

Project Management Update from Lugano ¹



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Project Organizations – Evolutions between theory and reality

A Study of Organizational Project Management in Swiss and Italian companies by faculty of Innovative Technologies at the University of Applied Science of Southern Switzerland

Abstract

The faculty of Innovative Technologies of the University of Applied Science of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI) started in November 2020 a study for assessing the importance and the diffusion of a project management structure in the Swiss and north Italy small to large size companies.

The study was based on a structured survey, written in Italian, sent to a huge pool of Switzerland and Italian companies and it aimed to understand how the organizational structure has been affected by the pandemic time we are living and by the management knowledge relating to managing projects. More precisely, the following research study focuses to analyze the organizational structure into the different operational contexts of the inquired companies and therefore its correlation with project management maturity and the most relevant factors responsible for the project's success or failure during this uncertain time.

The research will provide objectives and results showing which is the common organizational structure related to a working context and its relations with management knowledge and

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project' success achievement, clarifying how companies have been affected by the global pandemic situation in terms of managing projects.

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1 Introduction

Every Organization adopts a different structure in which they are working, to achieve their goals according to their corporate objectives.

The well-defined organization structures in accordance with the business context make it possible to achieve the objectives, allocate the correct resources and influence the success of the projects and subsequently the success of the company.

The literature [1] shows how organizations can apply different organizational project structures and how these affect the benefits or disadvantages compared one to another, this is regardless of the context in which the company operates.

In fact, it is not the activity which is carried out by the company that defines the type of structure chosen, but it is the result or product which influences the choice of the Organizational Structure (OS).

The OS creates a reference framework that allows the interaction of all those who are involved in the project and which are necessary for the execution of the project. The support of the OS is responsible for a smooth progression and therefore to be as efficient as possible, this responds in a clear definition of roles, tasks, responsibilities and the allocation of the necessary skills. Project organizational structures are distinguished by their ability to determine the availability of resources and influence how projects are managed and conducted.

The main forms of OS are:

- Functional organizations
- Dedicated functional organization
- Organization for projects
- Matrix Organization (weak/balanced/strong)
- Project Management Office (PMO)

1.1 OS theory vs. reality

The Organizational Structure (OS) is the major factor that plays a fundamental role in guiding and defining the ways in which the organization carries out its operation, in the same way they are responsible for determining the hierarchy of people, their function, the workflow and the reporting system. In relation to the different sectors in which they operate the organizations shape their structures to optimize their results to obtain the needed resources and to optimize it for the marked demand.

1.2 OS and the success of the project

The failure of a project often occurs in the absence or unclear organizational structure. With time passing, technological innovation and the market demand for increased specific skills, organizations are meeting often new challenges like new, unusual and limited in time. Furthermore, the current pandemic situation creates new challenges to which companies must adapt relatively quickly. In this scenario the classic organization is unable to cope with this kind of commitment: here a specific organization and/or strategy is required for the project management.

1.3 Training and knowledge management

With the advancement of technologies, the markets in the various fields of application are confronted with a sudden change and with increasingly specific and ambitious requests. It follows that the organizations have to keep up with the times, the organizations are in need to hire highly specialized professionals which bring the know-how and are able to handle the required tools and methodologies which are currently available and who have the flexibility to adapt to changes.

The type of OS applied within the company influences the role of the PM and the respective skills required, this can have a range from the simple coordinator/expediter (administrative PM) towards the real project manager with full decision-making power.

Nowadays the resources that are sought by organizations are no longer limited to an in-depth knowledge of the subject, these so-called hard skills are well trained resources with a well-

developed behavioural and leadership skill. The so-called soft skills on the other hand are additional internal training courses, these are often held by specialized external organizations in the field of training. It is often necessary to introduce new training for a changing market demand, this creates a benefit for the company because it creates new professional figures, new tasks and a reorganization within the company structure.

2 Methodology

We decided to collect the necessary data for our study by sending an email survey to Italian companies located in Switzerland and northern Italy. It was sent to small, medium and large companies which are operating in different sectors on a national and international scale. To interview people out of different sectors has brought us many advantages, one of these is a wide view of different organizational structures.

Being in a situation of health and economic crisis because of the covid-19 we took the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the methodologies in this particular situation and if the trend of the same approach received any change.

To perform this survey, we used the tool “Google form” and the survey consist of 21 questions, divided into 4 categories:

- 7 general questions, these are used to identify the type of company and their general idea of project management.
- 3 questions on how the projects are structured. These questions are used to identify how projects are managed within the organization.
- 8 questions on how the projects are managed, these questions allowed us to measure how far these organizations deviate from the OS in practice.
- 3 questions about the degree of success of internal projects. These questions are used to get an idea of the degree of success depending on the organizational strategy.

General identification	Project structure	Project management	Achieved results
In which environment operates the company?	Who manages the projects in your company?	What kind of organizational structure comes closest in your company?	How do you rate the success rate of the projects and are the results satisfying?
What's the size of your company	Does the Project Manager or Project representative have specific training for his role ?	On which standard is your project management methodology inspired by ?	If there are problems, which areas are most frequently touched?
On which scale of useability refers to the core business of your company?	In your project management methodology, what level of decision making does the project manager /	Are the projects part of a program or portfolio ?	In your opinion, what are the causes of possible failures?

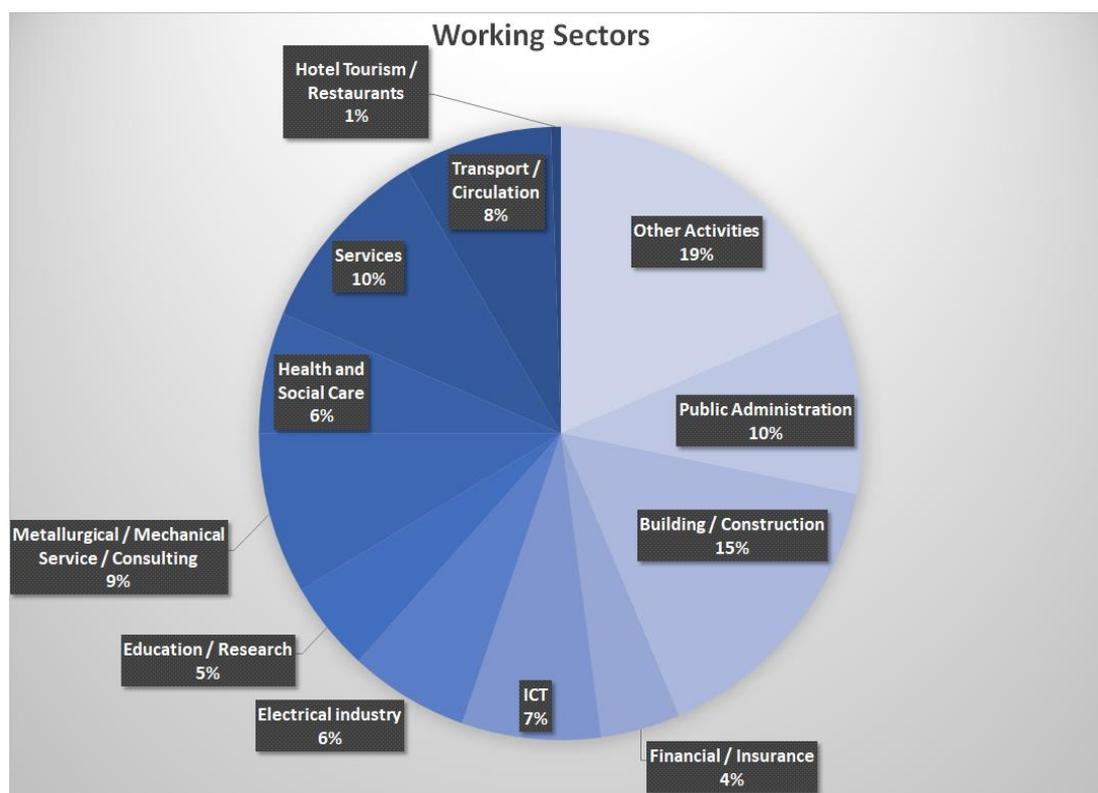
	project representative have?		
Who is in charge of the project management organization?		Is there a central organization (PMO) in your company responsible for project management?	
Is there a common and clear strategy in your company?		In case of an existing PMO, what role does it cover?	
How many years has project management been introduced?		Does the organization ensure adequate allocation of human resources for ongoing projects, taking into consideration the qualitative and quantitative need of multiple projects?	
Indicatively, what percentage of the projects are covered within respect of the company operations (routine/daily business)		The project management methodology is always identical or varies according to the project (complexity, duration, sectors touched)	
		How often the company project procedures will be updated?	
7	3	8	3

Finally the results will be analyzed, interpreted and summarized in the following chapter.

