

Chapter # 42

***INCREMENTA ATQUE DECREMENTA*¹... MANAGING THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTRES ALONG THEIR LIFECYCLE: Three Cases and a Common Administrative Issue²**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter raises a specific question: Is there any common reason behind cases of failure encountered in higher education research centres or laboratories? The purpose is to launch a discussion about reasons behind unexpected failures of some university research units, with the objective of *identifying possible administrative and management causes*, possibly a common reason (either internal or external). As methodology, the study is qualitative, using both secondary (literature review) and primary research (empirical investigations). The method (observation) used three case studies (i.e. university research centres that failed). They were directly observed and/or personally experienced instances in the Romanian university environment – over a relatively long period of time (1980s–2000s). The empirical data were analysed through the lens of the organizational lifecycle. Regardless of their diverse age and size, mission and profile, and phase of growth in their lifecycle, administrative decisions were found as common type of cause of ending the activity in each case explored. The concluding remarks are focused on a set of recommendations centred on the main findings – to be recommended to the stakeholders: higher education policy makers, administrators and research managers.

Keywords: university research centre, research and didactic laboratory, organizational lifecycle, growth-induced crisis, university administration and management, management principles.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is not about the rise and fall of empires or the decline of great powers (Rapley & Heather, 2023) as the metaphorical title might suggest, but about managing contemporary, less prominent organizations—like university research centres—along their lifecycles. Yet there is one similarity: organizations, like more complex systems such as empires and great powers, have their own lifecycle (Greiner, 1989; Lester, Parnell, & Carraher, 2003; Phelps, Adams, & Bessant, 2007; Bento & Alves, 2014): growth and glorious periods end up less gloriously, if not in ashes. There also are lessons to be learnt in both cases, and—as The Economist's (2023) book review shows—organizations don't always collapse but reinvent themselves, survive and thrive, despite many "Thucydides traps" (McCormack, 2023) embodied by competing organizations. Analysing growth-type crises (Witt & Worch, 2023), Slywotzky and Wise (2002) have proposed financial solutions.

The chapter opens a discussion on the causes that may cause the collapse of the university research centres—despite their promising start-up—notably, from causes other than competition (“Thucydides traps”). In other words, the scope of work (i.e. failures of university research centres) is less investigated (it is rather scarce from that standpoint of literature) for at least three reasons: (i) small organizations are less studied than larger companies; (ii) the reason of failing is other than competition; (iii) the scope of work is even narrower (the higher education environment).

In addition, the smaller organizational units—research centres or research laboratories—as advanced scientific research units (limited to prominent Romanian higher education institutions) are less investigated as distinct organization structures (Scarlat, 2003a), rather than university entirely.

2. BACKGROUND

In the framework of higher education environment, the standpoint of our discourse is managerial. This is simply because the decisions (made by the research centre’s manager, within authority limits awarded by the University’s leadership) are at managers’ own hands and have immediate and visible effects.

Therefore, the main research question is this: Is there any common reason (other than fierce external competition) behind the failures (truly, seldom) encountered in higher education research centres or laboratories? If so, is it a matter of lacking professionalism or management skills; human nature or local culture; or other pressure? This seems to be a rhetorical question – as the cause could be any or a mix of them, in addition to scores of others, depending on case-by-case circumstances.

In other words, the goal of this investigation is to identify the root-cause around administration and management, and management conflicts eventually – both inside and outside university research units – yet related to the university management and administration. In addition, according to the findings, a set of recommendations for the main stakeholders (from research founders and funders to research managers) are ultimate objectives.

Considering the time dimension, from the establishment of the scientific research units to their collapse, it is essential to use the lens of Ford’s organizational life cycle concept (Ford, 2022, p. 1): “organizational life cycles [synonym: organizational life span] refers to the sequence of events from organization initiation/birth to [its] death”. This should not be confused with the better-known term “product lifecycle” (common to marketing), neither with the economic concept of “life cycle as the lifetime pattern of income and consumption” (Black, 1997, p. 270) nor with other the macro-economic concepts as “business cycle” (Pallister & Isaacs, 1996, p. 75; Black, 1997, p. 44) or “trade cycle” (Pallister & Isaacs, 1996, p. 504; Black, 1997, p. 471) – although the last two are equivalent. In micro-economic terms, the organizational lifecycle definition is equally applicable to all types of organizations, regardless the size, age and activity sector (higher education sector included). Nevertheless, even if the business life cycle is more specific (applicable to profit-oriented organizations) than organization life cycle (applicable to all not-for-profit organizations), the scientific research units from higher education institutions are somewhere in-between – for several reasons (related to their mission, funding, destination of the research outcomes, sustainability, etc.)

