actors in attracting external funds.

### 5. Conclusions

To sum up, we see that activity of a PMU has both an operational component and a strategic one. Given the complexity of the tasks, functions and missions of the PMU – operational and technical, coordinating, planning, initiating, implementing, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, representation and

collaboration - we emphasize the need for a solid foundation on which it should be built and integrated into a strategic perspective.

Therefore, understanding the importance and benefits of establishing of specialized units in project management in national defence system institutions and raising awareness of decision makers in this respect are essential. This approach calls for consistent steps and developing of new skills of the leadership in the ever-changing philosophy in order to achieve superior results through projects.

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