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MANAGEMENT IN STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS – CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF 3 YEARS (2022-2025)

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Purpose: The study explores the challenges of management development in student organizations over a three-year period. Also, it detects similar patterns in the approaches to managing these issues.
Design/methodology/approach: Longitudinal qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews conducted in 2022 and 2025.
Findings: In their work, students identify teamwork and motivational-related challenges rather than administrative ones (like funding). Actions that they take to handle them do not resolve issues but often change a problem or the emphasis on it to a different one.
Research limitations/implications: Research scope being confined to one university and a specific period. Future research could compare different institutions or extend the timeline to assess long-term trends.
Practical implications: The results are useful for supervisors, leaders, trainers, and other staff members connected with scientific organizations, as they provide practical guidance in today's reality of these organizations.
Social implications: Students can better prepare for societal challenges by consciously developing leadership and teamwork skills – by looking at common issues and patterns in other, similar student organizations.
Originality/value: The study provides a rare longitudinal insight into student organization challenges and management evolution across multiple years.
Keywords: student organizations, student projects, management, resilience.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The development of students' activity at universities is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon, reflecting both social changes and the evolution of universities themselves. Student organizations – including research clubs and cultural/social ones – play a significant role in shaping the competencies of future professionals as well as integrating the academic community and building the university's identity.

A literature review on student organizations was conducted using the PRISMA standard, based on keywords related to student organizations, student projects, and project management (since 2000). The Web of Science and Scopus databases were used. The aim was to answer the question: "How are student organizations described in literature?" What problems do they face? How have they changed over time?

1.1. Student organizations - overview

Student organizations are described as self-governing communities that allow students to develop many skills through non-academic activities. These include academic initiatives as well as social, sports, and artistic organizations. They conduct a wide range of activities, including primarily scientific and research projects, but also popularization, integration, and social initiatives. Participation in student organization activities significantly impacts student performance by developing social, professional, leadership, and time management competencies. However, excessive involvement or participation in too many of them can lead to time conflict and stress, which can negatively impact the outcomes of the course of study itself (Fu et al., 2024). Available articles also discuss strategies for supporting youth communities in educational environments, emphasizing the need for favorable conditions for activity, cooperation, and development (Wang, Deng, 2015; Munoz, 2016; Nolen et al., 2021; Gruzina et al., 2022).

1.2. Challenges

However, despite numerous successes and a rich tradition, the activities of these organizations face a number of challenges. These difficulties concern, for instance, physical aspects, such as limited funding, complex administrative procedures at universities, and a lack of space for activities (classrooms, laboratories) (Urania.edu.pl, 2024; Forum Kół Naukowych, 2022). On the other hand, there are attitudinal and organizational challenges. Research points challenges related to different organizational management models, internal cohesion, and member motivation. These challenges include, mismatches between members, unstable cohesion, limited practical benefits, lack of leadership or coordination, and high turnover of organizational members (Bush et al., 2017; Godwin, Ferrarese, 2014; Zhang, 2017; Yao, 2018; Ren, 2018; Dvorkin et al., 2015). Considering today's Generation Z is also important in this

context. They are characterized by greater individualism, a preference for short-term activities, and difficulties in long-term commitment to team projects (Katalog Aktywności Studenckiej, 2023).

The article "Student Organizations: State of the Art and Perspectives for Future Research" by Iwona Michałowska, Ewa Więcek-Janka, and Ada Domańska (Michałowska et al., 2023) presents a bibliometric analysis of research on student organizations from 1900 to 2022. The study identifies key trends, such as the standardization of student organization management processes modeled on university management and the challenges associated with overseeing diverse groups. The authors point out that existing research on this topic in scientific literature is limited, but its number is increasing year by year. They also emphasize the need for in-depth research on management models, competency development, and governance of these organizations in the academic environment.

1.3. Challenges

Analysis of the evolution of student organizations' problems indicates that despite the professionalization of organizational activities and increasing cooperation with external institutions (Hu et al., 2010), the basic challenges remain similar – financing, bureaucracy, access to infrastructure, and student motivation – and these challenges remain relevant and require constant monitoring and flexible support from universities.

1.4. Research Gap

Despite some studies and reports, there is a lack of in-depth comparative research on changes in student organizations' problems and the projects they implement over the medium term (several years). Most available publications focus on the current state or individual cases, omitting the broader historical and social context. The literature review raises the following question: "How do problems in student organizations change over the course of several years? What aspects do they primarily concern? Can the same problems occur within a few years?"

2. Methods

This chapter outlines the key points regarding the study's objectives, the methodological approach, the gathered data, and the tools used. These components are discussed both from a broad perspective and in detail.

2.1. Objectives and data collection

The aim of the research conducted was to check the status of student teams/projects, teamwork, delivery, problems and solutions. The study was divided into 2 stages, the first took place in 2022 and the second in 2025. This allowed to look closer at this environment and to observe whether there have been any changes in this area – research was done at the Wrocław University of Science and Technology (Poland). The main research questions were formulated as follows:

Q1: What is the current status of student project implementation and teamwork inside organizations? (2022; 2025)

Q2: What problems do student teams encounter and how do they try to solve them? (2022; 2025)

Q3: Is there a difference in the approach to teamwork in student projects between 2022 and 2025? (2022; 2025)

A significant challenge at this stage was the vast amount of information involved in project work - comprising many variables and interdependencies. One major uncertainty was determining which aspects to prioritize in research. Certain areas, such as individual members' private work habits or personal productivity tools, were intentionally excluded. They are important, but focusing on such details could dilute the study's impact by shifting attention away from core project activities. Instead, the data-driven strategy emphasized a broader, team-based perspective.

The selection of key data areas included:

1. Planning and work regularity – How actions are planned and how consistently the team works over time.
2. Goal orientation and success metrics – Clarity of purpose, focus on outcomes, and the use of performance indicators.
3. Communication and team dynamics – Internal communication practices and the quality of team relationships.
4. Team autonomy and responsibility – Level of self-organization, task delegation, and accountability mechanisms.
5. Delivery standards and learning – Definitions of task completion, project reviews, and learning from experience.

6. Leadership and organizational development – Evolution of leadership styles and how the organization matures.
7. Challenges – Recognition of recurring problems.