Churchill and Lewis (1983) synthesized contributions by Rostow (1960), McGuire (1963), Christensen and Scott (1964), Steinmetz (1969) and Greiner (1972) to their model of five stages of small business growth. Then a revised version of their model was produced (Lewis & Churchill, 1987).

Despite large acceptance, the Greiner model was criticized for being too theoretical; thus, Flamholtz and Randle (2007) arguably proposed an easy-to-apply model of growth with seven stages, based on the company revenue. Other critics (Kaufman, 1991) simply deny the active role of management and consider the longer-term success as a matter of randomness. Therefore, the theories and models of organization life cycle should be well understood and carefully applied.

Using the Greiner (1997) model, Scarlat and Şişu (2021) studied the growth phases of the companies belonging to an international group as well as the group's entrepreneurial behaviour along its lifecycle (Şişu & Scarlat, 2020). Then, in this study, for the management reasons presented, the Greiner's (1989) model is used as analysis framework as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1.
The management-oriented framework for growth study, adapted after Greiner (1997).

Management practices	The five phases of growth				
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
	Growth by creativity	Growth by direction	Growth by delegating	Growth by coordination	Expansion & collaboration
Management focus	'Make & sell'	Operations efficiency	Market expansion	Organization consolidation	Problem solving & innovation
Organizational structure	Informal	Centralized & functional	Decentralized & functional	Line staff & product groups	Matrix of teams
Style of top management	Individualistic & entrepreneurial	Directive	Delegation	'Watchdog'	Participative
Control system	Market results	Standards & cost centres	Reports & profit centres	Investment centres & plans	Mutual goal setting
Management reward system	Ownership	Salary & merit increases	Individual bonus	Profit sharing & stock options	Team bonus

Table 1 depicts the management practices associated to the five phases of growth, according to Greiner (1997). Considering that management practices define the phases of growth, the correspondence shown in the table can be used as a tool for identifying the phases of growth when the management practices are known. In specific terms, this correspondence can also be used as an analysis framework to characterize the phase of growth of a company when its set of management practices can be assessed.

The remaining of this chapter is structured as follows: methodological approach; the core primary research based on cases of failing university research centres; discussion of findings and recommendations; research limitations and further research avenues; and conclusion.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The investigation approach is by domain of research, from macro- to micro-level (organizational). The work is not continuous in time, yet cases happened during a relatively long period of time (1980s–2000s), before and after communism collapse in Eastern Europe.

This study relies on secondary and primary research mainly (direct observation and/or personal experience related to insulated cases) – i.e. particular situations that happened in the Romanian university environment (namely medical, engineering and entrepreneurship studies).

Secondary literature survey complements this primary research (observation), illustrating the matter under investigation.

Since the focus is on management issues, the theoretical framework used was the organization life cycle model (Greiner, 1997).

The case method serves to address the research objectives. There are three cases of university research centres with different profiles and importance (from local to national), funded from different sources, all sharing a common feature: failures after successful start (failure in terms of missing the strategic objectives, set according to their initial missions).

The failure cases were selected subjectively (by author) based on his experience and own research. The three university research centres were active in different research areas, in different circumstances at different times, and just happened to be at different levels of interest (macro- to micro- organizational level). Their presentation follows the natural order in which this chapter was developed (which just happened to be the reverse chronological order).

The subsequent section describes these cases in concrete facts, then the phases of growth are assessed by Greiner scheme (Table 1). Conclusions from each case are assessed and compared, converging to a particular root-cause that finally emerged. Depending on these findings, a set of recommendations is developed, which was the ultimate objective of this endeavour.

4. THREE CASES OF FAILING UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTRES

A recent piece of news with some media echo (Case 1) was the spark for this study. Two other summarized cases are symmetrically presented, on both sides of the historical cornerstone, which was the Romanian “1989 Revolution” (Case 2 right after it, and Case 3 right before). There were very different circumstances, yet similar promising starts, followed by unexpected collapse. This is an attempt to explain the collapse.

The selection of cases was based on a single criterion: the unexpected failure (i.e. the research centres unexpectedly failed, apparently with no explanation). Each of these cases deserves an extended, in-depth study. Ciurea (2022) depicts the Case 1 in more details, colours and feelings.

