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The Role of Philosophy in Project Management: Guest Editorial

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Guest Editorial

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The Role of Philosophy in Project Management

In creating a special issue on the philosophy of project management, the first questions we need to be asking ourselves are: *Why should we be interested in philosophy? Why should we be interested in philosophy in project management? What does philosophy have to offer to us as project management professionals and academics?* These are fundamental questions that need to be answered with capable and adequate responses; otherwise our endeavors in this field can be considered futile. The answers to these questions aren't straightforward. Academic thought and professional practices have been supported by many fields including, but not limited to, sociology, management science, organization studies, anthropology, engineering and, more broadly speaking, the arts and humanities (of which philosophy is a part), and the natural and social sciences. Is an advanced focus on philosophy needed? We believe that it is for the following reasons.

We Need Philosophy Because. . . The World is Changing

Our world and the world of projects are changing in, perhaps what can be termed, an unprecedented rate. The aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008; the refugee crisis; the slowdown of China's growth; the increases in terrorist threats and cybercrime; the ongoing commercialization of education; the continuously changing power balance between nations, governments, citizens, religions, and professions; the weakening and strengthening of political and economic unions, such as the European Union; the persisting levels of poverty in wide areas across the world; and the ongoing technological advancements can perhaps be considered miniscule issues in the face of climate change. These issues are interdisciplinary, in many cases time-critical, and reflect the context in which all projects will need to be inspired, designed, executed, and delivered.

Most importantly, however, these are issues that seem to be driven by different, yet *persisting forms of inequality*—social inequalities, political inequalities, economic inequalities, technological inequalities. For example, executives are better paid than workers and professionals; foreigners are better received in some places of the world than others;

and information asymmetry is a fundamental characteristic of financial markets and projects. The finite resources of our planet, our systems/technologies, and ourselves in devising economic and political systems that can allow us to live and prosper fuel manifestations of inequality and establish different types of *privileges*, some we would consider legitimate, others we see as the source of pain and inequality (Abbot, 1988). People who live in resource-rich countries of the world are privileged with natural resources that often become the source of political, economic, and social privileges when combined with strong politics. Based on their advanced command of an area of practice, extensive socialization in the profession and membership in a professional community, professionals legitimize their claims over areas of expertise. And in so doing, they are required to be accountable for privileges such as their expertise, higher pay, and social status. So, how can we address inequality and privilege? In answering these questions, we turn to and debate different philosophies, different ways of doing things, arguing for priorities, means, and goals of actions. For example, Pierre Rosanvallon, Professor of Political History at the Collège de France, Director of Studies at l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, (2016) writes:

"Equality based on singularity requires a type of society grounded in neither abstract universalism nor identity-based communitarianism but rather the dynamic construction and recognition of specificities. Singularity is not a sign of withdrawal from society (individualism as retreat or separation). Rather, it signals an expectation of reciprocity, of mutual recognition. This marks the advent of a fully democratic age: the basis of society lies not in nature but solely in a shared philosophy of equality. Democracy as a type of political regime is mirrored by democracy as a form of society." (p. 21)

Philosophies underlie our thinking; our social and personal existence; our innovation; and, ultimately, the solutions and the actions we undertake to address the challenges we face collectively and individually.

The world of projects is equally changing. Most obvious is the trend toward agility, which blurs the long-established demarcations between operations and projects by questioning existing roles (such as those of project managers) and project management methodologies. The trend toward agile/Scrum shows a change in the underlying philosophy of project management. The traditional ontology of a one-time, unique undertaking is

Guest Editorial

replaced, at least in some projects, by a process philosophy that uses repetitive daily mechanisms in which, for example people, not plans, are the media for communication, and change is embraced rather than avoided. This change in the inward-looking view of managing projects is complemented by an outward-looking view that puts projects in their larger context. A key concept to mention here is project governance. Biesenthal and Wilden (2014) remind us that the number of publications on this subject has virtually exploded since 2005. This is underpinned by another change in philosophy, in which projects are no longer perceived as standalone entities to deliver standalone products or services, but rather are parts of a larger whole or system in which they fulfill a clearly defined role, using clearly defined interfaces to their environment in the forms of governance structures and mechanisms. In other words, the macroscopic global changes are also reflected in the microscopic world of project management, and each of these levels requires underlying philosophies so that the humans living within them can make sense of their world and their roles and tasks therein.

