

# Project Management System as a Reputation Factor of an Educational Organization

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**Abstract:** This article is devoted to the features of the project management system in Russian educational organizations. The empirical base of the research is based on a survey of employees of educational organizations in several Russian regions. The study revealed such characteristics of the project management system as the lack of flexibility in the choice of project management and project team management practices, the dominant practice of hierarchical management and control. In fact, this system has fake features, as it misleads both employees of educational organizations and stakeholders, which damages the reputation of the educational organization. The weakness of the existing project management system in educational organizations leads to a high workload of human resources in the routine, a drop in their motivation to work and professional burnout. This determines the deterioration of the reputation of the educational organization as an employer.

## 1. Introduction

In modern conditions, the value of a person's reputation and the reputation of an organization is constantly increasing. The business reputation of a person is converted into his professional recognition and price in the labor market, and the business reputation of the organization is converted into competitiveness among other industry players and in the labor market as an employer. Also, the reputation of the educational organization has a strong influence on the motivation of students to learn, the prestige of education in general.

Digital Economy creates many opportunities for both strengthening and promoting reputation, as well as new reputational risks. One of them is fake as a by-product of the digital economy (Fakery in Economics). The deep penetration of information technologies into all spheres of human activity, which makes it possible to create and extract a variety of information, creates the basis for the uncontrolled distribution of falsified products and services. This is misleading consumers and causes irreparable damage to organizational reputation [1]. Fake news and fake education services undermine the trust of parents and students in an educational organization. The main reason for the fake nature of an educational organization is an inefficient management system [2].

Special reputation damage comes from fake projects, primarily related to the transformation of educational organizations [3]. A project can become fake if during its implementation it loses its meaning or does not reach its stated goal or discredits an educational organization by incompetence of project team members or leads to the loss of qualified personnel and a decline in the attractiveness of the organization as an employer due to management defects or leadership style. In this regard, the project management system is becoming an important factor in the reputation of the educational organization.

In this paper, we understand the project management system as an interconnected set of project management and project team management practices that form synergies and are aimed at achieving the goals of the projects and the strategic goals of the organization [4; 5; 6]. A project is a social system; therefore, it is very dependent on the competence and motivation of both project team members and managers and all colleagues with whom project teams interact. In this regard, the reputation of each member

of the project team becomes a component of the reputation of both the project and the entire educational organization.

Project management is an open system. There are numerous factors of the external and internal environment of the educational organization, first the practices of human resource management and project management technologies [7; 8; 9].

In the context of the strategy of socio-economic development of the Russian Federation, the issue of project management has acquired relevance. The choice of educational organizations for our study was not accidental, since at the present time, significant changes aimed at significantly improving the quality of education in the digital economy are taking place in the Russian education system.

The purpose of the article is to identify the features of the project management system and their impact on the reputation of the educational organization.

## 2. Materials and Methods

At the end of 2017, we conducted an online survey of managers and employees of educational organizations on a voluntary basis. In accordance with the purpose of the study, the questionnaire is formulated so that we can get complete information about the features of the project management system, management technologies used. 77 respondents took part in the survey. The sample is random, but it can be defined as representative, because all the respondents correspond to the target group of the study. The structure of the sample of respondents: 44.2% of senior managers; 45.5% of middle managers; 5.2% of specialists; 3.8% of teachers; 1.3% did not answer.

Representatives of organizations of higher education, secondary vocational education, municipal education systems and regional education systems participated in the survey. The geographic diversity of the respondents also contributes to obtaining more reliable data on the features of project management of educational organizations. Representatives from 27 regions of Russia are among the respondents.

Almost all respondents have experience in project management. 9.1% of respondents have project management experience up to 1 year; 26% – from 1 to 3 years; 19.5% – from 3 to 5 years, 26% – more than 10 years. And 9.1% of respondents found it difficult to answer this question. Thus, the structure of the respondents corresponds to the goal of our study.