2.2. Research plan

The study was structured into three phases. The first phase involved an assessment of the existing state of knowledge regarding student-led organizations and projects (as a literature review). The second phase consisted of empirical research conducted in 2022. Whereas the third phase entailed the analysis and synthesis of the data obtained in the second stage. Three years later, a follow-up round of empirical research was carried out (2025). The findings from both data collection periods were subsequently compared, providing the basis for the final conclusions and responses to the research questions. A visual summary of the research process is presented below:

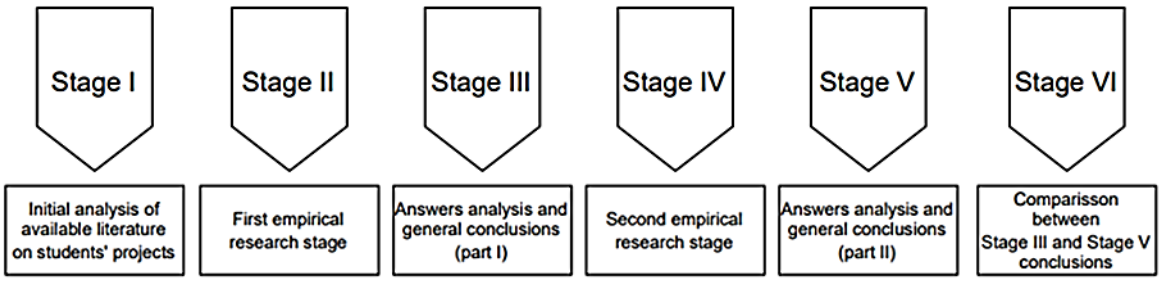

Figure 1. Research stages.

Source: Own elaboration.

2.3. Method

Once the objective and scope were established, the next step was to determine the most appropriate research method. The primary methodological choice was between quantitative and qualitative approach.

Given basic methods standard limitations (e.g. response rates), the authors opted for a qualitative research approach - specifically, semi-structured in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2014). To enhance the validity and depth of insights, the authors used a two-stage interview process (spread over time). This multi-phase design aligns with best practices in qualitative research, where iterative data collection helps refine findings and adjust lines of inquiry based on emerging themes (Seidman, 2013).

In the first stage, interviews were conducted with individuals in leadership roles and general members within the students' teams. Discussions focused on team structure, project goals, planning tools, and communication. In the second stage, interviews were carried out with the same-positioned people within organizations, from the same organizations as previously, but three years later. This two-stages approach enabled triangulation, improving the credibility and richness of the findings (Patton, 2002).

In summary, the chosen qualitative methodology, structured around two stages of individual interviews, provided a flexible, in-depth, and context-sensitive means of exploring team dynamics and project practices in student environments. This approach is well-aligned with Creswell's (2014) emphasis on using qualitative methods when the goal is to explore processes, meanings, and relationships that cannot be quantified effectively.

2.4. Research Tools

The first stage of research was conducted in early 2022, during the period when COVID-19 restrictions required a remote approach. Video conferencing tools, already widely adopted by students and faculty, were used for conducting interviews. During the interviews, the authors took handwritten notes, visible on camera to simulate an in-person interaction. Notes were later transcribed digitally for analysis. The second stage of research took place in 2025. This stage was conducted by face-to-face interviews.

2.5. Interviews script and conducting

The interview form consisted of two main parts. The first provided general information, such as a guarantee of participant anonymity and a request to give answers in the context of completed or ongoing projects. The second part covered thematic areas, each corresponding to a specific aspect of project work or management.

The form functioned as an interview guide, accessible to both the author and the participant throughout the session (see Appendix - Script). It was structured to ensure that all essential areas were discussed, thereby enabling comprehensive insights into participants' project experiences.

The approach to each interview included a brief review of the participants. After an introductory segment explaining the research, interviews began with a question about the participant's role in past projects (figure 2 & 3 - participants). Participants were then invited to select which thematic area to address first. The discussion focused on how that topic was handled in their project experience - e.g., leadership roles. The author used open-ended and follow-up questions to deepen the discussion and ensure all relevant points were covered. Prompts like "how frequently", "to what extent", or "how strongly" were commonly used.

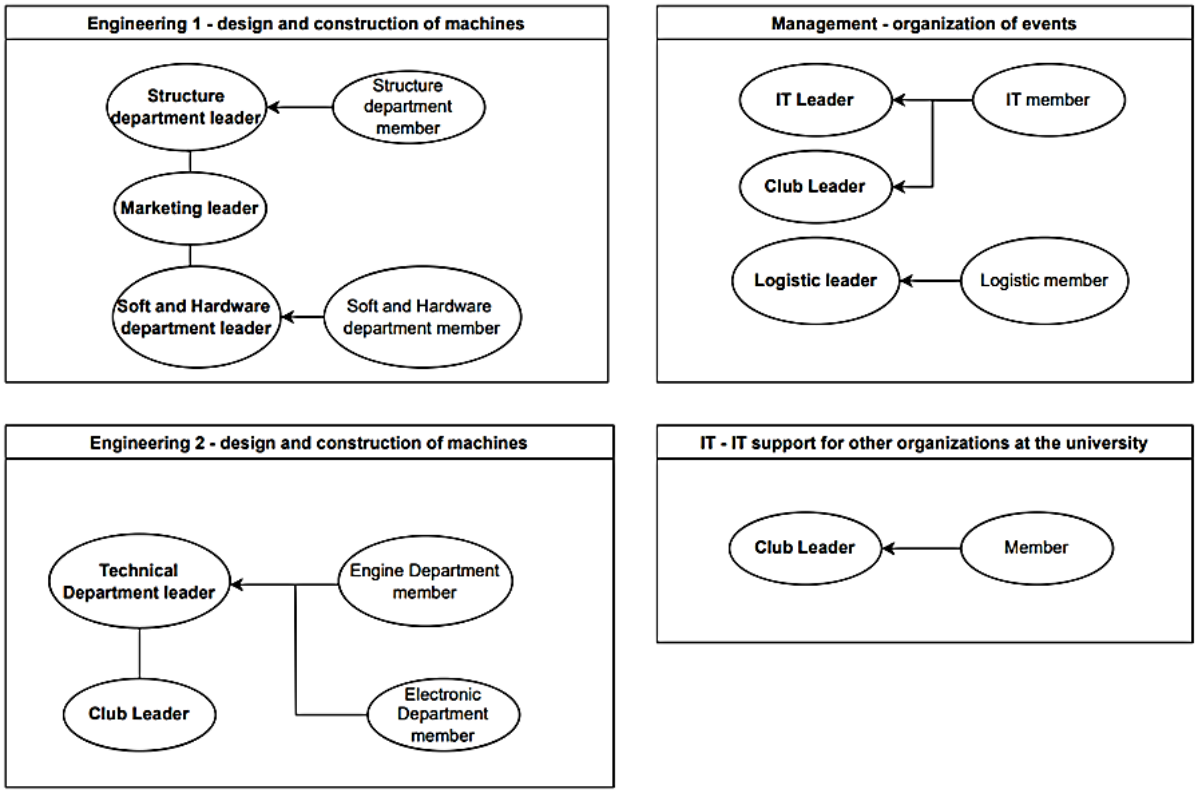

Figure 2. First empirical stage (2022) research participants.

