

# PMI Sponsored Research Grant:

The Future of Project Work: What  
Motivates Young Professionals to Pursue  
a Project Career and What Motivates Them  
to Persist?

Final Report

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## Executive Summary

Young professionals are increasingly looking for a specific work environment, characterized by opportunities for learning, meaningfulness, and achievement. Projects—with their goal orientation, development and learning opportunities, and visibility of end results—appear to offer the kind of work environment that fits the expectations of young professionals. While there is agreement that projects are attractive to young professionals, what motivates them to pursue a project career and to persist, are open questions. With this project, we want to gain insights into what motivates young project professionals to work in projects. This will give us deeper understanding of the reasons why young project professionals enter and pursue a project career or why they leave it. To answer these questions, we draw on self-determination theory, a theory that focuses on motivation.

As we are particularly interested in the interplay between the motivation of the project professional and the organizational context and the wider societal context, we adopt a case study approach. Our aim is to analyze the motivation of young project professionals to work on projects in four large, project-oriented, German-speaking organizations from different industries.

We present implications for organizations, young project professionals, and the Project Management Institute (PMI). Our findings show that organizations can motivate young project professionals by providing a transparent career path that enables personal growth and development and demonstrates how projects act as motivators for those young project professionals. Our results also show how projects meet the specific career expectations of young project professionals through their learning and development opportunities, visibility of results, and creation of value for organizations and society that aligns with their own values. In addition, we highlight implications for PMI on how they can promote projects for learning, value creation, and relating.

## Introduction and Research Question

The need for project professionals has grown in recent years and this growth is expected to continue in line with the projectification of work in organizations and

societies around the world (Schoper et al., 2018). Existing research suggests that recruitment of project professionals is a priority for organizations (Crawford et al., 2013) and that project careers are increasingly evident in a growing number of traditional (e.g., engineering, construction) and nontraditional (e.g., banking, healthcare) sectors (Akkermans et al., 2020). Young professionals between the ages of 25 and 31 qualified with at least a bachelor's degree (Lattuch & Young, 2011) seem to look for specific characteristics in the work environment. Projects, which emphasize such features as goal orientation, teamwork, and visibility of end results (Havermans et al., 2019; Huemann, 2016) may meet these expectations of young professionals. We suggest that projects therefore represent the future of work.

Prior research (Hölzle, 2010) has focused on incentives, motivation, and retention of project professionals from an organizational perspective and without specifically addressing age, experience, and field of expertise. Research on employee well-being and career development (Akkermans et al., 2015) has focused mainly on more experienced employees; relatively few studies have focused on young employees or professionals. While studies find that young professionals tend to get involved in a wider range of career self-management activities (Sturges, 2008), these have not been well researched. If young professionals experience too few development opportunities, they may look to other organizations for growth opportunities. This challenges organizations to meet the career demands of young project professionals in order to attract and retain them.

The literature on project careers is still nascent (Akkermans et al., 2020; Huemann et al., 2019; Keegan et al., 2018), and project careers are still—it would appear—somewhat accidental (Havermans et al., 2019). More needs to be known about projects as a specific work environment to underpin greater knowledge of the factors motivating young professionals to enter into, and pursue, a project career.

Therefore, the main research question stated in the research project is: **What motivates young professionals to pursue a project career and what motivates them to persist?**

## Main Goals

- Better grasp the project as a specific work environment and career context and how this interplays with motivation.
- Identify the key motivators for young professionals to initially pursue a project career, specifically in the role of project professional.
- Examine why some young professionals stay the course, and continue to pursue a project career, and why some do not.
- Identify incentives to better support the future of project work by understanding factors that motivate launching and persisting with a project career.

## Gains for Specific Target Groups

**Organizations** gain insights on:

- Motivators for young project professionals to pursue project careers.
- Incentives to attract and retain young project professionals.
- How to support young project professionals in project careers with a more strategic approach to attracting and retaining young professionals.

**Young project professionals** gain insights on projects as a work environment and what they can realistically expect from a project career.

**Project Management Institute** as a professional association gains insights to promote the attractiveness of project careers to young professionals.

## Young Project Professionals

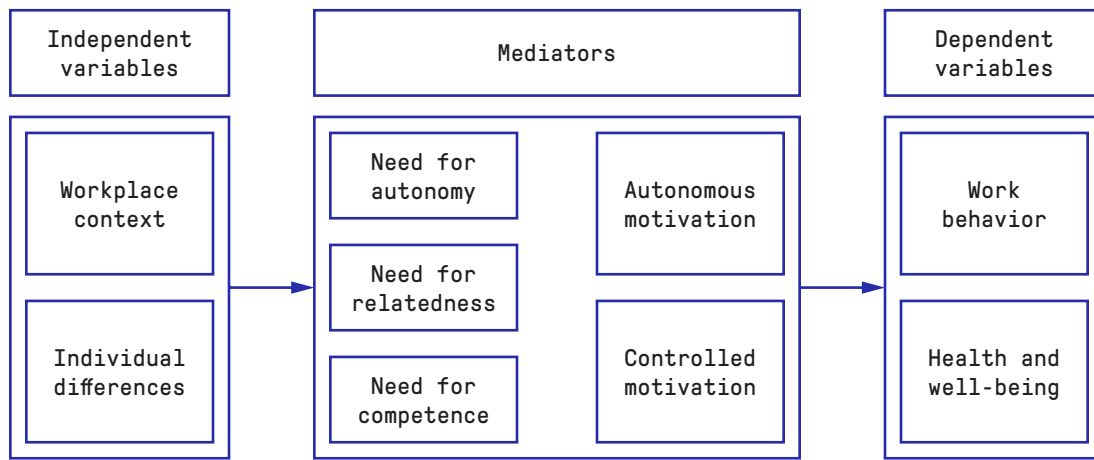
Young professionals are defined as those who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher and between the ages of 25 and 31 (Abbott, 1988; Lattuch & Young, 2011). In our research, we refer to young professionals as members of the so-called "Generation Y" (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Generation Y, also known as millennials, are people born in the early 1980s to the mid-1990s (Barford & Hester, 2011). For this generation, personal growth is especially important, where lifelong learning and broadening horizons are important when choosing a career (Seiler et al., 2012). Work and salary are seen as the means to maintain a desirable lifestyle, but work-life