The questionnaire had open and closed questions: open questions for qualitative research (for a clearer understanding of research questions) and closed questions for quantitative research (for studying the relationship between variables), including questions with a choice of multiple answers, questions with a list of answers, dichotomous and quantitative questions, as well as several open-answer questions. In most questions, a structure consisting of seven gradations was used. Respondents should indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement (level of importance or criticality) with certain statements: "1" corresponds to such answers as "least important" or "very low", while "7" is "most important" or "very high". In open-ended questions, respondents had to provide their own answers, which did not limit them to a fixed set of possible answers.

## 3. Results

In general, our study showed that educational organizations actively use project work in the implementation of their strategies, with all categories of personnel involved in projects, often simultaneously in several. Specialists (84.4% of respondents) and middle managers (22%) are most involved in the project work of educational organizations, least of all are top managers (14.3%).

Projects of educational organizations vary widely in scale, duration, and complexity of tasks. 55.8% of respondents are involved in system projects with a time horizon of 1 to 2 years; 50.6% of respondents are also involved in operational projects with a time horizon of up to 1 year; 44.2% of respondents are involved in strategic projects with a time horizon from 2 to 5 years. 1.3% of respondents are involved in projects at the development stage, and 6.5% of respondents have difficulty in answering this question. In itself, the presence of a large number of strategic and system projects has a positive effect on the reputation of the educational organization, but at the same time it forms among the interested persons and structures elevated expectations from their activities. If in the future these expectations are not met, then the reputation of educational organizations is damaged.

The high involvement of staff in a variety of projects in addition to performing their duties requires the use of effective methods of planning and organizing work, a mature and flexible project management system. Otherwise, professional burnout of employees, as well as a drop in their motivation to work and the loyalty of management policies, inevitably occur, which naturally leads to reputational risks for educational organizations.

In the organizations of our respondents, project management systems are built, basic competences in project management are developed, these competences in the aggregate ensure a positive reputation of educational organizations as an employer. Thus, most respondents (74%) noted that organizations have a clearly formulated human resources management policy. 11.7% of respondents answered this question negatively and 14.3% found it difficult to answer. The reputation of the organization as an employer depends on the management policy but is also reflected in the code of business conduct that governs employee behavior. In the case of compliance of the principles of management and standards of personnel conduct with the long-term goals of the organization, a clear policy and code become important management tools, as well as the basis of the project management system. Our study showed that most educational organizations have their own code of business conduct (78.9% of respondents gave a positive response). Organizational culture is another powerful factor in project management. The survey showed that 74% of respondents believe that organizational culture in organizations fully contributes to the success of projects and supports the positive reputation of the organization.

In general, a clear human resource management policy and a strong organizational culture in support of project work are evidence of a certain maturity of the management system. In this regard, it is natural to expect that human resource management practices will be consistent with the objectives of the projects and, at the same time, contribute to improving the image of their educational organization. Our survey showed that, in general, human resource management practices in educational organizations can achieve project goals, but not in the most efficient way.

Almost 47% of respondents believe that the practice of human resource management fully supports projects and innovations, 45% support partially. But these practices do not fully contribute to improving the reputation of the organization as an employer. Thus, less than half of respondents (47%) believe that current human resource management practices fully contribute to motivating employees to productive work and professional development. At the same time, we recall that the majority of our respondents are managers who, as a result of the established management system, lose their motivation for results and professional development.

The project management system consists of a set of interrelated elements, each of which should work as a well-established mechanism. Defects of any of the subsystems of management create serious obstacles in achieving the goals of projects, on the one hand, and provoke fakeness, on the other. The transformation of management models, including project management, goes towards the introduction of project offices, agile and delegation of authority, which implies a change of focus in the management system from control to trust, from incentives to performance to initiative, teamwork and continuous development.

That is why, we asked the respondents to identify the most efficiently operating control subsystems. Respondents should not choose only one subsystem, but as much as they consider to be more efficient.

Most of the respondents are satisfied with the work of the planning and goal setting subsystem, 71% of respondents rated it as more efficient. Within this subsystem, the following technologies are used: defining goals and objectives for SMART (55.8%), determining project priorities (46.8%), the WBS (Work Breakdown Structure) method of planning steps and structuring a project (28.6%), as well as maintaining permanent communication channels with all stakeholders and project structures (44.2%).

