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PERSPECTIVE

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A Manifesto for project management research

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Abstract

Project management research has evolved over the past five decades and is now a mature disciplinary field investigating phenomena of interest to academics, practitioners and policymakers. Studies of projects and project management practices are theoretically rich and scientifically rigorous. They are practically relevant and impactful when addressing the pursuit of operational, tactical and strategic advancements in the world of organisations. We want to broaden the conversation between project management scholars and other scholars from cognate disciplines, particularly business and management, in a true scholarship of integration and cross-fertilisation. This Manifesto invites the latter scholars to join efforts providing a foundation for further creative, theoretical and empirical contributions, including but not limited to tackling grand challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and global poverty. To this end, we identify five theses:

1. Projects are often 'agents of change' and hence fundamental to driving the innovation and change required to tackle grand challenges.
2. Much project management research leverages and challenges theories across disciplines, including business, organisation and management studies, contributing to developing new theories, including those specific to projects and temporary organisations.
3. 'Projects' are useful units of analysis, project management research is ideal for scientific cross-fertilisation and project management scholars welcome academics from other communities to engage in fruitful conversations.
4. As in many other fields of knowledge, the project management research community embraces diversity, welcoming researchers of different genders and various scientific and social backgrounds.
5. Historically rooted in 'problem-solving' and normative studies, project management research has become open to interpretative and emancipatory research, providing opportunities for other business, management and organisational scholars to advance their knowledge communities.

KEYWORDS
project management, temporary organization, organizational change

WHY WE NEED THIS MANIFESTO

The projectification of society and the need to tackle grand challenges

We live in a 'project society' where projects shape people, organisations and society (Lundin et al., 2015), a phenomenon that was dubbed 'projectification' in a business context about 30 years ago (Midler, 1995). In this 'project economy', projects (which drive change and innovation) and operations (which make organisations run daily) compete and collaborate as leading economic agents (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2021). This goes beyond the mere focus on single organisations since coalitions are

behind socio-technical transitions or even societal changes (Lenfle & Söderlund, 2022). As Martin (2013) noted in the *Harvard Business Review*, the manager's job is project work, and organisations should be run through projects. The morphology of projects extends much further, as our colleagues in sociology observe (Castells, 2000). 'Hence, projects have become intrinsic to our lives. They permeate what we do, how we speak, how we think of our daily activities (Lundin et al., 2015), how we construct our identities, and, ultimately, who we are. […] Indeed, we are experiencing the "projectification of everything." It is therefore reasonable to argue that we are in the wake of the project society, a society in which projects are omnipresent as a form of coordinating human activities (Lundin et al., 2015), and in so doing, become a human condition' (Jensen et al., 2016, pp. 26).

Many projects deliver change and create the future (Huemann, 2022; Huemann & Silvius, 2017). For example, without projects, it would be impossible to tackle grand challenges such as pandemics, climate change or poverty (Ika & Munro, 2022). COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination rollouts were developed and delivered through projects (Winch et al., 2021). Policymakers have turned to initiatives such as Make Poverty History and COP 27, which require trillions of dollars of investment over several decades to deliver projects that target the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). Projects are also relevant at the national level as they shape the future and realise the significant changes needed to create a better society (Davies, 2017). For instance, in the United States, the Biden administration's response to the crumbling infrastructure problem is 'a once-in-a-generation investment' to the tune of USD 2 trillion in infrastructure projects to fix 20,000 miles of roads and 10,000 bridges throughout the country. Project management has the strategic means for realising economic and social value through the delivery of systems, products and services.

Our world requires project skills, competencies and capabilities; therefore, project management practice is burgeoning. Project management is an important part of management practice transcending the traditional boundaries between, for example, management and engineering, with project management specialists, consultants and support staff working together to ensure professional and sound implementation of projects. Project management organisations, such as the US-based Project Management Institute (PMI; which has close to 700,000 members) or the Europe-based International Project Management Association (IPMA; a federation of some 70 member country associations over the world), have become some of the largest professional associations in the world, demonstrating the need to foster skills and competencies to run projects in all sectors of society.

The increasing role of projects in society and the growing awareness of the criticality of project management practice have triggered various initiatives within higher education. Leading universities deliver executive education programmes in project management and related topics, attracting some of the best students in engineering and management. For instance, the University of Oxford launched the BT chair to focus on megaprojects; University College London has established a chair of infrastructure delivery with major projects; the University of Sydney created a School of Project Management and the John Grill Institute for Project Leadership; and Université du Québec à Montréal has recently established a research chair on the social value of infrastructure projects.

Project management research is a disciplinary field in its own right, overlapping and requiring special attention notably from engineering, business and social sciences schools and from both top and lower-level managers. This is a major opportunity and, at the same time, a fundamental challenge that calls for collaboration across and beyond established disciplines. To this end, we first need to clarify how modern project management literature describes projects and the implications of two key perspectives on projects.

Two perspectives on projects

Most practitioners and scholars think they know what a project *is*. Projects, however, assume many forms with sometimes only faint family resemblances. The polysemic concept of 'project' means different things to different people in different contexts at different times. Often, we read authors who conceptualise a project as a product, an initiative, a strategy, a purpose, a goal, a process, a change, a concept, a story, an organisation, a problem-solving approach, a practice, a set of tasks, a cost, anticipation (temporal or spatial) of the future or any combination of these (Ika & Bredillet, 2016). Two overarching and conflicting notions of projects dominate the literature: a relatively narrow view where projects are construed as deliberate leaps into a planned future and a broader view where projects are seen as processes of pursuit, experimentation and discovery (Kreiner, 2020).