balance is important (Seiler et al., 2012). These young professionals choose their employers based on social responsibility and suitable behavior (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). In the absence of sufficient development opportunities, they may seek growth opportunities in other organizations (June & Mahmood, 2011). Interest in this group of young professionals is widespread among practitioners (Foot, 2001; Hoover, 2009): Generation Y represents a significant portion of the population and workforce. It is an important part of the current and future workforce, and its skills, values, and perspectives will have a significant impact on the way work is done and the types of jobs that are available (Lyons et al., 2015; UKCES, 2014).

## Theoretical Background

Following various calls for research, we are combining different research streams: career research, motivational research, and project management research. In doing so, we consider the increasing relevance of working in projects (Gemünden et al., 2018; Keegan & Turner, 2002; Schoper et al., 2018), the need for new human resource management practices in project-oriented organizations (Turner et al., 2008), as well as calls for a better understanding of project professionals' careers (Crevani et al., 2010; Keegan et al., 2012).

Looking at motivation to work on projects, we focus on self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Self-determination theory states that people are naturally inclined toward psychological growth and integration, that is, learning, mastery, and connection with others (Figure 1). The satisfaction of basic psychological needs provides the main ground for motivation and the desire that people have to feel competent and autonomous in order to maintain motivation. These basic needs of motivation are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals: "Autonomy refers to volition—the organismic desire to self-organize experience and behavior and to have activity be concordant with one's integrated sense of self" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). The need for competence refers to "feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities" (Ryan et al., 2002, p. 7). Furthermore, the need for relatedness refers to the need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment



**Figure 1.** The basic self-determination theory model in the workplace (Lechler & Huemann, 2023 after Deci et al., 2017).

to other people: “Relatedness refers to the desire to feel connected to others—to love and care, and to be loved and cared for” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Figure 1 demonstrates the relationships between different individual contexts, the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the relation to their overall well-being (Deci et al., 2017).

## Methodology

The research study is based on a comprehensive literature review and four case studies. The case study results were triangulated and rounded up with several focus group workshops.

### Case Study Overview

The case definition highlights the individual project professionals as a unit of analysis closely related to the phenomenon under study, the motivation of young professionals to work in projects, the level of analysis, the interaction between the individual level (i.e., the young project professional) and the organizational level (i.e., the company), and the context of the cases, which are described in detail next. The four case studies were conducted in companies with a high level of project management maturity, a high number of project professionals, an interest in young project professionals, and an interest in the cocreation process in research. We studied companies in German-speaking regions with Cases A, C, and D in Austria, and Case B in Switzerland.

Case A is a large-sized, high-tech company that mainly conducts external projects as core business, but also internal projects. In particular, these are software and IT

projects for the corporate security sector, primarily safety-critical communication and information solutions for public authorities. This sector is characterized by projects with high security standards and specific expertise in IT security. Case B is a medium-sized engineering company that mainly conducts external projects as core business. These are mainly construction projects, studies for urban drainage, and drinking water supply. The engineering sector is characterized by projects in building construction, civil engineering, transport construction (i.e., road and rail networks), and hydraulic engineering (i.e., water supply and disposal). Most of these projects are commissioned by public authorities and cities. Case C is a large-sized company from the oil and gas sector, where only interview partners from the downstream functional area in Austria were interviewed. In this area of the company, the project focus is on internal projects dealing with in-house consulting projects about IT and digital transformation, organizational restructuring, and business development. Case D is a large-sized company in a specific area in Austria. This company is in the consulting sector, which deals with management and IT consulting projects, mainly external and partly internal.

### Data Sources

Various data sources were used for the multiple case study analysis. As described next, 14 to 15 interviews were conducted per case company, which resulted in a total of 58 interviews. Thirty-eight young project professionals were interviewed, along with 13 project team leads and seven representatives from top management and the HR department. The interviews were held in English (Cases A and C), German (Case B),

and mixed English and German (Case D). As the interviews were mainly conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were partly conducted online and partly face-to-face. An average interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed and translated into English when necessary. The transcripts, which later formed the basis for the analysis, totaled 808 pages. We also examined documents of various kinds as a further data source. These were documents such as job descriptions, project-relevant process descriptions, work instructions, and interview guidelines. We analyzed a total of 148 pages of such documents.

### **Multilevel Analysis**

The analysis is multilevel. We are interested in the individual motivation, the organization, and their incentives as well as the interplay between the individual and organization. We collected three different types of data: (1) in-depth interviews, (2) project-related documents, and (3) focus groups, as recommended by Martinsuo and Huemann (2021).