Source: Own elaboration.

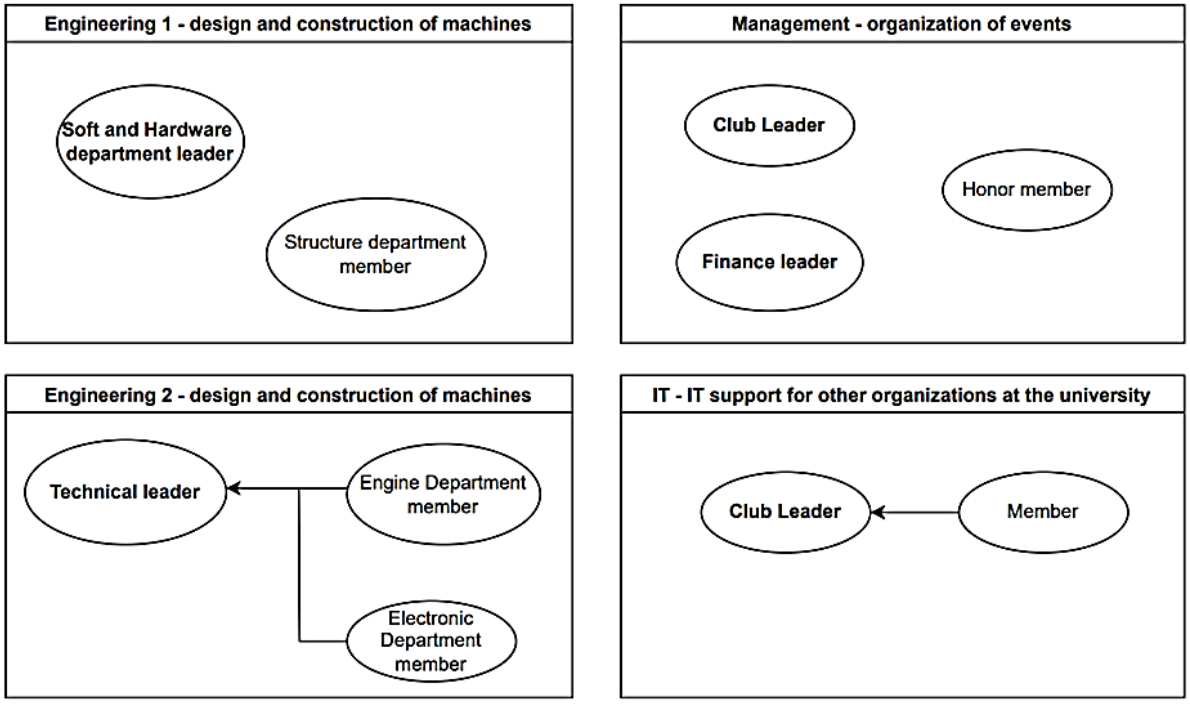

Figure 3. Second empirical stage (2025) research participants.

Source: Own elaboration.

Interviews from 2022 and 2025 were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. An initial round of open coding was conducted to label fragments relented to categories selected at the beginning of research (2.1), which later formed the basis for the comparative tables presented in the Results section. The coding scheme was refined in steps: similar codes were merged, unclear ones clarified. The data triangulation was also present, by including respondents with different roles (leaders and regular members) and by contrasting within organization perspectives when they differed.

2.6. Participants

As outlined in the previous chapter, the purpose of the study was to explore how student teams manage projects and organize their work. To achieve this, individual in-depth interviews were conducted, which maximized the potential to meet the research objectives. Two stages research approach was selected – the first stage in 2022, the second in 2025. A total of sixteen student club members from four different organizations participated in the first stage. Ten people participated in the second stage. These students represented the same student organizations in both stages.

Two clubs primarily focused on building mechanical systems but also relied heavily on software, sensors, automation, and managing complex assembly processes. Their annual work cycles could be seen as large-scale projects. Another organization operated within the field of information technology. This association supported the university's digital infrastructure, particularly for students and teachers use. Their projects included software licensing and developing platforms used within the university. The final club work involved organizing conferences, workshops, lectures, as well as training sessions. The club's leadership demonstrated strong project experience and organizational competence.

First stage participants included 9 individuals in leadership or leadership roles and 7 regular members – 16 participants. Most participants were already well-acquainted with the university and their respective organizations, which contributed to relatively objective responses grounded in experience rather than novelty. These factors increased the credibility and relevance of the study's conclusions to the broader context of student project work. Ten individuals participated in the second stage of the research. There were 5 regular members, and 5 people in leadership roles.

It is worth noting the difference in the number of participants between the first stage (16 people) and the second stage of the study (10 people). A smaller number of respondents in the second phase could have influenced the results. However, both the number and type of organizations studied remained unchanged. In our opinion, this difference did not have a that significant impact on the overall conclusions, as the key aspects of project activity and management were represented in both stages by the same members' roles (both leadership and general members).

3. Results

Results of the first stage of the research that took place in 2022 revealed crucial insights into the mechanisms of students' teams and organization management - through the individual in-depth interviews conducted with sixteen members from four different student clubs. The diverse project environments - from mechanical systems to IT infrastructure - highlighted varying challenges and strategies that clubs undertook. Notably, the balance between leadership and regular member perspectives provided a comprehensive understanding of both macro and micro elements of work. These results set a foundational benchmark for the second stage of research, scheduled for 2025, aiming to delve deeper into evolving practices and challenges in student group work.

The general findings will be presented below to give an overview of problems that students face during work (not assigned to specific organizations). These insights were later used to verify the changes in organizations in the second part of research in 2025.

