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Call for papers: Managing strategic projects and programs in and between organizations

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1. Aims and scope

In recent decades, organizations across the private, public, and voluntary sectors have encountered an increasing number of surprises and changes, fueled by the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of their operating environment. Organizations have needed to adapt to such environmental changes, while some have sought to anticipate and even drive them (e.g., Shoemaker et al., 2018). At times, the resulting changes are so significant that the organizations must reconsider their missions, strategies, value goals, markets, offerings, structures, and value chains (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998; Huy et al., 2014). Such transformations can be labeled *strategic* – they renew the foundations upon which organizations choose to operate. While strategic transformation can sound attractive and is occasionally necessary, such transformations are known to be challenging and prone to failure or lengthy delays, calling for skillful execution (By, 2005; Huy et al., 2014).

Taking a closer look, such strategic changes are implemented in part or fully via projects and programs that are temporary endeavors, seek to fulfill multiple value expectations, and require a unique organization with a specific goal (Lundin and Söderholm, 1995; Martinsuo and Hoverfält, 2018). While strategic projects refer to single goal-oriented endeavors, strategic programs are complex multi-project entities with several parallel or sequential endeavors (Artto et al., 2009; Martinsuo and Hoverfält, 2018). Organizing and implementing strategic transformation through projects and programs can provide capacity for change (Stensaker, 2011) and allow the rest of the organization to focus on business as usual. Projects provide a powerful structure that can enable more effective and efficient change than the more functional and hierarchical structures (Grundy, 1993). However, project-based structures can also create challenges and tensions as they may lead to a loss of power within the existing organizational structure (Partington, 1996) or isolate themselves harmfully from the permanent organization (Lehtonen and Martinsuo, 2009; Willems et al., 2020).

In this special issue, our focus is the management of strategic projects and programs that drive change within an organization, or between two or more organizations. The word *strategic* implies that the projects and programs are somehow *business-critical*: they are crucial to the organization's survival and/or success. They are also *transformative*: after completing the strategic project or program, the organization, its way of organizing, or its relationship with other organizations or the institutional field should have changed dramatically. Strategic projects and programs may include:

- large-scale organizational change and transformation (Martinsuo and Hoverfält, 2018; Pellegrinelli and Murray-Webster, 2011; Stensaker, 2011)
- inter-organizational strategic projects and programs, such as those that deal with mergers and acquisitions (Biorollo and Teerikangas, 2019; Faulkner et al., 2012; Laamanen and Keil, 2008) or other forms of inter-organizational relations (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Borys and Jemison, 1989; Heimericks et al., 2009; Oliver, 1990; Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2011; Sydow and Braun, 2018)
- new business ventures and radical innovations either within the organization or through inter-organizational collaboration (Martinsuo, 2019; Vuori et al., 2012)
- major and megaprojects and alliances for creating new institutional or business infrastructures (Brady et al., 2005; Davies et al., 2009; Lehtinen et al., 2019)

Strategic projects and programs are part of the *modus operandi* of contemporary organizations and are frequently adopted by practitioners to organize and manage strategic transformations. However, the literature appears to be scattered among the sub-disciplines in management, such as general management, strategy, change, international business, supply chains, projects, and industrial marketing, to name a few (Teerikangas and Gerald, 2015). While projects and programs are central terms in project studies, and are much debated and studied therein,

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in other fields of management these terms are at best referred to as concepts in passing (Teerikangas and Geraldi, 2011), yet often without adequate theoretical backing. This is somewhat surprising given that sociologists portray projects as spaces for projecting oneself in the present (Mead, 1932) or toward the future (Schutz, 1962).

In light of this, efforts to cross-fertilize this knowledge base are needed, to develop an integrative perspective on strategic projects and programs. The need for such cross-fertilization is illustrated in a comparison of the literature on mergers and acquisitions and the project literature (Birolo and Teerikangas, 2019; Geraldi and Teerikangas, 2011) and has consequences for the integration of scientific knowledge and managerial practice. This special issue intends to bring together these streams of research, hopefully creating a platform for cross-domain discourse on strategic projects and programs, while promoting idea generation for future research from neighboring domains of management.

