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Towards a multi-perspective research program on projects and temporary organizations: Analyzing the Scandinavian turn and the Rethinking effort

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze important parts of the contemporary development of project research and to outline plausible and desirable directions for the future.

Design/methodology/approach: This is accomplished through a review of the 'Scandinavian School of Project Management' and 'Rethinking Project Management', which is complemented with a set of questions distributed to 27 active researchers within the project research field from around the world.

Findings: Through the analysis we show how the two streams have more similarities than differences, despite the fact that they have been initiated in very different contexts and ways. We could also conclude that the 'Scandinavian school' appears stronger on the international scene than in the Nordic countries, and that general perception of what the 'school' stands for has changed and been blurred with time. Based on the analysis we also proposed the need for a broad, more coherent research effort in terms of a multi-perspective research program on projects and temporary organizations. The essence of this would be: a) an action research profile to improve practice and foresee the future, b) a combined research focus on institutional change and project practice to ensure both theoretical and empirical progress, and c) a strong global perspective to further enrich both theory and practice.

Research limitations/implications: This research has obvious limitations in terms of empirical scope and response selection. The questionnaire results should therefore be interpreted with care.

Originality/value: The value of this research lies in its reflective nature and the proposed trajectory of the project research domain.

Keywords: Projects, Temporary organizations, Project management, Scandinavian School of Project Management, Development, Future directions

1. INTRODUCTION

A 'school of thought' can be defined as an idea, or common set of ideas, held by a specific group of people (Merriam-Webster.com 2015). In the academic domain it thus represents an intellectual tradition where researchers within a scientific community share some kind of beliefs or approaches to research, often manifested in a more or less cohesive knowledge production. Such 'schools' are most easily observed in hindsight, and often described and structured based on their contemporaneousness into for example 'modern' or 'classical' ideals, whereas the separation, or change, between different sets of beliefs can be understood in terms of paradigm shifts (Kuhn 1970).

In retrospect it appears that there existed such a 'school of thought', and maybe occurred an interrelated (minor) paradigm shift, in project research domain during the late 1980's and beginning of the 1990's. Essentially, there was an emergent movement—today often referred to as the 'Scandinavian School of Project Management'—centered on applying organization theory and organizational behavior approaches to the project phenomena (see e.g. Kreiner 1995; Lundin and Söderholm 1995; Packendorff 1995; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002). Simultaneously, the notion of temporary organizations was introduced in parallel to the traditional project nomenclature and eventually a terminological drift opened up the research area in terms of empirical focus, methodological stance, and theory development (Hällgren et al. 2012). Further on, ambitions grew from merely applying organization theory to projects, to inspire and develop organizational theory via the insights gained (Jacobsson and Söderholm 2011).

The above-mentioned movement is however now coming of age, and this paper focuses on the 'coming of age' notion by describing trajectories—where it comes from, how it developed over time, and ultimately reflecting on the future. In doing so, we will also juxtapose this mentioned movement with the focal point of this special issue; more structured research program called 'Rethinking Project Management' that came out of the UK around 2006, and which in may aspects seem to have had overlapping aspirations and rationale (see e.g. Cicmil et al. 2006; Winter and Smith 2004; Winter et al. 2006). The main questions addressed concern: a) on what premise these two streams of research have been founded, b) how they have evolved, and c) their influence on contemporary way of thinking. In essence, our purpose is to describe and analyze important parts of the contemporary development of project research and to outline plausible and desirable directions for the future.

To reach our aim, we have conducted a review of the two streams, which is complemented with a minor questionnaire targeted at a number of active researchers within the project research field from around the world. With 'schools of thoughts' most easily being observable in hindsight, and also partly existing in the eyes of the beholder, the small set of questions focused on the alleged existence and present content of the 'Scandinavian School of Project Management'. Through the review, we also provide a reflection on the contribution of the streams to both organization theory, and what has been accomplished vis-á-vis practice. When comparing the 'Scandinavian school' to the more structured 'Rethinking Project Management' programme and the responses received, there are signs that the once novel notion of the Scandinavian school has now developed to become normal science in the Kuhn (1970) sense of the expression. Anyway, this is used as a basis for reflections about future directions for research on projects and temporary organizations. In that, we do agree with Söderlund and Geraldi (2012) on the need to both evaluate and learn from the past when outlining the future.

