



Advancing project stakeholder analysis by the concept 'shadows of the context' ☆

Pernille Eskerod ^{a,*}, Tina Larsen ^b

^a Webster Vienna Private University, Business & Management Department, Palais Wenkheim, Praterstr. 23, A-1020 Vienna, Austria

^b Slagelse Municipality, Rådhuspladsen 11, DK-4200 Slagelse, Denmark

Received 25 January 2017; received in revised form 30 April 2017; accepted 2 May 2017

Available online xxx

Abstract

The paper contributes to the theoretical debate on stakeholder management within project-oriented organizations. Despite acknowledging that 'no project is an island', project management theory (being originally a child of Scientific Management) has drawn on reductionism, i.e. the practice of simplifying the description of a complex phenomenon in order to better grasp it. Project stakeholder management theory has been heavily influenced by this approach, and the unintended consequence is that the simplicity of the stakeholder conceptualization makes it difficult for project representatives to predict stakeholder behavior. In the paper, we suggest the concept 'shadows of the context' as a substitute for narrow perceptions of 'What's in it for me?'. Advantages and disadvantages of a reductionist approach versus the richer and more profound and holistic 'shadows of the context' approach within stakeholder analysis are discussed. The paper also celebrates Prof. J. Rodney Turner's significant influences within the project management field.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd, APM and IPMA. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Stakeholder theory; Stakeholder analysis; Scientific management; Stakeholder behavior; Reductionist approach; Shadows of the context

1. Executive summary

A core idea within project stakeholder management is that the people responsible for stakeholder management related to a project – we can call them project representatives – can increase the likelihood of project success (regardless of the measures for success applied) by influencing the project stakeholders. The more it is possible to understand the stakeholders, the easier it is to perform effective project stakeholder management. This paper claims, however, that the very concept of project management, due to its origins within Scientific Management, is constraining

the (conceptual) understanding of the stakeholders more than necessary. The reason is that project management was built on reductionism, i.e. an approach to simplify the description of a complex phenomenon.

Based on literature reviews and logical deductions, this paper contributes to the field by offering an alternative to a reductionist approach to project stakeholder analysis. The concept 'shadows of the context' is proposed. To better understand and predict stakeholder behavior it is important to understand the stakeholder's perceptions of the relevant past, present and future. The concept encourages the project representative (as well as researchers) to not limit their focus to the project as the unit of analysis, i.e. accepting that 'no project is an island' when doing project stakeholder analysis. Instead, they should look at the project as embedded in the stakeholder's perception of experiences (with the project representatives), the expectations of the future, and other concurrent activities, relationships and networks the stakeholder is involved in.

☆ Parts of this article were presented by the authors at the EURAM 2016 conference in Paris.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: pernille.eskerod@webster.ac.at (P. Eskerod), tina@goingforward.dk (T. Larsen).

Two methods to operationalize the concept ‘shadows of the context’ are presented, i.e. ‘rich pictures’ method and systemic constellation. The methods give the project representatives and the project stakeholders a broader basis for communicating by bringing more information into the conversation. In the ‘rich pictures’ method, it is not only through spoken words but also through colors, drawings and symbols. (Notice that instead of talking about a real physical picture, the concept ‘rich pictures’ can also be thought of as a symbol of having a thorough data-set.) Likewise, in the systemic constellations method, different perspectives on the project or issue become visible, representing the perceived reality of the stakeholder in question.

A warning is offered as the risk of using the concept ‘shadows of the context’ is that the project representatives get paralyzed due to data-overflow, and thereby become worse off compared to a situation where they used reductionist analysis tools. A managerial implication of the research is therefore that project representatives should be aware of the challenge of finding the right balance between getting richer and more profound and holistic insights on stakeholders and getting paralyzed by data overflow.

In addition, the paper includes a tribute to IJPM’s chief editor, professor J. Rodney Turner.