3 Results

In this chapter we will describe the results obtained by considering the interaction between the survey questions according to the objectives set.

Referring to the general framework, the results show that among the companies surveyed, there is a majority of respondents from the building or construction sector in general, from the Public Administration and Services sector, as well as from sectors not properly defined by the list provided.



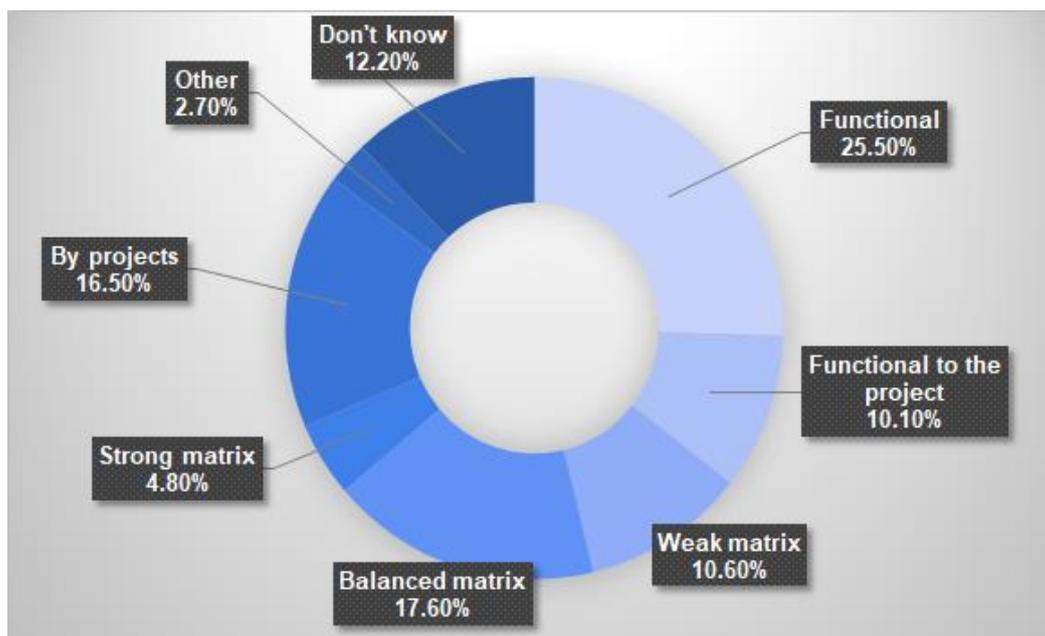
The vast majority of organizations that took part in the survey have a size of 1000 employees or more (large organizations), while most of the other have between 250 and 999 employees (medium organizations); the core business with the greatest influence is that which refers to an international scale of users (38%), but it can be seen that on a national scale also has a certain importance (32%).

With reference to project management, it is recorded that around 53,5% of the organizations have introduced this methodology over ten years ago, while around 30% have been doing so for less than five years.

From the data we also found that specific project management tools also follow this trend. In 40% of the companies where specific project management tools or tools adapted to the company's needs are used, project management has been introduced more than 10 years ago.

From an initial analysis, it can be seen that large companies, and those that are also looking at users outside the country, have had a project management methodology in place for years.

In relation to the work areas examined, it can be seen that the organizational structure that is most used is the Functional Project Organization.



This Project Organization is mostly used in the areas of Public Administration, Health and other activities not properly described in the list provided. In this way, it can be seen that a project-based organization is preferred in the construction industry.

As mentioned previously, the specific organizational structure mostly used by the interviewed company is the Functional, around 26% of the cases. This structure is organized by “silos” where decision making is referred to a functional manager. The other structure mostly used is the balanced matrix around 17%, where we can find an equal distribution of the decision making between the functional manager and the project manager. However, it should be noted that all matrix versions added together (weak/balanced/strong) we talk about 33% of the interviewed companies. As mentioned, the balanced matrix prevails just over 17% of the total, followed by the strong matrix (10.1%) and last but not least the strong matrix (5.5%) of the preferences.

It should be noted that in absolute terms almost one sixth of the companies (15.6%) use an organization for the projects and another 11.1% a functional organization for the project. Almost 12.1% of the interviewed participants were unable to indicate what kind of organizational structure their company has. In large companies almost 23% are organized in a functional manner, although it can be noted that 22% are oriented toward a balanced matrix organizational structure. Smaller companies on the other hand prefer project based organizational structure in which the project manager has a wide range of competences and a high authority.

3.1 Project Management Methodology

In absolute terms the most used project management standards in the analyzed samples are

- Agile - 27.6%
- PMI - 25.1%

ICB/IPMA, Prince2 and Hermes all down below 10% each.

23% of the interviewed participants use a standard not mentioned in our questionnaire, as many as 26.1% of the participants told us that they do not use a standard of any sort for their project management.

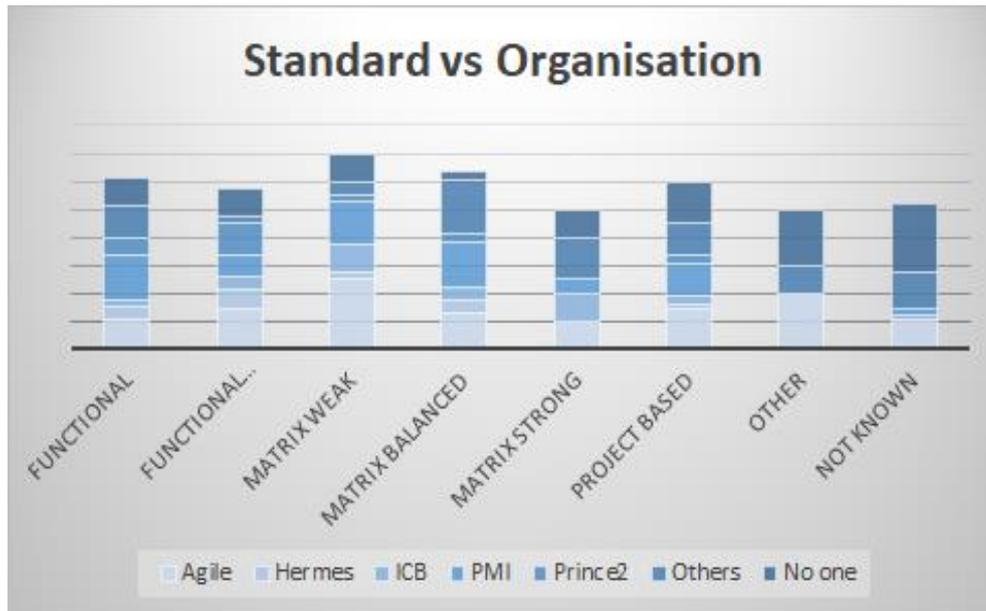
In general, it is noticeable that companies that have been introducing a project management methodology for less than ten years do not rely on one of the recognized methodological standards. In particular, the tendency is to have a methodology in the early years that is close to Agile or PMI and then turn into a customized solution that can no longer be assimilated to a standard in the first ten years.