Taking a relatively narrow view, Shenhar and Dvir (2007) define a project as a 'temporary organization[1] and process set up to achieve a specified goal under the constraints of time, budget, and other resources' (p. 5). Taking a broader view, a project can be conceptualised as a 'unique constellation of experiences and consequences, of direct and indirect effects', as a result of the 'varied interplay between' the structural complexity of the task to

[1]We hasten to note that the conceptualisation of projects as 'temporary organisations' is just one lens, while other lenses are also useful. For example there are temporary organisations which are not projects: A government with a 5 years' mandate is a temporary organisation, but not a project. Conversely, projects can lead to permanent organisations and thus their results get embedded in operations. A case in point, the entrepreneurial project to establish a new company is temporary, but the would-be organisation is designed with a permanent intention.

complete on the one hand and the socio-political context on the other (Hirschman, 1967, p. 186).

These two ontological schools of thought are not without consequences for managing or leading projects. With the relatively narrow view, we assume that we already and collectively know how to deliver these purposive human actions successfully. Thus, we believe the management process is 'inconsequential' for project outcomes, as we need to adhere to a pre-established plan (Kreiner, 2020). Here, the approach of planning the work and working the plan prevails; thus, the notion of 'project management' or the management of project execution makes perfect sense (Ika & Bredillet, 2016).

Contrastingly, taking a broader view, due to the inherent complexities and uncertainties, we cannot know in advance how 'to be successful in projects'. Instead, we are driven by learning and being open to new ways of learning. Thus, the task of management is to embrace wisely the role of agency in 'successfulness', exercise practical judgment in the face of the unforeseen and celebrate learning opportunities from 'accumulated experience' (Kreiner, 2020). In this instance, we can speak of 'managing' or 'leading' projects as the emphasis shifts to understanding the context surrounding the project, including its stakeholders and beneficiaries or end-users (Ika & Bredillet, 2016) through 'a set of managerial activities needed to lead a project to a successful end' (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007, p. 5). Managing or leading projects is hence the art and science of transforming a vision into reality (Turner, 1996) or a 'long voyage of discovery, in the most varied domains, from technology to politics' (Hirschman, 1967, p. 35). Increasingly, the leadership will be 'socialised' (Whyte et al., 2022) as leadership in the face of complexities and uncertainties requires a collective endeavour.

Understanding project management research and its value

Despite the relevance of projects, two challenges obstruct a genuine, fertile and sustained conversation between project management and the broader business, organisation and management scholars.

First, while decision-makers understand the importance of projects at the policy, strategy and organisation levels, they seldom engage with evidence from project management research and advice from project management scholars. Rarely do project management scholars get to advise policymakers on tackling projects to address world-scale challenges.[2] The stakes are high, if only because policymakers rely on projects and project management to deliver their policies and strategies. While scholars increasingly refer to strategy-as-practice, much of that practice occurs in projects (Whittington et al., 2017). For example, COP 27 envisaged the investment of trillions of dollars in net-zero initiatives, most of them projects. While several scientific communities attended that event, from engineering to finance to economics to international trade experts, few project management scholars were invited to those discussions. Project scholars would have been of great help in providing ideas on selecting, planning, organising and delivering these projects efficiently, effectively and sustainably. Project management knowledge can make policy and decision-makers aware of which projects to pursue and how projects may collaborate to generate better value and sustainable outcomes. This enables an understanding of how projects interdependently create impact and the potential risk of resource cannibalisation. Too often, policy and decision-makers select the wrong projects or launch those that do not exploit synergies, thus often causing a 'double whammy' of cost overruns and benefit shortfalls (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Ika et al., 2022).

Second, many academics from business schools, for example, mistakenly regard project management as an adjunct of 'operations management' or just a practice or a mere collection of tools and techniques. Their understanding of project management research is outdated. They will recognise project management as a professional disciplinary field, albeit one often regarded as lacking a robust theoretical background; this interpretation fails to recognise, for instance, the bridging work between organisation studies and project management in the past 20 years. Yet project management has been one of the most researched and theorised topics in management (Pinto & Prescott, 1988) in the first decades after World War II (e.g., see Gaddis, 1959; Katz, 1982; Nutt, 1983; Roman, 1964; Thamhain & Wilemon, 1975; Wilemon & Cicero, 1970). Despite the importance of projects and their widespread nature, little space is currently devoted to project management research in leading business and management journals, whether they aim at an academic (e.g., *Strategic Management Journal*) or professional (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*) audience. For example, in the field of strategy, papers are increasingly dealing not only with strategy formulation but also with strategy execution. But even though the importance of project delivery is paramount in strategy execution, the strategy field has so far focused little on projects. The Financial Times (FT) 50-listed *Journal of Operations Management* (JOM) and *Research Policy* are notable exceptions, as they demonstrate an increasing focus on projects and project management in their scope.

Further, many project management scholars may have received this advice from a seasoned business and management scholar: "' … if you want to get published, drop the term project management from the title or keywords," […] "… the area is too applied, too close to practice for proper academic study"' (Söderlund &

[2]A notable exception is the contribution of Bent Flyvbjerg, the first Oxford BT Professor of Major Programme Management, one of the most cited scholars in the field of management, who has focused his attention on the challenge of infrastructure cost overruns.

Maylor, 2012, p. 687). Such a lack of cross-learning between project management and the broader business and management field is a regrettable loss of opportunity for readers of those journals. FT-50 or ABS 4* outlets are missing crucial and rigorous research on projects. To cite one example, though the notion of 'project economy' has been lately re-discovered in business and management, project management authors have been using it for 16 years in project management (e.g., Gemünden, 2013; Joffre et al., 2006). A cursory glance at project management publications over the past decade is sufficient to realise that 'project management is not a spreadsheet – even in a virtual era' (Peters, 2004, p. 18).