Rather than adhering to 'research as usual', consisting of minor refinements in line with previous studies and along the lines of current practice, there is a need to let developments in other scientific areas trigger renewal and foster future directions. Finally, we allude to the norm that whatever the future directions will be, what is done should provide significant insights not only to the academic community but be of interest to both society and project practitioners of various kinds.

2. BACKGROUND

The background part to this paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, which serves as the foundation for the whole paper, we outline the main rationale for the initial movement that later will be referred to as the 'Scandinavian School of Project Management'. In the second section, we will sketch out the essentials of the UK based 'Rethinking Project Management' research program in order to provide a source for comparison in analysis.

2.1 Rationale for the Initial Movement

The term "Scandinavian School of Project Management" was as far as we know used for the first time in the initial chapter of a book with the title "Beyond project management" (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002). It was used as a label to characterize an, at the time, fairly

recent line of research within a set of Nordic countries pointing to a specific and fairly coherent direction[1].

In the book it was strongly argued that such a school had emerged for the main reason that projectification of society had taken huge strides leading to "*a swarm of new issues and problems for research*" at the same time as there was room for "*new thought styles*" in comparison with the traditional project management research (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002:7). This appears most useful when it comes to a direction of research away from the handbooks and other publications devoted to normative suggestions on 'how to better manage projects'.

There were a few distinguishable and suggested features connected with the school according to the book. These were:

1. The scope of project studies should be beyond the individual project.
2. The movement should be based on theory, in particular organization theory and human relation matters of concern.
3. Studies should be based on empirical work with a qualitative orientation on how projects evolve.

Similar features were later also brought up in a historical review by Hällgren and co-authors (2012), who argued for why and how the school had developed in more detail. Their starting-point, and unit of analysis, was however to a book weathering criticism against how practical project advice had been formulated as unquestionable truths (Christensen and Kreiner 1991), arguing that advice was not based on scientifically derived research results. In other words, the basis can be interpreted as a criticism of the, at that time, conventional wisdom ascribed to the influence by the Project Management Institute (PMI) and an early version of the PMI handbook Project Management Body of Knowledge (*PMBOK® Guide*) providing prescriptions and practical advice. A major ingredient, or concern, initially was also the understanding of time, especially when it comes to the connections between what is regarded as permanent vs. what is regarded as temporary (see e.g. Lundin and Söderholm 1995; Jacobsson et al. 2013, 2015).

From the mid 1990s and forward, the school seemed to grow with a series of publications in the same vein from many of the Nordic countries. When it comes to Sweden, the contents of

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[1] Despite being referred to as the "Scandinavian school", Finland is often included in the notion despite not geographically being a part of Scandinavia. This is also the case in this paper.

the chapters of the book on 'Beyond Project Management' (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002) provide some examples. In the other Nordic countries various related specialties were developed. The notion of 'Project Business' became a key concept used in Finland, often connected with logistical problems. In Denmark notions of 'rationality' and project networks were issues often discussed. The focus in Norway was much on project management in practice—sometimes also with reference to the concerns on how to run projects in a rational way. In Iceland the notion of a 'Viking approach' to projects was weathered.

The relationships to how research has been connected to practice deserve to be developed. Historically, research on projects has had the advantage to be considered interesting also for practitioners. The relationships with practice have however developed differently in the Nordic countries. In countries like Norway and Finland, some research themes have been very close to giving advice to project managers. In Denmark much focus has been put on unintended consequences of project organizing. In Sweden the notion of 'project-as-practice' has become fairly influential, and in 1994 the 'Swedish Project Academy' was also launched as a forum for discussions between practitioners (project managers and consultants) on the one side, and project researchers on the other side.

In sum, even if the initial efforts described above today can come across as coherent, they cannot be considered a research program, since the efforts were never purposely coordinated at that time—at least not on a broad scale. This means that the 'school' was not intended to become a school but merely came to be a taken-for-granted fact through the publications and possibly due to discussions at various conferences. An exception in terms of a coordinated effort was however the first special conference by the 'International Network on Organizing by Projects' (IRNOP) in 1994, which possibly played a role for the notion of a school with its focus on the organizing aspect of projects.

2.2   Main Ingredients of the Rethinking Effort

Seemingly grown out of similar rationale as the 'Scandinavian school', the research program or rather government-funded network 'Rethinking Project Management' was initiated in the UK in 2004. The research resulted in many publications and was reported in a special issue of *International Journal of Project Management* in 2006. It took its basis in the increased use of projects in society, in combination with an observation of increasing complexity in project work.

