Megaprojects—Symbolic and Sublime: AN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

According to Warrack (1993, p. 2) ‘megaprojects have powerful economic, social, and symbolic roles in the society.’ We invite authors to submit papers for a special issue focusing on an investigation of megaprojects as symbols. Flyvbjerg (2014) identifies four causes or “sublimes” that seduce decision makers to undertake megaprojects. We would like authors to submit papers about megaprojects that can be considered as symbols in these four sublimes—political, technological, economical, and aesthetic. We also want authors to take an organizational theory perspective in their papers.

Several megaprojects from the past stand out: the “Manhattan Project” (Lenfle, 2011), “Sydney Opera House” (Hall, 1980), “Hoover Dam” (Kwak et al., 2014), “Titanic” (Geraldi et al., 2010), and “Panama Canal” (van Marrewijk & Smits, 2014). These projects have been written about extensively in the literature, which focuses specifically on their history, planning, and project management lessons learned. Söderlund and Lenfle (2013) published a special issue on “Project History” in the International Journal of Project Management, which attracted both project management scholars with an interest in history and historians who were interested in projects that included some megaprojects. Scantant (2015) presented an excellent survey of the landscape of projects through an historical analysis. All these publications have contributed significantly to the understanding of project history to the project management community. How about the megaprojects of modern times, however? For example, the Shanghai Tower was built to demonstrate local capability. The FIFA World Cup in South Africa helped elevate the country’s image as a growing competitive economy. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced a megaproject called the ‘Mahatma Gandhi Clean India Program,’ a multimillion-dollar sanitation project created to clean up 1,000 Indian towns.

Building on previous research and special issues, we propose taking a different path for this special issue, in two respects. First, we want authors to focus on intended and achieved benefits or outcomes from the projects they choose to write about rather than on the details of managing them. Second, we would like authors to do this using an organizational theory lens.

We ask authors to make sense of the intended benefits that these projects were expected to achieve when they were conceived. We also ask them to analyze how and why these intended benefits changed during the time these megaprojects were being built (if they did) and what benefits they achieved at the end and over time.

For example, the Swedish ship Vasa, built in the 17th century, was intended as a political symbol of military force to intimidate Poland but the Vasa sank on her maiden journey and never achieved her goal. However, the ship is now a major tourist attraction at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm, Sweden and a testament to the skill of the experts who salvaged and restored it.

Questions that might be addressed in the papers are:

What sense-making or social construction practices were used to authorize or sanction symbolic megaprojects? In the past and at present?

What changes did these projects undergo that made them deviate from this original intent? What role did stakeholders play in influencing the intent?

What roles did power and politics play in conceiving and making changes to these projects as they were being built?

What methods can we use to understand symbolic megaprojects from an organizational theory/studies perspective?

Do modern symbolic megaprojects differ in the ways they are conceived, implemented, and delivered from older megaprojects?

The list of questions is not exhaustive. We welcome submissions that address questions beyond what we have listed as long as they contribute to a richer understanding of these symbolic megaprojects within the scope of this special issue.
SUBMISSIONS

Full papers must be submitted by the end of July 2016 via the journal submission site. An extended abstract of 2,000 words, including a tentative title, aim, and nature of the submission (conceptual or empirical) should be submitted to one of the editors by the end of December 2015 for consideration. Papers accepted for publication but not included in the special issue will be published later, in a regular issue of the journal.

If you have any additional questions please consult any of the following guest editors:

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REFERENCES


