Editorial

The management of the project-based organization: A personal reflection

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Abstract

In this paper I make a personal reflection on my research and writings in the field of Project Management over the past 30 years. My research has primarily been about the management of the project-based organization. Within that I have researched governance, organizational behaviour, contingency, marketing, success and shareholder value.
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1. Introduction

I am very grateful to Martina Huemann, Anne Keegan and Ralf Müller to have produced this feschrift in recognition of my having obtained the age of 65 (and my upcoming retirement). As part of the feschrift, they have asked me to write a personal reflection on my work.

There are, I think, four significant features of my work:

1. My contributions to the science of project management almost all fall within the broad topic of the management of the project-based organization. I have made some general contributions within the field, which I discuss in the next section. Then I have also made some more specific contributions, which I suggest fall within the topic areas of governance, organizational behaviour, contingency and some miscellaneous topics. I discuss each of those in the following four sections.

2. Almost all my work has been co-authored with other people. I am very grateful to all the people I have collaborated with. Of my 56 peer-reviewed journal articles, three are not co-authored. Of my 30 book chapters, a larger number, 12, are solely written by me. And of my 19 books, 9 are solely written or edited by me. I have successfully supervised 19 doctorates (PhD and DBA). Many of those students I have written papers with, and several I have continued to work with. Several of my doctoral students have influenced my work and I mention them in what follows. Two of my doctoral students, Lynn Crawford and Ralf Müller, have won life-time research achievement awards. What does it make you when your doctoral student wins a life-time research achievement award? Old?

3. Then there is the metaphor of the butterfly. It is the nature of me, that certain topics attract me like a bright flower, and I go and sit on them for several months. But I get bored and flit off somewhere else. Then 10 to 15 years later the rest of the world is in there like a swarm of bees. I have flitted off and other people are earning the huge consulting fees. Several times in my career I have been asked to take part in workshops to predict the future direction of project

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management. When directly asked to do it, I find it very difficult. But in my research I seem to have done it several times, researching things 10 to 15 years before they become popular, and often lighting slow burning fuses that lead to future research topics. So when I sat down and was asked to make predictions I can't do it, but through my research making predictions is almost my trade mark.

4. I have won two life-time research achievement awards, from the Project Management Institute, PMI®, and the International Project Management Association, IPMA. I am one of just four people to have won both, so in my more arrogant moments I say that makes me one of the top four researchers in project management in the world.

2. The management of the project-based organization

As I have said, almost all my work has been within the field of the management of the project-based organization. There are many words that are used to describe organizations that do a significant proportion of their work as projects. Maxim Miterev and I list many of them in a recent paper (Miterev et al., 2017a). Anne Keegan and I used the phrase, "project-based organization" (Turner and Keegan, 2000, 2001), whereas in the work we have done with Martina Huemann (Huemann et al., 2007) we have used the phrase, "project-oriented organization". I now differentiate between project-based organization and project-oriented organizations (Miterev et al., 2017a). Project-based is bottom up. The work that an organization does requires it to do that work as projects; it is project-based perforce. On the other hand, project-oriented is top down. The organization makes the strategic decision to adopt project management as its way of doing business, and to adopt a project culture; it is project-oriented by choice. As I say (Turner, 2014), the two should meet in the middle. An organization that is project-based should choose to be project-oriented, and an organization should only choose to be project-oriented if it is project-based. However, that is not always the case.

My work was about the management of the project-based organization from the start. My first significant work, the book *Goal Directed Project Management* (Andersen et al., 1987), was primarily about the management of a project, but the follow-up academic paper (Turner et al., 1988) showed that a significant element of that book was the management of projects within the project-based organization. (The latter was my first ever peer-reviewed journal article, though it was more selected than peer-reviewed.) My contributions to the last three IPMA Expert Seminars held in the late 1980s and the IPMA World Congress in 1990 were in the field of the management of the project-based organizations (Turner and Haug, 1989; Turner, 1988; Turner et al., 1987; Turner et al., 1990). My research direction was set.

In the work we did in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Anne Keegan and I had the objective of trying to develop a comprehensive theory for the management of the project-based organization. In the event, we developed theories for many elements of the management of the project based organization (Table 1), which I will discuss below, but the comprehensive theory eluded us. Maxim Miterev and I (with the help of Mauro Mancini), have taken up the challenge again (Miterev et al., 2017a, 2017b).

3. Governance

In the area of governance we see the butterfly effect. Some people say I invented the field of project governance (Alvarez, 2011). Certainly the first time I saw the words project management and governance together in the same sentence was in the papers by me and Anne Keegan (1999, 2001). But a lot was being written about governance at the time in the general management literature, and it was natural for people researching project management to start asking whether it was relevant to project management. I am fairly certain that David Shannon, who founded the Association for Project Management's Special Interest Group on the Governance of Project Management came to the party separately from me (Association for Project Management, 2004). Like Leibniz and Newton both invented calculus independently, people are working in the context of the same discussion, and come separately to the same idea. But the bees have come five years after me.

I came to governance because I thought an effect that Anne Keegan and I had observed was a transaction cost issue. I had been introduced to transaction cost analysis by Susan Foreman (1996). I read the books of Oliver Williamson (1995, 1996), and the papers by me and Anne Keegan (1999, 2001), resulted. I also researched transactions costs on projects (Turner and Müller, 2004a).

I realized later that the work I did with Reza Peymai (1995) was touching on governance. Anne Keegan and I noticed that whereas for routine supply for external transactions (markets), the governance structure is aligned with the transaction yet for internal transactions the governance structure is aligned with the hierarchy perpendicular to the transaction (hierarchies) (Williamson, 1975), on projects the governance structure is always aligned with the project, which is the transaction, for both internal and external supply. Reza Peymai and I (1995) had effectively observed the same thing. (For that paper I won my first award, from the Association for Project Management.)

Roland Gareis has said that he does not believe in project governance. He says you can only have the governance of a permanent organization. In my most recent writing on project governance (Turner and Müller, 2017), I have gone to the other extreme. I got heavily involved in the idea of organizational project management. There are three primary organizations

Table 1
Elements of the theory of the management of the project-based organization developed by Anne Keegan and I.

Element	Paper
Operational control	Turner and Keegan (1999, 2000)
Governance	Turner and Keegan (1999, 2001)
Learning	Keegan and Turner (2001)
Innovation	Keegan and Turner (2002)
Human resource management	Keegan and Turner (2000)
Communication	Müller (2003)