III Międzynarodowa Konferencja Naukowa
Instytutu Zarządzania UEP
ZRÓWNOWAŻONE ZARZĄDZANIE ORGANIZACJĄ
3rd International Scientific Conference
of the PUEB Institute of Management
SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION MANAGEMENT
Zrównoważone Zarządzanie Organizacją
Instytut Zarządzania
UNIWERSYTET EKONOMICZNY W POZNANIU
SAMSUNG
21–22 października / October 2026

Dysfunctions of Project Management Offices

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Introduction and research aim

The aim of the study is to integrate dispersed evidence on PMO dysfunctions and to explain the mechanisms through which PMO practices may lead to negative consequences. Three research questions were formulated:

- RQ1: What dysfunctions and negative consequences of PMO operations does the literature identify?
- RQ2: Through what mechanisms do these consequences arise?
- RQ3: What organizational conditions does the literature associate with the occurrence of PMO dysfunctions?

Research methods

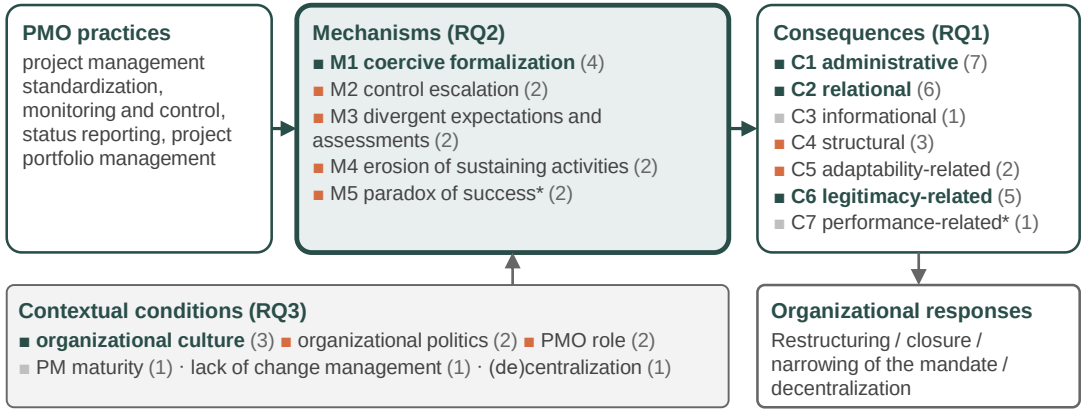
A structured literature review with thematic synthesis was conducted and reported in accordance with PRISMA 2020. The search was carried out on October 9, 2026, in Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection. English-language records were included, with no lower limit on publication year. The database search was supplemented with five previously known publications.

Twenty-four publications were included in the synthesis, and 71 findings were coded. The strength of the evidence base was assessed at the level of 14 research programs to limit multiple counting of related publications. Screening and coding were supported by a language model; decisions and source excerpts were verified by the authors.



Fig. 1. Simplified publication selection process

Results and discussion



■ relatively strong ■ moderate ■ weak evidence base; (n) number of independent research programs; * category that emerged during the analysis; arrows represent proposed relationships requiring empirical testing; organizational responses lie beyond the research questions

Fig. 2. Working model of PMO dysfunctions and strength of the evidence base

The literature primarily describes administrative, relational, and legitimacy-related consequences. Evidence on informational consequences and on deteriorating project performance is scarce. The best-documented mechanism was interpreted in terms of coercive formalization. This interpretation requires verification, as the primary studies did not measure the characteristics of this formalization. A paradox of success also emerged from the analysis: pressure to transform a PMO may also stem from its achievements. The sequence from dysfunction through loss of legitimacy to organizational responses is supported only by fragmentary evidence.

Conclusions

The review integrates dispersed evidence into a catalog of seven categories of negative consequences and a working model of PMO dysfunctions. On this basis, propositions for further empirical testing were formulated:

P1: The more coercive rather than enabling PMO standards are, the greater the risk of additional administrative workload, resistance, and bypassing of procedures.

P2: Negative consequences at the project level reduce PMO legitimacy, and its loss increases the likelihood that the PMO will be restructured or closed.

P3: PMO success may in itself generate pressure for the PMO's transformation.

Practical implications: Standards should be designed as tools that help project managers perform their tasks and should be adapted to project needs. The PMO should monitor administrative workload and signals that its value is being questioned.

Limitations: The evidence is concentrated around the Aubry and Hobbs research program. The search was limited to English-language records in two databases. Six publications could not be accessed. The working model requires empirical testing.