4.1. Case 1: A Centre for Excellence in Neurology and Neurosurgery

Established in 1975 as a national neurosurgery hospital, and extended in 1993 as an emergency hospital, this hub of medical services currently hosts the largest neurosurgery clinic in Romania. It also functions as an important advanced research, education and training centre in medicine.

In 1999–2000 the Romanian government launched a project to fund a Centre for Excellence in Neurology and Neurosurgery (CENN) in this hospital. Its aim was to provide world class medical services and conduct advanced scientific research in neurology and neurosurgery (Valcea, 2003). According to Ciurea (2022, pp. 245–248), world class medical equipment was acquired, including a Gamma Knife Surgery (GFS) system.

The CENN project was successfully completed in 2004, and officially opened by the Minister of Health in March 2005. The cost of this green field investment was €31 million for a 5,000 sqm building that included world-class medical utility infrastructure and equipment. The first patients visited the CENN, and it seemed to have a promising take off and glorious future. Unfortunately, in 2006, a government reshuffle (Minister of Health included) and an inspection by the new Health minister resulted in the hospital's downgrading. The hospital was thus turned into a regular neurosurgery hospital (emergency unit included) – as reported by Ciurea (2016; 2022). Several different opinions regarding the CENN failure were collected–seen from different angles (media, ministry of health, CENN director).

- Failure as a sustainability issue: “[CENN’s] disappearance is the result of lack of government funding” and its complex mechanism of financing via Ministry of Health and National Agency for Health Insurances (9AM News, 2006).
- An administrative decision made by a new Minister of Health (not a physician / medical doctor accidentally), who was not involved in the decision to establish and build CENN (made by the preceding cabinets), destroyed CENN (and emerging advanced neurology and neurosurgery research as non-necessary) by turning it into a regular neurosurgery hospital (Ciurea, 2022).
- Former CENN director: By introducing an emergency unit (ER), the initial function of CENN facility gradually decayed. It was “a total disappointment” because “an exceptional education and research hub in neurosurgery simply vanished. It is such a pity that initial enthusiasm at CENN inauguration [attended by former Minister of Health] has diluted in time like many other things in Romania, which had a promising start, just to disappear later. Why?” (italicized by author). (Ciurea, 2022, p. 248).

Fact is that CENN failed so quickly that it not only struggled for existence in the stage one of their lifecycle (Lester et al., 2003) but it also barely reached the early phases of small business growth (Churchill & Lewis, 1983). This rapid and unexpected extinction of CENN–recently narrated by the former CENN director–had a strong reverberation in the author’s business memory, which instantly recalled older somehow analogue cases (Case 2 and Case 3), which were the seeds of the study displayed in this very chapter.

In the CENN case it is rather difficult to discern the right and wrong between the Ministry of Health’s criteria to decide CENN founding and funding (1999–2005) and the arguments of the same Ministry of Health (nevertheless, another minister) to decide CENN downgrading (2006) and collapse eventually.

It is beyond the purpose of this study to judge that, based on limited information. However, it is surprising that such costly contradictory decisions happened. On the other hand, it was an obvious misalignment between a research project within hospital and the hospital strategy and overall strategy of the Ministry of Health. Anyway, the root-cause of the CENN collapse was external to the research centre (a strategic decision made outside CENN).

4.2. Case 2: A Center for Business Excellence

This story is older. The Romanian 1989 revolution came up with huge local enthusiasm and international waves of sympathy. The sympathy was soon followed by assistance programmes, mostly for developing the democracy, free-market economy, civil society and civic organizations. Some donors focused on reforming the education system. Co-funding business assistance centres in major universities from former communist countries in Eastern Europe (Romania included) were such projects (Scarlat, 2001, pp. 193–197).

Under these circumstances, in 1991, it was agreed (Ibidem, p. 193) that a Center for Business Excellence (CBE) to be established in a major technical University. Its aim was to stimulate and develop business education as well as support services such as consulting, training and research. Among other results, a team of local professionals and teaching staff were the beneficiaries of business management training by US university counterparts and certified as business counsellors.

A flexible organizational structure was developed by a core team of five professional and master consultants supported by an IT expert and an administrative clerk (occasionally extended to 15 people, including intern students).

In the following years, CBE has developed organically, provided business services to over 2,000 entrepreneurs across Romania and the Republic of Moldova (1998), and eventually became the hub of a national CBE network (Big, 2004).