The research work was basically built on the notion that more research on normative procedures is not what is needed to improve project management practice. Instead, it is claimed that focus should be on what is actually going on when projects are carried out and on the practices of project management practitioners (Cicmil et al. 2006). Rethinking Project Management indicates an extension of theoretical frameworks used to understand projects as empirical phenomena, rather than approached in a normative or prescriptive way.

Conclusions in terms of future direction for project management research have been reported (Winter et al. 2006). The first direction is a call for research that takes the complexity of projects into account to replace simple life cycle models. This is in recognition of real life complexity and the limitation of theories as always partial. The second direction is to view projects as social processes and thus attending to human action and interaction in project processes. Third is a proposed focus on value creation, instead of only focusing on product creation. Fourth is a broader conceptualization of projects as being of many different kinds, sometimes ambiguous and renegotiated during the process, and of a multidisciplinary character. The fifth and final direction is a turn for practitioners from being trained technicians to becoming reflective practitioners, able to learn and constantly adapt as a part of continuous project processes, based on experience and intuition.

For future studies to be in line with the suggested five directions it was recommended that more extensive research approaches would be required, for example through action learning, longitudinal case studies, and co-operative inquiry. Rethinking project management consequently implies a renewal of research questions, research methods as well as a renewed relationship between research, theory, and practice when compared to more traditional and normative project management research.

2.3 An initial reflection on the Scandinavian School and Rethinking Effort

There are several obvious similarities between the Rethinking Project Management programme and the Scandinavian School of Project Management. Conceptualization and embeddedness of projects, the importance of human action, and a research strategy based on thorough empirical work are some of the most significant ones. The close and deliberate relation with practice and practitioners was however not originally as clear in the basis for the Scandinavian school, and thus was neither the need for developed theory to be normatively applicable on real life projects highlighted in the same profound way. On the other hand, the

Scandinavian school was more based on contemporary organizational theory and management studies as compared to the rethinking program.

Recently, Svejvig and Andersen (2015) have done a literature review focusing on Rethinking effort. They define "rethinking" as a stream of literature where classical project management (instrumental and rationalistic project management) is replaced by broader, more complex and socially embedded definitions of projects. Consequently, both the UK Rethinking program and the Scandinavian school (Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm 2002) are considered to be part of similar streams of research. The mentioned closeness is also acknowledged by Söderlund (2012:612) who state that both streams are concerned with questions regarding what project management is, rather than to "*preach what it should be*". Important to note here is that Packendorff (1995) is one of the more important references both in the early Scandinavian movement, as well as when the "rethinking" was formulated.

Based on the literature review, Svejvig and Andersen (2015) present six different categories where contributions have been made in the rethinking literature. They are (1) expanding context, (2) social and political aspects, (3) rethinking practice, (4) complexity and uncertainty, (5) the actuality of projects and (6) broader conceptualization. The categories are quite self-explanatory and in line with both the UK rethinking programme and the Scandinavian school. The former perhaps somewhat more considered points 3 and 5, while the latter 2 and 4 but, basically, there are definitely more similarities than differences.

3. METHOD

Based on our purpose, and with 'school of thoughts' partly being in the eyes of the beholder and most easily being observed in hindsight, we decided to send out a minor questionnaire to further explore the current existence and perceived content of the Scandinavian school. The rationale for only sending out question in regards to the Scandinavian part, and not on the Rethinking effort, is twofold. First, the decision was based on the fact that the authors of this paper are frequent contributors to the former. Based on that, a more pluralistic 'outsider perspective' on the present content was needed in order to present a more balanced picture, beyond merely basing it on the authors own pre-understanding. Second, the decision was based on the difference in nature between the two streams where the Scandinavian school, in contrary to the Rethinking effort, was never a coherent programme with a clear purpose and defined boundaries and therefore easily captured.

With the intention to get a complementary and a more pluralistic perspective of the current thinking among researchers interested in projects and temporary organizations concerning the (or a) 'Scandinavian school', we formulated a few questions and sent out a personal email to a set of currently active researchers around the world. With the three authors of this paper having approximately 60 years of combined experience of project research, our joint network—and thus total population from which we selected—is extensive. Essentially a sample of 27 project researchers was made from this network. The selection was done through an iterative process and based on a shared decision among the authors. The basis for selection was nationality (or current location of activity), gender, research focus, and experience of the potential respondents. Even if the set of questions was (and is) merely intended as a complement to the review and our personal understanding of the Scandinavian school, we attempted to achieve a distribution of respondents that represents the current diversity of the field. After deciding on appropriate respondents, the questions were sent out via a personal email from one of the authors and consisted of three simple and fairly straightforward questions. The following three questions was sent out (in some cases also with reminders):

1) Is there a Nordic/Scandinavian School of managing projects and temporary organizations?