3.1. First stage results

1. Planning:
   - Lack of comprehensive planning.
   - Misallocation of resources in activities per project phase.
   - Ineffective delegation for new solutions.
   - Scope creep.
   - Wrong prioritization of project elements.
   - Superficial analysis yielding substandard outcomes.
2. Work regularity:
   - Incomplete projects.
   - Lack of documentation of individual project stages.
   - Predilection for simpler tasks over critical ones.
   - Challenges in estimating task workload.
   - Recurring delays managed through last-minute efforts.
3. Team autonomy and responsibility:
   - Reluctance to acknowledge problems and seek assistance.
   - Problem of deciding when the team only delivers the MVP (basic version of the assumed effect, device, etc.) and when the team refines the solution to the end.
   - Hesitation to accept responsibility.
   - Varied levels of involvement among team members.
   - Adherence solely to assigned tasks.

4. Purpose and its perception:
   - Absence of goal discussions during the project.
   - Boredom in large group goal discussions.
   - Lack of reflection on project assumptions.
   - No designated role overseeing scope implementation (big/long projects).
5. Communication and team dynamics:
   - Intermingling of project-related and personal conversations.
   - Suboptimal information flow between departments/projects.
   - Insufficient discussion concerning emotional barriers.
   - Information grain size for reports, meetings.
   - Many separate communication spaces (on-line ones).
   - Inconsistent information dissemination.
   - Unstructured meetings resulting in unproductive discourse.
6. Challenges:
   - Problem with removing harmful or unproductive people from the team.
   - The importance of dilemma - studies vs. science club.
   - Rewarding people.
   - Resistance to management methods.
   - Concerns arise that student projects may adopt overly corporate-like structures.
   - Underestimation of management's significance in projects.
   - Perfectionism leading to excessive allocation of time and resources.
   - Infrequent retrospective meetings, typically annual or board-exclusive.
   - Recurrent errors across analogous projects.
   - Inadequate learning from previous team experiences.
   - Teams deficient in requisite skills for project execution.
   - Deficiency in work tools/platforms expertise.
   - Surplus of tools lacking clear usage guidelines.
   - Inefficient management of collaborative workspace.
   - Limited knowledge amongst new recruits.
   - Limited allocation of space for collaborative input and an individual's propensity to dominate task execution.
7. Successes:
   - Success is perceived as a final, acceptable result.
   - Milestones celebrated rarely.
   - Definition of success is not defined and discussed at forum, especially by non-board members.
   - Celebrating success is spontaneous.

8. Leadership and organizational development:
    - Problem in mediation between sections dealing with one project.
    - Whole-project knowledge confined to board meetings.
    - Negligence in emphasizing in-club work benefits.
    - Motivation predominantly derived from competition.
    - Team members unfamiliar with one another.
    - Leaders avoiding conflict resolution.
    - Deficient charisma and decisiveness.
    - Addressing issues exclusively to the leader without preemptively formulating potential solutions.

Many of these challenges pertain to communication and coordination rather than substantive or direct financial issues.

3.2. Second stage results

The second stage of research, conducted in 2025, also aimed to gather data on how student teams manage projects and organize their work. The study in the second part was conducted in a very similar way to the first segment, by conducting interviews with members of student organizations. This time, 10 members from the same 4 student organizations, as in previous stage, were interviewed. This enabled a comparison of findings to identify changes and advancements in management practices.

The final findings indicated significant development in some organizational competencies and improvements in team efficiency, and on the other side - reduced efficiency in other areas. The results of the second part of the study, were categorized into 8 significant areas – as interview questionnaire followed. Recommendations based on the collected data will help in further enhancing student projects and optimizing management practices.

3.2.1. Planning

The first area of research was "planning in student organizations", the table below presents the summarized results across student organizations.

Table 1.
Results in planning area

Planning
Organization 1
• The Management Board coordinates general matters. • Submissions and decisions are made on the forum. • KOs are planning their own projects. • Large upfronts are planned, while smaller ones are sometimes spontaneously done. • Lack of consistent discipline in sticking to the plan. • Task control in Trello and on team meetings. • Former obligatory project cards, currently they are optional. • Members initiate planning themselves even before the start of project. • Main calendar of organization events.

• Organizational planning is done in short-term horizons (~1 month). • Project statuses once per week. • Finance written down on paper. • "Lessons learned" are written down after misguided projects.
Organization 2 • Almost all members of organization are new. • The scope of activities can be unclear. • Organization starts with small optimizations that later turn into larger projects. • Large activities are planned and analyzed beforehand. • Members work on an ongoing basis within a roughly defined scope. • Improvisation is limited to non-beginners, because greater autonomy equals greater risk. • At meetings members discuss the scope together and ask "who wants to do it". • Adaptation to changes is agile, but not always formal.
Organization 3 • There are quarterly plans with milestones made regularly. • Project kickoffs are now being organized, which is new. • The plan often changes ("lives its own life"). • Less elasticity than before. • Weekly meetings with KOs drag on actual time up to 1 h versus planned time of 15 min. • Changes in the plan are at least visible.
Organization 4 • Change in project planning from Waterfall to Iterative. • Project cycles are according to the test schedule. • Risk assessment is made. • Tasks are located on one platform. • Monthly meetings of the KOs board are organized. • A lot of time is used for coordination. • Rigidity of plans inhibits innovation. • Sometimes there is too much planning, even with things that do not require a plan. • Members return to old ideas instead of constantly creating new ones.

Source: Own elaboration.

Similar patterns can be noted among the results. All organizations have a designated planning framework and schedules of activities that give direction to projects. And it is worth noting that priorities are defined, although they are not always subject to regular revision. However, the differences can be found in the fact that Organization 1 and Organization 2 plan strategically for longer periods, while Organization 3 and Organization 4 act more reactively and in the short term.

Organizations are moving to combine strategic planning with agility, with a growing interest in digital task management tools like Jira, Trello, and Asana. There were also comments on the further development of the organization, which indicated that it is worth developing long-term planning methods, combined with cyclical revision and updating schedules.

The table below also presents the changes that have been observed in the area of planning in organizations considering first and the second stage of research (Figure 1 – Reserach stages).