Fortunately, things are recently changing albeit slowly. Project scholarship now more commonly appears in a broader range of outlets beyond its original more specialist homes, recent examples of which include leading FT-50 or ABS 4* journals, such as the *Journal of Management Studies* (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007), *Organization Science* (Pitsis et al., 2003), *Organization Studies* (van Marrewijk et al., 2016), *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Davies et al., 2017), *Research Policy* (Gil & Pinto, 2018), *Production and Operations Management* (Browning & Ramasesh, 2007), *Management Science* (Pich et al., 2002), *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* (Maylor et al., 2018), and *Human Relations* (Söderlund & Pemsel, 2021). Project scholars increasingly borrow theories (Drouin & Jugdev, 2014; Ika et al., 2022; Keil, 2022) from 'neighbouring fields' such as strategy, organisation studies, human resources management, operations management, information systems and innovation management (Davies et al., 2018; Kwak & Anbari, 2009; Maniak & Midler, 2014). Further, project scholars endeavour to contribute new theoretical insights that can help further our understanding of the contribution of projects to business and management (Müller & Klein, 2018). They are writing books for leading publishing houses such as Harvard Business Review Press (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007), Oxford University Press (Morris et al., 2011), Cambridge University Press (Sankaran et al., 2017), Edward Elgar Publishing (Drouin & Turner, 2022), Sage (Clegg et al., 2021) and McGraw-Hill (Ika & Saint-Macary, 2023).

This Manifesto builds on those recent developments. Indeed, it is time for project scholars not only to engage with policy and practice but also spark a win-win conversation with the broader business and management scholars about projects, project networks, project business, project ecologies, project-based organising and project society, as well as project portfolio and programme management practices. Embracing insights from different fields of inquiry, such as social sciences, engineering and business and management, is important to foster the ability to shape the right projects in the right way, engage the right stakeholders, involve communities and ensure that society generates projects that will make a difference and that will spark agency to trigger necessary change.

FIVE THESES FOR THE FUTURE OF COLLABORATIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

To harness the contribution of projects to society and the world, policy and decision-makers need insights from empirical research that are academically rigorous and socially relevant. The collaboration between project scholars and other social scientists will be essential to exploit the opportunities for cross-fertilisation and learning between project management and its neighbouring disciplinary fields. Therefore, the theoretical, topical and community diversity that characterises project management research places it in a position to invite other communities to collaborate in this essential and exciting journey.

In what follows, we articulate these ideas around five theses that will guide project management research over the coming years. We challenge the mistaken perception that project management research focuses only on tools and techniques or even normative publications (including popular books aimed at practitioners). As with the broader business and management field, there is no shortage of these, but they do not constitute project management's contemporary academic and research focus (Söderlund, 2011). We show that research published in project management journals fully belongs to modern social science and contributes to the progress of science and society. We take stock of the advancements achieved, as demonstrated in the past years of project management research published in our leading project management journals. We demonstrate how the disciplinary field is evolving, present directions for the future, and highlight potential collaborations with the wider social sciences and business and management communities. We show how project management is forward-looking and equipped to contribute to theory and practice.

A mature social science disciplinary field: taking stock of the past three decades of development

Project management research is useful

Thesis 1. Projects are often 'agents of change' and hence fundamental to driving the innovation and change required to tackle grand challenges.

Not all projects are small product changes, routine execution interventions, maintenance initiatives or simple extensions of infrastructure. Many projects fundamentally drive change of a significant nature. In this Manifesto, we construe such projects as 'agents of

change'. These are key elements of the project society in which we live, where 'an increasing share of our gross national product and an increasing share of our time are spent financing and enacting projects in all kinds of industries; this is also true in our private lives, when we engage with others in social, cultural, or political projects during our leisure time. […] The project economy is needed in order to develop and implement our future: Project business is future business!' (Gemünden, 2013, p. 2).

For a long time, the private sector has relied on projects to execute business strategy and deliver business change, innovation and effectiveness (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). Projects have also been instruments of choice for policymakers in the public sector whether they seek to build infrastructure (Flyvbjerg, 2014), plan and deliver Complex Products and Systems (CoPS) (Davies & Brady, 2000; Davies & Hobday, 2005; Gann & Salter, 2000), build or develop capacity (Ika & Donnelly, 2017), improve or reform governance (Vukomanović et al., 2021) or tackle and curb grand challenges (Ika et al., 2020). Several academic and industrial sources report that projects are frequently delivered late and over budget (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Locatelli, Mikic, et al., 2017; McKinsey, 2015; PWC, 2013; Sovacool et al., 2014; The Standish Group International Inc., 2020), and about half of the investment projects funded by donors such as the World Bank may have failed to deliver much-needed impact for the world's poor, that is, their beneficiaries, as a McKinsey-Devex survey suggests (Ika & Donnelly, 2017; Lovegrove et al., 2011). Thus, project management research is essential to develop projects that can deliver the significant 'changes' that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals envisage (Ika et al., 2020). To this end, a few books and articles tackling 'grand challenges' in project management journals have been published in recent years (e.g., Davies et al., 2023; Ika & Munro, 2022). To cite two broad examples of projects fundamental to driving the innovation and change required to tackle grand challenges, let us consider the project management literature on sustainability and the dark side.