2) If so, which are the two or three most important characteristics of that school?

3) What developments of it do you expect for the immediate and distant future?

In order to keep the emails brief to promote a high response rate, the rationale for the questions was not spelled out at all. The persons were only kindly asked to respond without indications on how the responses were going to be used and in what context.

Following the selection criteria, the recipients consisted of two distinguishable "groups" of researchers. One of them consisted of people from the Nordic countries (9) and the others were from outside Scandinavia (a total of 18). In the following results section a distinction is thus made between "Nordic" and "others". Besides from that the selection was unrestricted, the purpose was merely to get a wider (and contemporary) snapshot of how researchers in general perceive the school notion, and the areas with which the school is connected. In terms of gender, the Nordic group had three females and in the other group there was two females. Consequently the remaining 22 invited respondents were men. The figures most probably mirror the gender biases of the two groups. The division between 'experienced' and 'very

experienced' researchers was about equal. No really 'inexperienced' researchers were included, since a fairly good understanding of current research trends was needed to respond to the questions. In total, the response rate was good. With a few reminders, in fact all 27 invited researchers responded.

As an alternative to the questions/answers approach used, we briefly considered using a Delphi technique. We abstained from that for a number of reasons—one of them was that we wanted to learn about the answers to our questions unfettered by "group think" effects. A second reason was that we were not looking to single out a coherent group judgment. A weakness of the approach used is however related to the unknown effects of the respondents receiving the questions by email from one of the authors of this paper. I.e. the risk of a reflective confirmation bias where the respondents provide the answers they believe we would like to have. For this reason we have also been cautious in our interpretations.

4.   RESULTS: RESPONSES FROM THE PROJECT RESEARCHERS

Based on the responses received, we have categorized the answers into six different areas—each area represented by a bullet below and reflecting a specific observation related to the three questions.

1) One conspicuous matter is that almost all (with two exceptions) in the "others" group responded "yes", "absolutely" or something similar to the question about the existence of a Scandinavian School. Some of them seem to prefer another denomination, though, like "Nordic" or even "Swedish". As a contrast, in the "Nordic" group of researchers most responses were more questioning, or at least more nuanced in their responses, and quite diverse, ranging from a clear cut "no" over "yes and no" to a "yes, previously existing but no longer". In total there were only a couple of clear "yes" answers in the Nordic group. In both groups there were people stating that the ideas about "temporary organizations", etc., now have spread over the world meaning they are no longer connected with a particular part of the world. By that one might ask whether the epithet "Scandinavian" is today representative for the described way of thinking, rather than a regional connection. With the spread of the ideas to more people and in an interconnected research world, we believe that the geographical limitation is no longer relevant. The two exceptions in the "others" group refer to not knowledgeable enough to respond to the questions on a school.

2) From a research fame or reputation point of view it is a bit surprising that researchers of the Nordic group (of countries) do not relate more strongly to the notion of a Scandinavian school. One way to do so might have been to state "yes" but adding comments that the perspectives have widened including more elements with reference to for instance their own particular areas of interest rather than denying the existence of a school. Or as one of the "others" respondents formulates it "they should take stock". From this one could maybe draw the conclusion that the notion of a school of though is not only more easily observed retrospectively, but also from the outside in. Or as the saying goes, "its hard to see the forest for the trees".

3) A related reflection following a comment from one of the Nordic respondents: *Scandinavian Journal of Management* was once started with the notion that it should present Scandinavian studies related to research on management to the world and be an outlet for researchers from the Nordic countries to practice international publishing (Kreiner 2007:83). During the first years articles related to organizational studies and from the Nordic countries dominated. Articles were to a large extent authored by researchers from the Nordic countries with strong references to management as mirrored in the developments in organization theory. Eventually submissions from other countries in the world started to dominate and with that the journal became an outlet for a variety of management studies. And with time the adjective "Scandinavian" was less suitable to characterize contents of the journal issues. Furthermore, Scandinavian authors have with a few notable exceptions had any impact at all on the international research scene related to organization theory when it comes to visibility in international publications (Kreiner 2007:86).