Table 2.
Changes in planning area

Planning – changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Mandatory project cards are now optional. There is greater emphasis on shorter cycles and forum decisions.	A lot of new members involved in planning. Clarification of the scope of activities. Change from ambiguity to clarity.	Formerly more flexibility in planning, now quarterly milestones, kick-offs, longer weekly meetings.	Change from Waterfall to Iterative Cycles for Testing and Risk Assessment.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.2. Regularity of work

The second area of research concerned the regularity of work in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 3.
Results in regularity of work area

Regularity of work
Organization 1 • Greater regularity thanks to growing know-how. • Informal checkpoints in projects. • Year-round operations are maintained, which provides continuity for organization. • Differences in regularity between sections - Milestones and MVP minimum scope.
Organization 2 • Cyclical meetings increase regularity, but work is still done in waves ("sine work wave"; a lot is done at the last minute). • Completion of tasks expected for the next meeting. • Diverse engagement of members. • There is difference of opinion, where one person says, "no bottlenecks" and another: when no one comes forward to do the task, the boss does it (potential bottleneck). • No formal checkpoints.
Organization 3 • Generally, more regularity than the former chaos. • Greater emphasis on control. • A group of "pseudo-systematic" members report without work done. • Crunch before the deadline is still there, but less than 3 years ago. • There are sine waves in work engagement (after the session decrease in engagement). • There are new "bottlenecks", for example waiting for approval.
Organization 4 • Work is done more systematically than before. • Constant development with buffers. • Still a lot of work is done just before the deadline. • There were periods of chaos, now there is more structure. • Some people "break away" from deadlines (processes that have no end). • A lot of things are done quickly without documentation, which creates problems later. • Organization implements incremental approach (MVP first, the rest later). • Members test what works before building something new.

Source: Own elaboration.

Common patterns can be identified in the results, such as the organization's desire to maintain business continuity and regular work meetings, but real-time progress analysis is not always included. There are also differences such as Organization 1 follows rigid procedures and a fixed schedule, Organization 4 operates at a more flexible pace to adapt to the current situation, and Organization 2 combines planning and regularity with the ability to make ad hoc changes.

There is also a trend towards real-time progress monitoring tools such as boards, sprints, and weekly reports. It was also pointed out that clear procedures for monitoring progress (for example, Kanban boards or Scrum sprints) can increase the regularity and transparency of work.

The table below also presents the changes that have been observed in the area of systematic work in organizations.

Table 4.
Changes in regularity of work area

Regularity of work – changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Regularity increases along with the accumulation of know-how.	Change from very few meetings to cyclical meetings. Work is still completed in waves.	Change from chaos to more regularity. Pseudo-regularity and waiting for approval appeared.	Change from periods of chaos to more structural approach with buffers. There is still a lot of pressure before deadlines.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.3. Autonomy and delegation

The third area of research concerned autonomy and delegation in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 5.
Results in autonomy and delegation area

Autonomy and delegation
Organization 1 • Difficulties with delegation, which results from lack of competence, trust or willingness. • People take and do some things by themselves. • Hierarchical structure means that there is need to delegate, the leader watches over the coordinators. • After gaining the know-how there is less work, which leads sometimes to too few tasks. • Competence is stable in organization, because know-how is written down. • There are some overdue tasks (e.g. website development). • Motivation is a bigger problem than skills, because onboarding provides competence.
Organization 2 • Responsibilities are shared. • People usually take work up, although recently there is less willingness (there are young, inexperienced members). • Organization trains members in organizational knowledge. • Progress is checked in meetings. • Habit of "flipping the frog" is growing. • The leader assigns tasks when there are no volunteers or he does it himself.

Cont. table 5.

Organization 3 • Leaders have full autonomy. • Most of the tasks are done within the team thanks to knowledge transfer, more than before. • Mentors support new members, which is time-consuming, which makes delegation difficult. • Now there is almost no shifting inconvenient tasks between each other. • People take on tasks without a sense of responsibility for them.
Organization 4 • Coordinators decide locally within teams. • Everyone has their own "plot of land" after basic training. • Small team's equal clear responsibilities. • Organization developed specialist knowledge. • Members consult with the alumni of organization. • There are weekly section meetings. • Members working together when someone cannot do it alone.

Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis of the results allowed for the identification of recurring patterns – delegating tasks occurs, but most often functions, within clearly defined roles, are treated without a full sense of responsibility on the part of members. Significant differences were also observed such as Organization 2 and Organization 4 show greater flexibility in decision-making, while Organization 1 and Organization 3 stick to the central control model and limit independence of students.

There is a growing need to find a balance between autonomy and control. It is increasingly emphasized that effective delegation of responsibilities is conducive to increasing work efficiency and team development. Attention was also drawn to the need to implement training and workshops on effective delegation to strengthen the sense of responsibility among members.

The following table also shows the changes that have been observed in the area of autonomy and delegation in organizations.

Table 6.
Changes in autonomy and delegation area

Autonomy and delegation - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Delegation is still difficult despite the structure. There is now frequent self-performance.	Initial willingness to take on tasks decreased (young, less willing).	There is greater autonomy of Team Leaders. There was decrease in shifting unwanted tasks, but responsibility is still lacking.	Now there are stabilized "plots" of responsibility and basic training. Members receive support from alumni.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.4. Purpose and its perception

The fourth area of research concerned the purpose of the organization and its projects and their perception in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 7.
Results in purpose and its perception area

Purpose and its perception
Organization 1 • Overall goal of organization is to create space to train skills. • There are annual goals and regulations on the wall. • Integration of people is important. • The tendency to optimize may displace the development goal. • There is a need for more process focus. • There is lack of formal metrics (attendance, graduates, MVP achieved means project is "managed").
Organization 2 • Goals are set (integration and delivering projects). • Previously, there was a lack of clarity on the role of the team. • Some members claim that general goals are not known, for people the goal is learning. • There is emphasis on process / shared understanding. • There are discussions on what was done well.
Organization 3 • Tangible goal of "we build things" is known. • Transition from effect orientation to process. • The occasional question "does this make sense?" is asked (lack of regularity in checking sensibility).
Organization 4 • Before the tests, the question "why this test?" is asked. • Team understands the elements critical to success. • Analysis after each test is made (what worked / what did not / what to improve). • There are monthly coordinators-board meetings.

Source: Own elaboration.

The results identified recurring patterns: in all organizations, goals are present and known to leaders, but their degree of understanding and relationship to team motivation varies. There are also differences – in Organization 1 and Organization 2 the goals are defined in detail (in KPIs), while in Organization 3 and Organization 4 they are rather general and are not always translated into everyday activities. The question remains, if members share the same goal perception as leaders and coordinators.

There was also a tendency to increase the emphasis on making goals both understandable and motivating for team members. It also pointed to the need to communicate more effectively the links between strategic goals and operational tasks to help the team understand the meaning of work.