We Need Philosophy Because . . . We Don't Know

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) writes:

“Nature, the world, has kept so much freedom for itself, so that we cannot—even through knowledge and science—come close to understanding what it is or place it in an uncomfortable position. (p. 93)”

Goethe personifies the world and nature, almost as if it were a real human being that can stand in front of us and we could talk to, and claims that he or she is keeping meaning, reason, experience, and emotions away from us. For Goethe, the world is a cryptic entity—a reserved individual that remains silent and fundamentally unknown to us. Goethe alludes to that which is not known and cannot be known; to the ideas, meanings, mathematical equations, laws of physics, concepts, feelings, abstractions, and paradigms that we have yet to discover *and* to that ‘which is not, but exists’ and we cannot discover. For Goethe, and much earlier for Parmenides, the world consists not only of truths that can be discovered, understood (through science) and be learned, but also of that ‘which is not’ and cannot be examined via reason and experience—the illusion. To the question, ‘What is?’ (i.e., what is the world, what is a human being, what is a rose, what is a book?), Parmenides answers: ‘everything is’—that ‘which is’ and ‘which is not’—and alludes to ‘the unity of antitheses’ as a core fundamental mechanism that holds that ‘which is’ and ‘which is not’ together. Similarly, in writing about the space the poet or author needs to create literary art, Blanchot talks about ‘the reader that is yet to come’ (1989, p. 199). Obviously, Blanchot is not talking about a reader that is out there as a market segment that is in existence and can be studied and analyzed

for its key consumer characteristics; he is talking about the unknown reader, the reader who will inspire the ‘genesis of the work.’ He too, personifies the unknown and alludes to the existence of that which is unknown and will remain unknown, and which by remaining unknown, serves as inspiration and is an eternal source of imagination and creation.

So, if our sciences and scientific methods can help us understand and explain truths, what can we do about that ‘which is not’? What can we do, how can we exist and live with that ‘which is not’? Where scientific method does not apply? One answer is religion. That which cannot be explained and grasped has been addressed by humanity by the creation of religions, the creation of gods, and other deities. In a more fundamental reading and understanding of the world, it is philosophies—different ways of existing with the unknown—that prevail. Philosophies underlie our fears and the extraordinary potential of human beings to be inspired and create images and impressions of the unknown, while it persistently, stubbornly remains as such. Our philosophies help us dress up the unknown in ways, which comfort us in its presence, while it remains as such.

There is so much ‘which is not’ in projects. Flyvbjerg (2011; 2014) reminds us that the long-standing notion that project success can be secured through processes, tools, and techniques is too narrow a philosophy. By looking at mega-projects, he raised the understanding that not only optimism bias, but also strategic misrepresentation are main factors (or ‘which is not’ elements) that need to be considered in projects. Thus, the need to adjust the ontology of projects being tasks and processes that we know, can predict, and just need to apply correctly, by also positioning projects as phenomena at the crossroads of sociology and humanity to make sense of them. Examples include the countless aid and support projects started and executed by the people in the European Union for the refugees who had to leave their war-shattered countries; these are hardly understandable by using economic philosophies and traditional “business case” perspectives.

A multiplicity of philosophies is required for sensemaking of and in these projects. We see traces of this multiplicity of new philosophical perspectives, for example, in:

- Gauthier and Ika’s (2012) ontological framework to transcend the abstract epistemological and methodological debates and create a wider view and broader understanding of projects;
- Morris’ “management of projects” tradition (Morris, 2013), which firmly establishes the ethos of the project as one that needs to be primarily concerned with building value for the sponsor and attended to in the front-end and throughout the life of the project;
- The “rethinking project management” movement, which attempts to understand project-based working in the context of creating a better, more organized relationship between theory (knowledge) and practice (experience) (Winter & Smith, 2006).

