

# Career Paths and Career Systems for Project Managers

## SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS:

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The literature alludes to a relationship between project team management and leadership and the performance of projects (e.g., Belassi & Tukel, 1996; Malach-Pines, Dvir, & Sadeh, 2009; Müller & Turner, 2006; Westerveld, 2003). Yet, although “project management” has developed into a recognized profession, the routes into the profession and progression within the profession have little recognized structure. To a number of scholars, project management has been and continues to be the ‘accidental profession’ (Pinto & Kharbanda, 1995; Richardson, Earnhardt, & Marion, 2015). Rarely does a project management career begin within the profession, as the typical career follows as a consequence of another career within the industry (Marion, Richardson, & Earnhardt, 2014). How well do we understand these entry routes? Do we understand what influences the progression of project managers’ careers? What is the project manager’s identity? How do they view their careers? (McKevitt, Carbery, Lyons, 2017). The literature suggests (e.g., Delery & Doty, 1996) that career paths are, in part, a function of organizational structures, which may comprise training, clear-cut career pathways, appraisal and feedback mechanisms, and other factors. This leads us to additional questions. For example, how widespread are such career systems in project management? What are the constituents of effective project management career systems?

At this juncture, it appears that a significant amount of the literature concerning the careers of project managers may be anecdotal or conceptual based (e.g., Marion, Richardson, & Earnhardt, 2014; Turner, 1999). There is empirical work that touches on this area; for example, work on competence development (e.g., Cheng, Dainty, & Moore, 2005; Chipulu, Neoh, Ojiako, & Williams, 2013) or work that uses career systems as one of a number of influencing variables (Ekrot, Rank, Kock, & Gemünden, 2016). There is less work, however, that focuses on this area—particularly the influence of career systems on success measures, such as project portfolio success or wider business success.

To learn more about the careers of project managers, it would make sense to be informed by the literature on career development (for a recent review of popular topics in careers, see Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017). The recent scholarly debate on careers has primarily focused on individual agency and proactive behavior as the foundation of a successful career. For example, two dominant theoretical perspectives are the boundaryless career (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005) and the protean career (Hall, 2004). Both perspectives contend that the individual worker oversees his or her career; however, the former posits that contemporary career development is primarily characterized by flexibility and mobility, both physically and



psychologically; the latter proposes that career meta competencies, such as adaptability, guide an individual's career choices. Related to these perspectives are topics such as career self-management (e.g., De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009; King, 2004), career competencies (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Schaufeli, & Blonk, 2015; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006), and employability (e.g., Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Forrier, Verbruggen, & De Cuyper, 2015; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006)—all stressing the important role of individual agency in career development. An important question, then, is: What does this knowledge from the careers disciplines mean for studying and understanding the careers of project managers?

Bringing these two fields together means that recent insights into the factors determining career success and employability need to be integrated into the context of project management. Such an integration could work in two ways: “outside in” and “inside out.” About the former, it would be fascinating to study popular concepts in the careers literature and bring them into the project management debate. For example, what kind of career-related competencies would be necessary for project managers to develop their careers? What kinds of behaviors might enhance their employability? And if many of the careers of project managers are really “an accident,” how about the role of ‘calling’ in their careers? Regarding the latter, it would be important to see how knowledge within the field of project management might enhance findings from the careers discipline. Especially relevant here would be to see what kinds of structural factors and boundary conditions might impact the career mobility and career success of project managers. For example, how significant are the number and characteristics—such as size, types, and level of complexity—of projects or programs managed? Are project careers supported or constrained significantly by differing forms of organizing by projects as project-based or project-oriented organizations?

Henceforth, the objective of the special issue is to gain a better understanding of the career development processes of managers who have repeatedly managed projects or programs for a sustained period by integrating the fields of project management and careers, using both “outside in” and “inside out” perspectives. Papers are welcome to address, but are not limited to, the following questions:

### Outside In

- Which factors contribute to the objective career success (e.g., promotions, salary) and subjective career success (e.g., career satisfaction, meaningfulness, see: Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016) of project managers?
- What are the key antecedents and outcomes of employability among project managers? How might different forms of employability, such as competence-based (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and perceived employability (Forrier et al., 2015), contribute to their success as a project manager?
- To what extent do project managers' careers have boundaries (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), and what is the effect of the lack or porousness of these boundaries? Are project management careers traditionally linear or are they characterized by multidimensionality (e.g., Baruch, 2004)? In other words, which of the dominant career paradigms would be most appropriate for project managers' careers?
- Do project managers have more traditional career attitudes of vertical growth and stability, or do contemporaneous perspectives of boundaryless and protean careers (e.g., Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006) prevail? What might be the role of such career attitudes in their career development as a project manager?

- What roles can personal resources, such as career competencies (Akkermans et al., 2015) and career adaptability (Savickas, 1997); and proactive behaviors, such as job crafting (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013) and career self-management (De Vos et al., 2009; King, 2004) play in the performance and career development of project managers?
- What is the role of meaningful work (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) and, more specifically, having a 'calling' (Duffy & Dik, 2013) in the careers of project managers?
- In which ways might the fit between a project manager and his or her job, project team, and organization (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), and the balance between the resources and demands in their work (see *Job Demands-Resources Theory*: Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) affect their careers?

## Inside Out

- How have the required work-related competences of project managers changed and how do they interact with career-related competencies as a foundation for a successful career in project management (e.g., see Whittington, Yakis-Douglas, Ahn, & Cailluet, 2017, for such an analysis for strategic planners)?
- How important are project management certifications in career paths? What is the relative influence of professional qualifications versus academic qualifications (Crawford, 2007)? Is close alignment via accreditation between the professional and academic qualifications problematic (Leybourne, Kanabar, & Warburton, 2011)?
- It is argued that participating in project management is instrumental in developing project-critical skills, such as formal planning (Scott-Young & Samson, 2008), ability to utilize matrix and dynamic team structures (Mendez, 2003), and flexible learning (Bresnen, Goussevskaia, & Swan, 2004); but such skills can benefit non-project management positions, too. This suggests that project management experience can benefit executive development: What is the contribution of project management experience to senior management (e.g., CEO) career paths?
- What is the impact of project management career systems on project portfolio and business success and on project leader behavior and attitudes?
- Is entry into the project management profession still largely 'accidental' (Darrell, Baccarini, & Love, 2010)? To what extent do project managers pursue careers and what are the barriers and enablers to progression? What are the significant milestones in a successful project management career?
- To what extent does empirical evidence support the hypothesis of project management as an organizational core competence (e.g., Lampel, 2001; Pinto & Kharbanda, 1995)? To what extent do, for example, competitive strategies relate to organizational project management competency, and, consequently, what role can project management career systems play in supporting organizational strategy?
- How can different theoretical lenses, such as strategic human resource management theories (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delery & Doty, 1996) or organizational behavior theories about, for example, leadership, teamwork, and culture, shed light on any of these questions?

We welcome papers from all methodological approaches.

## SUBMISSIONS

Full papers must be submitted by **30 June 2018** via the journal submission site. Papers not selected for inclusion in the special issue could be considered for regular submission to the journal.

If you have any additional questions, please consult any of the following guest editors:

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## AUTHOR AND REVIEWER GUIDELINES

Articles in special issues follow the same guidelines as those in regular issues; however, we expect the authors and reviewers to react promptly with their revisions and reviews. A special issue is a project with a scheduled deadline. While some variance may arise, timeliness matters more than with regular submissions.

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