Sustainability has been a topic in project management since the 1990s (Van Pelt, 1993), and it became popular in the 2010s. While Sabini et al. (2019) have published a detailed review of publications at the nexus of project management and sustainability, in this Manifesto, we want to stress the relevance of two aspects introduced by Gareis et al. (2013) and Huemann and Silvius (2017).

1. 'Sustainability *of* the project': The project is managed and delivered using sustainable processes and sustainability principles (Silvius & Huemann, 2023). Planning and delivering projects require immense economic, financial, natural and human resources; therefore, the world needs to be 'sustainable' in using these resources. For instance, Infrastructure Outlook (2020) estimates that USD 79 trillion will be invested in infrastructure projects by 2039. Sustainability in this context can refer to the treatment of the people involved (gender balance, fair salaries, etc.), the use of responsibly sourced materials, the minimising of waste in construction and so forth.
2. 'Sustainability *by* the project': The delivered project is a sustainable good or service. For example, once built, infrastructure will be in place for decades or centuries. So, looking at projects as 'agents of change', we should address questions such as: Is the project promoting sustainable mobility (e.g., infrastructure for electric public transportation) or promoting private car use (e.g., construction of highways and parking lots)? How do we set up project-based organisations to ensure that we create the projects, programmes and portfolios needed to tackle grand challenges (Ika & Munro, 2022; Lenfle & Söderlund, 2022)? In developing countries, are we promoting projects that favour the well-being of local populations in the long run (e.g., schools, sanitation infrastructure and sustainable agriculture) or merely complying with the procedures of foreign organisations and governments in the short run (Ika et al., 2020)? We want to stress the importance and utility of research on the sustainability 'of' and 'by' projects to build a better future. Unfortunately, historically, in many instances, projects do not have a good record of achieving sustainable outcomes; therefore, a mindset shift is needed. Several sustainability strategies for projects, particularly major projects, still overemphasise economic growth and do not pay sufficient attention to the impact on natural environments. We need more research leading to more systemic/contextual approaches to projects, which also situate the project in wider organisational landscapes. To address grand challenges is thus to change current project management practices to create and distribute value among different project stakeholders with differing expectations inside and outside the project (Gil, 2021; Ika & Saint-Macary, 2023).

Another emerging stream of research aimed at tackling grand challenges refers to the 'dark side' of projects (Locatelli et al., 2022a). As noted earlier, many projects shape the future by being positive agents of change (e.g., developing a vaccine for COVID-19, building primary schools in deprived areas, etc.) or having detrimental social and environmental impacts, both expected and unexpected, thus showing their dark side. The planning and delivery of projects might involve corruption, modern slavery, promoting sexism and so forth (Locatelli et al., 2022b). Other projects might deliver harmful outputs (e.g., unsustainable infrastructure or weapons of mass destruction) or promote wrongdoing in organisations and the normalisation of deviance (Krystallis & Locatelli, 2022; Pinto, 2014). Until recently, these topics were scarcely covered in project management journals;

however, they are receiving increasing attention that emphasises their relevance. A clear example is 'corruption and projects'. According to the World Economic Forum, USD 2 trillion a year is wasted on corruption (Thomson, 2017), with political, social, economic and environmental costs (Transparency International, 2022). Projects play a key role both as 'enablers' and as 'means of fighting' corruption (Lehtinen et al., 2022). The topic's relevance is further demonstrated by Locatelli, Mariani, et al. (2017) and received considerable attention outside academia (European Parliamentary Research Service, African Development Bank, OECD, etc.). Other topics, such as bullying, sexism or gender discrimination, have been more sparsely covered (Creasy & Carnes, 2017; Locatelli et al., 2022a; Pinto et al., 2015). Still, these topics are essential to tackling 'grand challenges' and are strongly encouraged in project management journals. All these are excellent topics for collaborations with other communities, as envisaged in the following sections.

Much of project management research is theoretically rich and strong

Thesis 2. Much project management research leverages and challenges theories across disciplines, including business, organisation and management studies, contributing to developing new theories, including those specific to projects and temporary organisations.

We do not view theorising as the be-all and end-all of scholarship that addresses world-scale challenges or society's most pressing issues, but we recognise it can play a key role. Accordingly, we acknowledge that in its early years, much of the research published in project management journals did not significantly leverage theoretical perspectives or creatively develop theories. Over the past two decades, however, this situation has changed, and the importance of adopting and developing theories has been addressed repeatedly (Reich et al., 2013; Söderlund, 2004; Svejvig, 2021). For example, a recent editorial in the *Project Management Journal* invited 'authors of PMJ submissions to take the additional step from description to explanation in order to develop articles that provide a solid theory for use by academics and practitioners' (Müller & Klein, 2018, p. 4). And a recent paper in the *International Journal of Project Management* sought to 'examine literature about theory building in the project management discipline and integrate it with knowledge from other disciplines to develop a meta-theoretical framework for theory building in project management' (Svejvig, 2021, p. 850).

In light of this renewed importance, we submit that a project management theory is not just a collection of ideas, but consists of a carefully crafted depiction of a phenomenon under study, including its underlying variables and concepts (the what), the relationships between variables (the how) and the explanations for these relationships (the why) (Müller & Klein, 2018; Whetten, 1989). Project management theories may be of a 'gap spotting' nature when they extend the assumptions and logic of prior work, or of a 'problematisation' nature when they reject these assumptions and logic and replace them with new ones (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Barney, 2020).