- Thus, a different philosophical stance, grounded in subjective human experience rather than objective planning and control;
- The “projects-as-practice” movement (e.g., by Blomquist, Hällgren, Nilsson, & Söderholm, 2010), who try to understand projects from the practices applied in managing them. Yet another philosophical stance, which centers on the way project management work is executed;
 - The “making projects critical” movement (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006) which introduced the notions and ideas of critical management studies in our understanding of projects and their management; and
 - Borrowing philosophies from neighboring sciences, such as transcending the ‘genotyping–phenotyping’ concept from the natural sciences to the world of projects. This philosophical stance assumes that projects (just as flowers) may have the same genetic setup (genotyping) at the start, but develop very differently over the course of their lifetime (phenotyping), because of exogenous and endogenous influences (Joslin & Müller, 2013).

Coming back to the above quote from Goethe, we can say that these approaches help us “*through knowledge and science–[to] come close to understanding what it is*” this thing called a project, but we can not put it in an uncomfortable position, as it is up to us to understand projects, not vice versa.

We Need Philosophy Because . . . Some of us are Driven Toward Growth, not Followership

For Kogler (2012) the beginning of selfhood is intent. Being human requires intention or, what is commonly known, as a purpose in life, a sense of direction that has been consciously selected by the individual him or herself and has not been imposed. For sociologists, human beings and, more interestingly here, professionals will find their purpose and define their intentions via a process of socialization, where the individual chooses to affiliate or disassociate him or herself with professional, organizational, one’s own, and higher order values. In this process of socialization, the individual will engage, ‘test’ different sets of values, reflect, and will ultimately create his or her own, unique (professional) identity that reflects an amalgam of different values that are brought together and ultimately reflect who they are and how they go about living life and practicing their work (i.e., their philosophy) (Konstantinou, 2008). In other words, our philosophy (i.e., the guiding principles and values that we choose to follow via a process of socialization with the world and our work) is a fundamental constitutive part of our selves in life and at work.

Some professionals do not realize they can have an active role in defining their professional philosophy and thus improve their profession and practice. Indeed, a recent study showed that top project professionals rarely think about ethics when asked to talk about professionalism in project

management (Konstantinou, 2015). They will—somewhat uncritically—adopt and even obey the professional values of the profession. In this case, the profession and the practice are—in the best case—sustained, reproduced, and preserved throughout time as the professional ‘votes for’ and supports the existing status quo—the existing philosophy.

However, for those who realize that they have and can play an active role in defining their professional philosophy, there is a point in one’s professional career where one becomes interested in a debate about different philosophies (i.e., different ways of living life and practicing). Similarly, those professionals interested in developing the profession and, far more importantly, the practice will feel the need to be engaged in a debate about different philosophies with the aim of a better practice, growth, development or, if nothing else, a professional life that holds some excitement. For example, is a project manager responsible for fulfilling the expectations of all stakeholders of a project or only of the project sponsor, who is his or her employer or contract partner? Should we be asking how the ethics of the project management profession will develop and who will drive such a change? (See, Eskerod, Huemann, and Savage, 2015, for a discussion). The biggest challenge here is that there is a notable lack of inspiration and debate about the different philosophies for practitioners to turn to.

We Need Philosophy Because . . . it is the Antecedent for Theory Development

Academics in project management have criticized the theoretical base of project management as being too narrow or insufficient. Although this critique in itself is debatable, it opens the path for a bigger question: *Which philosophies should underlie these theories?* Any theory is contingent on a philosophy, an antecedent stance, from which a theory is developed. Weick’s statement that a theory should only be interpreted within the ontological and epistemological framework within which it was developed indicates that. Examples include agency theory and its underlying philosophy of economics. Attempts to develop theories of project management, such as those by Turner (2006), are often based on economic and process ontologies/philosophies. A much wider field of possible theories could be derived from a broader ontological/philosophical base, including sociological and humanities ontologies. To that end, we must first ask what the philosophical base of project management can be before we can develop a theory about it. The likely result is a kaleidoscope of different theories, based on a kaleidoscope of different philosophies. A first glance is given through the different schools of project management, such as those by Söderlund (2011) or Turner, Huemann, Anbari, and Bredillet (2010), in which each school builds on a different philosophy. The scope of these theory frameworks has thus far been limited to management and organizational perspectives, which bear the

Guest Editorial

potential to develop project management theory from very different perspectives.