The results of the CBE activities influenced the entrepreneurship education in Romania. The first Entrepreneurship subjects were included in the University curricula (since 2000), followed by the first Romanian books on entrepreneurship and business management (Scarlat, 2001; 2003b).

The CBE enjoyed both national and international recognition. To mention a few, member of the US Association of Small Business Development Centers, 1993; Project of the Year Award, 1997 by National Association of Management and Technical Assistance Centers from USA (Figure 1).

A decade later, the Romanian Ministry for SMEs awarded the Project of the Year to CBE for organizing Business Plan Contest for students (2008) and CBE was nominated for the European Enterprise Award, Prague, 2009 (Figure 1).

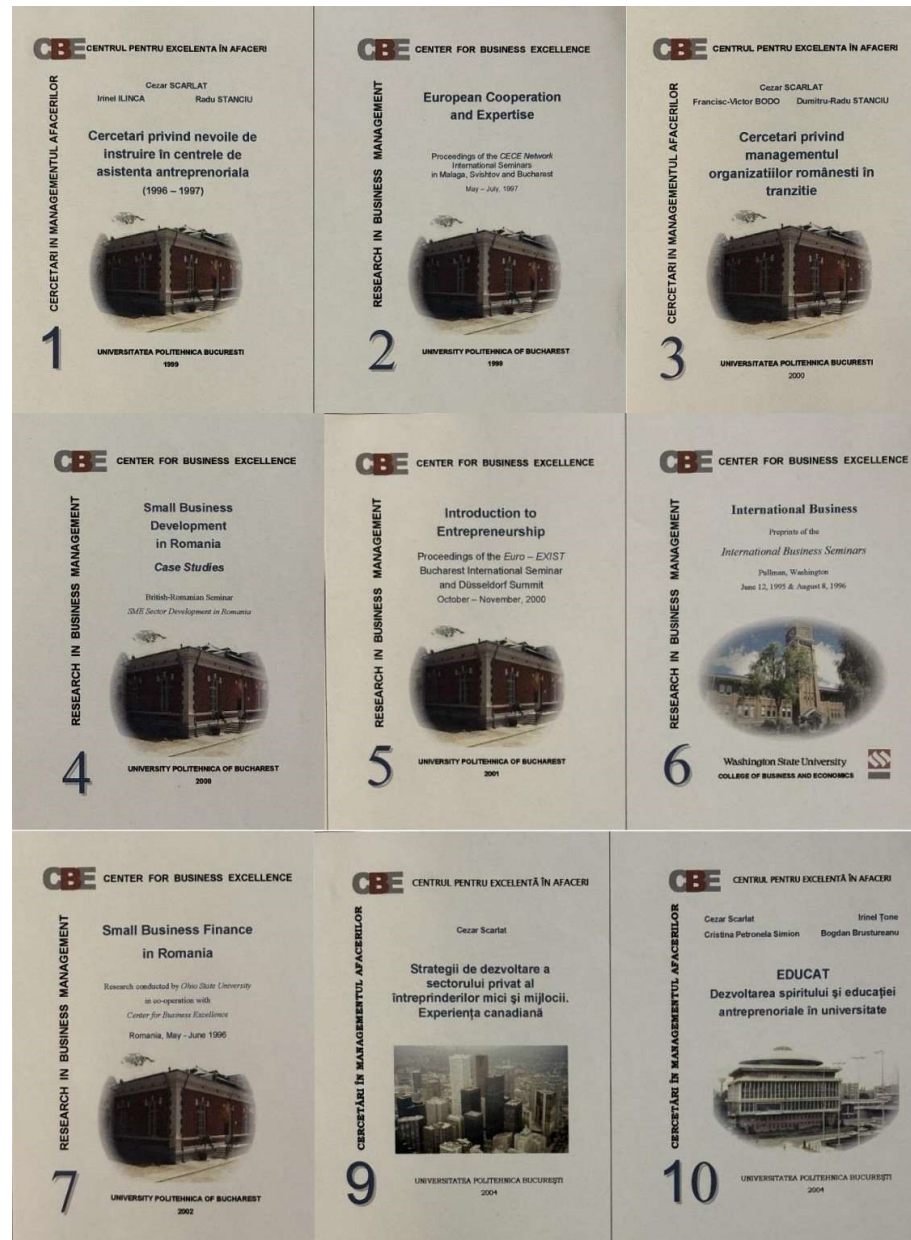
CBE staff have produced and edited ten issues of a book series: Research in Business Management, referring to research activities and projects conducted in CBE in about a decade (1996–2005) – as it is displayed in Figure 2. Two of the booklets are enlisted as Additional Readings (Scarlat, Bodo, & Stanciu, 2001; Scarlat, Țone, Simion, & Brustureanu, 2005).