In many cases the complexity of standard methods and their vastness can push companies to create a lean-system that gradually creates more and more distance to the official standards, although there is a tendency to use Agile in some areas.

3.2 Relationship between standard used, organizational structure and working sector

We cross referenced the received data about the organizational structure of the companies and their used standard, to see if there are any correlations between the two data sets.

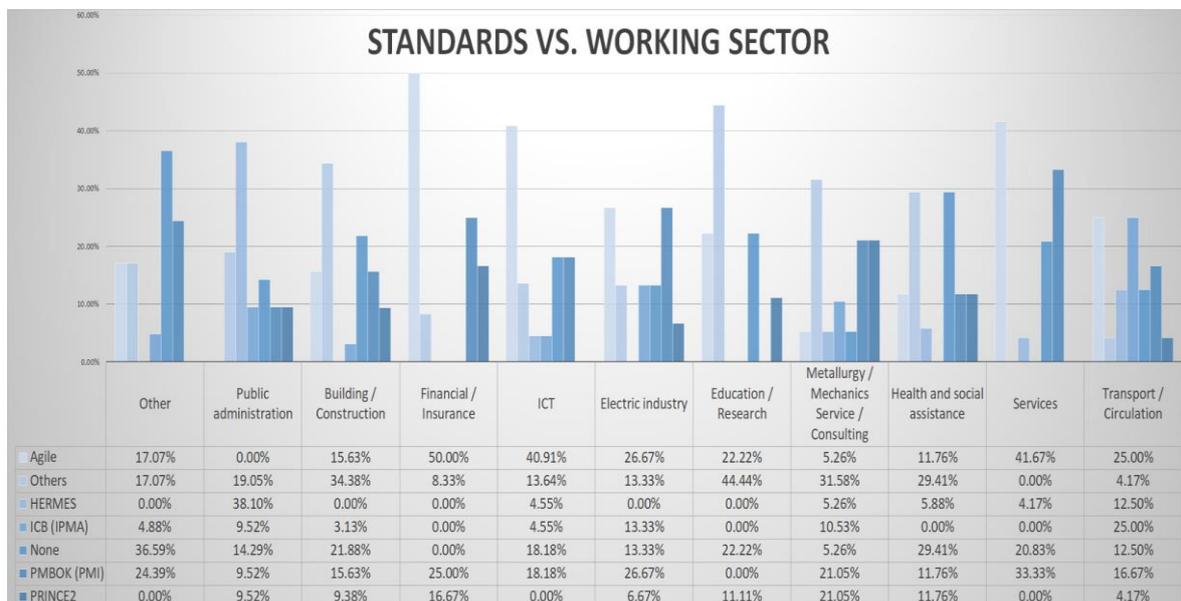
Agile is the most used standard by the companies organized in a weak matrix or by project oriented. The standard most often used by for example functional organizations is the PMI standard. It should be noted that project organizations indicated that they use (besides Agile 29%) a not recognized standard. Probably their organization is determined by the project, this forces them to create a personalized methodology not further specified by a strictly formalized standard.



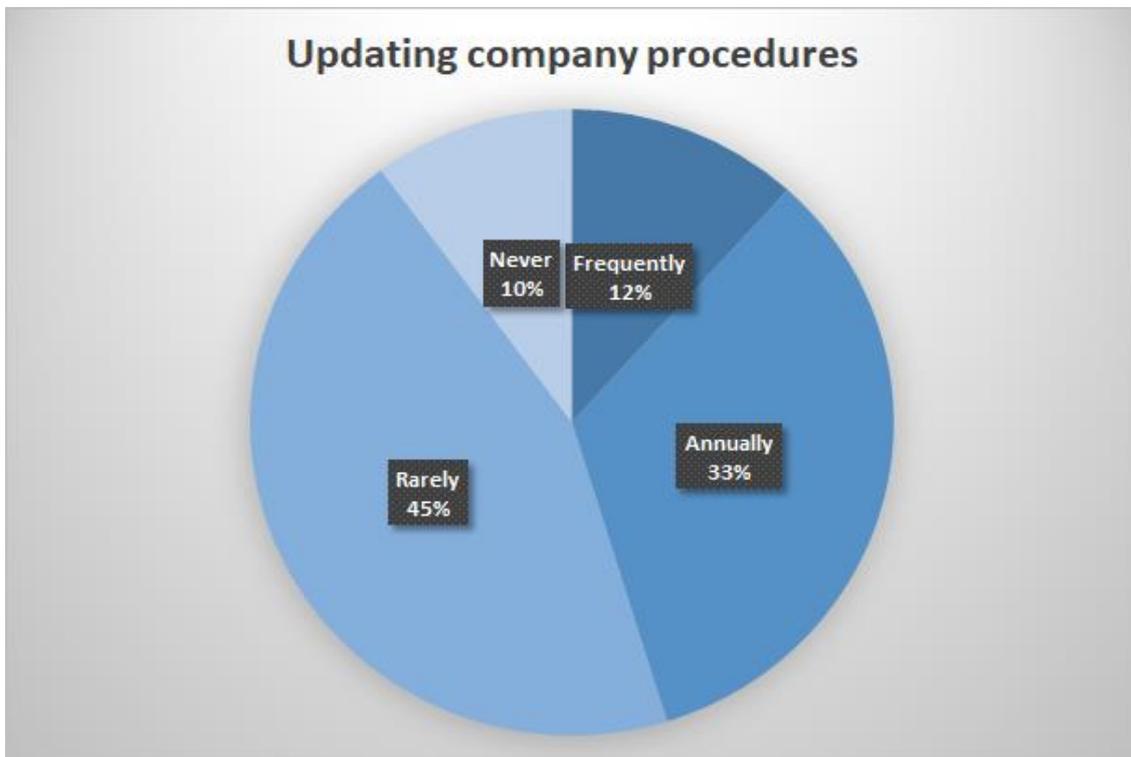
Comparing standard used and working sector we would notice that in the Public administration obviously the most used standard is Hermes (the PM method developed by Switzerland's Federal Administration).

Agile, born in the software development sector, is the most used standard not only in ICT and Services sectors as expected, but in Financial/Insurance and Transport/Circulation sectors, too. PMBOK (PMI) is widely used in quite all the sectors analyzed, even if it is never the most used.

Health and social assistance sectors have probably very specific and wide needs, so they use quite all the standards but mostly customized ones (“others” or “none” answer). Most working sectors use all standards to varying degrees, others are focused on only a few (Tourism, Services, Education, Financial).



3.3 Project management maturity



The data shows that most companies rarely update their processes (45%) and some never update their processes (10%).

Business processes are the key that describe how a company operates in its day-to-day life. To understand whether our processes allow us to be efficient, we compare the frequency of process updates with the efficiency perceived by employees. In companies where process changes are rarely made, the assessment was either partially efficient (69%) or not very efficient (15%). On the other hand, companies where processes are frequently updated are rated very efficient (92%).

A large proportion of the SMEs questioned in a study by the Swiss Federation for Adult Learning [2] believe that continuous training is very important in order to respond to the impacts of the pandemic. The skills required of employees have changed considerably. One third of the companies surveyed stated that employees are now required to have new or different skills (half of the companies said that the skills had remained the same, while 15% could not answer, suggesting that they have difficulty in assessing developments in this area).