The academic world, which could be seen as a promising destination for philosophical alternatives and debate, has been dominated for decades now by a rather unbearable over-reliance on evidence-based, 'scientific' research that significantly compromises our ability to envision and debate different philosophical positions about practice. On this, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2005) remind us of the 'heightening danger that in future skill and expertise will be lost through over-reliance on calculative rationality' (p. 790). Academics, and by implication practitioners and the practice, are restricted by the pace of innovation in practice. Academics have to wait for the practitioner community (or in the best case, devise action-learning projects and join the practitioners in their efforts) to produce new approaches to practice that will translate into academic, scientifically compiled evidence bases. The role of the academic is restricted within the framework and/or the space of the data from existing practice; this is partly due to the intellectual comfort that is attached to evidence.

"Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do, and do over and over again, an immense amount of dead, specialized work in the region of 'facts.' We forget that facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, incomplete meanings, and unless they are rounded out in complete ideas—a work which can only be done by hypotheses, by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities—they are as helpless as are all maimed things and as repellent as are needlessly thwarted ones." (Dewey, 1927, p. 8)

Our research mindset, methods, and our professional standing necessitate and depend on the collection of strong datasets from the realities of *existing* practice. Transcending this mindset into the natural sciences, Higgs, Englert, and Brout would have never predicted the Higgs boson (first time measured 50 years after its prediction); just as Einstein could have never predicted gravitational waves (measured for the first time 100 years after Einstein's prediction). Arguably, using existing practice as a point of departure can be a source of new philosophies and approaches to work; however, we wouldn't be able to quote many examples here. The practitioner can turn to the academic for expertise in a variety of tools, techniques, methods and methodologies, and insights into existing practice. But where can the practitioner (including the academic practitioner) turn to for a well-informed, well-thought out, intelligent, and dynamic discussion about how he or she can change his or her profession for the better? Where can we find out about different views on how we can marry competitiveness and ethics; how we can handle ethics when business schools have been heavily criticized for their lack of attention to business ethics; how we can bridge inequalities; how we can handle climate change; and so forth? Where can we find out about transformative views and inform our professional philosophies in ways that supersede

existing thinking and can lead respective industries into the future? We have been criticized for our lack of attention to these matters (Morsing & Rovira, 2011), and the examples are abundant. For example, in May 2015, the Schumpeter blog in *The Economist* urged practitioners to adopt 'a palette of plans' and 'smudging the canvas' on the premise that 'choosing a strategy is a lot more complex for companies than it used to be' (p. 66). Underlying this piece and the author's thought is that the existing approaches (philosophies) to strategic development are no longer relevant. According to the author, the only alternative seems to be a combination or 'smudging' of the existing strategic approaches. Is this really the best we can offer practitioners?

So, the news is out! Faced with a world that is changing, that can only be partly known to us, and with a distinctive lack of alternative approaches and philosophies to existing practice, it is now time to perhaps turn to the field of philosophy for inspiration. In this attempt, our allies will be:

- Our datasets and evidence bases, which can be interpreted anew from different philosophical perspectives;
- Our existing insights from practice, which can inform our future searches and help us avoid re-inventing the wheel;
- Our existing good practices and academic thinking/insights, which have helped us thus far (and may prove to be invaluable), but do need to stand our scrutiny anew. Critically evaluating our existing ideas for their strengths and limitations will help us decide and prioritize the areas that need to capture or attention in the short- and long-term future;
- Our existing theories, which helped us to understand the world to the level we do today;
- Our curiosity, which helps us to combine, broaden, and deepen all of the above, but also look at the missing links between them, such as the Higgs boson in natural science.

In other words, we may need new perspectives, approaches, or philosophies but not at the cost of severing our relationship with the past and our development to date. As Dewey (1927) writes:

"Philosophy sustains the closest connection with the history of culture, with the succession of changes in civilization. It is fed by the streams of tradition, traced at critical moments to their sources in order that the current may receive a new direction. [. . .] [Philosophy] is itself a change; [. . .] The intellectual registrations which constitute a philosophy are generative because they are selecting and eliminating exaggerations. [. . .] [philosophy] is additive and transforming in its role in the history of civilization" (p. 5).