The parallel to project research is that research from the Nordic/Scandinavian countries seems to have had a wider impact on the world scene when it comes to the project area as compared to the general organizational theory area. The responses in the "other" group demonstrate that at the same time as those from the Nordic countries also allude to arguments of that type saying that researchers in the Nordic countries have taken an important role in the global community on project based organizing. This development might be due to the fact that project field early on was dominated by engineering and by normative ambitions and that the initial profile providing fame in the academic world—temporary organizations—created a sense of newness in the

project field and added other areas for attention. Later on there has been a broadening view including new types of projects relating to contexts previously not much studied.

4) Moving over to question #2: When it comes to characteristics the ones mentioned the most are "*temporary organization/organizing*", connecting "*action and structure*" in particular post-industrial organizing but also to view empirical research from a organization theory perspective, connecting to the development of organization theory. Exploring features of projects and the contexts of projects with an open attitude to individual experiences are also mentioned together with a "*focus on identifying new, interesting phenomena*". The use of qualitative case studies is also mentioned several times as examples of characteristics, and so are constructivist approaches of inquiry. Two respondents specifically pointed out applications of critical theory in the project management field as examples of the latter (to be more specific with special reference to "Making Projects Critical").

5) "*Theory building and case-based knowledge development*" is also described as a focus for in particular early efforts. In that vein, the messages brought forward are "*less commonly framed as advice*" and "*talking more directly to academics than practitioners*". Developing a "*theory of practice*" analyzing "*what is actually going on*". In essence a stronger focus on descriptive an analytical research rather than normative.

6) As to developments to expect, the range of input from responses is wide and the responses cover forecasts as well as "*what I would like to see elements*". Further, the suggestions seem to be personal and connected to the experiences of the respondents as well as to their own ambitions. More studies of project-as-practice are asked for but also on the roles of the professional organizations like IPMA and PMI and their certification schemes. Better connections to institutional theory, innovative methods, theoretical work on "time and dynamics", mega-projects and agility are some of the elements asked for. The classical questions on relations between presumably more permanent forms of organizations and the relation to projects, i.e. "projects in context" is also mentioned. Bridging studying projects and general management research is another example. In the category concerning "what I would like to see", the ambitions to move further from publishing in minor journals into prestigious journals are put forward as important for the future (in fact for the entire project research field) as well

as teaming up with leading research institutions in the rest of the world. Some respondents also include a discussion about promoting IRNOP to be known as the prime conference in the field (as compared to special tracks in most major conferences).

As expected, the variability in responses to the last question on the future was overwhelming. One reason is probably that no kind of 'groupthink' has been taking place. It is naturally easier to find patterns in the past using experiences from research conferences and publications than to find commonalities related to the future. One thing is conspicuously absent though in connection with future developments, i.e. relationships to the world of practitioners and the broader societal challenges which humankind is facing. Maybe that need is fulfilled via the expectation of continuing empirical work. As a summary from the responses received one might however conclude the following:

- The "Scandinavian School of Project Management" appears stronger on the international scene than in the Nordic countries.
- The general perception of what the school stands for centers on foundations related to "temporary organizations", strong empirical studies, and projects-as-practice among other things.
- The future is still to be invented in terms of themes and research questions.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section a Kuhnian inspired discussion of the development is presented, followed by a proposition of what we believe needs to be in focus when taking research in the area of project management with the purpose to vitalize not only Scandinavian and British research, but indirectly also the project research field worldwide.

5.1 A Kuhnian Perspective of the Developments

More than 50 years ago Thomas Kuhn (1962) applied the sociology of the scientific community view on how science develops over time. Using observations from a variety of scientific fields ranging from physics over child psychology to the social sciences he was able to device a theoretical view on how changes within the sciences developed.

Kuhn's findings (in a brief and 'dirty version' of the essence of his book) were based on two central notions: Normal science and Revolutions. He as well as others had found the concept of development-by-accumulation in science unsatisfactory. Instead he discerned periods of

crises for scientific work where existing and dominating paradigms were questioned and the scientific field was broken up by discoveries of anomalies that did not fit in with the dominating paradigm. The revolutions opened up the field for alternative paradigms.

Central in the Kuhn scheme is the existence of a 'scientific community' characterized by social ties and sociologically oriented belief systems. In order for a revolution to occur, anomalies that do not fit in well with the dominating paradigm are needed for change to take place. But paradigmatic changes do not take place automatically. There is a need for something like a clash or more mildly of a serious discussion between actors and adherents to a potentially new paradigm and the old predominant one (Kuhn 1970:8).