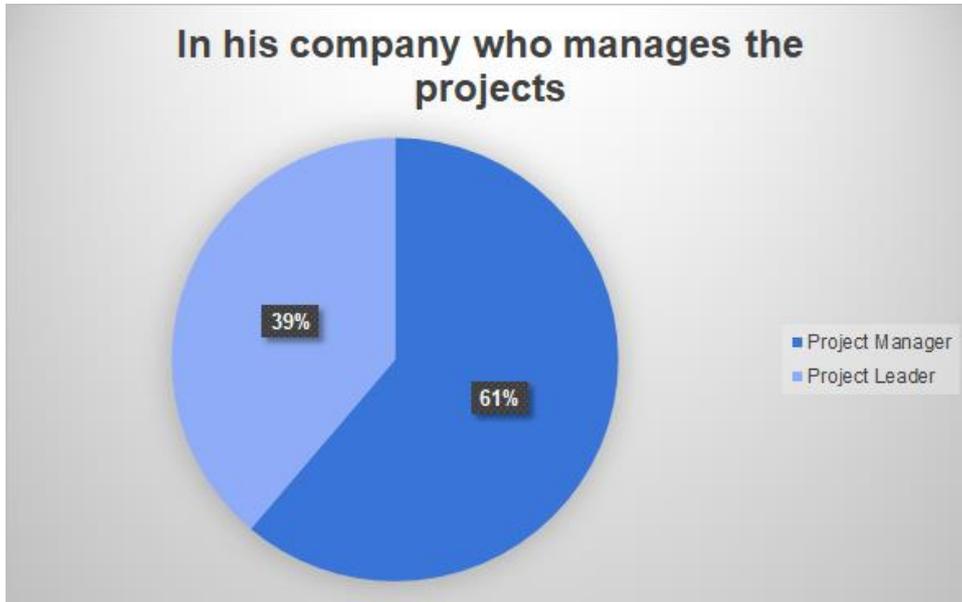
From the graph it can be seen that as many as 87% of the companies only occasionally and regularly carry out training courses to improve their skills in relation to the tasks they perform within the organisation and only 12.9% never carry out training. Furthermore, a deeper analysis of the data showed that the smaller the company, the more likely it is to carry out training courses, while interest decreases slightly as the size of the company increases. This leads us to think that small organisations with growth objectives invest more in training in order to achieve greater competitiveness compared to companies that have consolidated their position in the market.



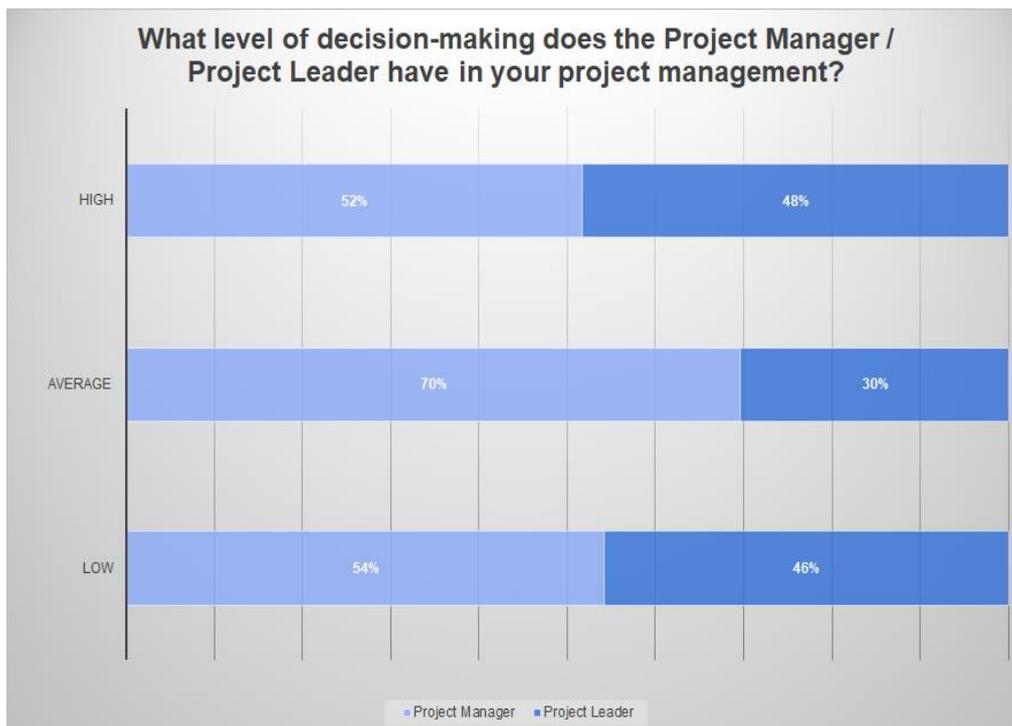
Only half of the organisations collect and use both Historical Information and Lessons Learned during project management. An interesting relationship emerges when comparing the collection of Lesson Learned and historical information and project success, with 53% of those

who collect and use Historical Information and Lesson Learned responding that they almost always achieve project success.

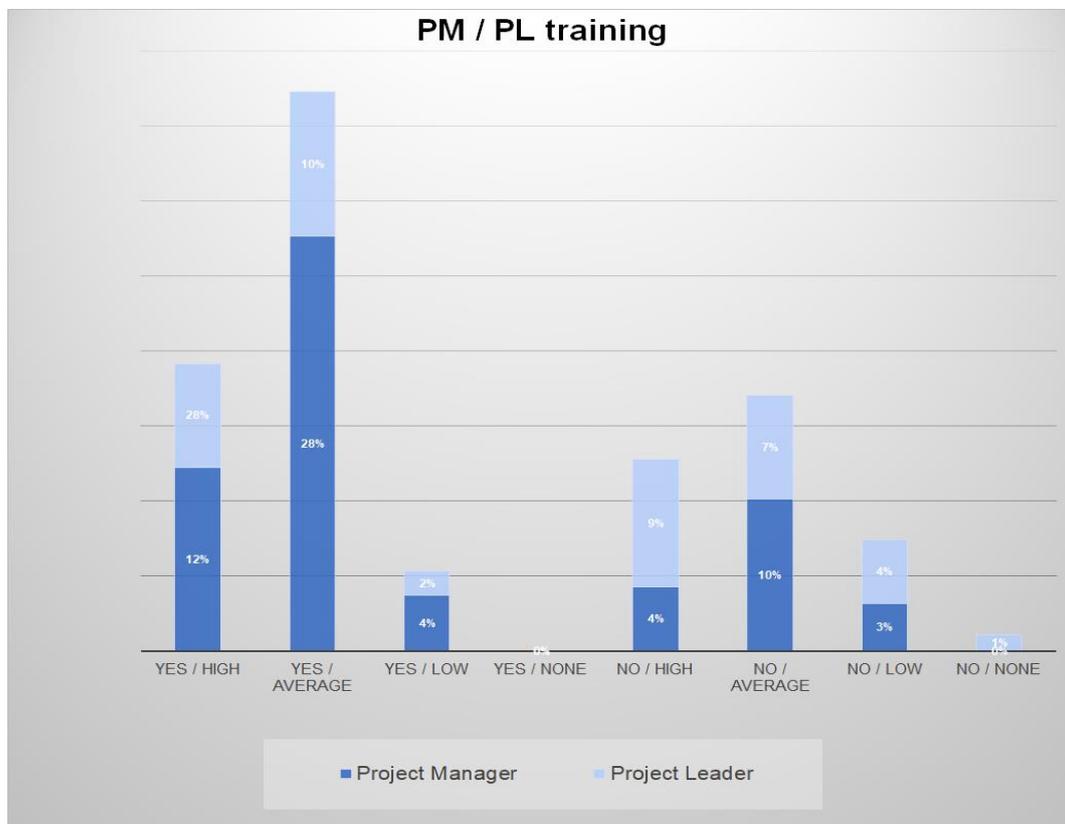
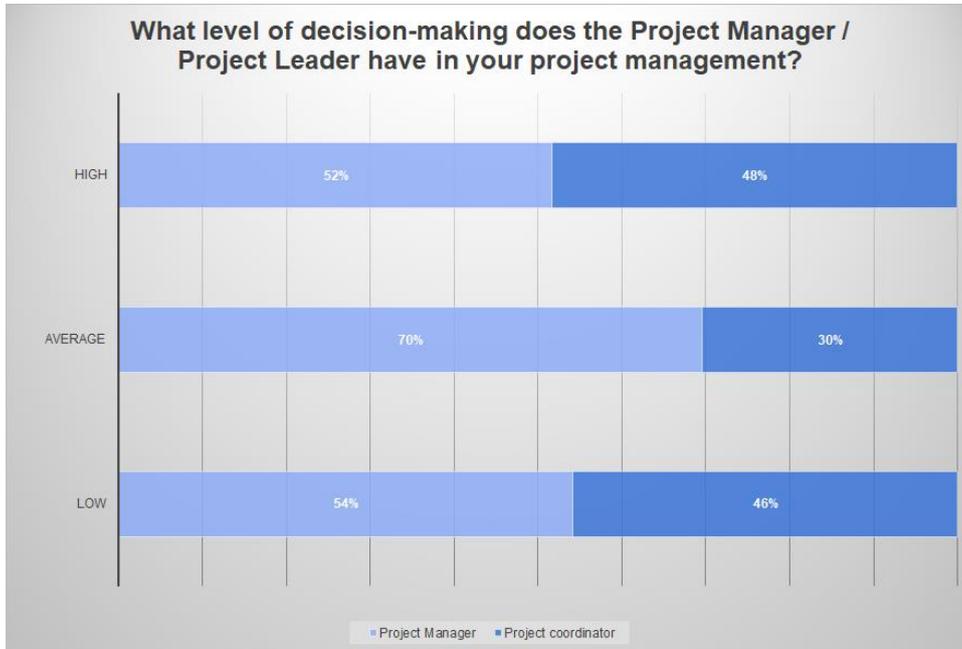
3.4 Project manager vs Project Leader