This IJPM special issue invites contributions that focus on the challenges and mechanisms in managing strategic projects and programs. We are interested in both intra-organizational projects and programs that require implementing and diffusing the changes within a permanent organization, and in inter-organizational projects and programs that require knowledge transfer between organizations to achieve transformation in the involved organizations or even in an institutional field. Since organizations are likely to implement different types of strategic projects and programs in parallel and simultaneously, the parallel existence of multiple types of transformation is also of interest. We invite authors to reflect on the theoretical underpinnings of strategic projects and programs (or lack thereof in their respective disciplines/phenomena) and submit empirical studies that both feed the theoretical discourse and offer practical implications to the professionals leading strategic projects and programs. Such theoretical underpinnings could be sought from neighboring sciences such as philosophy, psychology, engineering, or sociology, or from across levels of analysis such as the institutional, network, organizational, team, practice, or actor levels. Comparative and integrative perspectives across phenomena and management disciplines are encouraged, as well as conceptual, review-based papers developing theory.

2. Possible types of strategic projects and programs

Strategic organization change projects and programs. Organization change projects and programs typically reside within one permanent organization with the intent of changing that organization, building future capabilities, and enhancing the organization's survival and success in the future. Strategic organization change is particularly sensitive to the project's or program's interplay with the permanent organization and its internal ways of working, but it is by no means disjointed from the broader external environment. The literature on organizational change is strongly concerned with how the changes are planned and implemented. Possible topics can include but are not limited to:

- How are strategic organization change projects/programs governed, particularly when multiple changes are occurring simultaneously?
- How do project/program leaders involve external stakeholders in strategic change, and how do the stakeholders drive or hinder the implementation of the change?
- How do the goals and plans of strategic change projects/programs evolve over time, and how do personnel both inside and outside the project/program team affect the evolution of the goals?
- How do the leaders of strategic change projects/programs perceive, foresee, and build on the future organization?

Strategic projects and programs aimed at inter-organizational integration. Organizations increasingly pursue inter-organizational strategies in collaborative or co-opetitive settings. Interest in the study of mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, alliances, partnerships, supply chains, networks, and ecosystems has thus burgeoned in recent decades. A closer

look at these bodies of work shows that inter-organizational integration operates via projects and/or programs. Despite this, these bodies of knowledge are largely disconnected from project studies, where the concepts of projects and programs are under continuous scrutiny. Moreover, these bodies of knowledge on inter-organizational relationships are largely disconnected from one another. As a result, an over-arching perspective on inter-organizational integration, set across different partnership types, is missing. Possible topics can include but are not limited to:

- How does integration take place via projects/programs in the context of inter-organizational dyads or triads as mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, alliances, outsourcing, franchising, licensing, (cross-sector) partnerships, supply chains, value chains, or inter-organizational networks or ecosystems?
- How are projects/programs used across a variety of inter-organizational relationship types, and what could an integrative perspective look like, based on comparing different types of inter-organizational relationships?
- What could be the value and use of project-based metaphors in the study of inter-organizational relationships?
- How can scholars learn from project studies toward the management of projects and programs in inter-organizational settings?

New business ventures and radical innovation projects and programs. The core intent with radical innovation and new business venture programs is typically to generate new business for the firm. Some of these changes may merely expand current business, but other changes might cannibalize existing business or move the firm's focus to the customers' industry or neighboring business fields, which might have been previously unknown to the firm. These kinds of strategic change projects and programs are highly risky and uncertain, and their management may be particularly sensitive to managers' political behavior. Possible topics can include but are not limited to:

- How can the permanent organization safeguard itself from radically new ventures and innovations, but at the same time prepare itself for implementing them efficiently?
- How can radically new venture and innovation programs acknowledge the external environment – including customers, new competitors, and neighboring industries – in project/program planning and management?
- How can firms manage the risks of business cannibalization in strategic projects/programs?
- What is special about the lifecycles and temporal orientation of projects/programs for radically new ventures and innovations?

Major and megaprojects for innovating and creating new institutional or business infrastructures. Major and megaprojects have received more attention lately in light of significant successes as well as failures due to their high cost, great complexity, and long delivery time. A largely overlooked issue is the difficulty of such projects' innovative capacity and inter-organizational coordination and communication in creating completely new institutional and business infrastructures. The research knowledge about this topic is currently very limited, especially for major and megaprojects that may alter the operating logic in a business domain or institutional field. Possible topics in this area may include but are not limited to:

- What roles should control and trust have in transformational major and megaprojects?
- What forms of governance are beneficial for transformational major and megaprojects?
- How do the roles of stakeholders change in transformational major and megaprojects?
- How can transformational major and megaprojects be used to advance sustainability in an industry or institutional field?
- What are the differences between transformational major and megaprojects and ecosystems and where are their boundaries? How

is value created for stakeholders? What coordination and communication difficulties are experienced, and how could these be overcome?

3. Possible topics

We call on researchers from across disciplines to consider one or more of the following topics.