The table below also shows the changes that have been observed in the area of the organization's purpose and its perception in organizations.

Table 8.
Changes in purpose and its perception area

Purpose and its perception - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Development goal partially overshadowed by optimization.	Change from "you don't know what we do" to setting integration/project goals.	Shifting focus from the effect to process. Questions about the meaning arise.	There is a systematic question "Why the test?". Awareness of critical elements is growing.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.5. Communication

The fifth area of research concerned communication in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 9.
Results in communication area

Communication
Organization 1 • Discord is the official communication channel. • Messages often turn into broadcast without discussion. • Members react faster in projects than in team sections. • The requirement to install a Discord reduced the lack of reading messages. • The Management Board monitors the lack of reaction. • Team channels communication is open to whole organization. • Section reports every 2 weeks on Discord. • After the meetings, people stay to talk. • Relationships fluctuate. • Large projects strengthen "team spirit".
Organization 2 • Communication is based on Discord, Meetings and Messages. • Activity on discord is low. • Messages are often read, but left without reaction. • Meetings are organized every 2 weeks. • Tasks are often too big to be carried out "next week". • There is a need for greater integration. • People are cautious in giving feedback.
Organization 3 • The number of platforms has been limited, but there are still too many channels and formalities. • Relationships between members are good but less spontaneous. • Members leave emoji-reactions without reading. • Meetings are too long.
Organization 4 • There is excess of notifications, which creates informational noise. • Coordinators spend a lot of time in meetings. • Documentation overload leads people to stop reading. • There are more face-to-face meetings. • There is rarely no reaction on technical topics. • There were inter-team meetings. • Small teams communicate well. • Time for coordination takes away working time.

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis of the results allows us to identify recurring patterns, such as regular meetings (status, briefings) and the use of email as the main channel for information exchange, with communicators playing a complementary role. There are also important differences such as Organization 3 is more likely to use informal face-to-face communication, while Organization 1 and Organization 2 prefer formal solutions, while Organization 4 uses a hybrid model.

There is a trend of implementing modern communication tools, such as Slack or Microsoft Teams or Discord, which results in a reduction in the use of traditional e-mail in the ongoing exchange of information. It was also pointed out that the optimization of communication tools and the reduction of unnecessary meetings can significantly increase the efficiency of information flow. The issue of no-reaction to meetings summaries, reports, massages is common – generally due to on-line communication as default one, outside team meetings.

The table below also shows the changes that have been observed in the area of communication in organizations.

Table 10.
Changes in communication area

Communication - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Discord is now official communication channel and introduction of section reports. There is monitoring of the reactions.	Low Discord activity persists. There is a need for more activity.	Now there are fewer platforms, but more channel formalities.	Now there is more documentation and cross-team meetings. Information noise arose as a problem.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.6. Problems

The sixth area of study concerned general problems in student organizations; the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 11.
Results in problems area

Problems
Organization 1 • Minor communication mishaps with people with poorer organization-knowledge. • Accumulated know-how shortens the learning of new members, yet it lessens educational experience. • There is less engagement/activity among members. • Different time availability of members. • Intention to combine finance + logistics (change to solution from a few years ago). • Struggle for a place to meet. • People are afraid to manage projects. • Changing the leader after 2 years means a big change.
Organization 2 • Late and poor transfer of responsibilities and information, sometimes it is even deliberate in conflicts. • New team means more competence gaps. • Lack of know-how for the leader (leader doesn’t know "how it used to be"). • Not all members are responsible. • Few people willing to take on tasks.
Organization 3 • Micro-management practiced by some Team Leaders. • Burnout manifests in some members of organization from processes. • Too much paperwork/documentation compared to core work. • It's harder to get to know everyone with a larger team.

Cont. table 11.

Organization 4
• Meetings cause fatigue. • Paralysis by a multitude of options/analysis (lack of decisiveness). • Problem with managing the complexity of dependencies between tasks. • Too much procedural bureaucracy (too many approvals for minor changes). • Limited testing resources due to cost. • Simulation to reality gaps. • Paralysis in analytics.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the analyzed results, recurring patterns were identified, among which the difficulties related to the underestimation of resources, ambiguity of priorities and delays caused by changes in the environment are particularly visible. Significant differences between organizations were also observed such as Organization 4 faces problems resulting from the lack of coordination and the occurrence of chaos, Organization 1 struggles with excessive formalization of processes, Organization 2 struggles with imprecise definition of roles, while Organization 3 experiences a deficit of process documentation.

Organizations tend to invest in risk analysis, retrospection, and learning from their mistakes to minimize the recurrence of problems. It also highlighted the need to develop proactive mechanisms to identify issues to limit their escalation.

The following table also shows the changes that have been observed in the problem area in organizations.

Table 12.
Changes in problems area

Problems - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Management and resource barriers have been revealed.	Change of team members exposed gaps in the transfer of power and knowledge.	Increase in processes, caused micromanagement and burnout.	With iterative approach there is visible bureaucracy, test costs and complexity of dependencies.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.7. Successes

The seventh research area concerned successes in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings.

Table 13.
Results in successes area

Successes
Organization 1
• Teams celebrate the completion of projects. • In general, there are a lot of celebrations when there is success. • Individual successes are rarely celebrated outside the organization.

Cont. table 13.

Organization 2 • Success celebrations are rare. • Sometimes teams do "round of glory" (sharing recent success). • New people improved the atmosphere.
Organization 3 • Celebration is sometimes a mandatory ritual (less spontaneous).
Organization 4 • There is team celebration after successful testing.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the analysis of results, it is possible to distinguish recurring patterns, such as achieving success by organizations in the form of completed projects, effective implementations or efficiency improvements, although the definitions of these successes vary depending on the entity. Significant discrepancies were also identified such as Organization 2 and Organization 4 indicate flexibility and rapid adaptation as key determinants of success, while Organization 1 emphasizes the importance of quality and stability and Organization 3 focuses on small but regular improvements.

There was also a growing tendency to appreciate team achievements, celebrate smaller successes and strengthen team spirit. In addition, attention was drawn to the need to implement a culture of sharing best practices and analyzing the factors influencing the achieved results.

The following table also shows the changes that have been observed in the area of successes in organizations.

Table 14.
Changes in successes area

Successes - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
There is a tradition of celebrating success in projects. Individual success celebration is still rare.	Change from no celebration to the appearance of "glory rounds".	Spontaneous celebrations turned into more obligatory rituals.	Now there are regular celebrations after testing.