From the chart you can see that more than 61% of the projects are managed by the Project Manager while the remainder are managed by a project coordinator who coordinates the project. In the next points we will analyze in more detail.



It can be seen that the level of decision-making is generally medium to high, while for project referents the decision-making power is similarly situated but more balanced. In dept, the high decision making is half and half for both PM and PL the same result for the low decision making.



The chart above relates to whether or not a PM or PL is trained, and of these how much decision-making power they have. It can be seen that for 28% trained PMs, they also have a fair amount of decision-making power. In comparison, the PL generally does not have specific training.

On the whole, we notice that those who have specific training also have high decision-making power regardless of whether they are PM or PL. On the other hand, those without project training have only a low level of decision-making power. From these data it can be assumed that adequate training in project management is useful in order to be able to have more leadership in the execution of projects.

The graph illustrates that medium and large (>250) companies generally have staff with good decision-making power, and this is a general trend, where the larger a company is, the more they need adequate staff to lead projects.

3.5 Program and Portfolio

From the responses received, it emerges that 64.7% of companies manage projects by also using Program and/or portfolio management.

26.7% state that they do not use these tools, while 8.6% state that they are not familiar with them. The sum of these two percentages - 35.3% - is higher than the percentage - 26.1% - of those who said they did not use any standards. This leads to the assumption that even those who do not use a formalized standard, but do use their own methodology, consider it useful to use the techniques of program and portfolio management to coordinate and distribute resources on the various projects followed.

3.6 The Project Management Office (PMO) and its influence

The project management office (PMO) is a support structure that helps the organization to monitor and control their projects.

A PMO is a group within or outside the organization that defines, maintains and ensures standards for project management within that organization.

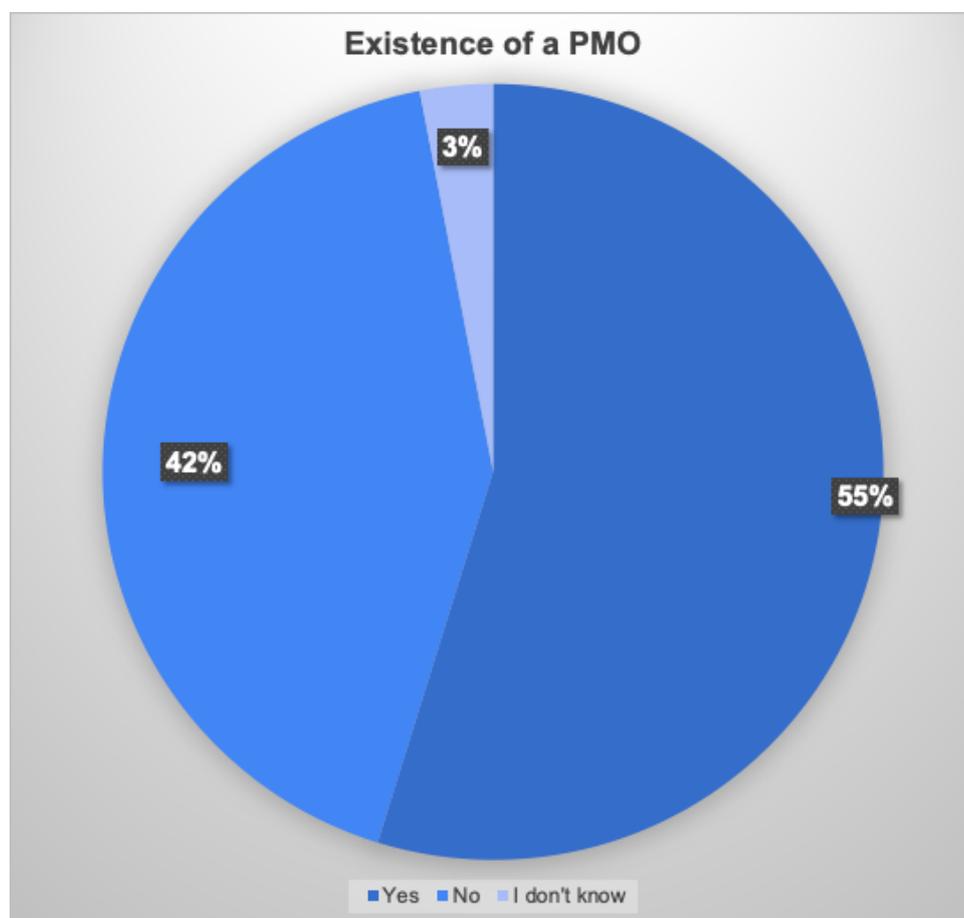
It is a centralized overseer and manager of best practices, status and direction of projects.

The influence of the PMO on the organization and the management of the respective projects depends on the type of PMO applied, moving from a more supportive PMO to a managerial PMO with complete control and management of the projects.

In periods like ours, conditioned by both organizational and economic uncertainty, having a PMO is an advantage but can also be a disadvantage.

An advantage is that it allows you to centralize and manage various PMs in a coordinated manner regardless of whether they work locally in the company or in the home-office. But it allows you to keep the status updated and keep it in line with the situation of the projects relative to the business strategy.

