Project Management Institute

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***PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL*® SPECIAL ISSUE**

# Exploratory Projects

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## DEADLINE FOR PAPER SUBMISSIONS: FEBRUARY 2018

The strategic roles of innovation and exploration in today's competitive environment have triggered an important evolution in the field of project studies. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the dominant, rational view of project management as the accomplishment of a clearly defined goal in a specified period of time, and in conformity with certain budget and quality requirements, does not fit with the logic of innovation that is first and foremost characterized by discovery (Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999), unforeseeable uncertainty (Loch, DeMeyer, & Pich, 2006), and expansion (Hatchuel, 2002). It also does not fit with the logic of entrepreneurial orientation, which is characterized by proactively seeking, (co-) creating, and seizing new and innovative business opportunities and by a risk-taking attitude, leading to a sustained proclivity of shareholders and senior managers to pursue projects with uncertain outcomes (Anderson, Kreiser, Kuratko, Hornsby, & Eshima, 2105; Covin & Slevin, 1991; Miller, 1983; Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009; Rosenbusch, Rausch, & Bausch, 2013).

These limitations of the dominant model give birth to a research stream on the management of exploration projects (Brady & Davis, 2004; Loch et al., 2006; Lenfle, 2008, 2014, 2016; Fredriksen & Davies, 2008; Lenfle & Loch, 2010; Dugan & Gabriel, 2013; Brady & Davies, 2014) for which neither the goals nor the means to attaining them are clearly defined from the outset. These works bridge the project, innovation, entrepreneurship, and discovery management literature. This literature leads to a new approach to projects as *experimental learning processes* for which new management principles, such as selectionism and sequential learning, have been defined (Loch et al., 2006; Lenfle, 2008; Sommer, Loch, & Dong, 2009). From the same perspective, this literature underlines the need to differentiate between the management processes for exploratory projects, since the traditional stage-gate approach generally leads to failure (Sehti & Iqbal, 2008) and to designing new evaluation methods adapted to their "expansive" nature (Lenfle, 2012; Gillier, Hooge, & Piat, 2014). We are only at the beginning of the research; thus, the goal of this special issue is to continue and develop the research on exploratory projects. More precisely, we welcome contributions in the following areas:

1. We believe, following the practice approach outlined by Blomquist, Hällgren, Nilsson, and Söderholm (2012) and Cicmil, Williams, Thomas, and Hodgson (2006), among others, that our understanding of the logic of exploratory projects should be grounded in an analysis of what is really going on during their unfolding—of their actuality. In this special issue, we welcome research that sheds new light on the actor's practices in exploratory projects.

2. The validity of the management principles proposed in the literature has yet to be tested. The actor's practice relies on social practices, in other words, tools, rules, and methods. We know from experience that traditional project management tools are relatively inefficient when dealing with uncertain situations, which begs the questions: What are the substitutes? How can we manage the "experimental learning process" in progress? Recent research has begun to explore the question of value expansion in exploratory projects (Maniak, Midler, Lenfle, & Le Pellec-Dairon, 2014; Gillier et al., 2015). There is no doubt that this and other areas, including time and cost management, deserve further research.

3. We know little about the functions and roles of the actors in teams involved in exploratory projects. We encourage contributors of this special issue to explore actors in relation to the existing research on project teams.

4. The relationship between the project and its parent organization remains understudied. This deserves further research, in particular whether the literature on ambidexterity (see, for instance, Organization Science, special issue, vol. 20, n°4, 2009) and intrapreneurship may provide interesting guidelines.

5. The role of exploratory projects in the creation of the ecosystem constitutes a central problem in innovation management (see Van de Ven, 1986; Adner, 2012; and von Penchman, Midler, Maniak, & Charue-Duboe, 2015, for an analysis of the roles of projects in the constitution of an innovative ecosystem).

6. Another important topic is studying the type of cognitive process used during these types of projects. We believe that in order to fully grasp the logic of exploratory projects, we have to abandon "*the traditional view of the firm as a rational, machine-like entity by drawing on the social and creative character of businesses revealed in design thinking*" (Hobday, Boddington, & Grantham, 2012, p. 18). The link between project management and design theory constitutes a fruitful avenue for future research (see Ben Mahmoud-Jouini et al., 2016; Lenfle & et al., 2016), which could also lead us to revisiting the ontology of projects.

7. Following concerns raised about the value of problematizing research assumptions (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2010; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; Hällgren, 2012) we encourage contributors to this special issue to consider their assumptions, which includes investigating taken for granted methodological, theoretical, and empirical assumptions about exploratory projects. For example, it has been shown that extreme situations and extreme contexts provide insights into innovation literature and project studies.

We welcome all research methods (contemporary case study, quantitative analysis, historical research, and so forth), along with research coming from adjacent fields (entrepreneurship, management of extreme situations, and so forth).

## SUBMISSIONS

Full papers must be submitted by 28 February 2018 via the journal submission site. Papers accepted for publication but not included in the special issue will be published later in a regular issue of the journal. If you have any additional questions, please consult any of the guest editors.

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## AUTHOR AND REVIEWER GUIDELINES

Special issues follow the same guidelines as those for regular articles. We expect 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 that in a regular submission.

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