The unit of analysis is the single, young project professional and their motivation to work on projects in the context of the particular case study company. The interview partners were selected according to the following criteria: young project professionals (YP), between 25 and 35 years old, with at least a bachelor's degree, belonging to Generation Y. Most of the young project professionals interviewed have up to five years of professional experience in project management

(five out of 38 young professionals have more than five years of experience). In addition, 13 project team leads (TL) were interviewed to get a perspective from direct supervisors. They have mainly more than 10 years of project management experience. Also, seven managers, partly HR managers (M), were interviewed to get an organizational perspective and understand how the particular organization attracts and retains young project professionals. Next, we analyzed project-related documents such as job descriptions, project-relevant process descriptions, work instructions, and project meeting guidelines. A total of 148 pages of documents were analyzed. The analysis of documents provided us with additional insights on our topic and helped create a better understanding of the organizational and project-related context (Martinsuo & Huemann, 2021). To deepen the case study analysis and triangulate the findings thus far, a number of focus group workshops have been conducted in addition to the research workshops. In the research workshops, only the research team took part. The focus group workshops also included other researchers and practitioners interested in the topic (Table 1).

We analyzed the empirical material according to the principles of thematic content analysis: Relevant themes, patterns, and concepts emerging from the data were identified and coded in an adaptive approach (Gioia et al., 2013). In doing so, we proceeded in three steps. The first step: initial coding involved recognizing and grouping initial concepts into categories based on participants, ideas (first-order coding, n = 94).

**Table 1. Workshops and Focus Groups Conducted**

NO.	WORKSHOP	DATE	DURATION	PARTICIPANTS
1	Research Workshop, Vienna	4 March 2022	3 hours	7
2	Research Workshop, Vienna	1 April 2022	3 hours	6
3	Research Workshop, Vienna	6 May 2022	3 hours	7
4	Research Workshop, Vienna	24 June 2022	3 hours	7
5	Focus Group Workshop, online	13 July 2022	3 hours	7
6	Focus Group Workshop, online	3 October 2022	2 hours	16
7	PMI Webinar, online	15 February 2023	1 hour	1,700
8	Focus Group Workshop, Zurich	23 February 2023	2 hours	10

Concepts capture features that describe a phenomenon of theoretical interest; they help us understand organizational worlds (Gioia et al., 2013). The second step: the first-order concepts were grouped into second-order themes (second-order coding, n = 20). Reducing the categories developed in first-order coding to developing themes resulted in more focused coding. The third step: we further distilled emergent themes into aggregate dimensions that made sense of the data. This theme development is also referred to as aggregate dimensions (third-order coding, n = 9). These aggregate dimensions then became the top nine motivators for young project professionals to work on projects. These were integrated into the conceptual model of young project professional motivation.

## Results

### **Individual Key Motivators to Work on Projects**

The analysis reveals four sets of narratives related to the individual motivations of young project professionals. Narratives are a means by which people's stories are systematically presented to show their individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin, 2006).

#### *Narrative 1: Learn and Develop*

- **Individual Development:** Individual development results from gaining practice and experience during project work, dealing with challenges to achieve goals, and developing solutions to those challenges.
- **Gaining Project Management Competence:** Project management competence is acquired through positive feedback from peers and supervisors and continuous learning through training and support. In addition, project management competence improves through a general willingness to learn and the freedom to make one's own decisions.
- **Developing a Project Management Career:** Career development in project management is fostered by covering diverse interests, learning about different topics and business areas, and deepening knowledge based on prior experience.

#### *Narrative 2: Relate and Connect*

- **Belonging to the Project:** Belonging to the project is promoted by aligning activities with one's own values and the feeling of connectedness through activities in regional, environmentally related, and socially relevant areas.
- **Collaborating with Others on Projects:** Collaboration with others on projects is strengthened by sharing knowledge, working as a team, and participating in finding ideas for solutions.
- **Being Appreciated:** The feeling of being appreciated arises from empathic communication at eye level and from connectedness that emerges through appreciation, with open communication and praise.

#### *Narrative 3: Create and Deliver*

- **Achieving Project Outcomes:** Achievement of project objectives is the creation of new concepts and solutions, which are implemented from planning to realization. This involves interesting and diverse tasks that generate visible results.
- **Creating Value for Business:** Business value is created by delivering value to the organization through change and innovation.
- **Creating Value for Society:** Value creation for society comes from the social impact of project activity to improve society by implementing the customer's needs and creating impact for stakeholders.

#### *Narrative 4: Work Autonomously*

- **Autonomy:** Fostering a sense of autonomy in young project professionals by giving them the opportunity to make influential decisions independently.
- **Self-Determination:** Project work inherently exhibits a significant degree of self-determination, thereby empowering young project professionals to govern all associated components independently.
- **Responsibility:** Determining the work sequence and achieving the desired result is both a responsibility and an opportunity for young project professionals.



**Conceptual Model of Young Project Professional Motivation**

By relating the motivators to work on projects to self-determination theory, we explain the relationship between the young project professionals’ basic psychological needs and their motivation to engage in a particular behavior in project work. This establishes the conceptual model of young project professional motivation (Figure 2), after Lechler and Huemann (2023). The model combines young project professionals’ needs to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals, gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills, and experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people. It further shows the importance of purposefully connecting to their work, their team, and their company’s mission.