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2.8. The role of a leader

The eighth area of research concerned the role of leadership in student organizations, the table below summarizes the findings of the four student organizations.

Table 15.
Results in the role of a leader area

The role of a leader
Organization 1 • Leadership style is situational, changes from supportive/developmental to authoritarian when necessary. • Leadership style now encourages the initiative of members. • ~3 years ago, leadership style was more authoritarian/formal. • The "cult of the leader" emerges. • A pro-social leader (parent/friend) is needed for the strategy and development of organization, although a lot is happening from the bottom-up initiatives.

Cont. table 15.

Organization 2 • Controls and watches over the transfer of tasks to the coordinators. • Leader organizes work and searches for new projects. • Leader controls execution of plan. • Leader takes on the role of the teacher / integrator. • Some members assess the leader as "too nice".
Organization 3 • Shift from authoritarian leadership to more collaborative/supportive leadership. • Leadership style is still not perfect.
Organization 4 • Leader serves as a technical mentor and coordinator (not a dictator). • Sometimes there is a lack of decisiveness. • Current leader is technical expert, which provides stability in comparison to the past leaders.

Source: Own elaboration.

In the analysis of results, recurring patterns can be identified such as leaders organize work, make key decisions, motivate the team, and act as the main "filters" of information and conflicts. However, there are important differences such as in Organization 1, the leader has a more controlling and formalized role, while in Organization 4, he or she is more of a partner and mentor. Organizations 2 and 3 present a combination of elements of control and mentoring, adapting the leadership style to the current situation.

There was also a trend of the evolution of the role of the leader towards coach and facilitator. Greater emphasis is placed on developing team competencies, not just on control activities. The need to develop soft skills of leaders, such as facilitation, motivation, change management and coaching, was also emphasized.

The following table also shows the changes that have been observed in the area of leadership role in organizations.

Table 16.
Changes in the role of a leader area

The role of a leader - changes			
Organization 1	**Organization 2**	**Organization 3**	**Organization 4**
Formerly authoritarian style of leadership, changed into more encouraging and initiative style. The cult of the leader appears.	The leader acts as a controller and teacher for new members.	Change from dictatorship-like leadership to cooperation/support-based leadership.	Change from leader as a dictator to technical mentor. Sometimes leader is not very decisive.

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Conclusions

Based on two carried out qualitative research stages and their comparison, conclusions were developed. They describe often and/or important issues that arose during whole research process – regarding student organization and their work.

Iterative planning may push out traditional Waterfall models

Teams declare that they are slowly moving away from rigid, linear project plans toward shorter development cycles. This shift enhances flexibility and adaptability, yet teams continue to face challenges in maintaining delivering milestones in set deadlines. It would be worthwhile to deepen research on management methodologies and their potential connection with developmental directions, e.g. in the business environment.

Work regularity improves but remains inconsistent

As teams accumulate knowledge, meetings and milestone schedules become more structured, which helps reduce disorder. However, work patterns still fluctuate in cycles, with frequent last-minute efforts before multiple deadlines during year. The persistent pre-milestone pressure indicates that existing procedures and tools have not fully resolved this uneven workflow.

Delegation remains a significant challenge

Despite efforts to clarify roles, effective task delegation is hindered by skill gaps, lack of trust, and reluctance among team members, especially newer or younger ones. Formal role definitions do not ensure accountability. Initial increases in autonomy diminish as responsibility avoidance and competence gaps reoccur, showing that structural changes alone are insufficient to ensure engagement.

Fragmentation of responsibility worsens

Although clearer role assignments have boosted technical delivery, individuals often undertake tasks without ownership, leading to fragmented responsibility and repeated errors. The problem of unclear accountability intensifies, particularly with high team member turnover.

Motivation issues overshadow skill transfer

While onboarding has improved competency acquisition, motivation has emerged as a more critical barrier. As initial enthusiasm declines, the willingness to accept tasks decreases, making motivation a new limiting factor even when skills are adequate. It is possible that this drop in motivation is connected to generational factors specific to Generation Z. However, our research

focused exclusively on Generation Z participants, so we cannot confirm this as a broader trend. Exploring this connection could be an interesting direction for future research, but meaningful comparisons will only be possible once Generation Alpha begins entering universities, which is expected to occur in at least five years.

Evolution in goal clarity and motivation

Goals are now more often specified and linked to integration and project delivery, sometimes considering the project's deeper significance. However, goals frequently remain undesignated on paper and are based on broad mission understanding without collective validation. Misalignment between strategic and operational objectives persists, adversely affecting team motivation.

Formalized communication increases information noise

Platforms such as Discord improve cross-team updates, but the multiplication of channels and excessive formalization result in information overload and reduced engagement. Members increasingly respond with superficial reactions rather than substantive interaction, indicating that more channels can dilute actual comprehension.

Feedback and integration decline despite mechanisms

Although meetings and cross-team reporting increase, genuine integration and face-to-face interaction diminish. Feedback changes from active dialogue to passive reactions or silence, reducing learning effectiveness and team cohesion.

Process bureaucracy leads to burnout

Enhanced documentation and micromanagement raise administrative overhead, causing fatigue and disengagement compared to earlier periods.

Knowledge management gaps persist

Documentation and mentorship protocols improve onboarding efficiency, yet knowledge transfer remains deficient, especially following member turnover or team restructuring.

Formal celebration rituals risk reduced authenticity

Spontaneous celebrations of project completion have given way to routine, obligatory, and more frequent acknowledgments of smaller successes. Members report that these ceremonies may feel less meaningful, suggesting potential cultural drift and decline in morale over time, though the actual impact requires ongoing observation.

Leadership is transitioning toward partnership but lacks consistency

Leadership approaches are shifting from authoritarian to more collaborative and supportive styles. Nevertheless, decision-making can still be unclear, and autocratic tendencies remerge during conflicts.

Formalized communication increases information noise

Platforms such as Discord improve cross-team updates. But the members report concerns the multiplication of channels and excessive formalization, that can result in information overload and reduced engagement. On the other hand, leaders increasingly often see emerging problems of responding with superficial reactions rather than substantive interaction, which can indicate that more channels can dilute actual comprehension and involvement of members. This topic should be further investigated with specific quantitative measures to determine the scale of the problem.

5. Summary

The article goal was to examine the evolving challenges within student organizations over a medium-term period, focusing on how student teams implement projects and organize their work from 2022 to 2025 at Wrocław University of Science and Technology.