The disadvantage is that having a PMO involved are the large costs which are harder to bear in an economically difficult situation. In this chapter we will analyze the behaviour of companies in respect of the adoption of a PMO in this period of uncertainty and how it will affect projects in the company.



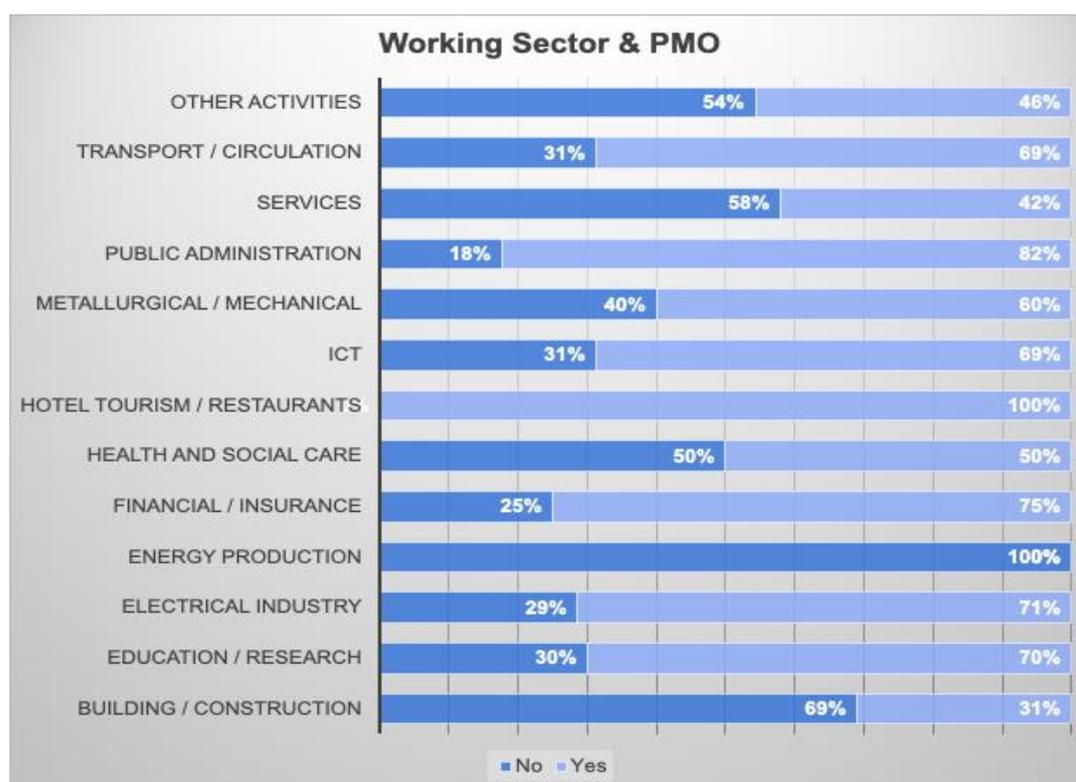
The results show that the culture of having a PMO office is not prevalent or widespread. In fact, 55% of participants have a PMO office for their organization, compared to 42% who do not have a corporate PMO office. 3% of respondents are unaware of what a PMO is or do not know if one exists within their company.

By relating the above figure to the size of the organization we can understand if this has an influence on whether or not they have a PMO office.



The results show that the use of a PMO office is widespread in companies with more than 1,000 employees (78%), while for smaller companies it is not so widespread, with a prevalence of not having a PMO office.

This result can be explained from the fact that using a PMO office has a cost, which is easier to support for companies of large dimensions in contrast to companies of smaller dimensions. Going into further detail, by aggregating the data related to the application of a PMO office and the industry in which the organization operates, we can understand whether the business environment affects whether or not to have a PMO office.



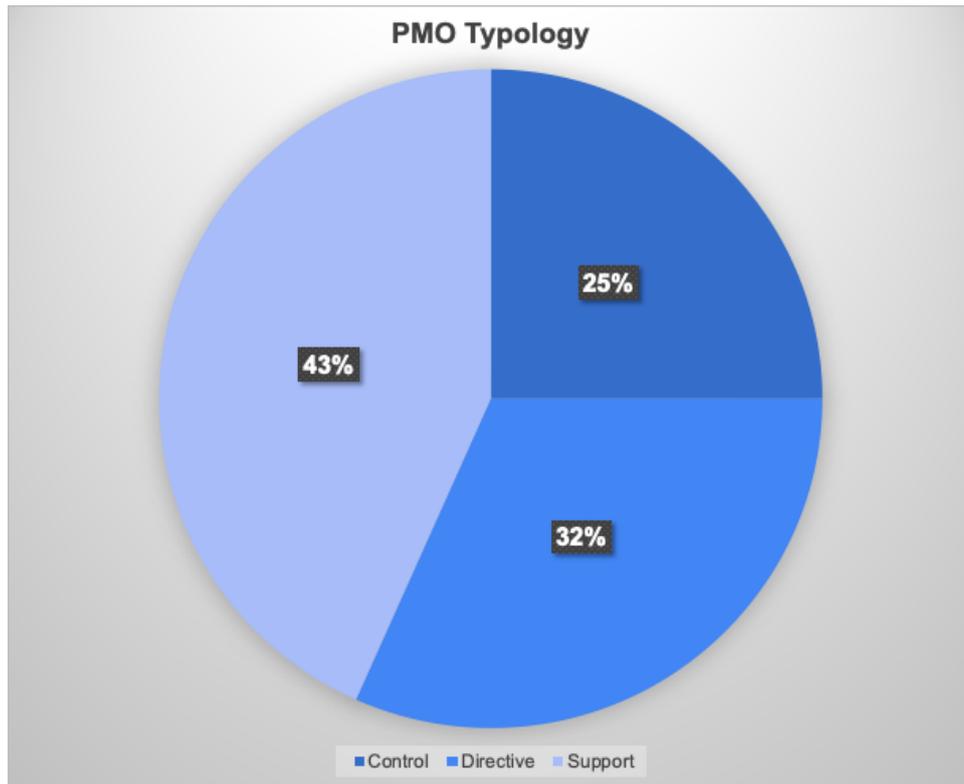
In almost all sectors, the prevalence is to have a PMO office, and this is little affected by the context in which the company operates. In fact, although with different percentages, the existence of a PMO office is present in practically all sectors in which companies operate.

There are, however, contexts where this practice is more widespread, such as Tourism, ICT, Education and Research, Finance and Insurance, Public Administration and Transport and Circulation.

Some sectors, however, are still oriented towards project management without PMO support, such as the Building and Construction, Electrical Manufacturing and Services sectors.