Our data suggests that the need for autonomy is a key underlying factor in motivating young professionals to work in projects. This is because autonomy gives young project professionals a sense of control over their work, which increases their sense of ownership of the project. Conversely, if young project professionals are micromanaged and not allowed to make decisions about task execution, they do not feel free to make decisions and their need for autonomy is not met. Therefore,

autonomy is necessary for young project professionals to learn, create and achieve goals, and feel motivated by the opportunity to collaborate with others. Young project professionals are driven by the need for relatedness, seeking recognition and validation from others. Taking ownership of tasks and responsibilities enhances their motivation to collaborate and network with colleagues. When they perceive their skills and abilities as contributors to the project’s success and feel capable of meeting project challenges, they are motivated to learn and grow, fulfilling their need for competence. This influences their approach to learning, as they embrace new challenges and actively seek opportunities for personal and professional development.

Furthermore, the need for purpose is a vital aspect for young project professionals. Establishing a meaningful connection to their work, team, and organizational purpose allows them to identify with overarching goals. When professionals experience their work as valuable and rewarding, a sense of purpose and fulfillment emerges. Creating meaning in project management practices and aligning goals with core beliefs contributes to their overall well-being and motivation.

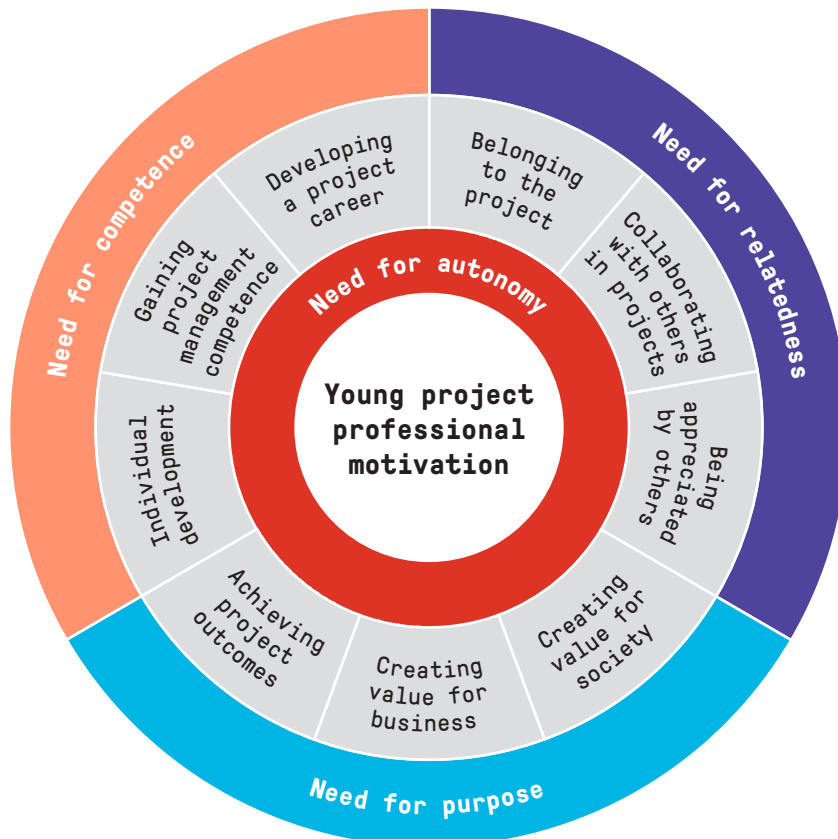


Figure 2. Conceptual model of young project professional motivation (Lechler & Huemann, 2023).

## Motivators in Context

The analysis within the cases reveals the motivators inherent in the context of each of the four organizations and indicates how different project types and organizational contexts influence them. Figure 3 provides an overview of the motivators in context, as shown in Lechler and Huemann (2023).

- Motivators in High-Tech Contexts:** The importance of learning and individual development can be reasoned with the high learning opportunities in projects, which are typical for organizations like Case A. Information technology projects often involve collaborating with a team of people, which can be a rewarding and motivating experience. They can be a source of challenge and reward for individuals working on these projects, because the field of IT is constantly evolving, and these types of projects often require individuals to keep up with new technologies and approaches.
- Motivators in Engineering Contexts:** The importance of creating something can be reasoned with due to the visibility and tangible nature of the particular type of projects delivered in organizations like Case B. Engineering projects often involve solving complex problems, which is a source of motivation.

Engineering projects require young professionals to learn new skills and knowledge, which can be a source of personal growth and development.

- Motivators in Internal Development Contexts:** The relevance of learning and individual development can be reasoned with due to the high learning opportunities in internal transformation projects, which are typical for organizations like Case C. Internal projects often involve improving processes and systems within an organization, which is motivating for professionals who want to make their work more efficient and effective. Internal projects can provide opportunities for individuals to learn new skills and knowledge, which can be a source of personal growth and development.
- Motivators in Business Consulting Contexts:** The importance of learning and developing, as well as the creation of results can be reasoned with due to the uniqueness of activities in typical projects of organizations like Case D. This type of project tackles identifying and solving complex problems for clients, which can be a source of challenge and reward for consulting project professionals. These projects can have a significant impact on clients' businesses and provide the opportunity to make a positive difference in the partnering organizations of the project professional.