Dewey seeks to explain the relationship among new ideas, philosophies, change, and the past; he views them as inter-linked, with the clear objective of philosophy to eliminate that which is excessive and unnecessary—unnecessary ideas that grow on our thinking like mosses and lichens on rocks by

the ocean. The role of philosophy is to clear our thoughts of excess and therefore provide clarity in terms of future directions and orientations. In this way, philosophy is by nature transformative, progressive, and forward looking.

The Role of Philosophy

Philosophy has a very clear role to play in practice: to offer and propose *a range of ideals that can be developed into entire philosophies that can guide and inform practice*. Different ideals will produce different philosophies, which will apply in some cases but not in others. Swift (2008) argues that ideals and, by implication the philosophies they generate, will entail intellectual and conceptual merits and limitations that—when known to the practitioner—can help him or her critically discuss, compare, evaluate, and sensibly judge his or her approach to practice. He writes:

“As long as philosophers can tell us why the ideal would be ideal, and not simply that it is, much of what they actually do when they do “ideal theory” is likely to help with the evaluation of options within the feasible set” (p. 365).

Swift makes strong claims about the need for ‘fundamental, context-independent, normative’ philosophies and approaches on the basis that the challenges we face reflect non-ideal circumstances, very much like the challenges that project managers face. As we mentioned above, these are complex, interdisciplinary and, in many cases, time-critical issues that require a sophisticated understanding of an issue and ways of addressing an issue that are underlined by different philosophical orientations and approaches. The latter will, by definition, entail conceptual and intellectual strengths and limitations, and will ultimately lead to very different outcomes in practice. An aggressive philosophy and approach to climate change would solve some problems and create others, as would a fair/just philosophy/approach, an inclusive philosophy/approach, and so on and so forth. Some philosophies/approaches will reflect favorable and relevant solutions in some cases and irrelevant and impractical solutions in other cases. But without an understanding of different philosophical orientations, what is possible, and why, we remain fundamentally limited in our capacity to evaluate our options. We remain attached to past experiences that may no longer apply and may not represent adequate solutions to problems, or—even worse—we may be left with luck and the hope that we may get it right. Surely the relevance, applicability, and feasibility of different philosophical approaches will play a significant role in the process of critically evaluating new philosophical approaches for their merits and limitations in practice. But the fact that a philosophical approach may not be relevant or applicable in a particular case or problem is not an adequate reason to not evaluate different options about how to go about practice, how to practice. Philosophy

can create and help us envision options, alternatives, propositions, suggestions that can inspire groundbreaking or incremental, new conceptualizations of practice. These are options, alternatives, propositions, suggestions that can help redefine or reposition what practice is and can be. Philosophy can produce a variety of options and alternatives that can help us grow and develop the practice through a process of critical evaluation. It can distract us from the existing status quo; shake our core; create alternatives and space for debate and evaluation; and construct different targets that once imagined and conceptualized can start to become feasible, practical, and relevant in some, if not many, cases.

If we pay attention to creating different options and alternatives to approaching practice, we might have a better chance at sensibly evaluating what to do, how to proceed, and what our options are. We might have a better chance at drawing new directions for practice, a new state of affairs; a better, fairer, more equitable, more inclusive, more relevant state of affairs that can be prioritized and help us renew the ways in which we think about practice and the inequalities that create our challenges. We can start an intelligent, well thought-out, considered and informed process of exploration, risk-taking, growth, new thinking, and new orientation—a process of creating a reality that does not yet exist but can be and is perhaps waiting to be imagined and created. We can create new philosophies tailored to the challenges we face, new philosophies which allow us to explore different ways of interpreting the unknown part of the world, and which allow the personal development a professional needs—a consciousness about our choices that will require us to become accountable and inseparable from our practice. If philosophers can outline our options and the reasons why they can be important for our practice, the practitioner will be obliged to take full responsibility for his or her actions. For the professional, this increased accountability over the choice of practice reflects a need, because accountability is a fundamental characteristic of being a professional.