Project scholars may turn to different theories. They often borrow theories from neighbouring disciplines and apply them to project settings (Drouin & Jugdev, 2014; Ika et al., 2022; Keil, 2022). The theory of escalation within projects is a key illustration that draws on organisational behaviour theories (Keil, 2022) and has also further developed in 'reverse escalation' (Juarez Cornelio et al., 2021). Another example draws on behavioural theories, such as optimism bias and strategic misrepresentation (the Planning Fallacy), developed in the fields of psychology and economics and extended to project settings to make sense of cost overruns and benefit shortfalls (Flyvbjerg, 2014). However, despite past perceptions that the theoretical basis of project management research is scant, many 'well-established' theories, including the theory of project success factors (Pinto & Slevin, 1987), the theory of project categorisation systems (Turner & Cochrane, 1993) and the theory of temporary organisations (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995), feature prominently in project management research. More recently, considering the distinctive nature of project settings, other theories have emerged, complementing or challenging theories developed in permanent organisational settings. Good examples are the theory of balanced leadership in projects (Müller et al., 2022), the behavioural theory of the 'Fifth Hand', which seeks to move beyond the Planning Fallacy and to embrace ecological rationality (Ika et al., 2022), the organisational learning theory (Lundin & Midler, 1998), and learning and capabilities theory (Brady & Davies, 2004; Prencipe & Tell, 2001). In light of the expansion of the theoretical basis of project management research, several themes have emerged: projects as agencies in corporate governance (Turner & Müller, 2003), projects as economic transactions, building on transaction costs economics and agency theory perspectives (Müller & Turner, 2005), as well as projects as social interactions based on a sociological perspective (Bechky, 2006), to name but a few. Thus, theory building is ever-present in project management (Svejvig, 2021).

In addition, much research published in project management journals is, particularly in recent years, scientifically rigorous, and much of this work is well cited, as demonstrated by, for example, the growing impact factors of our leading journals (5 years IF for IJPM: 10.171; PMJ: 4.883 and IJMPB: 3.175). Project studies require a complex range of theoretical, methodological and empirical inquiries (Tsoukas, 2017; Tywoniak et al., 2021). Such inquiries call for pluralism in terms of ontology (what is

out there to know about), epistemology (what and how we know about the phenomena in question), theory (what, how and why we can know about the relevant phenomena) and methodology (how we can gain knowledge of these phenomena) (Grix, 2002). Various ontologies, theories, epistemologies and methodologies exist for studies in, on and around projects (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). Project scholars may espouse ontological commitments such as projects are things 'out there' to be found (realism) versus names, labels or conventions for making sense of them (nominalism), or projects' structural features may be stressed (being) versus seeing them in processual terms as a changing and emerging reality (becoming) (Gauthier & Ika, 2012).

The future of project management research

Promote scientific cross-fertilisation

Thesis 3. 'Projects' are useful units of analysis, project management research is ideal for scientific cross-fertilisation and project management scholars welcome academics from other communities to engage in fruitful conversations.

Projects are useful units of analysis that call for multiple images, perspectives and theorisations. Cross-fertilisation with other disciplines and epistemological communities is extremely beneficial for scientific advancements, especially when it furthers the constitution of integrated disciplinary knowledge. Yet different communities 'speak different languages', take different epistemological approaches and hold different research traditions. These differences have wider implications; for instance, the common structure of an article in a law journal might appear unfamiliar and difficult to understand for a project scholar (and vice versa). Similarly, while management scholars now accept having a well-defined theoretical lens, this may not be too common for engineers or law scholars. Other related challenges apply to structuring an article's literature review or discussion section. The practical consequence is that while cross-fertilisation exists, it has been relatively limited, even with 'neighbouring disciplines', despite its potential for developing relevant studies for scholars and practitioners (Davies et al., 2018).

A case in point is Flyvbjerg (2021) on bias in project settings, which was featured in outlets aimed at practitioners, such as Forbes (Hoffman, 2022). This showcases the potential of project management research in reaching out to other communities and practitioners. To this end, we emphasise the need to open dialogues and engage with scholars from other disciplines by developing research and co-authoring papers. We are keen to develop calls for papers explicitly aiming for cross-fertilisation and to launch tracks in project management conferences featuring non-traditional topics. This also calls for the development of meta-theories that transcend scientific communities and joint events that create arenas where scholars from different fields meet (Davies et al., 2018).

In project-based research, several intellectually challenging questions or dilemmas might instigate curiosity in academics from other fields. For instance, a core characteristic of projects is their institutionalised termination (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995); that is, projects start with an intention to die. This is unlike most other forms of organising where 'continuing to be alive' is usually associated with success, not failure. This notion is as fundamental as theoretically interesting, and challenged even by project scholars, for instance, in megaprojects whose planning and delivery take decades (Brookes et al., 2017). What do these temporal peculiarities mean to our classic organisational theories and concepts? This question points to the need for colleagues to bring their perspectives and ideas to illuminate this dilemma.

Academics with a strong research track record and interest in temporary organisations are invited to join our community, even if they do not think of themselves as project management scholars. We are in the process of creating a 'project scholar society'. Such a learned society will be a platform for promoting projects across disciplines nurturing younger scholars' careers and facilitating collaboration among more senior academics. To this end, a domain has been registered (www.projectscholarssociety.org), and a website will soon be published. This website will provide a window into the activities jointly led by the editors of our three top-ranked project management journals (*International Journal of Project Management*, *Project Management Journal* and *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*), including online micro-conferences series, workshops, podcasts, a YouTube channel and so forth. We have also created tracks related to project management in several business and management conferences and platforms, such as the European Group for Organisational Studies (EGOS) and British Academy of Management (BAM), and disseminate our research in numerous symposia and workshops at the Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meetings. An outstanding example is the Project Organising Special Interest Group (SIG) at the European Academy of Management (EURAM), which was one of the first to nurture project organising research within the broader organisation and management research community. We have worked hard over the years to sustain this SIG precisely because of its potential for the type of broader cross-fertilisation that this Manifesto espouses. We may also set up a full-blown project management annual congress if we feel it can help us grow as a field of scholarship. We are keen to meet academics in these venues, host their papers and discuss their research. Likewise, we are keen to continue sustaining our involvement in other communities' activities and venues.

