

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS AN AREA OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN POLAND ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROJECT MASTER COMPETITION

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to present a growing interest in issues in the field of project management among students and doctoral students of Polish universities. The study used literature analysis of the subject as well as the analysis of internal data of the Project Master competition. The main results of the analysis are:

- presentation one of the forms of promoting project management, which is the organization of the Project Master competition;
- identification of research areas in the field of project management among students and doctoral students.

The conclusions obtained have a practical importance, because they allows identification areas of interest within the field of project management among future employees. Taking up the topic, it allows to signal the importance of spreading the idea of project management among students and doctoral students.

**Key words:** project management, competition, student, doctoral student.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Management sciences are eclectic, they combine many fields of science, on the other hand they are utilitarian, which means that they develop in response to the needs of business practice. These elements determine the difficulty in defining individual sub-disciplines in their area. Systematisation is not facilitated by the fact that their nature is multi-dimensional. They consider different perspectives that are complementary to each other. One of the subdisciplines distinguished by the Team of Committee of Organization and Management PAN is project management (Cyfert, Dyduch, Latusek-Jurczak, Niemczyk, & Sopińska, 2014, pp. 37-48).

In this model, project management understood as a subdiscipline of management sciences, has been placed in the practical field at the operational level. In addition, the following thematic ranges of theoretical considerations and empirical research conducted within project management are indicated: project life cycle, project management methods and methodologies, project maturity and methods for measuring the effectiveness of processes.

Project management is perceived as a set of managerial skills necessary for efficient and effective project implementation (Trocki, 2012, p. 49). Project management is therefore a field of knowledge that creates the basis for managerial skills required in the implementation of projects.

The development of project management issues started already in the sixties of the last century. Along with the growing needs, in the developed countries associations began to be formed to acquire and take over practical experience from the best specialists, to develop model methods for the conduct and training of project management specialists. Best project management practices become the subject of publication in the field of project management, both among researchers, as well as students or doctoral students.

The aim of the article is to show the growing interest in project management among students and doctoral students in Poland. The research methods used in the article are the analysis of the subject literature and the analysis of internal data of the Project Master competition from the period 2015 to 2018.

## 2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management is defined in the literature of the subject by many authors. According to professor M. Trocki, this is “a field of management dealing with the application of available knowledge, skills, methods and tools in order to achieve the assumed objectives of the project, i.e. the intended result with a certain quality, at a given date and at a set cost” (Trocki, 2014, p. 39). The Institute of Project Management define it as a “application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities to meet its requirements” (PMI, 2000, p. 6). According to H. Kerzner “project management is the planning, organizing, directing, and controlling of company resources for a relatively short-term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives. Furthermore, project management utilizes the systems approach to management by having functional personnel (the vertical hierarchy) assigned to a specific project (the horizontal hierarchy)” (Kerzner, 2017, p.4).

The functioning of project management as a separate field of management is currently justified in the framework of, among others (Łapuńska, & Pisz, 2016, p. 148):

- separate subject of interest (projects),
- separate theoretical foundations (process approach),
- separate methodological foundations (special methods and techniques),
- separate literature of the subject,
- separate periodicals,
- separate scientific institutions and professional associations,
- separate certification system for professional qualifications.

Regardless of the adopted definition or application, project management is an area which in recent years has become increasingly popular in both the scientific and business environment. And reports published by the employment agency Manpower indicate that the profession of the project manager, despite the growing number of people with appropriate qualifications, belongs to one of the 10 most difficult jobs to fill in Polish companies ([www.szkoła.pm/project-manager-zawod-przyszlosci](http://www.szkoła.pm/project-manager-zawod-przyszlosci)). Therefore, it is extremely

important to promote the idea of project management among people preparing to enter the labor market, so among students and doctoral students.

## 3. PROJECT MASTER COMPETITION

The Project Master competition has been organized since 2002 by the International Project Management Association Poland. From 2015, the co-organizer of the competition is the Faculty of Management and Economics of Services at the University of Szczecin. As part of the competition, the best projects in the field of project management are awarded in four categories: bachelor's thesis, master's thesis, doctoral thesis and postgraduate works.

The aim of the competition is to spread the idea of project management, for promotion a scientific research carried out by students and doctoral students, and promotion of these people. From year to year, the number of students and doctoral students who are interested in the subject of project management, including the Project Master competition, is growing. The analysis of data from the last four years shows that the number of applications reported increased from 10 to 40, that is by 400%. Such a large increase was influenced, among others, by the decision of the Competition Jury on the extension of the types of works that may take part in the competition. The decision was made in connection with the interest reported by the students themselves and doctoral students preparing work related to project management. In 2016, the possibility of submitting papers was received by the authors of doctoral dissertations, and in 2018 - bachelor theses.