The connection of the projects and programs to the permanent organization. One of the major challenges in strategic projects and programs is the implementation of change in the permanent organization. As an organization's routine operations are ongoing while change efforts are being implemented, change must usually be carried out *in context*, with awareness of the permanent organization's other duties, including other simultaneous projects and programs. This connection of the strategic project or program to the permanent organization, and the need to separate the program to enable the change, has been investigated previously, both before and during change programs (Lehtonen and Martinsuo, 2008, 2009; Nieminen and Lehtonen, 2008; Pellegrinelli, 2002; Pellegrinelli et al., 2007; Turkulainen et al., 2015; Willems et al., 2020). However, the stakeholder involvement, value delivery, and impacts of programs still need to be studied (Martinsuo and Hoverfält, 2018). We are particularly interested in the permanent organization's role in supervising and steering the strategic project or program, any potential tensions and shifts in power, as well as approaches to coordinating and controlling multiple simultaneous projects and programs.

The collaboration across organizations via strategic projects and programs. When strategic projects and programs take place between multiple organizations, as in the context of mergers, alliances, networks, outsourcing, or ecosystems, integration problems increase exponentially. The complexity of the context requires that strategic projects and programs serve multiple different needs and value expectations. Prior research has focused on the dynamics of integration and execution (Graebner et al., 2017; Ireland et al., 2002), largely disregarding the project or program specificities therein. At times competing firms must partner (for example to radically innovate), which raises the question of when to collaborate and when to compete (Bouncken et al., 2015; Walley, 2007). We are interested in both the planning and implementation of strategic projects and programs in inter-organizational settings, and the co-opetitive dynamics therein.

Uncertainties and risks in strategic projects and programs. Another major challenge is the uncertainties and risks in strategic projects and programs. With strategic initiatives, it may be difficult or even impossible to specify a precise goal in the beginning (e.g. Martinsuo, 2019; Martinsuo and Lehtonen, 2007; Thiry, 2002). As the goal emerges and evolves over time, the change implementation faces many uncertainties and risks (Adler et al., 2016; Laine et al., 2016), because of the changes taking place in the environment and the lack of shared understanding within the project and program teams. We specifically encourage the submission of papers that tackle uncertainties and risks typical of strategic projects and programs, and how they are anticipated, mitigated, and resolved in dynamic contexts.

Temporal issues over the lifecycle of strategic projects and programs and across projects. We purposely adopt a lifecycle perspective whereby the time before and after the project is also of interest, as long as the topics are very clearly connected to the projects and programs and their goal-related performance. Events early in a project are reflected in later behaviors and practices (Aaltonen and Turkulainen, 2018; Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2019), and projects and programs may depend on or learn from other ones (Engwall, 2003; Godsell et al., 2018). Time and temporal issues have been explored in various project contexts (Dille et al., 2018; Stjerne et al., 2019), including the future-orientation of projects (Pitsis et al., 2003) and the building of change momentum (Jansen, 2004). In this special issue, we are particularly interested in the key decisions, actions, and challenges across the lifecycle of strategic projects and programs, the path dependence and path continuity of the deci-

sions and actions, and the creation or failure of change momentum in the strategic projects and programs.

As strategic projects and programs may take place in the private, public, and voluntary sectors, each with their specific requirements, we hope to see paper proposals from across these contexts. We seek papers that are deeply grounded in the empirical reality of organizations that implement strategic projects and programs, but at the same time are well connected to a selected theoretical discourse, to generate new theoretical insights. The above project types and themes are examples of ideas that we would like to include in the scope of the special issue and can spark more specific ideas. Authors may choose to explore either projects or programs and contribute to respective ongoing discussions, depending on their theoretical and empirical interests. Authors may also propose their own topic, as long as it is in line with the primary aims and scope of the special issue.

4. Process and key dates

Authors should first submit a max 1000-word proposal to get feedback about the suitability of the topic for the specific issue. Please submit proposals directly to Miia Martinsuo (miia.martinsuo@tuni.fi).

Upon proposal acceptance, full papers must be submitted online at <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-project-management/> → “Submit your paper” carefully following the Guide for Authors and indicating the publication category special issue “Strategic projects and programs” (available in the spring 2021). Submitted papers will be subject to the ordinary IJPM double-blind review process with multiple reviewers. For questions, please contact the guest editors.

- Proposal submission deadline (directly to miia.martinsuo@tuni.fi): 15 Jan 2021
- Selected proposals invited for full paper submission: Feb 2021
- Paper development workshop for invited authors: Apr 2021
- Full paper submission deadline: 31 May 2021
- Notifications to authors after review: Aug 2021
- Revisions and final acceptance decisions: Late 2021/early 2022
- Expected publication: 2022.

Special issue editors

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