As mentioned earlier, the PMO can take three forms, which more or less influence the organization and its respective project management:

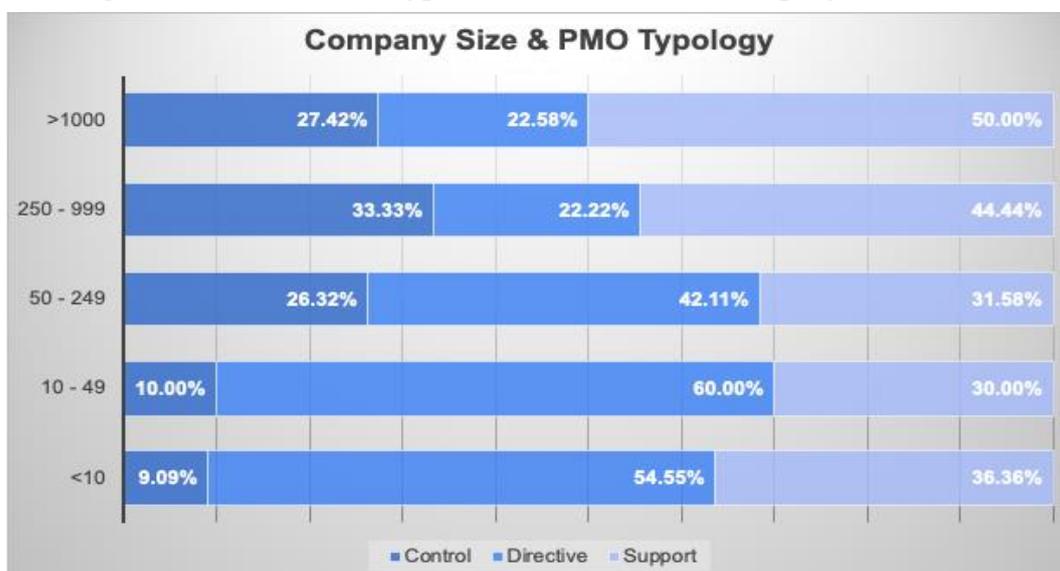
1. Supportive PMO, with a low degree of control. It has an advisory role to projects, providing best practices, templates and access to historical information and lessons learned from other projects.
2. Controlling PMO, with a moderate degree of control. Ensures support and compliance with project management best practices by adopting specific frameworks or methodologies.
3. Directive PMO, with a high degree of control. Assumes direction and control of the projects themselves, with authority to act as an integrated stakeholder and decision maker during a project.



Analyzing the data shows that the majority of organizations that have a PMO have a Support PMO (43%), followed by a Directive PMO (32%) and finally a Control PMO (25%).

The reason for these results could be due to the fact that, as indicated above, having a PMO is not yet standard practice among organizations. Since the support PMO is less onerous to introduce, it is also the first type introduced in organizations that want to have a PMO and then possibly evolve into the control and management types.

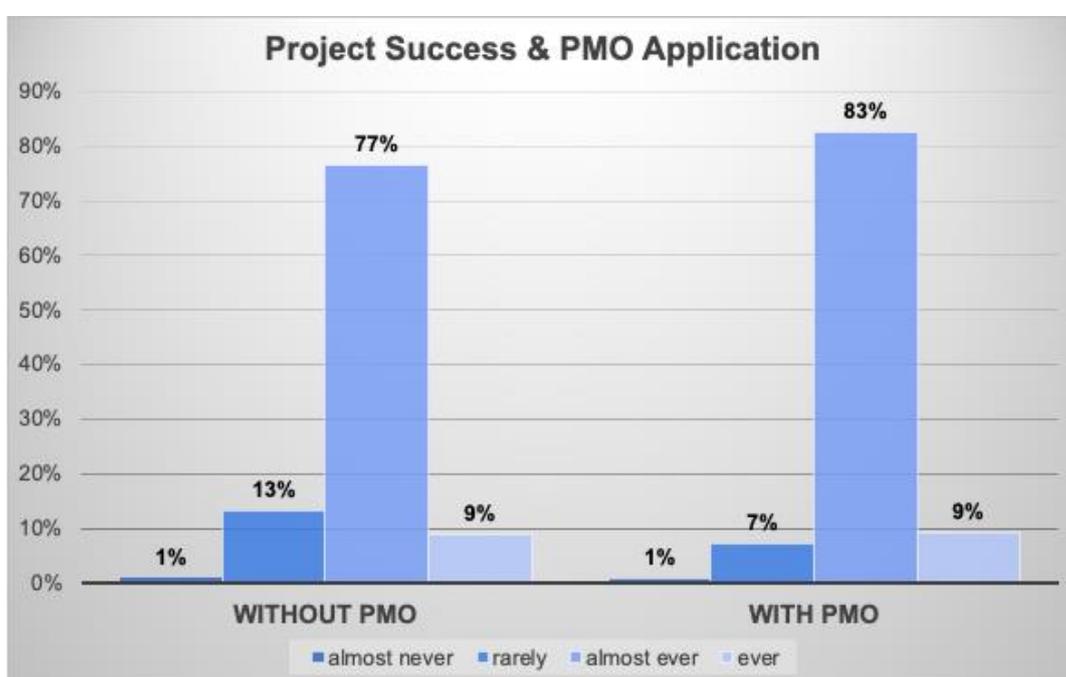
The following chart shows how the type of PMO is linked to company size.



The trend that the results show is that larger companies use a more supportive PMO. The smaller the company size decreases, the more they move towards a management-type PMO.

This result shows how the size of the company affects the type of PMO introduced, a plausible explanation is due to the fact that in smaller companies those who manage projects and those who lead individual projects, as PM, are the same entity and as a result there is a managerial PMO who acts as both manager/coordinator and PM.

Understanding whether the introduction of a PMO office leads to more successful projects being conducted is one of the most interesting outcomes to evaluate.



From the results obtained it seems that the success of projects is not strongly influenced by the presence or absence of a PMO, however, bringing benefits on the success of projects as companies that have a PMO office have approximately 6% more success for the projects carried out.

Organizations that have a PMO, the success of projects (values always and almost always) is 92% compared to the 86% obtained by companies that do not have a PMO office.

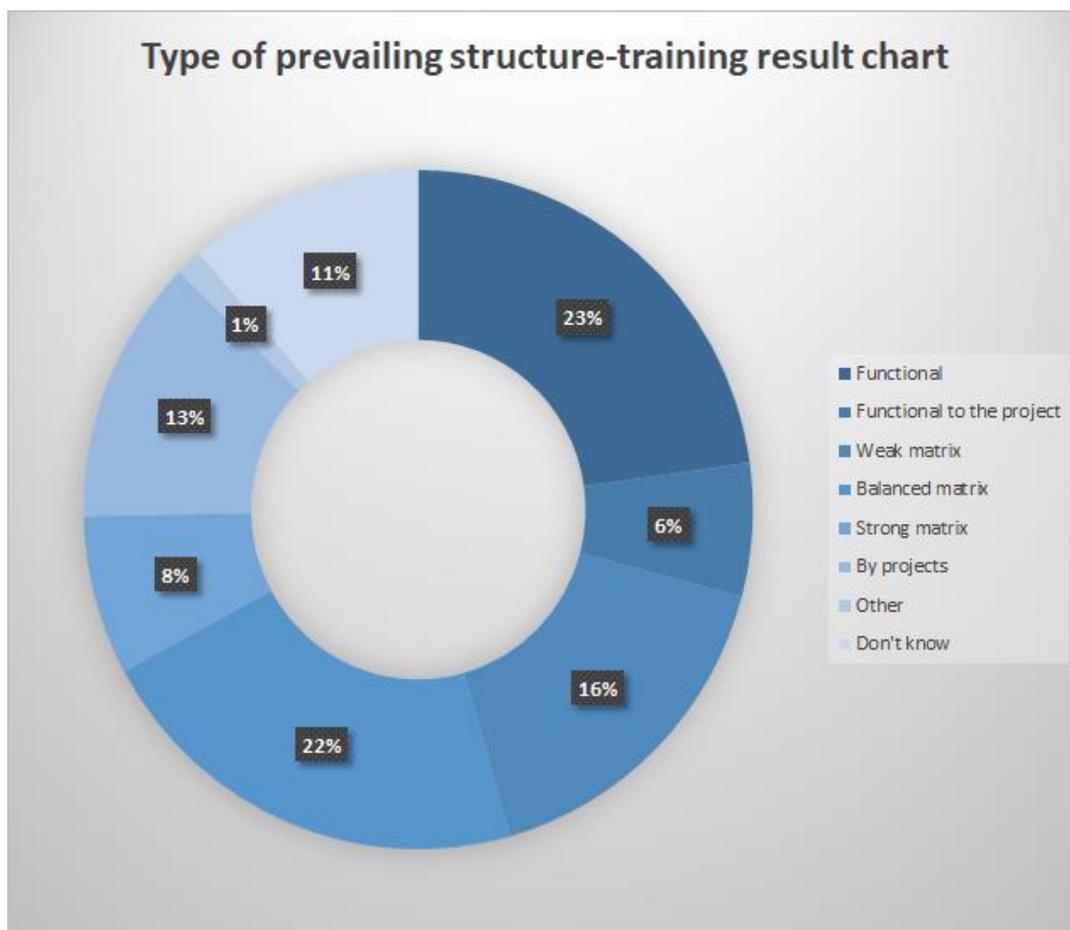
Similar results are also obtained for project failure, where values settle at 14% for organizations without a PMO, as opposed to 8% for companies with a PMO office.