## 4. PROCESSES OF PROJECT MASTER COMPETITION

One of the basic management process of competition is its promotion. It begins in May each year and includes a series of activities to inform both the academic and business community about the event. The most important activities undertaken by the competition's organizational team include:

1. Posting invitations to participate in the competition as an initiative promoting the idea of project management. Invitations are sent to the university

- authorities conducting courses or studies related to the field of project management, as well as to the promoters of works in this field.
2. Providing information about the competition along with the schedule and the envisaged prizes to the media partners of the event, as well as the websites of the universities co-organizing the competition.
  3. Sending by e-mail a personal invitations to supervisors of courses related to the field of project management at universities in Poland.
  4. Sending by e-mail invitations along with a request to disseminate information about the competition among students to scientific clubs operating at Polish universities.
  5. Placing messages with news about the event on the official website of the competition, as well as Facebook groups of: the competition, the IPMA association, the co-organizing universities and students.

Another important process is the evaluation of competition works, which is carried out in two stages. In the first stage of the assessment, each work is evaluated independently by two members of the Competition Jury. Forms for the evaluation of competition thesis, which are filled in by the Jury members, vary depending on the type of work. The doctoral dissertation evaluation form covers the most elements of the assessment and is the most extensive. In contrast to the other forms, there is a question about the originality of the research problem raised at work, the completeness of goals and hypotheses indicated by the author of the work, and also the key importance for the field of project management. The postgraduate work evaluation form applies different evaluation criteria, among others: it takes into account the assessment of the discussed research problem, but does not include the assessment of research hypotheses and originality of selected research methods, and does not analyse the importance of work for the development of project management but evaluates the author's contribution to solving a practical problem. The last two forms, bachelor and master thesis,

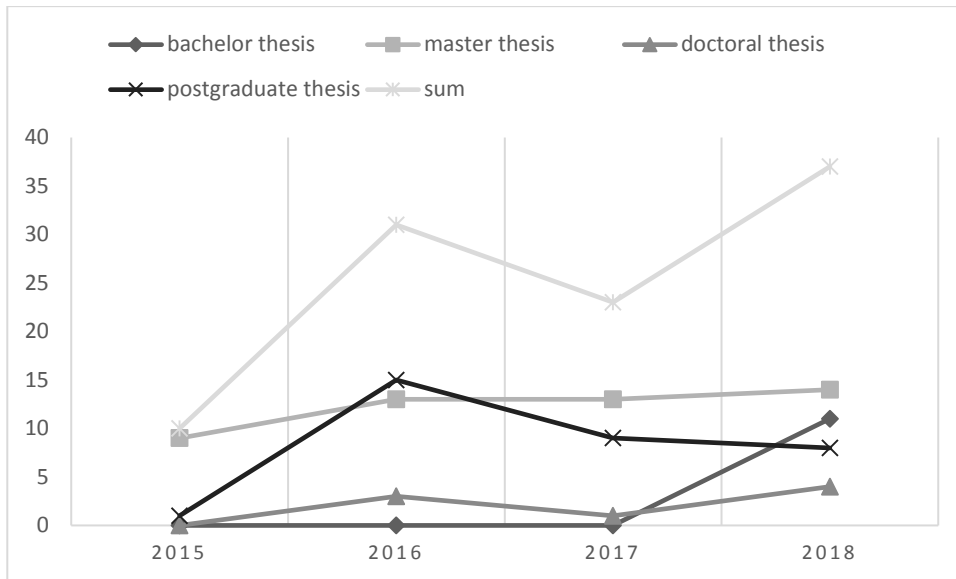
are the closest to each other, analyse both the goals and research hypotheses of the work, but only in terms of their correctness, not originality, also include questions about the author's contribution to solving the practical problem, the precision of defining the problem practical or accurate selection of research methods. The diversity of forms allows for a more honest assessment of the works sent to the competition.

In the second stage of the evaluation of competition thesis, the Competition Jury analyses the list prepared by the organizational team containing the assessments of all submitted competition thesis. Based on the results of the evaluations, the winning thesis in each category are selected, as well as the works highlighted on the background of other submitted works. The results of the assessment are then published on the competition website, and in addition, each participant receives information about the results on the email address.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

In January 2019 authors of the article made an analysis of data on all submitted thesis in the Project Master competition for the years 2015-2018. For each competition thesis, the following parameters were defined: the type of thesis, field, promoter and academic center in which thesis was defended. On the basis of the parameters specified, authors analysed the trends of change in the number and subject of submitted thesis in the Project Master competition as well as trends in the development of cooperation with research centers from which the competition thesis were submitted.

The analysis of the number of works that could be reported from the beginning of the competition, hence the master's and postgraduate thesis, shows their significant increase. In the case of master's thesis from 9 works in 2015, up to 14 works in 2018, while in relation to post-graduate work, data from the same period are 1 and 11 respectively. The exact data are presented in Figure 1.