Figure 1.
International recognition for CBE, a decade apart: US Project of the Year Award (1997)
and nomination for European Enterprise Awards (2008–2009).



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*Figure 2.
Research dissemination and international visibility: CBE research book series.*



By the time the Romanian Ministry for SMEs awarded the Project of the Year to CBE for organizing Business Plan Contest for students (2008) and CBE was nominated for the European Enterprise Award (Prague, 2009), the University leadership decided to dramatically (literally) change the CBE course. Without notice during the winter holidays they re-assigned

the CBE facility to a different purpose and disposed the existing materials for recycling (Scarlat, 2024).

Obviously, the CBE dissolution happened during its way towards maturity stage of the organization lifecycle (Lester et al., 2003). Hypothetically, in case of reasonable communication between CBE and University leadership, a possible transition to the fourth stage (renewal) would have been possible. At that moment, the facts demonstrate a neat misalignment of the CBE objectives with university strategy.

Further developments (the current interest of university demonstrates a clear orientation towards projects for developing entrepreneurship skills) depicts a different diagnosis: the CBE was probably born too early. In other words, the “strategy gap” is about a decade.

Despite the CBE dissolution, the CBE-trained and experienced professionals valued their experiences, continued their research projects, and extended their international cooperation – as seen in Additional Reading (Antončič, Prodan, Hisrich, & Scarlat, 2007; Scroggins et al., 2016).

Notably, on top of these, three doctoral research projects were conducted by CBE professionals, and associated PhD theses were successfully completed and defended (Scarlat, Bodo, & Stanciu, 2001).

4.3. Case 3: A Laboratory for Ergonomics

This story is even older: it started during the last decade of the communist regime and centrally planned economy in Romania—as in other east-European countries (1980s)—and ended by the end of decade, by the time of turbulent years of communism collapse (Sebestyen, 2010).

The Laboratory for Ergonomic Studies (LES) started its activity as a research centre and education laboratory associated to the Management Department within a large Romanian technical university (Scarlat, 1983a). A proper location was assigned, and the necessary support materials were prepared (Scarlat, 1983a; 1983b). LES was properly equipped (from equipment to test work micro-climate to equipment to test working skills) and staffed (laboratory coordinator, technical and secretarial support).

The number of students and faculties served by LES Increased for a few years in a row, resulting in inclusion of ergonomics in the engineering syllabi and curricula.

Then relatively quiet University elections were followed by radical changes because of the “revolution” (December 1989) that has affected the university life for years. Before disappearing completely, the LES equipment was removed and placed in a storage room (with the blessing of the new leadership of university, faculty and chair). End of the story.

By the time of its brusque collapse, LES was reporting some success, reaching about phase 2 of growth (Greiner, 1989), and organically progressing towards reaching its maturity stage according to Lester et al. (2003, p.343).

It is risky to discuss hypothetical “future LES” in the “what if” scenario. The political regime change was a historical fact, aligned with the political movements in the Eastern Europe by the end of last century. However, was the ergonomics removal an essential part of the regime change? Surely, not; it only was one of the numerous collateral and unnecessary victims. Worldwide, Ergonomics did not disappear; it only continuously adapts to the newer jobs (which is a strong reason to study this area). Then, why all these happened?

Same rhetoric question as in Case 2 emerges: Was LES born too early, just before the post-communist transition to a free-market economy?

The root-cause seems to be not only misalignment of the LES objectives with the university strategy, but also the lack of strategic vision (if not the lack of any strategy) across management levels in the University. Apparently there also were two aggravating factors at

both sides of the hierarchy, from macro- (tempestuous revolution) to micro-level (human nature oriented towards own interest); the first as an “opportunity” for the second, unfortunately.

5. DISCUSSION: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cases investigated display a large variety of circumstances (level of importance, research area, period of activity, activity peculiarities, circumstances of founding and dissolution, people involved – to name just a few).

In addition, from management standpoint, the research units under scrutiny collapsed in different stages of their life cycles.