2. A tribute to IJPM chief editor, Professor J. Rodney Turner

A core aim of this paper is to celebrate *International Journal of Project Management* (IJPM)’s chief editor and prof. J. Rodney Turner on his 65 years birthday. How could Rodney’s birthday be celebrated better than by pointing to the significant influences he has had since many years – and still has – within the project management research community through a festschrift on new reflections related to the project-oriented organization?

It will take many papers to cover all influences, so therefore we will concentrate on what we see as his core competencies, and that is (1): His ability to identify the basic components of concepts and logically deduct assumptions and implications. To our understanding this is a core competence that all researchers constantly should practice. We see this in many of Rodney’s publications, but most prominently in three IJPM editorials he wrote back in 2006 (Turner, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

As a second competence, (2), we will point to Rodney’s ability and eagerness to take up new topics and thereby add to the theoretical field and be valuable for many other researchers within the project management community. Rodney explained it himself on an occasion by pointing to the metaphor of a butterfly. He saw himself as a butterfly interested in some types of flowers for a while, but then after some years (or sometimes shorter) being curious about and attracted by other flowers, and then moving on to investigate the new flowers (or topics, if we translate the metaphor). Through his long term engagement in project management research, he has been able to cover a considerable ‘number of flowers’ to the benefit of all of us. Not least when he has chosen to reach out for theoretical frameworks outside the project management field for inspiration. As an example, we want to point to his article “Mechanisms of Governance in the Project-based Organization: Roles of the

Broker and Steward”, which he wrote with Dr. Anne Keegan (Turner and Keegan, 2001).

As a third competence, (3), we will point to Rodney’s ability and willingness to participate in a high number of conferences and other events year after year — and thereby meet numerous people and build networks. Throughout the years, he has encouraged and inspired an impressive number of junior and senior researchers to write and submit papers — and to commit to serve as guest editors. By this behavior, he has greatly influenced the personal careers of many researchers, as well as he has pushed the academic field forwards. I (Pernille) got for example my very first journal publication (Eskerod, 1996) due to Rodney’s invitation to submit a paper to the *International Journal of Project Management*, when he met me at my very first presentation at an international conference. That was at IPMA’s (at that time called INTERNET) World Congress in Oslo in June 1994. I was a PhD student then, and to understand the significance of Rodney’s influence, it is important to remember that at this point in time it was common for PhD students to produce monographs — and not journal articles as today. Without Rodney’s clear encouragement, this part of my academic training and development may not have started until years later, and it is with great pleasure I think back on all the hard work of writing and editing the paper, followed by the joy of seeing my research findings printed and published.

With these few words of appreciation of prof. J. Rodney Turner’s influence, we will now – and based on the inspirations mentioned in the competence (1) above – dig into a core concept of project management, i.e. the project stakeholders, and aim to uncover some of the shortcomings of the way the concept is treated in mainstream project management literature.

3. Introduction

A core idea within project stakeholder management is that the people responsible for stakeholder management related to a project – we can call them project representatives – can increase the likelihood of project success (regardless of the measures for success applied) by influencing the project stakeholders (see e.g. Jepsen and Eskerod, 2009; PMI, 2013). A project stakeholder can be defined as “any individual or group who can affect or be affected by the project process or the project outcomes” (Eskerod, 2014, p. 43, building on Freeman, 1984; Andersen, 2008). The stakeholders affect the project by contributing resources that are needed by the project, e.g. financial resources, workhours, expertise, approvals, reputation and compliance, i.e. no counter-productive actions. Each stakeholder is assumed to have a free will, that is, a power of choice (Barnard, 1938) on whether to provide the needed contributions. Therefore, the project representatives must try to figure out how they can make the stakeholders provide their contributions.

Stakeholder behavior may be defined as the chosen action taken towards the project by any individual or group who can affect or be affected by the project process or the project outcomes. It would be much easier to perform effective project stakeholder management if it was possible to fully predict the stakeholders’ behaviors, i.e. having a certain answer to the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6748094>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6748094>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)