3.7 Projects Satisfaction and Projects Success

If and how the OS evolves in organizations and in the various sectors (OS standard for all) and by which factors they are influenced (culture, training, success a.s.o.)

- Depending on the work environment and which OS is preferred (Discussed in the chapter)
- The need of training or courses (Discussed in the chapter)
- How all these factors are related to each other (Discussed in the chapter)

An analysis of the data on the success rate of the projects shows that 80% are considered to be satisfied despite the fact that most have encountered problems of different sorts, only a small amount have achieved the goal without difficulties.



Most of the problems encountered mainly timed coordination (24%) and sticking to the budget (18%), but the share related to times and financial resources (29%) is even greater, while the remaining is divided into the combination of factors (23%) and a small amount (6%) is dedicated to problems with the product.

The projects with the greatest satisfaction are led by a project manager (64%) with specific training. In any case the training of the project manager is carried out occasionally for 50% and regularly for 40%, a minority never followed a professional improvement course.



The best managed projects are those who are led by project managers with a high decision-making power.

On the other hand, the projects that did not achieve their purpose correctly (20%) are managed by unskilled people (59%) with medium to low decision-making authority and without the use of industry specific standard methodologies.

This causes the failure to achieve the goal and this led to higher costs in distributed and poorly managed resources, the underestimation of costs and uncontrolled expansion of the project (scope creep).

4 Conclusions

The vast majority of organizations that took part in the survey have a large size, while most of the others have medium size; the core business with the greatest influence is that which refers to an international scale of users, but it can be seen that that on a national scale also has a certain importance.

Medium-sized and large companies took part in the survey, and the results show that they have already introduced or are preparing to introduce the culture and methodology of Project Management. It can be seen that four out of ten of these companies have their core business at an international level and one out of three at a national level. On the whole, 25% of the companies have a functional structure among which we find the Public Administration and Health and Social Care, and a good 20% have a balanced matrix among which we find mainly the construction sector and the mechanical and metallurgical sector. As companies face the global market in a pandemic regime, their PM culture has to evolve and keep up with the times.

In order to expand their market and/or core business, this adaptation is essential for the survival of the company itself, given the high level of competition that increases complexity in this period of great uncertainty.

The results show that there is an increasing need to invest in PM methodology. In fact, the survey showed that half of the companies have adopted an Agile and/or PM methodology and that in companies that have been operating for more than ten years it has been converted into a customised solution. Further analysis showed that this trend is also followed for the use of specific tools for project management as well as for the management of PM methodology. In most companies, where specific tools for project management or generic tools are used, the introduction of project management has been introduced for more than 10 years and the high decision making is half and half for both PM and PL, the same result for the low decision making.

A high degree of efficiency was found in companies where business processes are updated frequently.

A further investment to improve business efficiency is the creation of the Project Management Office, which can bring a significant advantage in project management. Due to its complexity and the economic effort generated, the PMO is only adopted in medium and large-sized companies. Companies that have introduced the PMO have been able to make a marked improvement in project management. One point that should not be overlooked is that the project management culture must be passed on from the top-management to the entire company in order to solidify the basis for proper project management. In project management the decision-making power of the person in charge of the project is one of the key factors for the success of the project. A careful analysis of the results shows that people who are trained in project management are also the ones who have the most influence and authority in the running of projects, resulting in a significant benefit in achieving project objectives.

This organisational efficiency achieved by applying these methodologies will certainly be the key to success in tackling the current covid-19 global health and economic crisis that is literally changing the whole of business management.

From the educational institution's point of view, the analysis of the results shows us how important it is to have leaders who are trained in terms of project management if we want to carry out successful projects standards such as Agile and PMI still serve as a basis for most of the companies interviewed, but the tendency over the years is to customise the standard by adapting it to the needs of the individual company. In these terms the university must provide the necessary targeted training according to PM and business sector needs, so that companies can then understand which tools to implement for managing their projects in order to be facilitated in this changing transition.

As well, the introduction of Smart Working and Home Offices in the organisational realities gives the input for the universities to create specific courses at the request of companies or simply online events to promote the culture of project management.

Also, courses specified for top management can evolve the culture of project management, if top management increases the knowledge on project management this knowledge will then be disclosed within the company.

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Luca Buffoni, graduated in Civil Engineering and in Project Management, Master in Project, Program and Portfolio Management, member of the steering committee of the APM Ticino (Association Project Management Ticino), over 12 years of working experience in the Construction field. Since 2013 based in Switzerland as Project Manager for major projects into a general contractor company.

Fulvia Cipolato Caroli, graduated in Political Sciences - international laws area, master in economics and European laws & contracts for enterprises c/o Collegio Europeo di Parma - private consultant - expertise in the definition of European/international projects and contracts.

Madeo Previdali, accounting and IT studies, 20 years of experience in Information Technology, Business Analyst and 8 years in project management.

Qendresa Rexha, graduated in business economics, certified Project Management (IPMA C) member of the APM Ticino (Association Project Management Ticino), 7 years of experience in project Management and controlling, first as an assistant and now as a Portfolio Manager for infrastructure projects in the railway sector.

Ardian Rusiti, graduated in IT Engineering, Master in Project, Program and Portfolio Management (in progress). Over 7 years of experience in the IT field with different roles. Currently working for a Swiss Bank as an IT Product Manager.

Malcolm Tunzi, graduated SSS. in Information Technology, 13 years of experience in Information Technology applied in Festival and Event Management. Project Manager of a food and music Festival (2017-2018). Head of Information Technology of one of the major Film Festivals in the world.

Correspondent Bio



Antonio Bassi

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Antonio Bassi, graduate in Electronic Engineering from Politecnico di Milano, has been a Project Manager since 2000. He has been a lecturer in project management at Continuing Education and Engineering, Project manager certifier for TUV, and Head of Continuing Education at SUPSI (University of Applied Science and Arts of Southern Switzerland) Dti (Department of Innovative Technologies). He is author of several books on Project Management and of articles for the magazine 'Leadership & Management'. Currently president of the Project Management Association of Ticino (CH), he is a certified PMP (Project Management Professional) by PMI (Project Management Institute). He was previously a member of the steering committee for the Northern Italy chapter of PMI in Milano, the largest PMI chapter in Italy. He is now enabling the development of the Project Management culture in the Swiss Canton of Ticino (CH).

Antonio took part in the development of the ISO 21500 family of standards and has been Project Manager for the development of the Italian standard UNI 11648 for the qualification of Project Managers in the Italian Public Administration. He is also a former teacher of Project Management for SNA (National School of Administration) in Italy. He edited the Italian translation of the Hermes methodology developed by the Public Administration of the Swiss Confederation. He took part in the verification of the Italian translation of the PMI PMBOK for the III and IV editions and in the verification of the translations of PMP certification exam questions. He is a developer of Knowledge Management projects as research activity in universities and manager of webinars, conferences and forums for the development of knowledge management and project management.

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