“An expert’s role also determines the scope of accountability for the expert’s work. Professionals account for the complete professional task, including treatment. We can say that experts represent not only units of expertise (as human capital) but also units of accountability for the application of expertise in accordance to their expert role.” (Mieg, 2009, p. 753)

For those who feel comfortable reproducing practices; who do not seek to understand their options, and critically evaluate them and claim the accountability of their choice of practice, an emphasis and discussion of fundamental, context-independent, normative philosophies/approaches would indeed seem threatening. This is fair enough, yet does not constitute a professional profile. For the latter, a philosophical debate and enquiry with the aim of critically evaluating different philosophical approaches to practice isn’t relevant.

What Are the Risks of Engaging With Philosophy?

First, different philosophies and, more generally philosophy as a discipline, is frequently criticized for its normative nature. The very notion of a philosophy is seen as elitist, relevant to conservative thinking and moralistic views, which seek to dominate over other views and claim universality. Our message here is the exact opposite. We suggest that the role of philosophy is to create a space in which different philosophical orientations and approaches can be critically evaluated. The role of philosophy is to create alternatives and new ideas, while the professional remains firmly responsible and accountable for the choice of philosophical orientation and approach that he or she chooses to apply in practice. We suggest that the value of philosophy in practice does not lie in creating and adopting one, single, unitary, universal philosophy, but rather in creating and exploring different philosophical orientations to practice. As a process, this can enhance our thinking, train our instincts, educate our intentions, help us envision different goals for our practice and, ultimately, become another resource we can use to address the challenges we face, the unknown, and our need to immerse ourselves in our practice and serve it as professionals.

Second, in the same way that some disciplines can be criticized for their lack of attention to philosophy—such as management science and in many cases organization studies—philosophy as a discipline is frequently criticized (and arguably so) for its lack of attention to facts. Dewey (1927) writes:

“But in all of them there is an exuberance and fertility of meanings and values in comparison with which correctness of telling is a secondary affair, while in the function termed science accuracy of telling is the chief matter” (p. 7).

Dewey provides a great answer to this problem. He sees scientific thinking and method as a means of testing different ideals and the philosophies they generate, and is clear about those philosophies that do not pass the test: they should be eliminated.

“This confers upon scientific knowledge an incalculably important office in philosophy. But the criterion is negative; the exclusion of the inconsistent is far from being identical with a positive test which demands that only what has been scientifically verifiable provide the entire content of philosophy. It is the difference between an imagination that acknowledges its responsibility to meet the logical demands of ascertained facts, and a complete abdication of all imagination in behalf of a prosy literalism” (p. 7).

And here Dewey agrees with Swift, who similarly suggests that the distinction between philosophy and science is ill-conceived, one that has been unduly established. Our world philosophers Plato, Aristotle and, even before them, Parmenides, were all mystics and scientists at the same time,

searching for meaning amongst reason, experience, and illusion (Parmenides); structure and phantasia (Aristotle); and the intricate relationship between philosophy and action (as in Plato's *Republic*).

Finally, our discussion on the role of philosophy cannot end without acknowledging the political significance of philosophy and, by implication, our suggestions. A focus on inequality is one way of explaining and interpreting the challenges we face, and as such is a political statement. We have prioritized issues of social, humanitarian, and economic concern in our opening paragraphs—this has political bearings. We have put forward a view of the world being partially known to us and this too has political implications and gravitas. We have reinstated an extended role for the professional, one that needs to include a healthy preoccupation with philosophy—again, a view that could be seen through a political lens. These are choices with significant implications; they suggest that we need to focus on a particular aspect (e.g., inequality) and direct our limited resources (time, knowledge, human potential, funds, etc.) to address this aspect of reality; in other words, we suggest an emphasis on inequality rather than—say—profit maximization or communitarianism. A philosophy that targets inequality would enable and disable other competing philosophies and, if established, would give rise and power to practices seeking to address inequalities and the relevant communities.

Indeed, philosophy is a political issue; it creates alternatives and is intrinsically and by definition transformative. It is fundamentally political in that it creates impactful action and change; it prioritizes and sets aside; it gives and takes power. We suggest that by creating a discussion about philosophy in project management in this special issue, perhaps we have the opportunity to render different philosophical orientations on project management more visible and therefore more manageable and open to scrutiny by peers and others before we proceed and put them into practice. Then we will perhaps have a better chance to be more poignant in our choices and more effective in our practice. We hope we have offered a first step in this direction not only for the benefit of the communities involved (academics, practitioners, and policymakers) but—far more importantly—for the practice of project management.