Fostering scholarly diversity in project management research

Thesis 4. As in many other fields of knowledge, the project management research community embraces diversity, welcoming researchers of different genders and various scientific and social backgrounds.

Historically, project management research, like many other fields of scholarship, used to lack gender diversity in terms of contributions. Yet, in the disciplinary field's early years, many distinguished female scholars such as Connie Gersick (Gersick, 1988), Kathleen Eisenhardt (Eisenhardt & Brown, 1998), Amy Edmondson (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009) and Beth Bechky (Bechky, 2006) emphasised the key role of projects in the organisational world. For instance, with regard to Mary Parker Follett (Follett, 1998), Warren Bennis said: 'Just about everything written today about leadership and organizations comes from Mary Parker Follett's writings and lectures' (Bennis, 2003, p. 144). In our view, Lillian Moller Gilbreth (Gilbreth, 1929) is just as important as Frederick Taylor (Taylor, 1919) and a pioneer for applying a human-centred time and motion philosophy, and has written many relevant books and papers emphasising the contribution of projects. Joan Woodward (Woodward, 1965) published her work on three types of organisations, of which project-based production was one. This later paved the way for other works in the contingency theory tradition, such as Henry Mintzberg's (Mintzberg, 2009) work on adhocracy and Aaron Shenhar's (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007) contingency theory. More recently, Moss Kanter addressed the 'dancing giant'—the balancing of new stream and old stream projects (Kanter, 1989), and Connie Gersick (Gersick, 2017) addressed the significance of deadlines, which is part of much theorising on projects as organisational forms these days. Shona Brown and Kathleen Eisenhardt discussed time pacing, semistructures and milestones (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997), and Ruth McGrath wrote on temporary competitive advantage (McGrath & Gourlay, 2013).

While women, scholars from low-and-middle-income countries, and minorities have always been part of the project management community, we acknowledge that they have not been adequately represented in our publishing activities, at least until recently. However, we are moving to change this (for instance, the editors-in-chief of the *International Journal of Project Management* and the *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* are women, and several associate editors are from minority groups, including two of the authors of this Manifesto, who are of African and Latin American descent), and we aim to become even more inclusive by inviting diverse scholars to join the conversation. Diversity is key to enriching our conversations around project management. Different scholars have different concerns, values, ethics, empirical settings, etc. Diversity in authorship (and reviewing and editing) enables a diversity of discussions. In particular:

- From a gender perspective, we know very little about the experience of LGBTQ+ or feminist leadership in projects. We also have a paucity of studies using theoretical lenses such as feminist theory. Projects are far more than construction projects (a traditionally cis-male dominated sector widely discussed in our journals); there are plenty of projects where female and queer persons are far better represented (e.g., cultural projects, R&D projects). We encourage research on those phenomena and communities.
- From a cultural perspective, scholars from low-and-middle income countries are often underrepresented. For instance, topics related to international development projects are scarcely investigated (Ika et al., 2020), and little is known about the link between project governance and post-colonialism. We read little about projects managed in Africa and often miss Africa-based scholars' unique voices, and we know little about racism and racial tensions in projects (Ika et al., 2021). Decentralised political and social movements such as 'Black Lives Matter', mounting major social change projects, are scarcely considered in project management. We aim to develop these relevant perspectives in project management research.
- Project scholars tend to have an engineering or management background, but we aim to see a plurality of backgrounds. We wish to see, for example, lawyers discussing the role of law in projects (Ojiako et al., 2018) and philosophers enlightening us on topics such as ethics in projects (van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2015), and sociologists or anthropologists reflecting on societal and human advances and how they impact the delivery of projects (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007). We would also encourage a continuous conversation about the role of projects in modern society, the nature of welfare-improving projects, and the impact of cultural projects (Lundin et al., 2015; Sankaran et al., 2022).

Fostering research diversity in project management

Thesis 5. Historically rooted in 'problem-solving' and normative studies, project management research has become open to interpretative and emancipatory research, providing opportunities for other business, management and organisational scholars to advance their knowledge communities.

As explained by Geraldi and Söderlund (2018), project management research—which they propose to

rename 'Project studies'—can be clustered into three types:

Type 1. 'Problem-solving' research, which belongs to the traditional positivist tradition. Many academics outside the disciplinary field still believe that this 'traditional approach' represents much of project management research. This is where the disciplinary field started in the early 1950s, developing approaches such as the critical path method (CPM), programme evaluation and review technique (PERT) or later earned value management (EVM). While we are still publishing Type 1 research, such as work by Unterhitzenberger and Bryde (2019) and Einhorn et al. (2022), we will only keep doing this if they are scientifically sound (e.g., with clear and robust methods, informed by a theory, etc.). Notably, the space given to Type 1 research has diminished over the years, and this trend will continue.