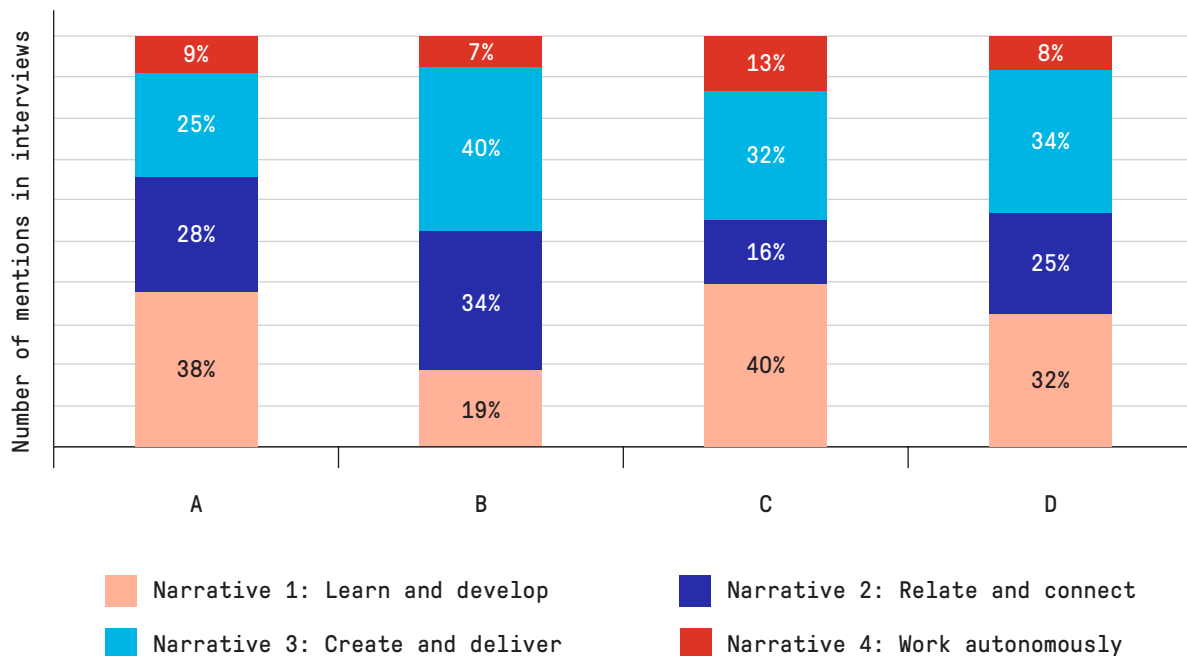


Figure 3. Motivators in context (Lechler & Huemann, 2023).

## **Demotivators**

Demotivation arises from external forces that reduce or weaken the motivational foundation of a specific behavior (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). According to the research, demotivators can vary depending on the person and circumstance. When asked about the circumstances under which young project professionals would leave project work, four main topics were mentioned:

- **Project Team:** If a young project professional had to work with others in project teams who didn't share their work ethic, respect, and values, most of them would not be motivated to work on projects and leave. Working in a toxic environment would be a reason for most young project professionals to leave the project or the organization.
- **Nature of the Work:** Most professionals would lack motivation to work on projects if they had to perform repetitive and nonexciting tasks continuously and exclusively. This would be the case even if the tasks were project related (such as PMO activities, writing minutes, organizing meetings).
- **Alignment with Values:** If the impact of the project or the values the organization stands for are not in line with the young professional's values, they will see this as a reason for demotivation and leave the project or organization.
- **Stage of Life:** Many young project professionals see project work as an opportunity to learn, discover their interests, and gain experience in different business areas. They also see project work as a stepping stone to future positions, as developing and applying project skills increase their employability. They therefore feel comfortable with potentially stressful project work because they see it as appropriate for their stage in life. However, as they get older, they would no longer be able to cope with it, as a career in other areas or starting a family would become more important.

## **Organizational Incentives**

As fellow researchers have been arguing, organizations should develop incentive systems to motivate individuals, maximize profits, and retain project leaders (Hölzle, 2010). The main purpose of organizational incentive systems is to guide employee behavior. It is therefore

imperative that organizations understand individual needs and keep individuals motivated. Our results show that monetary incentives are not considered as motivating as nonmonetary incentives. Internal incentives (praise, responsibility) and nonmonetary extrinsic incentives (flexible working hours, mentoring) were found to be the most influential in motivating people to work on projects. Career opportunities provide employees with motivation to perform and reasons to stay, since one's career is the factor most directly related to an intention to leave (Demers, 2001). Organizations should engage project professionals and provide continuity for project professionals, including making their career paths organizationally recognized and comparable to other career paths.

## **Incentives to Better Support the Future of Project Work by Understanding Factors That Motivate Joining and Persisting With a Project Career:**

- Projects for career development
- Projects to learn leadership
- Explicitly communicate purpose
- Mentoring programs

## **The Project as Motivator**

Our findings help us to better understand how the project works as a motivator for young professionals. They show that projects enable learning and improvement by solving challenges autonomously. They also provide an opportunity to develop a career in project management. Projects motivate through the opportunity to create value for business and society by realizing ideas, overcoming challenges, and implementing solutions. On the one hand, young project professionals can develop a career while discovering their interests in an autonomous way; on the other hand, they improve their skills by solving challenges automatically. They internalize the ability to work in a self-directed way and continuously develop their skills through the experience they gain in project work. Relatedness is established in project work through cooperation with, and a sense of belonging to, others. Young project professionals have a need to achieve challenging project goals and create value for business and society. They influence project outcomes by implementing their ideas and novel solutions.