The question now is whether the Kuhnian scheme can be adapted and of help in understanding the relations between the Scandinavian school and the Rethinking program. In the well-cited article by Packendorff (1995), which is central to both the 'Scandinavian school' and 'Rethinking program', the author refers to an extensive study of research publications in the project management and project areas. His main finding is that there are two fairly distinct types. One of the types can be referred to "project as plan" and the other as "project as a temporary organization". Furthermore, the "plan" perspective dominated a long time ago (especially confined to engineering research), but where the "temporary organization" came later (from a variety of scientific bases). The engineers seemed to be a distinct community but not the others.

The "project as plan" versus the "project as a temporary organization" could be seen as two competing paradigms that exist in parallel. Despite the major and fundamental differences between them, they seemed not to outcompete one another. The 'Scandinavian School of Project Management' viewpoints grew as research perspectives widened along the temporary organizing thinking. Similarly did the 'Rethinking programme'.

The mentioned development took partly place as a reaction towards the typical normative PMI type of research ("project as plan") focusing traditional themes alluded to in the *PMBOK® Guide*. Thus, two related fields of research—the Scandinavian school and the Rethinking program—both challenged the traditional project as plan perspective and provided two similar, although with different focus, alternatives to the instrumental project as plan perspective. It thus seems as competing perspectives, challenging the normal science, can develop in parallel.

As explained the divergent character of project work can be understood via a set of different mechanisms. A main explanation is that the prerequisite, a coherent scientific community, is not necessarily present in social science. The expansion has led to an overwhelming number of publications and concomitantly also a large group of special journals offering opportunities for researchers to publish their work within parallel and competing paradigms. Social science research may be more tolerant in terms of allowing several paradigms to be published simultaneously. There may also be more tolerance in terms of sharing the areas of domination; some research streams may go for increasing effectiveness in project performance while other may focus on a critical examination on human resource practices in projects. It is consequently not necessary to choose one perspective only, of the multitude of perspectives offered. Scandinavian school and Rethinking program thus may have more to offer as a combined effort instead of having one to replace or outcompete the other. See figure below.
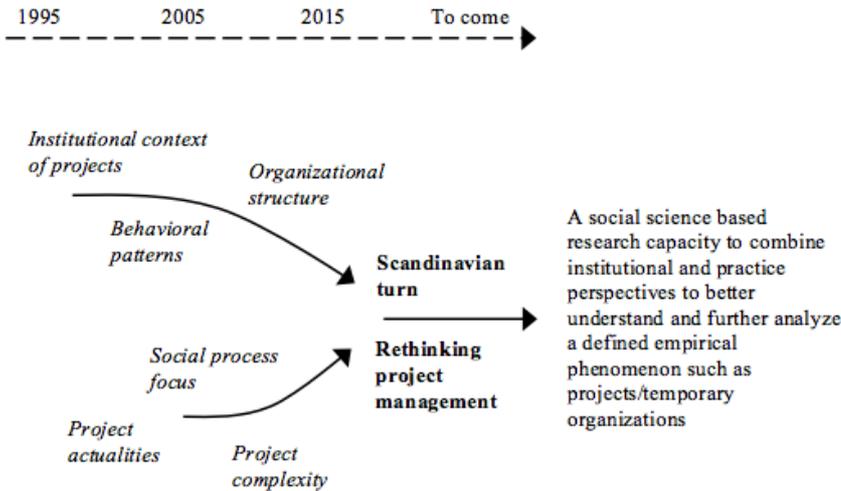

Figure 1: Combining Perspectives and Paradigms

The figure above outline the development observed in literature and publications as described in this paper. The Scandinavian school was founded in an organizational or institutional setting where there was an emphasis on institutional patterns, structure and behavior. It was rooted in an organizational theory tradition based on the importance of larger organizational settings where individual projects were objects of study rather than sources of inspiration.

The initial system level analysis within the Scandinavian School has been expanded to research efforts covering other theoretical lenses. As was reported in the survey discussed earlier in this paper, new areas such as practice and processes have been incorporated with the

initial thinking of the Scandinavian School (see e.g. Lindkvist et al. 1998, Lindahl 2003, Engwall and Westling 2004, Hällgren and Söderholm 2011, Sergi 2012). The Scandinavian School has thus been influenced by the Rethinking program as well as by social science theory in general.

