

# Adaptive programme management through a balanced performance/strategy oriented focus



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## Abstract

This paper explores how programme management (as opposed to project management) can contribute to the effective design and delivery of megaprojects. Traditionally, project management is considered to be performance focused and task oriented, whilst programme management entails a more strategic focus. The programme management literature suggests that this can result in tensions between the management of the projects and the programme as a whole. This paper uses the findings of the €2.4 billion Room for the River flood protection programme in the Netherlands as a case study, because indicators about its budget, time, quality and stakeholder satisfaction suggest high programme management performance upon completion of the planning and design stage of its 39 river widening projects. Based on a literature review, document analysis and 55 face-to-face interviews, we have analysed how the programme management of the programme contributed to this result. Six attributes for effective programme management that are identified from the project and programme management literature are used to structure the research data. Consecutively, the interactions between project and programme management are analysed. The analysis of Room for the River reveals a combined strategic/performance focus at the level of both programme and project management that enables a collaborative approach between programme and project management. This particularly enables effective stakeholder collaboration, coordination and adaptation of the programme to contextual changes, newly acquired insights and the changing needs of consecutive planning stages, which positively contributes to the performance of the programme as a whole.

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## 1. Introduction

Megaprojects in the infrastructure sector often fail to meet project objectives within their initial budget and time constraints. For example, international comparative research showed that out of 258 large infrastructure projects, some 90% had cost overruns averaging between 20% and 44% for different types of projects

(Flyvbjerg, 2007). In addition, the European Commission repeatedly reported time delays in realising the programme of the Trans-European Network, that consists of 30 priority projects with a total investment of €600 billion (estimation 2005; Hertogh and Westerveld, 2010). The performance of megaprojects depends partly on their management (Hertogh and Westerveld, 2010; Kwak et al., 2014; Shao et al., 2012). In addition, changing context factors during the long planning period of these projects can lead to delays and cost overruns when they complicate the accomplishment of important project decisions and/or change the scope of large infrastructure projects (Hertogh et al., 2008;

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Pellegrinelli et al., 2007). Furthermore, inadequate balance between project control and stakeholder engagement could lead to illegitimate project decisions that lack stakeholder support or create false expectations, both potentially resulting in cost overruns, inadequate progress and poor quality (Hertogh and Westerveld, 2010). Especially when tensions between stakeholders occur, project organisations tend to lean on the control approach, which often leads to disappointing results (Hertogh and Westerveld, 2010).

Megaprojects, particularly in the infrastructure sector, are often being managed as programmes, because megaprojects typically consist of multiple components that can be classified as sub-projects (Pellegrinelli, 1997). A programme can be defined as “a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually” (Project Management Institute, 2008a, p. 434). Although it is in practice difficult to make a clear distinction between a programme and a project, programme management is more than a scaled-up version of project management, because programmes include elements that are outside the scope of individual projects within a programme (Lycett et al., 2004; Maylor et al., 2006). With this, programmes are increasingly being adopted to implement organisational transformational strategies and integrate multiple projects (Maylor et al., 2006). Furthermore, the roles of programme managers are more strategic by nature compared to those of project managers who are more task oriented and performance driven (Brown, 2008). This difference often creates tensions between programme and project management and can hinder the achievement of project and programme objectives (Lycett et al., 2004).

This paper contributes to the programme management literature by exploring how project and programme management can collaborate effectively. The 2.4 billion Euro flood protection programme Room for the River in the Netherlands is used as an illustration, as this programme has performed relatively well during the initiation and planning/design stages in terms of output, stakeholder satisfaction, budget and time (Rijke et al., 2012b). For example, many other recent flood protection programmes were significantly more expensive than anticipated (e.g. Kim and Choi, 2013; Taskforce HWBP, 2010). The lessons that are presented in this paper potentially carry broad international relevance, because many large scale infrastructure upgrades to protect against flooding from the sea and rivers are organised through programmes that include multiple projects (Zevenbergen et al., 2012). As there are many similarities of flood protection programmes with large infrastructure projects in other sectors (Hertogh et al., 2008), the relevance of this paper could potentially also stretch beyond the field of flood management.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Project versus programme management

There is an emerging body of literature about programme management that originates from the project management literature, but has several theoretical bases such as organisational theories, strategy, product development manufacturing and

change (Arto et al., 2009). As such, there are many different interpretations to the meaning of programme management (Arto et al., 2009; Pellegrinelli et al., 2007). The traditional view of programme management is an extension of project management and focuses primarily on the definition, planning and execution of a specific objective (Lycett et al., 2004; Pellegrinelli, 2002, 2011; Pellegrinelli et al., 2007). In this view, programme management is a mechanism to coordinate the performance of a group of related projects (Ferns, 1991; Gray, 1997). A more recently developed view stems from strategic planning and attributes a broader role to programme management in terms of value creation for the organisations involved beyond the performance of projects in a particular programme (Murray-Webster and Thiry, 2000; Thiry, 2002, 2004; Young et al., 2012). Overall, programme management is used to create portfolios of projects (Gray, 1997; Turner, 2000), implement strategies (Partington, 2000; Partington et al., 2005) and generate change in products, business or ways of working (Pellegrinelli, 1997; Ribbers and Schoo, 2002; Thiry, 2004).

Programmes consist of multiple projects that run in parallel or (partly) sequential (Lycett et al., 2004; Maylor et al., 2006). However, the relationship between a programme and a project differs from the relationship between a project and a work package, as programmes can provide benefits over and above those that projects can achieve on their own, such as improved exposure, prioritisation, more efficient use of resources and better alignment with other projects (Pellegrinelli, 1997). Whilst project management is typically focused on performance in terms of quality, cost and time, programme management operates more on a strategic level to create synergies between projects and deliver a package of benefits through coordination of a series of interconnected projects (Lycett et al., 2004; Maylor et al., 2006). As such, programme management requires a different approach than project management (Partington et al., 2005), that takes a broader organisational scope and takes into account the interactions between projects (Maylor et al., 2006; Shao et al., 2012; Young et al., 2012).

Different types of programme management exist in which the programme management interacts differently with the management of individual projects (Lycett et al., 2004; Pellegrinelli et al., 2007; van Buuren et al., 2010). For example, programme management can take the form of as portfolio management, a shared service centre and goal-oriented programme management. In the case of portfolio management, programme management contributes to a higher level fine-tuning of project ambitions and prevents fragmentation in decision-making, without altering the planning and budget cycles of individual projects (Gray, 1997; van Buuren et al., 2010). This typology is applied to coordinate the effective use of resources, risk management and branding of a group of multiple projects (Gray, 1997). As the project objectives are often leading in this typology, programme management has limited influence on the internal management of individual projects which mutually adapt based on open information (Gray, 1997). When acting as a service centre, programme management can coordinate the management of knowledge across multiple projects through integration of, for example, financial, legal, administrative and technical services into a ‘shared service centre’ (van Buuren et

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