## Practical Implications

### Organizations

- **Incentive Systems:** Create incentive systems that maintain motivation over the long term and increase motivation through nonmonetary incentives. The most effective motivators here are nonmonetary extrinsic incentives, such as flexible working hours, mentoring, and internal incentives such as praise and responsibility.
- **Career Path:** Create career paths that transparently show their progression and how young project professionals can find relatedness, autonomy, competence, and purpose in their project work. Organizations should demonstrate how careers can develop and what development opportunities they can offer young project professionals.

### Projects as Motivators

- **Projects to Learn:** Organizations should emphasize the continuous learning opportunities through project careers. Young project professionals should see that they can have a career in which they can discover their interests and develop and improve their skills.
- **Projects to Create Value and Enable Purpose:** Organizations should demonstrate that challenging project goals can be achieved and added value can be created for the economy and society. They should also emphasize the impact that young professionals' ideas can have on the project results.
- **Projects to Relate to Others:** Organizations should emphasize the relationship level of project work and the networking opportunities for young professionals. This is done through the opportunity to work in diverse teams in cocreation, communication at eye level, and a climate of appreciation and praise.
- **Projects to Work Autonomously and With Self-Determination:** The project career should enable and promote recognizable, self-determined work.

### Young Project Professionals

Young professionals have specific expectations of their work and careers. Projects offer features that meet these expectations:

- **Lifelong Learning and Personal Development:** Projects facilitate the acquisition of new competences and knowledge. This enables personal and professional development. Project management roles can be found in a wide variety of industries, which is attractive to young professionals seeking a diverse and varied career. Working on projects also allows professionals to gain project management skills that help them work more efficiently and effectively.
- **Visibility:** Projects facilitate a sense of accomplishment and pride, especially if the project was complex and required a lot of effort. Young project professionals value the opportunity to work with others and contribute to a common goal. Working with others is a great way to build relationships and learn from others. It brings people together and creates a sense of community.
- **Purpose and Value:** Projects help address uncertainties and carry out unique endeavors, creating solutions to societal and business challenges. In addition, projects offer young professionals the opportunity to make a positive difference or contribute to a cause they espouse.

### Project Management Institute

For the Project Management Institute, the following insights emerge to promote the attractiveness of project careers for young professionals:

### Projects and Learning

- Emphasize the importance of learning through project work and providing the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in project management.

- Encourage young project professionals to share experiences and lessons learned from projects to foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- Facilitate regular feedback and coaching of young project professionals to help them identify opportunities for improvement.

### **Projects and Creation**

- Emphasize the importance of value creation through project work, and encourage young project professionals to focus on the implications of their project work for value generation for business and society.
- Give young project professionals a way to identify and measure the value created by their projects.
- Share success stories of young professionals who have successfully created value through their project work to inspire and motivate others.

### **Projects and Relating**

- Promote and advance communication skills and cocreation.
- Offer diversity and inclusion training to help young project professionals manage diverse teams and stakeholders and create an inclusive project environment.
- Promote networking so young project professionals can build relationships and learn from the experiences of others.

## **Conclusion**

We address the motivation of young project professionals to work in projects by conducting a multiple case study in project-oriented organizations. We base our work on theoretical foundations of self-determination theory, which states that people are naturally inclined to mastery (need for autonomy), to learn (need for competence), and to relate to others (need for relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). We explored this through structured interviews and validated our data with focus group workshops as well as contextualizing the data by analyzing organization-specific, project-related documents.

In presenting our findings, we reveal that working in projects enables self-determination by allowing young project professionals to make their own decisions and control their own behavior. Projects function as learning arenas that satisfy the need for knowledge and the ability to work in projects. They further excel as social arenas that satisfy the need to feel connected to others and to belong to a community. In addition, projects serve as creation arenas that satisfy the need to create value for the organization and society. The need for purpose reveals a new dimension of self-determination theory in the context of project management. These results will be validated and analyzed in further detail in an upcoming quantitative study.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## Appendix A: List of Outputs

Megawati, A., & Huemann, M. (2019, June 26–28). *Incentives in project work to motivate young project professionals: A self-determination theory perspective* [Conference Presentation]. EURAM–European Academy of Management Annual Conference, Lisbon, Portugal.

Megawati, A., & Huemann, M. (2021, August 31–September 3). *Exploring the motivation of young project professionals to work and engage in project work: The case of a hi-tech company* [Conference Presentation]. British Academy of Management Conference, online.

Megawati, A. (2021). *Incentive systems to motivate young project professionals in project-oriented organizations* [Doctoral dissertation, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Department of Strategy and Innovation, Project Management Group, published].

Huemann, M., & Lechler, R. (2023, February 15). Why I like to work on projects: Motivation of Generation Y. *PMI Webinar*.

Lechler, R., & Huemann, R. (2023). *Motivation of young project professionals: Their need for autonomy, competence, relatedness and purpose*. [Manuscript submitted for publication in *Project Management Journal*®, 12 April 2023].

Lechler, R. (2023, May 9). *What motivates Generation Y to work on projects?* [Conference presentation]. HERMES Spring Forum 2023.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### General Information

- What is your name? How old are you?
- What training have you received?