In This Special Issue

In this special issue there are four streams of articles. The first stream takes a broad view and addresses projects as an everyday or social phenomenon. The second group addresses philosophy in project management, including the people working in projects. The third group focuses on projects as such—what they are and what is done in projects. The last group of articles addresses philosophy in project management research.

The group of articles on broader perspectives starts with “*Minima Moralia* in Project Management: There Is No

Right Life in the Wrong One” by *Louis Klein*, who addresses Aristotle’s long-standing question: “How to live a good life?” but does it from a contemporary perspective using the lens of Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*. This article relates the broader picture of worldwide systemic social and industrial developments and the role of the individuals therein, with the particularities of the development of project management in its context and the role of the individual project manager. This allows for pointing out a number of factors, such as rationalization, systemization, and individualism, whose interplay should be considered by project managers in finding their own ways of being a good project manager.

The article “The Projectification of Everything: Projects as a Human Condition” by *Anders Jensen, Christian Thuesen, and Joana Geraldi* describes an alternative understanding of projects, beyond organizational practices. That is, projects as a human condition. Hereby human condition emerges through a shift from a merely disciplinary to a merely project society. Four philosophical concepts are used to explain this change: activity, time, space, and relations. The changes in these principles provide for a variety of worldviews and explain a number of issues and phenomena observed in recent times.

“Philosophy of Project Management: Lessons from the Philosophy of Science” by *J. Davidson Frame* addresses the development of a philosophy of project management. This is a fundamental issue for the community of practitioners and academics in the field, as theory development builds on philosophy as an underlying base. To that end is the development of project management related theory contingent on the existence of one or several philosophies of project management. Frame suggests using the Philosophy of Science as a role model for the development of a philosophy of project management. Specifically, he suggests developing simple and lean criteria that allow the demarcation of project management philosophy against other areas of philosophy. To do this, he suggests avoiding excessive abstraction and being open to inspiration from outside the project management discipline. Using the discourse on realism versus antirealism from the philosophy of science as an example, he shows the role of observable and non-observable entities in developing research that is repeatable, systematic, and unbiased, as well as acknowledged by the research community.

The group of articles on philosophy in project management starts with “An Existential Hermeneutic Philosophical Approach to Project Management,” by *Bradley Rolfe, Steven Segal, and Svetlana Cicmil* using the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Richard Rorty to re-describe the fundamental assumptions underpinning project management. They go beyond seeing project management as only a science and develop the significance and value of philosophy for project management. The authors use re-description as philosophical practice to respond to existential disruptions of the lived experience in managing

projects. The authors perceive this as vital, not only to being a project manager but to describing project management.

The article “Let’s Discuss Aesthetics for Projects” by *Bronte van der Hoorn and Jon Whitty* addresses the aesthetical aspects of projects, focusing on the often neglected aspects of sensory and lived experiences in projects. Starting from a Heideggerian perspective of aesthetics, two empirical studies were conducted to identify project managers’ sensory experiences in managing their projects. Results show how project managers decide on rendering processes and tools as effective or ineffective based on their aesthetic perception of their “fit” to particular project situations (i.e., “an equipmental totality in particular worlds” in a Heideggerian sense), which leads to the conclusion that in the various worlds of projects the aesthetic qualities of equipment can become catalysts for human behavior.

The article “Why Distinctions Matter: What Does Philosophical Analysis Have to do With Project Management?” by *José Idler* addresses the practical problem of optimizing project outcomes through the analytic philosophical method of making distinctions. Using examples from the Aristotelian and Kantian methods of finding distinctions, he derives at a process of identifying differences and contradictions (for example, in project deliverables) and then refining them conceptually by identifying classes of sub-concepts or elements and their relations, for example, in the form of essential and contingent attributes of project deliverables. While obviously appropriate for traditional approaches to project management, he points out the additional appropriateness for agile contexts, in which the focus lies on developing the project in the right direction as opposed to the traditional optimization of project outcomes.