For the literature review, the study applied a PRISMA-standard systematic search in WoS and Scopus databases targeting works on student organizations, student projects, and project management since 2000. It synthesized findings that student organizations contribute significantly to skill development and community integration but face persistent challenges such as funding limitations, administrative burdens, low member motivation, and high turnover. The review highlighted a research gap of these problems, prompting the key research question: "How do problems in student organizations change over several years? Are there recurrent issues how students manage them?".

In the empirical part, the authors conducted qualitative research using semi-structured in-depth interviews in two waves (2022 and 2025) with members and leaders of four separate student organizations. The research explored themes including planning, work regularity, communication, team autonomy, leadership, and recurring challenges. Findings revealed persistent problems like delegation difficulties, motivation fluctuations, communication noise, fragmented responsibility, and under-leveraged learning from past projects. Improvements were noted in iterative planning, formalization, and leadership styles shifting towards facilitation. However, some aspects deteriorated, such as increased workload bureaucracy and reduced spontaneity in celebrating success. The conclusions emphasized that despite professionalization and digital tools adoption, deep-rooted cyclical challenges related to team

dynamics, motivation, and task ownership remain resistant to change, often recurring in varied forms over time. Challenges that student organization faces, across 3-year period, do not change drastically – taking into account the external and internal influence of stakeholders as well as the entire environment. However, the approach to dealing with them changes. In a lot of cases, there are two solutions that are opposite to each other. Organizations tend to select one of them, and with all the benefits, they are trying to manage consequences. This underscores the necessity to align formal management structures with the real needs and cultures of student teams to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability.

Looking at all the findings, the following questions for further research occur:

- Do student organizations systematically change their approach in order to solve the general problems of this environment (such as motivation, delegation, regularity of work)?
- What specific actions can be taken in the management of student club projects to ensure they are more likely to achieve success and bring value?

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Appendix

Interview script

Hi! Thank you for agreeing to the interview – it's really valuable to me. Before we start, there are a few important things:

Firstly, the study is completely anonymous. There will be no information in the results that will allow you to identify a specific organization or indicate what projects were involved. I can even omit the fact of operating at Wroclaw Tech – it's up to you. The only thing I take into account is the general profile of the organization, i.e. whether you organize events, build something, program, etc. This is only important to understand the context of the action well.

Secondly, I really care about honesty and objectivity. The main goal of this study is to find a work model that fits real-world conditions. If something didn't work – it's worth talking about. If, for example, the team claims that communication was great, but in practice it looked different – then a model built on such a declaration will not work. It is not about judging but about capturing reality as accurately as possible.

You can talk about one specific project or recall different situations from several – everything that you think is characteristic and valuable. I want to better understand what teamwork really looks like in your environment.

Ready? Then we fly with questions!

Planning

1. What did planning activities in your organization look like in the past, and what does it look like now? Has anything changed in this area? What to look for: awareness of change, approach to planning (formalization vs improvisation).
2. Do you plan activities right at the beginning of the project, or do you rather act on an ongoing basis? Has this changed over the years? The key: agility vs long-term planning.
3. Do you control, do you stick to the plan or do you rather "let go of the steering wheel"? Have you changed your approach over time? The key: organizational maturity, evolution of work style.
4. Does it happen that you start doing something enthusiastically, and then it turns out that it didn't make much sense? Are such situations rarer than in the past? The key: reflectiveness, experience.

Regularity of work

1. Have you noticed a difference in the approach to systematic work – e.g. between "in the past" and "now"? The key: a change in the approach to time management.
2. Is the work evenly distributed, or does everything happen at the last minute? Are you trying to change it somehow? The key: deadline culture vs continuous work.
3. Do you use any checkpoints (e.g. milestones)? Has this changed over time? The key: growing organizational maturity.

Autonomy and delegation

1. What does the sharing of responsibilities look like now – and did it look different in the past? The key: an increase in structuring, changes in the style of work.
2. Does the team usually have the necessary competencies, or do you have to look for outside support more often? Has this changed over the years? The key: development of members' competencies, self-sufficiency.
3. Over time, have there been ways to monitor whether tasks are being carried out? The key: increasing responsibility.
4. Is it still possible to "flip the frog" – that is, running away from difficult tasks? Less or more than it used to be? The key: emotional maturity, a culture of responsibility.

Purpose and its perception

1. Do you talk more often about the purpose of the action these days, or is the focus still mainly on specific tasks? The key: strategic thinking, conscious action.
2. How has the team's approach changed – more result-oriented or process-oriented? Key: change the style of operation.
3. Do you think more about "why are we doing something" now than you used to? The key: reflectiveness, responsibility for decisions.
4. Are you currently held accountable for the effects? And someday? The key: changing liability mechanisms.
5. Have there been measures of success? Or maybe you also had them in the past, but they looked different? The key: the evolution of the way effects are evaluated.

Communication

1. What methods of communication do you use now and what were they before? What works better? Key: technology vs relationships, changing tools.
2. Have the relationships in the team deepened, weakened, changed? What did it look like in the past, and what does it look like today? The key: the impact of generational changes, hybridity.
3. Has the problem of "read but no reaction" always been present? Has it intensified/weakened now? The key: a culture of responsiveness.

Problems

1. What problems occur most often today, and which ones dominated in the past? Is there anything repeated? The key: changing challenges.

Success

1. Is celebrating success as important today as it used to be? What did it look like before? The key: a culture of appreciation.
2. Do you feel that commitment used to be more noticeable – or maybe more now? The key: motivation.

The role of the leader

1. Has the leadership model in your organization changed? What did it look like in the past, like today? Key: change in management styles.
2. What qualities of a leader/coordinator are more valued now than in the past? The key: expectations for leaders over time.

Definition of done

1. Have you put in place clear criteria for completing work on tasks? Were they less specific before? The key: formalization of work.

Retrospective

1. Do you make summaries after completing projects? When did it start – and has it always been present? The key: learning from mistakes.

Stakeholders

1. Has contact with the recipients of your activities (e.g. event participants, partners) changed over time? How? The key: orientation towards external recipients.
2. Do you show the effects of your work more often during or at the end? The key: transparency, interactiveness.

Management Knowledge

1. Where do you get your knowledge about project management now – and have the sources changed compared to previous years? The key: formal education vs practice, change of consciousness.

Conclusion: Thanks a lot for your sincerity! This information helps a lot in understanding what teamwork really looks like in projects. If you have any other thoughts after the interview, feel free to let me know.