

# Principles-Based Project Management: Where to Now?

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*A principle, according to the Oxford Dictionary is:  
“a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the  
foundation for a system of belief or behaviour or for a  
chain of reasoning”*

This raises issues for project management scholars and practitioners about how one acts in project-related situations. A technician might focus on activities in getting the project done, while their behavior would remind them to also consider the ethical principles of their actions. A structuralist might look for principles for guidance to govern project execution but may be influenced by their beliefs. A logician may fall back to a chain of reasoning when critical decisions are being made during a project, moving away from standard procedures. So how do principles guide us to carry out our projects?

A search using Google Scholar for *project management principles* provides references to several books on project management. Although books and guides written for practitioners have discussed the principles of project

management in the past, the academic literature on project management has been relatively silent on the *principles of project management*. This is the gap that this special issue aims to address.

Peter Morris (2012) argued that although Cleland and King's (1968) work on project management principles is a classic, “*managers of projects and programs need to deploy a broader set of functions, techniques and practices*” (p. 640) and be prepared to address “*long term challenges now confronting Planet Earth and its citizens*” (p. 640). Morris points to the big challenges we face in the 21st century, including climate change and the new technologies that will require us to turn our focus from the internal, technical aspects of project management to what projects and project managers need to do to address these societal issues. So are we back to reflecting on how the principles of project management will change to adapt to the future?

Lichtenberg (1989) suggested that the principles of project management have changed over time, from the first wave of formalization and a focus on tools and techniques, such as Gantt charts, to a second wave of computerized logical network-based approaches and, finally, to “*the ‘humanized’ third wave, focusing on personal management control and overview, consensus, flexibility, accepting uncertainty*” and applying the earlier tools to the extent that it serves the above overall goals (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 47). Shenhar and Dvir (2007, p. 93) alluded to changes in the way projects need to be considered, moving away from a problem-focused view to an organizational perspective using a “*strategic/business view, operational/process view and team/leadership view.*” Morris and Geraldi (2011) observed a further move to an institutional view of projects to consider the external environment as well. This indicates that project management principles need to change even beyond the third wave.

Perhaps the time is ripe to think of a fourth wave of principles with an emancipatory focus, which will look at “*projects as contemporary phenomena, temporary with*

*legacies that transform organizations and society*” (Gerald & Söderlund, 2018, p. 61). While the needs of the fourth wave are still emerging, Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2019)—writing about the future of project management in the 2030s—predict more collaborative ways of working, adapting well with advances in technology, being more aware of ethical responsibilities, and developing value orientation toward social responsibilities. They also see a generational change in project workers who will have different value systems.

At the same time, work outside the project management sphere is having an effect on some principles that projects need to adopt. For example:

- The governance of project management (OECD, 2015; APM, 2004);
- Sustainability principles applied to project management (Gareis et al., 2013; Silviu & Schipper, 2020); and
- Equator principles to minimize social and environmental risks from megaprojects (Equator Principles, 2020).

And as we move toward the digital disruption of project management, other principles come into play:

- Principles of responsible computing (Inverardi, 2019); and
- Guidelines for the responsible use of artificial intelligence (Benjamins, 2020).

Principles are also becoming important to project managers as they become caught between delivering projects based on short-term measures of success and the longer term need to consider their impact on communities, the environment, and “social ecology” (Thompson & Williams, 2018, p. 16). Although principles have been used in project management education and training, these are also undergoing changes as project management is evolving.

## The Aim of this Special Issue

The aim of this special issue is to extend existing principles of project management as well as identify new ones to keep up with the evolution of project management. This special issue aims to bring together a wide range of papers on the principles of project management from an academic perspective. We are interested in papers that take a single or multilevel perspective based on conceptual or empirical research using conceptual, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Literature reviews including systematic literature reviews

relevant to the topic of the special issue are also welcome. Questions that may be addressed in the papers include but are not limited to:

- What principles should (or could or might) apply to project management, taking an external perspective to address the problems of society and not just to deliver projects efficiently?
- How will changes to project management principles contribute to a better world for future generations to live in?
- Is there evidence that principles-based approaches applied to project management have contributed to better performance from projects in the past?
- Do principles applied to managing projects deliver better value?
- What impact will principles of responsible project management have on project managers?
- Will adopting a set of stringent principles prevent projects from becoming adaptable and responsive to complex situations arising in projects?
- How do emerging technologies, such as AI, blockchain, cloud computing, and data science influence the traditional principles of project management?
- What impact will further research on the principles of project management have on the project management profession or education?

This list of questions is not exhaustive but is intended to stimulate thinking about the various aspects related to project management principles. We welcome papers on topics beyond those listed above as long as they contribute to the evolution of project management principles.

## Time Line for the Special Issue:

- Submission of a one-page abstract: 20 November 2021
- Submission of full paper after acceptance of abstract: 18 February 2022
- Acceptance: November 2022
- Publication: February 2023

Manuscripts submitted for this special issue should follow the same author guidelines as those for regular issues. We expect authors and reviewers to work in a timely manner in order to comply with the anticipated time line outlined above.

**For more information please contact one of the guest editors.**

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