The next group of articles addresses the nature of projects and starts with the article “The Metaphysical Questions Every Project Practitioner Should Ask” by *Lavagnon A. Ika and Christophe N. Bredillet*, which addresses the question: What are projects? For that, the authors turn away from the popular worldview of how projects are used toward what projects really are. Through that, they aim to help practitioners understand how their metaphysical stance informs their project management style; more specifically, how a thing-based understanding tends to lead to planning-based project management and process-based understanding tends to lead to emergent management style.

“Living With the Unknown Unknown: Uncertainty in Projects,” by *Øyvind Kvalnes* addresses ways to deal with uncertainty in projects. Using the famous example of Wittgenstein’s fly-in-the-bottle as a metaphor, he shows how existing project management theory and practice can similarly turn project practitioners into prisoners in their fly-bottle, in this case, in the context of uncertainty. To that end, the article discusses a variety of different philosophical perspectives before it settles on philosophical pragmatism and concludes that the

Guest Editorial

prevailing approach of uncertainty reduction during project planning might be too narrow a perspective. This perspective should be complemented with other views, such as those that embrace uncertainty for the benefit of the project.

“Root Metaphors for the Management of Projects: Toward a Knowledge-Based View,” by *Terence Ahern, Brian Leavy, and P.J. Byrne* addresses the philosophical differences between traditional and situated approaches to the management of projects. The authors see projects as modes of organizing and learning for temporary undertakings. Using the meta-perspective of Pepper’s root-metaphor framework (1942) and interpreting it from a knowledge-based view using Popper’s (1979) work on problem solving learning, Pettigrew’s work (2012) on process research, and Polany’s work (1967) on knowledge’s tacit dimension, they identify different modes of learning in different project types. In addition, the article offers a different way of looking at projects, that is, as modes of organizing and learning. Following Pepper they suggest a Mechanism hypothesis for projects using explicit knowledge, thus traditional project management approaches; and a Contextualism hypothesis for projects taking a context contingency approach to knowledge in projects. Both metaphors are linked through tacit knowledge. Following the line of Pepper, they further suggest organicism for portfolio management and formalism for program management. With its four metaphors the article provides another philosophical base for subsequent theory development.

The article by *Sergei Floricel and Sorin Piperca*, “Project Management Between Will and Representation,” addresses the differences in perspectives toward projects. Using Schopenhauer’s concept of will and representation, they show the inadequacy of one-dimensional perspectives, such as purely rational or purely human perspectives toward projects. Rather, they argue for projects being a process of bricolage, which tries to accommodate opposing interests and disparate sensemaking strands. The process advances projects through a constant repositioning and rebuilding process, driven by a large variety of rational and non-rational influences. Moreover, the representation of this process is conditioned by its visibility, which often leads to more rhetoric-based representations of the project rather than factual narratives about the project. By building a framework of different perspectives, the authors suggest reconsidering various aspects of project management from new, emerging, and constantly changing views.

“The Open Secret of Values: The Roles of Values and Axiology in Project Research,” by *Mattias Jacobsson and Thomas Biedenbach* addresses the benefits for project research gained through a more philosophical treatment of axiology, especially when beyond the simple acknowledgment of values as concept or in project management methodologies. For this the authors review the concept of axiology and value theory and explore their use in published project

management research. Subsequently, they reflect on the historical-logical development of its influences on projects and project management.

In summary, this special issue provides for a large variety of philosophical perspectives toward projects and their management, including perspectives of classical thinkers, such as Aristotle, but also later and contemporary writers, such as Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Rorty, Popper, and Wittgenstein. As such it is the first work that brings together such a variety of perspectives and interpretations to explore new understandings and insights into the realms of projects and create the space in which the study and understanding of projects under different philosophies can help create excellence in practice. May this be the trigger for a new stream of thinking in the world of projects and their management.

It is our great pleasure to introduce the new call for papers for a special issue on process studies in project organizing with three invited editors: Viviane Sergi, Lucia Crevani, and Monique Aubry. Full papers must be submitted by 31 January 2017. For additional details please visit PMI.org/learning/publications-project-management-journal.aspx

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