Type 2. Interpretative research driven by 'how' and 'why' questions. For instance, while developing a new approach for estimating the cost of a project is Type 1 research, research designed to understand why projects come in over budget is Type 2 research. Type 2 research examines who is involved and excluded in projects and calls for research on the 'actuality' of projects as in the case of the 'Making Projects Critical' movement (Cicmil et al., 2006). Type 2 research might describe new organisational forms, for example, types and functions of special purpose vehicles in infrastructure megaprojects (Sainati et al., 2020) or different leadership styles used by project managers worldwide (Drouin et al., 2018). Type 2 research focuses not on normative applications but on the fundamental nature of projects (including organisations and people involved). Recently, Type 2 research has become more popular in our journals. This is because the scope of project management has broadened over the years. So much so that the disciplinary field now includes projects as temporary organisations, project-based companies as permanent organisations delivering projects, not to mention people involved in projects such as project managers, project teams, top managers overseeing the project and other critical stakeholders (Locatelli et al., 2021). The wider project management landscape is described in publications by Winch (2014) and Söderlund (2004), and others. Type 2 is an ideal setting for interdisciplinary research; for instance, 'Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources' scholars could study project teams (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009), and 'Marketing' scholars might study how projects are 'sold' to different stakeholders (Cova & Salle, 2005).

Type 3. This includes 'emancipatory research'. 'It follows the interest of emancipation and the pragmatic desire for changes in the status quo, not in an optimisation lens as in typical normative and positivist research. Rather, it is the reorganisation of inherent contradictions, giving voice to minorities while addressing major economic and social problems'. (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018, p. 67). Until a few years ago, Type 3 research was scant and often published outside project management journals (e.g., Clegg et al., 2002; Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007). However, more and more Type 3 contributions are appearing in our journals (van Marrewijk & Smits, 2016). Type 3 research is a key area that we intend to develop as it is theoretically rich and able to provide a major contribution to theory and practice for scholars working across different management disciplines (e.g., innovation, organisation, accountancy, ethics and corporate social responsibility).

THE WAY FORWARD AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Prediction is always hard, except perhaps when the future is just about to hit you in the face. And this is about to happen to humankind. Never before have we known with such certainty that our social, economic and ecological systems face a high risk of collapse unless action is taken immediately. Grand challenges are wicked problems, hard to do anything about. Projects offer a practically useful and intellectually rich unit of analysis of actions attempting to tackle grand challenges. These 'grand challenge projects' are core agents for managing change and thereby tackling society's most pressing issues (Ika & Munro, 2022). These projects are hard work, difficult to manage and highly uncertain and complex. They are powerful for making futures—which can either be sustainable or not—and thus, it is urgent that projects, organisations and management scholars join forces to understand how projects can address grand challenges. We need more research on projects, and due to the complexity of projects and grand challenges, we need cross-disciplinary work to help practitioners around the globe to shape a better future (Ika & Munro, 2022; Krystallis et al., 2022). A clear example is Nuno Gil's work on megaprojects (Gil, 2021; Gil & Pinto, 2018), leveraging the seminal work of Elinor Ostrom on the theory of governing the commons (Ostrom, 1990).

In this last section, we want to move forward with our Manifesto by inviting colleagues from other communities to work together. We start by explaining how studying the management of projects fits into the wider stream of social sciences research, focusing on the business and management literature (Section 3.1). Finally, in Section 3.2, we spell out our invitation to do collaborative work focused on a new unit of analysis.

Project management: an evolving, fragmented and encompassing field of knowledge but a disciplinary field in its own right

Project management, the science of managing and leading projects, came of age around the 1940s as an offshoot

of the broader business and management field. At the time, it was built on technological projects in engineering, the military and defence sectors in the United States, including the Manhattan Project, the navy's Polaris missiles, the Apollo Space missions and other NASA and military-industrial complex activities (Ika & Saint-Macary, 2023; Morris, 2013; Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). Project management has long been heralded as a future wave in the broader business and management field. Six years after the term 'project management' was coined in the business and management literature, a *Harvard Business Review* article proclaimed the importance of a new type of manager, *the project manager* (Gaddis, 1959). Project management practice enjoyed relative success in delivering major projects in the 1970s and gained prominence in the 1980s (Morris, 2013). In the 1990s, *Fortune* magazine rated project management as the number one career choice for the 21st century, and the project manager was heralded as a new species in the corporate jungle.

A decade later, Tom Peters foresaw project management as 'the essence of management training, operational excellence and value-added' (Peters, 2004, p. 19). Henry Mintzberg suggested that project managers serve a key role in managing the 'adhocracy' and that 'managing projects proactively' is a key aspect of their 'doing role' (Mintzberg, 2009). In a talk to executives and project managers in 2015, Michael Porter underlined the importance of project management for strategy execution (Porter, 2015). However, despite its widespread importance in different industry sectors, managing or leading projects is a 'fragmented adhocracy' in the broader field of business and management (Whitley, 1984), and diversity, plurality specialisation and fragmentation surround project management research (e.g., Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018; Kwak & Anbari, 2009).

In contemporary project management research, breadth and depth are pervasively present to study the complex project phenomenon in various idiosyncratic contexts. The focus is no longer largely on what is going on inside the task of executing a single project but has broadened to include stakeholders (many being external to the project organisation) with differing or conflicting, if not contradictory, expectations and claims for value distribution (Gil, 2021; Ika & Saint-Macary, 2023). Thus, project management research goes beyond the management of projects and includes multiple levels of analysis in, on and around projects, the study of the project society, project-based organisations and project-based work (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). In this context, there has been a long-standing debate over whether project management is a science, an art, a discipline, a field of knowledge, a profession, an amalgam of many other disparate disciplines or simply a practice (Morris, 2013). In this Manifesto, we posit that project management is a disciplinary field or a field of knowledge (Bredillet, 2010; Gauthier & Ika, 2012; Morris, 2013) that is fragmented and evolving in breadth and depth. As noted earlier, project management is both a practical and theoretical disciplinary field that calls for complex and pragmatist types of research to study complex topics. Project management research cannot just divide the project domain, thereby setting apart the scholar and the project under consideration. It runs the risk of overlooking the complexity of the world of project delivery in the theorisation process, much to the disappointment of practitioners who will question its relevance (Tsoukas, 2017; Tywoniak et al., 2021).