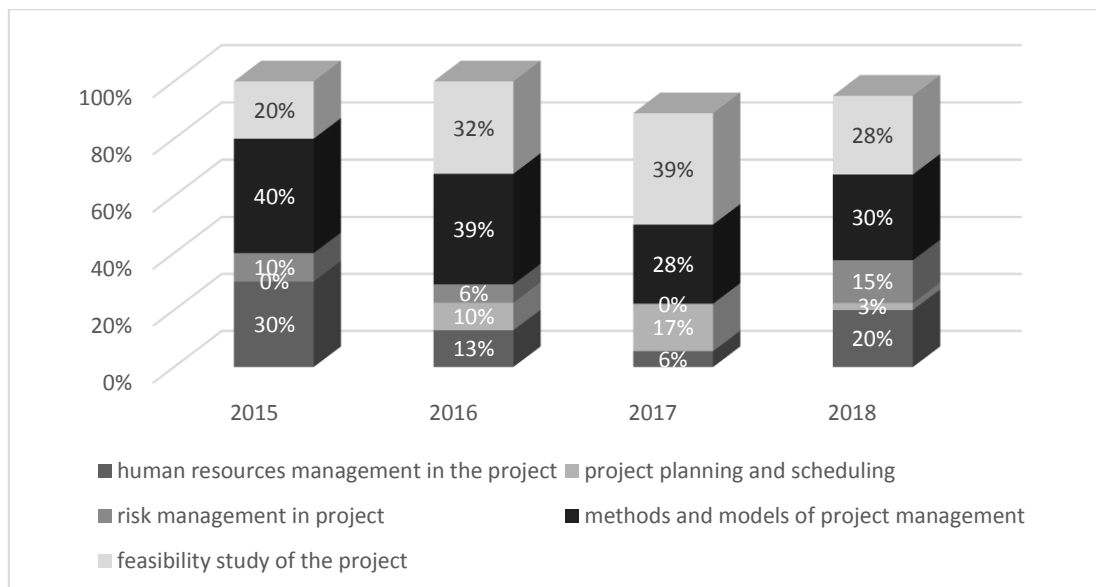
**Figure 1:** Number of thesis submitted in the Project Master competition in 2015-2018.

Source: own research

The number of universities in which the competition works were developed also increases year by year. Data analysis from 2015-2018 shows an increase of over 300% (from 5 to 16 higher education institutions). In this the largest increase is visible in the last year, when works were submitted from as many as eight universities that have not yet participated in the competition.

The popularity of project management is evidenced by the increase in the number of

cooperating promoters of the submitted works. During the analysed period, in only four years the names of only two promoters were repeated, similarly in the analysis of the last three years. In two editions, work was submitted from four of the same promoters. The rest of the works, however, is supported by forty outstanding scientists. In this, in the last year, up to twenty new promoters, whose graduates have not yet reported works in the competition.



**Figure 2:** Works submitted for the Project Master competition, divided into thematic areas and years

Source: own research

Every year, the most reported works concern on methods and models used in project management as well as project feasibility studies. In the last year, work in both research areas accounted for almost 60% of the total number of works reported. The least frequently reported works are works from the field of project documentation in 2015 and 2016, risk management in the project in 2017, and in 2018 - project planning and scheduling. The detailed breakdown by areas and years is shown in figure 2.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In the 21st century, the concept of project management acquires special significance in the face of challenges posed to contemporary organizations. As a result, several scientists began to think more about projects and project management as a reaction to classic view, but also as a response to challenges project implementation in practice and poor results previous projects (Morris, Pinto, & Söderlund, 2011, p. 1–11). It's broader thinking Over the years, he has developed many new observations, such as from the „project as a tool“ approach to the idea „project as a temporary organization“ (Packendorff, 1995, p. 319–333) and understanding project management as a whole discipline for achieving organizational efficiency, effectiveness and innovation (Jugdev, Thomas, & Delisle, 2001, p. 36–43).

Project manager's job belongs to one of the 10 most difficult jobs to fill in Polish companies. Therefore, it becomes important to educate in the field of project management and to popularize this field among people preparing to enter the labour market.

The analysis of empirical data on the Project Master competition showed that the most common area of interest, which was studied by students and doctoral students, is the feasibility study of the project, as well as the analysis of the applied methods and models of project management. Data analysis, however, indicates that areas of interest are changing, so the subject of project management is analysed very broadly. This is a positive conclusion that indicates the possibility of further development of the field.

The analysis showed also that the interest in the field of management among students and doctoral students of Polish universities is large and is constantly increasing. This trend should be strengthened through wider use of social media, which are most often used by young people. Promotion through Facebook should be wider by using social services like Twitter, Instagram or You Tube. Using larger number of social services, that are used by students guarantee larger publicity and further increase interests in Project Master competition, but also field of project management.

Organizers of the competition are preparing for the next years other initiatives promoting competition but also promotion of this field of knowledge among wider group of students. They are in a phase of discussions with other European Universities to conduct a similar competition in other countries. The winners of competition in different countries could at the end of competitions in all countries meet at the joint final gala. This would be a great possibility to exchange experience and knowledge, as well as opportunities to establish international cooperation in the field of project management.

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