

Process Studies of Project Organizing

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No one will be surprised to hear the term process in the context of project management: processes, mainly formal, have been the topic of extensive research in this field (Chih & Zwikael, 2015; Sydow & Schreyögg, 2013; Turner, Ledwith, & Kelly, 2010; Winter & Szczepanek, 2008)—and project management books are full of descriptions of processes. But what if processes were more than building blocks of project management, but rather, represented a way of viewing the world? In fact, processes are often thought of, both in research and practice, in terms of finite stages, following each other in a certain sequence. This is not what this call is aimed at. This call wants to go beyond such an understanding of processes, and instead, explore processes from an ontological point of view, as a means of foregrounding change, becoming, and fluidity. Process ontology shifts the focus from stability to change, putting ongoing action and emergent activity at the fore of inquiry (Chia, 1997; Rescher, 2012). It fundamentally posits that the world is continuously on the move, constantly becoming rather than being; seen in this light, every phenomenon can be redefined as continuously (re)constituted by processes and flows (Rescher, 2012). Therefore, in the context of project management, process ontology can “[invite] us to think about movement and transformation as defining what these endeavors are all about—which is, in fact, quite close to the actual experience of doing and managing projects.” (Sergi, 2012, p. 349).

With this special issue, we seek submissions that are inspired by the premises of process ontology, and apply process thinking to document and reveal the intricacies of project management and organizing as they unfold over time—we are not looking for models reducing processes to sequences of stable stages. Inspiration for this special issue can be found in organization studies, where process ontology has, in recent years, gained prominence (see Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014; Hernes, 2014; Langlely, 2009; Langlely, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Langlely & Tsoukas, 2010), turning upside down how phenomena are conceived. Management research has, in fact, traditionally been preoccupied with measuring variance between static states, thus focusing on stability even when talking of change processes. One step toward process thinking is taken by those scholars’ foreground entities engaged in dynamics of change over time (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). But research based on process ontology goes even further, departing altogether from a different conception of reality that foregrounds processes of change rather than stable entities—processes of change are what produce and reproduce entities; they come “before the entities.” Contributions from process studies, in general, have thus highlighted the dynamic quality of a variety of phenomena, revealing with great detail how they happen and unfold over time, therefore deepening our understanding of what takes part in them and through them, what influences them and to what they are related, and how specific results stem, progressively, out of them. Research drawing on process studies has addressed a variety of questions

such as changing routines (Bresman, 2013), collaboration (Bruns, 2013), change and innovation (Jay, 2013), change and performance (Klarner & Raisch, 2013), and brand transformation (Lucarelli & Hallin, 2015).

Yet, despite its potential to deepen our understanding of what happens in and during projects, only a handful of studies in project management have deliberately built upon this perspective. For example, Bengtsson and colleagues (Bengtsson, Müllern, Söderholm, & Wahlin, 2007) have suggested a new grammar of organizing for projects, proposing a coordination framework based on different time and space arrangements in projects—hence being influenced by process thinking. Given their attention to temporal aspects, changes over time, and how project organizing unfolds, a good number of studies belonging to the Scandinavian School of Project Management (starting with the contributions of Lundin & Söderholm, 1995, and Packendorff, 1995) can also be seen as approaching project issues with a process ontology sensitivity. Beside those two trends, very few have conducted studies within process ontology (notable exceptions include Linehan & Kavanagh, 2006; Söderlund, Vaagaasar, & Andersen, 2008; Packendorff, Crevani, & Lindgren, 2014; Karrbom Gustavsson & Hallin, 2015). Finally, some studies in the practice perspective (e.g., Sergi, 2012; Maaninen-Olsson & Müllern, 2009), have paid attention to daily activities through which projects happen, which can also be viewed as influenced by process thinking. This special issue wants to build on the mentioned studies and further this line of research. Hence, scholars interested in process studies, and in particular, those building on a process ontology, are invited to submit contributions that may be informed by a number of theoretical approaches that fit under the umbrella of process studies, such as the practice perspective, posthumanist views, relational perspectives, discursive approaches, and sociomaterial views, to name some.

This special issue has two main objectives for contributions to the project management research field. The first aim is to enrich the theoretical foundations of the field. In this sense, this special issue is an answer to the call for researchers to build, to develop on, or to renew the theoretical bases of project management (Morris, 2013; Söderlund, 2011). The second aim is to produce rich accounts of project activity in order to challenge reflective practitioners to question how and why things happen when they are involved in projects in their own organizations. Typically, contributions from process studies are not prescriptive. Conversely, although they invite the practitioner to look at rich, empirical cases through a specific perspective that challenges the traditional framework of project management, and thus, provides him or her with alternative ways of making sense of projects, they also require reflective practitioners to be active and to relate the results to their own context and experience (Schön, 1983). In this sense, albeit in different ways, process studies promise to appeal to both researchers and practitioners.

To reach these objectives, we encourage theoretically informed and empirically rigorous research contributions that cover, but are not limited to, the following areas:

- The main building blocks of project management: How can process thinking rejuvenate the way we conceive and study the main dimensions of project management standards and methodologies? How can we understand project leadership, coordination, teamwork, and so forth, from a processual perspective?
- The theory of the temporary organization: How can process studies challenge and/or refine how temporary organizations have been defined and/or studied up to now?
- Space and place: How can the increasing interest in space, place, and materiality expand perspectives on and analysis of projects, which have, thus far, neglected these dimensions?

- Project boundaries: How can process thinking contribute to furthering our understanding of the tension between projects seen as confined entities (in space and time) and organizational processes going on across formal organizational entities and across time?
- Rhythm and temporalities: How are temporal aspects of projects enacted? What role do they play in the unfolding of process organizing?
- Identity work: How is a project team identity constructed and sustained, given the temporary nature of a project?
- Project management and implementation: How does the implementation of plans, models, and tools unfold? How are strategic artifacts (such as plans, business cases, strategic objectives, etc.) translated when enacted in practice in project work?
- Project management and space of action: Is project management contributing to the creation of space for creativity and enacting innovation, or is project management performing control and contributing to standardization? How are trust and legitimacy produced in project organizing?
- Change and stability: Are projects a means of dealing with continuous change and/or as means for producing stability? Are projects ordering and/or disordering processes?
- Project management and ethics: Which relational processes are enacted through/made possible by projects? Which power relations are challenged/reinforced through projects?
- Methodological issues: How can we develop the way we study projects? Which approaches and techniques can further our understanding of such phenomena and their unfolding?
- Learning and education: What competencies have to be developed by educators and practitioners to make sense of project work from process studies perspectives in the workplace?

SUBMISSIONS

Full papers must be submitted by **31 August 2017** via the journal submission site. Papers accepted for publication, but not included in the special issue will be published later in a regular issue of the journal. For further information about this special issue, please contact Viviane Sergi at sergi.viviane@uqam.ca.

**For additional details about this call for proposals, please visit
PMI.org/learning/publications-project-management-journal.aspx**

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