

Special Issue: Project History
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There is a growing concern in the project management community about the lack of historical understanding of the emergence of project management and the importance of landmark projects. Both researchers in project management (Garel, 2004) and business historians (Scranton, 2008) call for the development of a history of projects and project management. Indeed with the notable exceptions of Peter Morris' work (1994) and the in-depth studies of Thomas Hughes (1998) and Stephen Johnson (2002), we actually do not know of any history of project management. To fill this void of historical research in project management, this special issue invites project management researchers interested in history, and historians interested in projects and project management.

Most textbooks in project management begin with a short historical section and then turns to the classical description of project management, its organization and techniques, most of which is notoriously disembodied, almost without taking context into account. The tendency is to produce a very shallow view on the history of project management. More sobering for the discipline of project management, the rare famous case study comes from political scientists (Sapolsky, 1972), historians of technology (Hughes, 1998; Johnson, 2002), historians (Hewlett & Anderson, 1962; Brooks et al, 1979) or journalists (Kidder, 1981; Rhodes, 1986). The problem for scholars in project management is that these contributions, even if they provide valuable empirical data, are not oriented toward the specific analysis of project management and project organizing as such, and thus rarely reflect on the process of project organizing or the act of project management. Accordingly, there is still room for more historical studies of projects and project management – describing and analyzing it from a project management point of view.

This lack of historical knowledge on project management raises several problems. First, the existing literature on project history is biased toward large, US, military and space projects. Hence, we need to broaden the perspective to other industrial sectors and national contexts. The history of projects and project management is accordingly a global phenomenon and variations exist across the globe, however, we know very little, for example, about the most influential projects in Scandinavian history, in English history, in South-American history and in Asian history, and their impact on management capabilities, management practice, and subsequent projects.

Second, history can help us to better understand the roots of project management and the evolution of current managerial practices. This could lead us to recognize

innovative managerial solutions from the past that are still relevant today and contradict the dominant model of project management. Indeed there is sometimes a discrepancy between current descriptions of historical projects and their realities. For example Lenfle & Loch (2010) in a paper in the *California Management Review* thus demonstrate that the usual statement that the Manhattan project “exhibited the principles of organization, planning, and direction that influenced the development of standard practices for managing projects” (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007) is notoriously wrong. On the contrary the Manhattan project exhibited managerial practices (typically parallel strategy, experimentation and concurrent engineering) that have been forgotten in favor of a more control-oriented approach of project management and are regaining relevance in today’s innovation-based and fast-paced competition (Loch et al, 2006). The problem is thus one, so common in management, of making simplifications of the past to present new findings. As Janik points out, the “idea that we are smarter, simply because we come later, is a scholarly form of hubris and no less self-destructive with respect to our cultural heritage” (Janik, 2006: 297). Accordingly, a better understanding of history might create an improved understanding of the difficulties in creating, shaping and managing projects – and thus add to the empirical wealth of the subject. Another role of project history would be to create a common ground among academics within this domain of knowledge. Consider the importance of the Sydney Opera House project; it makes it easier to transfer knowledge of more complex type, makes it easier for people to talk about and share experience, and could then also lead to theoretical and metaphorical developments, similar to the paradox of the Sydney Opera House project.

Thus, the present special issue has its origins in the belief that history matters in management (Kantrow, 1986; Kieser, 1994) and, therefore, in project management. However, compared to business history and management history, which has had such a profound implication for management in general, and strategic management in particular (see for instance the work of Alfred Chandler), project management has been little discussed and scrutinized in a historical light. We think, in line with the aforementioned authors, that we need to develop ‘Project History’ as an important and integral part of project management research, that seeks to integrate historical research with project management research. More particularly, by going back to history, we can:

- Illustrate and analyze the role of projects and project management for industrial and societal development
- Establish a more complete understanding of project management that is different from the conventional ‘tools and technique’ tradition
- Identify and discuss a number of generic problems in the practice of project management
- Create a better empirical ‘common ground’ among scholars within the domain of project management, for instance through ‘common examples’ and ‘common problems’
- Give a broader picture of project and project management history, complementing the dominant view of project management being a managerial innovation stemming from the defense industry, particularly in the United States

- Identify practices that seem to be critical for the success of projects and that are grounded on a contextual understanding of the particular project at hand
- Document the emergence of certain practices of key concern within project management, such as planning techniques, coordination mechanisms, team structures, visualization tools, etc.

In this perspective this special issue seeks to gather interesting work on management and business history that specifically address the individual project (or a series of projects/programs). The prime focus is on what might be referred to as industrial projects of various sorts, be they the early influential infrastructure projects (canal projects, railway projects), the large-scale development projects from the 1940s to the 1960s or more contemporary project that exemplifies innovative practices. We also want to invite studies of special kinds of influential construction projects that not only created objects of significance but also created them in a novel way which later on influenced subsequent project management practice.

Thus, the overall ambition is to welcome contributions that study landmark projects, their background, effects, management and organization. We want to emphasize that this focus on individual projects does not mean that we ignore the context in which they emerge and unfold. We believe, following Engwall (2003), that it is necessary to link a particular project to its context and history. By so doing, we will be able to show the influence of a particular project on managerial practices, before and after its unfolding. Accordingly, we invite contributions that position and present the studied project in its historical and institutional surrounding.

So far, although not completely, literature has documented such fascinating projects as the Concorde project (Morris & Hough, 1987), the Erie canal project, the Brooklyn bridge, the Empire State building (see for instance Shapiro & Berndt, 1997), the SAGE project, the Atlas project, the Central Artery/Tunnel project, the ARPANET project (see Hughes, 1998), to name a few. The idea here is not to present a complete list, only to give a few examples of possible projects also for coverage in the present special issue. The core idea however, we assume, is to cover, in Hughes' words, the "collective creative endeavors that have produced the communications, information, transportation, and defense systems that structure our world and shape the way we live our lives" (Hughes, 1998: 4). As mentioned earlier, the take here is not to treat industrial projects narrowly. Instead, we welcome contributions with a different focus and broader perception of industrial projects. We also invite contributions that cover different regions and institutional contexts, to give a multifaceted framing of the history of project and project management. We delimit the period covered to modern industrial projects, starting with the landmark infrastructure of the 18th century, moving over into the large-scale defense system projects and the landmark technology projects of more recent date. The focus is however not on technology as such. As also documented in Hughes' analysis, we assume the focus to revolve around management and organization, not merely technology as such.

The special issue speaks in favor of historical approaches to projects and project management, but at the same time it seeks to explore business/management history with a specific focus on projects.

Instructions to authors:

1. Authors should submit an **abstract** of approx. 200 words before **July 1 2011**. Send the abstract directly to the editors via e-mail. The abstract should clearly specify the selected project and the reasons why the project is interesting for the project management community and what might be learned from the selected project.
2. Notification of initial screening August 1 2011 and acceptance of abstract.
3. Submission of **full paper** before **December 30 2011** through the journal website. (Authors should follow the manuscript guidelines of International Journal of Project Management, see journal website) when submitting their full papers).
4. Publication of special issue 2012.

Please contact the special issue editors if you have any questions.

Let's make history – Project History!

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