### Organizational Context

- How long have you been working for this company?
- How long have you been working in project management (also before your current position)? Which functions have you held?
- How is your position defined in this company? What are your current activities?

### Project Context and Motivation

- Why do you work in project management? What motivates you (e.g., recognition, sense of purpose, career, salary)?
- What motivates you to continue working in project management?
- Why specifically at this company?
- Under what circumstances would you no longer be motivated to work in project management? What would have to happen?

### Incentives

- What incentives does your company offer you for project work that increases your motivation? (Incentives = measures designed to increase the willingness to perform, e.g., salary, further training, free drinks, trust work, company car)
- What influence do these incentives have on you? To what extent do they change your behavior?

- To what extent do your skills contribute to the success of your project management activities? Why (not)?
- How can competencies be better promoted? Which competencies are particularly important?
- How effective do you consider your work as a (young) project employee? Why (not)?
- How could this be increased? (effective = impactful, beneficial)

### **Motivators in Detail**

- To what extent does your work performance meet the expectations in your project environment? Why (not)? How could this be improved? (e.g., by clarifying expectations, defining goals and roles).
- How high is the evaluation pressure and coercion by others when you have to make project-related decisions? Why?
- How competitive is your work environment? To what extent does this affect your work as a (young) project employee? How could this be improved?
- How autonomous and self-organized do you work as a (young) project employee? Why (not)? How could this be improved?
- Is your work as a (young) project professional recognized by others? Why (not)? How could this be improved?
- How connected do you feel with others from your project environment (on an emotional level and factual level)? Why (not)? How could this be improved?
- How meaningful is your work as a (young) project member? Why (not)? How could this be improved?

### **Closing Questions**

- Do you have any other thoughts that we haven't touched on yet?
- Looking back at the conversation again: What would now be, in summary, the three most important elements thinking about motivation to work on projects?

## **Appendix C: Focus Groups**

### **Participants**

Two to three persons per company will participate in the focus group workshop, including at least one manager and one young project professional.

### **Objectives**

- Present our research results to the workshop participants.
- Validate our results (triangulation).
- Reflect on the research findings with a broad group of young project professionals, team leaders, HR managers, and other experts as well as researchers to ensure the validity of our findings.
- Serve as an important control to increase the validity of our results.
- Reflect and discuss the results from the individual companies.

### **Workshop Design**

The first results of the research project “The Future of Project Work” are available and we would like to conduct focus group workshops to complement the interviews with our interviewees from all four companies. These will be designed as online workshops with MIRO and Zoom. We will present our findings in two steps, first overall findings across cases and, second, within-case findings per organization:

- Motivators for young project professionals to pursue project careers.
- Incentives and strategic approaches to attract and retain young project professionals.
- Discussions with project professionals from other project-oriented organizations in the German-speaking region.

The following will be discussed:

- How do companies reflect on their results? What was surprising? What is special for them?
- How do the companies reflect on the results compared to the other focus group participants? What is special here? What is surprising here?
- What implications do they draw from these findings?



## About the Project Team

**Martina Huemann** (Martina.Huemann@wu.ac.at), PhD, is Professor at the WU Vienna University of Economics and Business where she heads the Project Management Group in the Department Strategy and Innovation and is the Academic Director of the Professional MBA Program: Project Management. She has published widely in the fields of human resource management and project management. Martina Huemann has 20 years of experience in research, teaching, and consulting. She is a board member of Projekt Management Austria, editor-in-chief of *International Journal of Project Management* and founding editor-in-chief of *Project Leadership and Society*.

**Ruth Christine Lechler** (ruth.christine.lechler@gmail.com) is Research Associate at Zurich University of Applied Sciences and doctoral candidate at WU Vienna in the Project Management Group. She researches and lectures on motivation in projects, project management, and organizational design. Furthermore, she is a trained design thinker and holds a degree in Management, Organizational Studies, and Cultural Theory from the University of St. Gallen (HSG). She has professional experience as a project manager in strategy consulting, and on transformation and digitalization projects in the industrial sector.

**Julia Bauer** (julia.lilla.fekete@s.wu.ac.at) is a PhD student in the Project Management Group at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. Her research interests include motivating young project professionals to pursue a project career, incentive systems, intrinsic motivation, and leadership. She has five years' experience as a management and IT consultant at an international consulting firm as well as three years' experience as a marketing manager at an international IT services company.

**Anna Megawati** (anna.megawati@wu.ac.at), PhD, served as a junior researcher of the Project Management Group in the Department of Strategy & Innovation at the WU Vienna University of Economics and Business. She has taught international human resource management and organizational behavior. In the business world, she has worked in Bank Rakyat Indonesia, one of the largest banks in Indonesia, and at a start-up company in the Philippines as a business consultant. Her research interests include how to motivate and what motivates the young project professionals in project work, and human resource management in the project-oriented organization.