As the selection of cases was based on a single criterion (the centres that suddenly failed, apparently with no explanation), it was challenging to conduct the investigation (yet focused on management issues) up to the point of revealing the root-cause of that abrupt change of positive course of that research centre (which was the main research objective).

A common administrative issue was found in all cases explored: an external administrative decision rather than an internal management reason for falling. To identify the reason behind those administrative decisions is a matter of further analysis and investigation—as “external” (relative to the research unit) is different in each case.

The failures exemplified are neither results of growth crisis (Witt & Worch, 2023) nor starvation cycles – as described by Lecy and Searing (2012). Not even “Thucydides traps” (McCormack, 2023). All organizations analysed enjoyed promising take-offs, and displayed organic growth, which was abruptly curbed by administrative decisions taken by supervising authorities, external to the research units and not related to their performance. The centres faced these decisions in different growth phases (Table 2).

Table 2.
Essential features of the organization lifecycle by cases investigated.

Case	Case 1: CENN	Case 2: CBE	Case 3: LES
Year established	2005	1991	1983
Owned by	Leading neurosurgery university hospital	Leading technical university	Leading technical university
Unit integrated in the structure of	University hospital under Ministry of Health	University, associated to a department	University Department
Mission	World-class neurosurgery & neurology research	Services (research, consulting, etc.) to business community	Ergonomics studies & internal training – faculties & staff
Year of extinction	2006	2009	1989
Phase of growth*	Phase 1	Phase 4 to 5	Phase 2
Reason for activity ending	CENN facility changes its mission	Facility re-assigned to different purpose & equipment displaced	Facility re-assigned to teaching activities only & equipment decommissioned
Root-cause	Decision of the Health Ministry	Decision of the university	Decision of the Department

* According to Greiner’s model (Greiner, 1997)

The examination of the quantitative assessments in Table 2 – i.e. age of research unit at the time of collapse and the corresponding growth phase (phase 1 at 1 year; phase 2 at 6 years; phase 4-to-5 at 18 years) – suggest a positive correlation which can be considered a reasonable argument for the organic growth of the research centres up to the moment of growth cut caused by upper administrative decisions. This observation would indicate that external administrative decisions were made against organic growth of the research units, regardless the timing they were active (varied from case to case).

Since the decision in case 1 (CENN) was made on political grounds (because of government reshuffling), by a novel political person with not much medical knowledge (not a physician as shown), the mechanism of that decision (even not reasonable) might be understood. In cases 2 and 3, the decision was made within university (top university level and department level respectively), but external to the research unit. Therefore, the lack of professional knowledge is out of discussion, and deeper reasons could be speculated only.

While in case 3, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (Romania included) was likely the force that provoked a ‘domino-effect’ across all society (and LES was a ‘collateral victim’), in the other case CBE was ‘at stake’ in the internal fight for resources: the renovated CBE facility was likely the match for a generous EU grant.

Beyond the objective assessment of the size of the strategic gap revealed in case 2 (from the organizational management standpoint), an equally objective perspective but from the larger socio-political standpoint (education included) is possible. The poisonous seeds of communism were quite uniformly spread across Eastern Europe. But they germinated differently in people and peoples. The fall of The Wall did not instantly change the two generation-long communist education. Probably it is taking two more to clean the ‘legacy of communism’. Would it possibly be that kind of *Biblical forty years*?

These two standpoints are not exclusive but complementary.

The findings allow the formulation of a set of recommendations as follows.

- The founding of such research centres (RC) in a higher education organization (HEO) should be based on longer-term vision and not on short-term interest (apparently bringing advantages).
- The RC activity and objectives must be in line with the HEO strategy.
- Environment monitoring and timely information exchange between RC and HEO would help to keep the above alignment.
- The RC should organically be integrated in the structure of the HEO; yet the HEO constitution should provide reasonable limits for flexible RC management.
- Besides functional and hierarchical management relationships, the HEO constitution must include clear (not bureaucratic) provisions related to financial relationships between HEO and RC, mainly in the perspective of RC financial self-sustainability.
- Conflicts between RC research projects and HEO (project versus organization-type) should be detected in their early stages; they can be avoided by keeping regular meetings and clear communication protocols.
- While working in a multicultural environment, developing industry-specific vocabularies would be beneficial (Scarlat & Sârbu Bărar, 2023).

There are two more notable mentions. The failure cases explored are just insulated instances, among plenty of successful stories. They were exceptions to the rule. It also should be mentioned that failures reported in the local higher education environment are not a unique phenomenon, since failures, even in the education organizations, were reported abroad as well (Ford & Andersson, 2016).

