

Editorial

Best papers from 2013 EURAM conference in Istanbul



Created in 2002, the Project Management track had constantly developed to become a Strategic interest Group (SIG) on “Project Organizing” in 2010 EURAM conference in Rome. The 2013 conference in Istanbul shows a new step in term of quantity and quality of contributions. This development led organizers to create, besides the “Project Organizing” general track, two other subtracks focused on “Implementing and informing innovation strategies through project portfolio management” and “Crisis management and recovery projects and programs”. 43 communications were selected through a more than 30% rate of rejection. Most attendees came from Europe, but with significant number of colleagues from North America and Australia. The communications reflect a variety of methodology, from pure conceptual papers (15%) to many empirical ones (80%), based on quantitative analysis, single or multiple case studies and bibliometric analysis (5%).

The topics addressed reflect the dynamic of the research field but also the capacity of academics to analyze the contemporary evolutions and experimentations within professional world, which is in line with the growing importance of the relevance criteria in academic research.

One major trend is the re-orientation of the research focus from the inside of one project perspective to multi-project issues (sessions on project portfolio, collaboration and learning between projects, programs and firms) and connections between projects and the social network they are imbedded in (sessions on project-based firms, stakeholders, involvement of customers within projects). One interesting consequence of this trend is to explore articulation between project field concepts and different theoretic perspectives such as contract/agency theory, learning and organization theory.

Traditional topics as risk and value management are still active, but deeply renewed by the type of project which are studied, as by the theoretical perspectives which are mobilized. Communication presented on the two subtracks “Implementing and informing innovation strategies through project portfolio management” and “Crisis management and recovery projects and programs” are typical of how project academic field escapes from the traditional quality/cost/time triangle to explore new organizational and methodological perspectives to deal with very innovative or unpredictable situations. Such approaches built useful bridges between project and innovation academic communities. On the same line, key issues of communication, organization and work

within project have inspired contributions, focused on team characterization and its consequences on project results.

The three papers of this special issue have been of course selected for their top quality, and they also reflect those significant trends within contemporary research in project organizing domain, in term of variety of approaches as of topics. I must add that other best ranked contributions of the project organizing tracks had been published in other scientific journals, an important signal that the project field productions irrigate other domains of management research, which is a good news, in line with persisting efforts of our community to cross the frontiers of different management and more largely social sciences academic communities.

In “Three domains of project organizing” Graham Winch develops a conceptual paper which poses an important landmark for the project organizing academic community. It opens with the provocative but relevant statement that projects have been axiomatically defined as temporary organization, but that the ongoing growing projectification of firm and society generates permanent social settings (or permanent challenges) that are key issues for effective implementation of temporary projects. Project organizing is therefore defined through a conceptual framework which articulates three domains: (temporary) projects and programs of course, but also (permanent) project-based firms and owner & operators actors. Such conceptual framework invites scholars to develop research both on the interface between these three domains (commercial, resourcing and governance themes) and to analyze more directly projects as temporary configurations of coalition between permanent organizations to deliver a specific output. In doing so, Graham Winch opens new avenues for project organizing research and he helps to fruitfully articulate in project organizing field concepts and results that had been developed in other management traditions.

In their paper “Identifying, framing and managing uncertainties in project portfolio”, Miia Martinsuo, Tuomas Korhonen and Teemu Laine address a classical topic in project management literature: risk management in project portfolio. Again here, we see the trend to look at multi-project management, and the relevance of addressing the uncertainties issue in a more and more unstable and unpredictable economic context. After a deep and clear state of the art on existing literature, they demonstrate how the general vision of PPM as rational systems lacks to understand how managers, based on their experience to uncertainty, identify, frame and

respond in project portfolio management situation. The importance and originality of this paper is to consider uncertainties not only as objective characteristic of the situation (which is mostly the case, generally induced by ex post case analysis) but as subjective managerial perceptions, which are characterized through an original and relevant methodology. The findings of the research are both important for scholars and for practitioners. They show how, for different managers, uncertainties are identified differently as threats or opportunities depending on their source: environment, organizational complexity or single project content. This framing plays an important role in the way managers take actions to respond to them within the project portfolio processes.

Here again, Carl Dutton, Neil Turner and Liz Lee-Kelley build and expand the large tradition of organizational learning and project learning research by exploring the “Learning in a programme context: An exploratory investigation of drivers and constraints”. As the portfolio notion, the program concept is typical of the trend to look at multi-project coordination issues. The authors base their analytical framework on the “4I learning model” (Crossan et al., 1999) to explore organizational learning within and between programs, a relevant model to grasp the different levels of learning, from individual to group and organization. The findings confirm some of the results of the project learning literature (such for instance the importance of the life cycle on the inside project/program learning processes, or the importance of social networks in cross project/program learning). They also identify differences. For example, high level knowledge transfer is more

relevant and efficient in program to program learning than detailed methodologies or tools which could be supported by PMO in a project to project learning process. Such result is confirmed through the concept of “metarules” in mega projects (Jolivet, 2003) or in more recent research on “lineage management” (Midler, 2013), a category of program which is, in some way, dedicated to learning efficiency.

This 2013 EURAM best paper issue is therefore a good demonstration of the fruitfulness of such temporary academic events, when they are monitored by more permanent structures such as the Project Organizing Strategic Interest Group. They help to clarify the ongoing trends and open new questioning for future research in the field.

References

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