A Manifesto to work together toward a 'new unit of analysis'

We, from the project scholarly community, turn to you, scholars across disciplines, especially in the broader business and management domain, to pledge for the studies in, on and around projects. This is not a 'one-way invitation'; we are keen to work with you to 'infuse projects' into organisational and management theorising, thus contributing to both knowledge domains. We are 'for an inclusive and integrative research field for all perspectives, fostering vibrant dialogue and debate that welcomes different opinions and perspectives' (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018, p. 55). Project management research has evolved over the past five decades and is now a mature disciplinary field investigating phenomena of interest to academics, practitioners and policymakers. Studies of projects and project management practices are theoretically rich and scientifically rigorous, with practically relevant and impactful implications when it comes to addressing the pursuit of operational, tactical and strategic advancements in the world of organisations. We want to broaden the conversation between project management scholars and scholars from other cognate disciplines, particularly business and management, in a true scholarship of integration and cross-fertilisation. This Manifesto is our open invitation to other social scientists to join efforts providing a foundation for further creative, theoretical and empirical contributions, including tackling grand challenges.

This Manifesto shows the importance of projects, the dynamism of the current project management community and the pluralism and rigour of the research. As we take stock of project management research across many fields, we have come to realise that several fields, including business and management, have had in the past an interest in projects, and project management studies have played an important role in driving developments within organisation theory (e.g., Galbraith, Lawrence and Lorsch) and strategy (e.g., Mintzberg, 2009). Hence, we conclude this Manifesto by inviting scholars from the fields of business, organisation studies and management to re-join us and make project research more relevant to society. Together, we can continue to advance knowledge in projects in a more orchestrated manner, with a real intent to learn from each other to develop and build a stronger field.

When world-scale challenges call for collaboration and mutual aid, scholars must work together by breaking down silos. Let us stop serving specific research interests, let us not merely preserve existing knowledge, but let us allow scholars to think differently across the boundaries that presently separate fields.

Projects are more than a unit of analysis. They are an integral and important part of the global economy. We subscribe to Grandori's (2019, p. 90) call for a new line of thinking to deal with new problems '[the] fundamental issue to be addressed in the line of thinking endorsed here is a redefinition of the "unit of analysis." […] It should not be assumed that any organized unit or firm is already in place (producing and exchanging something, as done in most economic theories of the firm), or that resources have been already pooled in an entity (as done in most management "resources-based" views of firm). A good candidate new unit of analysis with those properties can be "the project" – after all the starting point in the real starting of enterprises. In fact, a view of "the economy as a collection of projects" rather than of activities (or transactions or resources) has also been endorsed as a possible new unit of analysis by scholars of the firm in a historical perspective'.

To cite an example, studies in, on and around projects may shed light on topics pertaining to strategic management, innovation and entrepreneurship at the macro level or on those dealing with organisational behaviour and human resource management at the micro level. Other studies might offer contributions to governance, risk management and coping with complexity and provide opportunities for learning from, with and between projects. As a field of knowledge, project management offers plenty of research opportunities, as all projects are unique in their singularity and eventfulness. Project management is a vast and unexplored space for creativity in research. It is a space in which to develop, test and challenge theories. Therefore, we strongly invite business and management scholars to consider projects as an interesting theoretical setting for research work. As scholars, let us take this opportunity to create bridges between research fields and to theorise through win-win collaborations between scholars from various backgrounds (e.g., joint conference sessions and special issues). Let us consider projects as interesting collaborative venues. Let us favour more openness in leading academic journals by welcoming articles addressing project nature, significance and dynamics. Likewise, we should enable opportunities in project management journals for topics that expand project management knowledge through innovative themes from different fields. Ultimately, grand challenge projects are agents of change; studying them and engaging various stakeholders all over the world to understand how they can be managed to make an economic, environmental and social contribution may have a great impact. By doing this, we scholars can make a difference. We live in a project society; let us study projects together!

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Giorgio Locatelli, Lavagnon Ika and Nathalie Drouin conceptualised this Manifesto, wrote the initial draft of this Manifesto, did most of the rewriting and managed the review process. Ralf Müller, Martina Huemann, Jonas Söderlund, Joana Geraldi and Stewart Clegg provided detailed and frequent feedback and wrote the initial draft of some specific sections of the Manifesto. Giorgio Locatelli is Editor-in-Chief for the "Project Management Journal"; Lavagnon Ika is Associate Editor for the "International Journal of Project Management"; Nathalie Drouin is Editor-in-Chief for the "International Journal of Managing Projects in Business"; Ralf Müller is Editor-in-Chief for the "Project Management Journal"; Martina Huemann is Editor-in-Chief for the "International Journal of Project Management"; Jonas Söderlund is Editor for the "Project Management Journal", member of the Strategic Advisory Board for the "International Journal of Project Management", member of the Executive Editorial Board for the "International Journal of Managing Projects in Business"; Joana Geraldi is Editor for the "Project Management Journal"; Stewart Clegg is member of the Strategic Advisory Board for the "International Journal of Project Management", member of the Scientific Committee for the "Project Management Journal", member of the Executive Editorial Board for the "International Journal of Managing Projects in Business"

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