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH AVENUES

This chapter is like an experimental film made of three short flashes taped in three different space and time circumstances (i.e. the three cases), aiming to illustrate a certain pattern, followed by some comments from ‘off’. In this respect, the subject looks like specific and restrictive (limitative).

Nonetheless, the study lens and light were focused on the main objective: identification of the common cause (an external administrative decision) and this objective was reached.

However, all other individual issues (level of the administrative decision; relationship and communication between this managerial level and management of the research unit; lifecycle and growth phase; strategy and management issues of each research unit, etc.), which were fairly presented, can be further research paths.

Each case is a whole and different story able to document a book itself (e.g., in case 1: Ciurea, 2022). Deals of data related to case 2 (Figure 1 and Figure 2) and case 3 can go in any of the directions mentioned above. As an example, the lifecycle of the research unit can be described in more details and so the phases of growth and management practices can. However, from the standpoint of the main objective of this study (limited to this chapter) and for the sake of this piece of work, it should be only mentioned that the phase of growth did not influence much the administrative decision (upper level made, external to the centre management) that abruptly ceased the existence of the respective research unit (Table 2)."

Obviously, the number of cases surveyed is a serious limitation; yet the findings open research paths for further longitudinal and mainly transversal studies – extending the investigation on more failure cases, by activity periods and regions as well as research areas. Further studies on similar cases in other countries might lead to comparative studies as well. On the other hand, in-depth and extended studies in each case with more detailed objectives might reveal novel findings (related mostly to miscommunication, misalignment of organization objectives, conflicts of management, conflicts of strategy, and even conflicting projects).

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the results of a work which has reached its objectives. External administrative decisions (and not managerial internal errors) unexpectedly caused the end of activity in all cases investigated. However, depending on circumstantial peculiarities, several lessons should be learnt.

The set of recommendations can help improve the management of research units integrated in higher education organizational structures.

Despite its novelty and contribution to filling the knowledge gap related to the failures of research centres within Romanian higher education organizations, this is just opening Pandora's Box – as further questions may emerge. As such, beyond all facts, comments and recommendations rendered in this chapter—and regardless the number of failures of research units that displayed various organizational structures in relation with respective universities—isn't organizational structure itself an issue worthy for further debate? Isn't it possible that organizational structures chosen in each case to be unsuitable? Aren't there too many hierarchical levels to decide what a research unit should do?

The problem *might not be in the administrative decision but in the management structure*; how the structure of the research unit should harmoniously integrate into university organizational chart. The research structures that successfully operate in more advanced economies like US, UK or EU might be positive examples to follow. However, a US implant in a Romanian body (as CBE started) is not enough to thrive.

Finally, three comments are noteworthy:

- Usually the success stories are reported, and investigations are looking for successful people and organisations. This study follows the opposite approach.
- The failure cases reported are just instances, among plenty of successful stories.
- Despite RC failures, the RC people (mainly young professionals) ended up stronger; they are more experienced as beneficiaries of lessons learnt, hopefully.

This piece of work did not intend to become a standard study (as some readers might expect). It just happened to develop into a book chapter. Not by chance but in a deterministic manner that had a spark as a starting point: while reading Neurosurgery chapter in professor's Ciurea book (Ciurea, 2022) about the collapse of CENN. By then there were no ideas about any study, essay or paper. Nothing about any title yet. Just the feeling of 'how can this happen?' It did not last much to realize that a similar feeling has emerged, recalling my own experience in different time, space and professional circumstances, when a promising university research centre has collapsed. It collapsed unexpectedly, despite enthusiastic start-up, positive take off, good results, and development perspectives. Hence: *Incrementa*. Then *decrementa*. Keeping thinking around same question, it did not take much to add a third case to have a triad as a construction base. This chapter is a slice of the efforts to put my thoughts together in a systematic manner.

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¹ *Incrementa atque decrementa* [Latin] means the growth and decline, and it is inspired by: *Historia Incrementorum atque Decrementorum Aulæ Othomanicæ* [*The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*] written (1716) by Demetrius Cantemir (1673–1723), Romanian Prince; encyclopaedist, man of letters and statesman who has also served as Voivode of Moldavia Principality twice (1693; 1710–1711).

² This chapter is an updated and extended version of a previous paper (Scarlat, 2024).