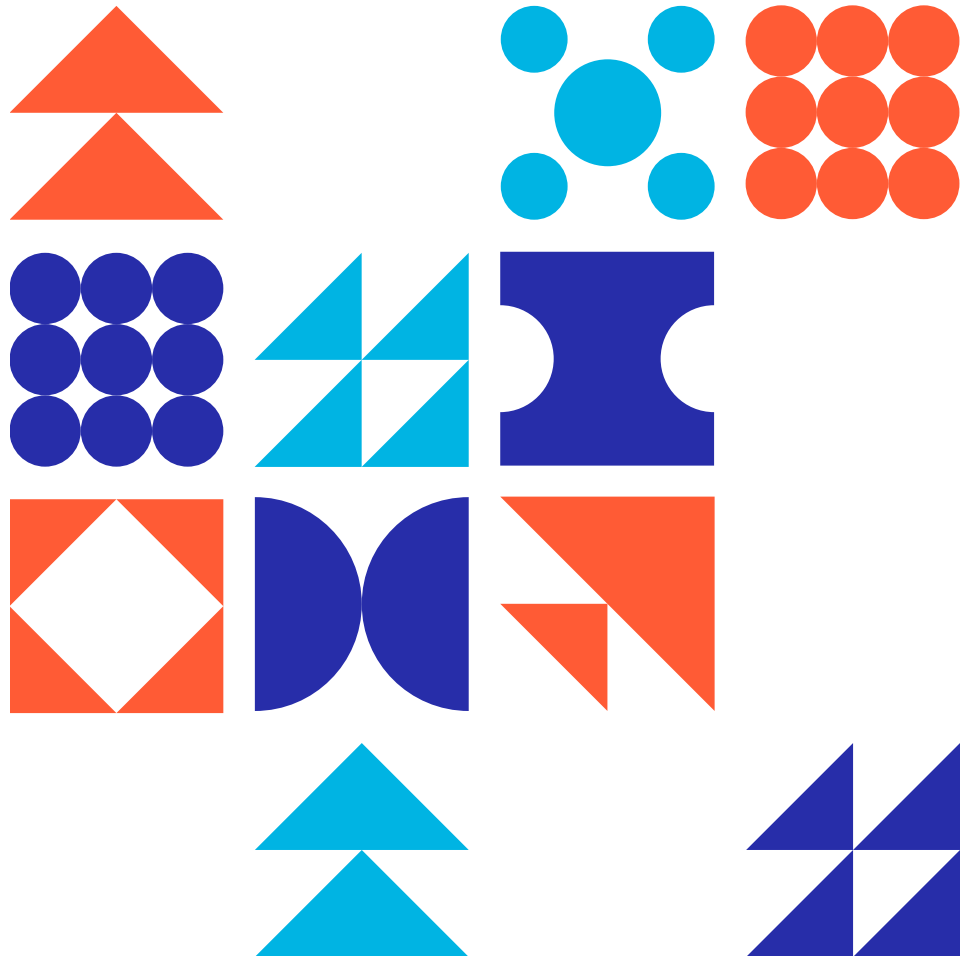
## About Project Management Institute (PMI)

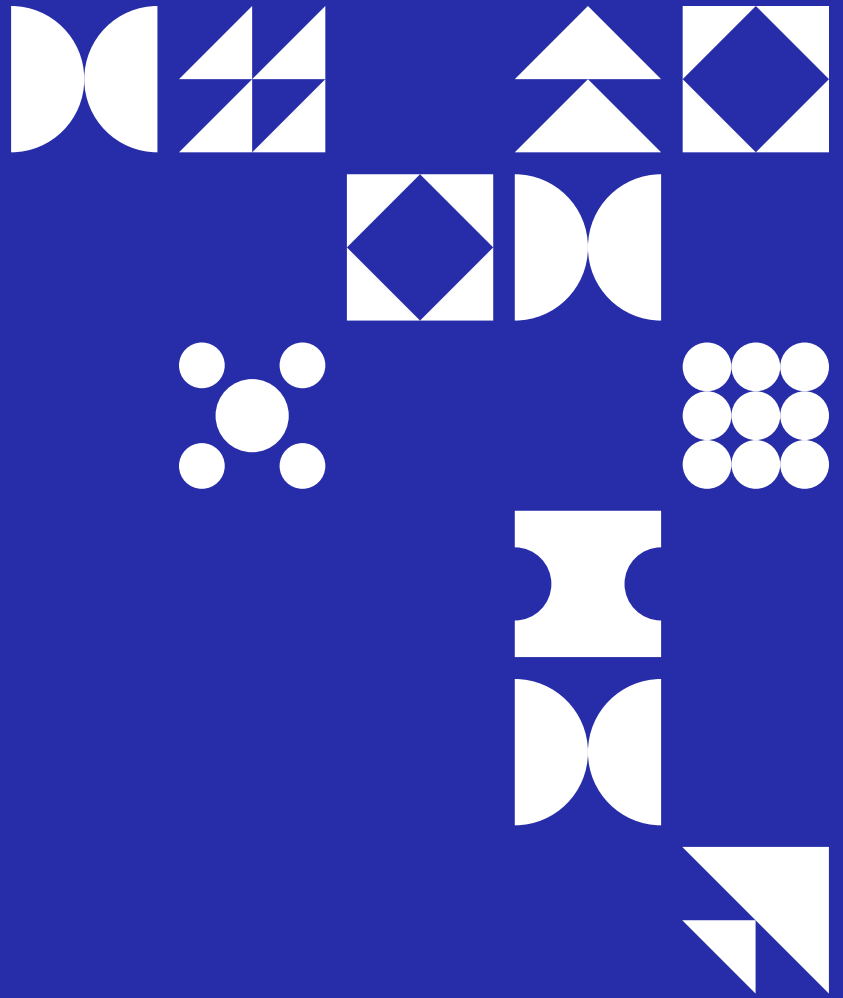
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