The project monitoring and evaluation subsystem was named the next in terms of efficiency (40.3%). Technologies such as directives and control of intermediate results (35.1%); management by objectives (35.1%) can be attributed to this subsystem.

Despite the fact that respondents identified these subsystems as the most effective, modern methods of planning and organizing project work in most organizations are not applied on an ongoing basis, which creates a number of serious problems for staff, among which the most typical are busy routine (63.6%), psychological fatigue and professional burnout (37.8%), and red tape (16.9%).

Over 30% of respondents noted the effectiveness of training and development. But for the most part, this element of the management system provides only basic project management skills (85.7%). This is clearly not enough for effective project management.

28.6% of respondents identified the incentive and motivation subsystem as effective. However, they also noted the lack of incentives for productive project work. In particular, only 22.1% of respondents noted the presence of material incentives to achieve the project goal.

Non-material incentives for project team members also leave a lot to be desired. In particular, the application of advanced methods for managing project teams can be such an incentive. So far, a minority of educational organizations use these methods in project management. According to the degree of decrease in popularity, respondents called interviewing candidates for members of the project team (48.1%), delegation of authority (42.9%), team sessions during business hours (31.2%), organization of special informal events for creating climate and cohesion of team members (29.9%).

The data show that in Russian educational organizations, the use of introductory team sessions to determine the project's purpose, its feasibility, effect and risks (applied only to 23.4%), professional training of project team members (23.4%), holding regular team sessions (22.1%), teaching teamwork (15.6%), is not typical. Even holding episodic meetings with project team members "between times" is typical only for 14.3% of respondents.

The emphasis on traditional methods of control and reporting, planning and incentives to the detriment of the use of flexible methods does not allow educational organizations to effectively use the potential of their employees, which negatively affects the reputation of the organization as an employer. Most of the employees noted that they would not recommend their organization as the best place to work and are ready to leave it themselves at an opportunity.

So, our study showed that the project management system was developed in educational organizations, but it cannot be characterized as flexible and effective. Its peculiarity is a certain rigidity based on common management principles and corporate standards of business conduct. The system is based on a limited set of traditional management practices, among which are the practices of hierarchical management and control dominate. This feature does not allow for timely response to environmental challenges, effectively using the potential of project team members and making extensive use of advanced agility practices. In fact, this system has fake features, since it misleads both the heads of educational organizations and employees regarding the prospects and impact of projects. A weak project management system can lead to the appearance of fake projects, in turn, they cause an increase in the risk of deterioration of the educational organization's reputation in the opinion of all stakeholders and structures.

The weakness of the existing project management system in educational organizations leads to a high workload of human resources in the routine, a decrease in their motivation to the effectiveness and quality of work, professional burnout. This determines the deterioration of the reputation of the educational organization as an employer. In the face of falling prestige of the education worker and the war for talents, this circumstance casts doubt on the success of strategic projects of educational organizations.

#### **4. Discussion**

Our study revealed a paradoxical situation. The high involvement of employees in various projects in practice leads not to the involvement and growth of motivation for the outcome of the project, but to burnout. Particular attention should be paid to the best practices for solving this problem.

Our study did not allow to find answers to all questions related to the influence of the project management system on the reputation of the educational organization. In particular, the trend towards the introduction of agile technologies in project management demonstrates the humanitarian reorientation of management practices, the shift of attention from the manager to the teams [10]. In this regard, the need is growing in studies of the readiness of educational organizations to transform leadership and enhance the role of leaders in strengthening the reputation of educational institutions and the success of projects.

#### **5. Conclusion**

So, all research tasks were solved. Based on the analysis of the results of a survey of employees of educational organizations, we have identified the features of existing project management systems.

The article revealed a link between the project management system and the reputation of the educational organization as an employer, as well as its reputation in the opinion of all stakeholders and structures. This question is new and can be considered as a direction for future research.

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