The Rethinking program, on the other hand, focused on practice and what actually took place in projects. The organizational settings are important factors having an impact on the practice even though they may not be the primary area of inquiry. The focus was on how complexity is dealt with and how the social processes unfolded within a particular project setting.

Some of the lead researchers of the Rethinking Program also engaged in a research stream labeled Making Projects Critical (MPC) where critical theory is applied as an analytical approach (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2006). MPC represents a move of the focus in the Rethinking Program from practice and actualities to more comprehensive and system level critical research. If this is considered to be a development out of the Rethinking Program we can claim that the program developed to share some of the system level approach of the Scandinavian School, although using a critical approach.

Both perspectives could claim to be alternatives to the traditional "project as plan"-studies but from two different angles. Over time it seems as the two perspectives have expanded to have more shared lenses, research areas and research questions. But what roads are there towards a more stringent development of research? Is there room for a neo-Scandinavian research oriented school in the area of projects and temporary organizations? Or perhaps a Rethinking #2 school that take on where the Rethinking program stands today? Or, is there a possibility to combine the experiences of both research streams into a research program combining institutional and practice oriented perspectives of the two perspectives to the traditional school? Based on our analysis and discussion, our claim is that the third option would be fruitful to explore.

6.   TOWARDS A MULTI-PERSPECTIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The project research field has experienced an almost unprecedented growth in terms of the number of researchers attached to the field, in terms of publications, books as well as journal articles, in terms of practitioner interest in development of research, etc. This expansion is good since we do believe that there is a development towards a project society (Lundin et al. 2015), and therefore definite needs to expand and advance the research area in various ways.

Discussions of this type and leaning on the Kuhnian inspired discussion above lead us to propose that the time has come for Scandinavians not only to learn from the UK experiences with the 'Rethinking program' but also to make a revolutionary style research effort to move the field forward as a joint effort. Launching a coherent research program with partners in the European countries aiming at throwing light on some of the most urgent societal problems in the world today, and using project lenses might well be a good way to move forward from the fragmentized project research scene of today. Since the world and its problems do not come aligned in the traditional academic disciplines, such a coherent research program should take its starting point in a collection of problems and opportunities pointed out as relevant for the future societal developments. Also, the attempted solutions to some of the major problems are organized as projects.

The Scandinavian school and the Rethinking program were both innovative and challenging. Combined they provide the basis for a strong social science perspective as an alternative to one-dimensional or instrumental project management research. To further promote a joint European effort, we suggest that a multi-perspective research program on projects and temporary organizations to be explored.

There are three major issues that we think an integrative program should highlight. First, there is a need to map global real life problems and challenges and to further enrich relations between academia, industry, and society at large. Empirical research has always been important in the Scandinavian tradition but there is, we believe, a need to move from empirical research to dialogue. The 'Rethinking program' had a comprehensive approach to promote the development of project management practice through a series of meetings, workshops, etc. (Winter et al. 2006). Doing research, i.e. collecting data, was combined with learning and discussion with those actually doing projects to improve their practice. But, there is also another reason to strengthen the empirical relation. Besides improving practice today, a strong engagement with industry and society is also important to create knowledge on changes underway, new challenges, and new project entities or endeavors that might be organized as projects.

- An action research profile to improve practice and foresee the future should consequently be a core part of an Integrative research program on projects and temporary organizations.

Second, research themes within the program should be broadly defined but two areas could be suggested based on the responses to our questions to experts and literature review. In short:

research should span from institutions to practice and, it goes without saying, have a social science emphasis. Institutional focus is to include broader societal changes and their impact on the current project portfolios and methods. Institutional changes may include changes in knowledge bases of professions, changes in regulations or norms guiding organizational as well as project work or long term shifts in attention of general management and politics.

The reason to have practice as the other theoretical key word is because a practice focus is needed to make the most of the empirical focus; a practice focus is an excellent approach to allow real life experiences be part of the research agenda and have a strong influence on theory building efforts. Practice is also where daily problems or challenges are met through interpretations, actions and relations. It is important to make the micro processes part of the explanation of more general project processes. Having practice in focus is an excellent way to study consequences of complexity issues that may have been seen on a more aggregated level of study.

- A combined research focus on institutional change and project practice is the key to ensure a combined theoretical and empirical progress.

Third, we believe that both the Scandinavian school and the Rethinking program have been fairly successful in terms of providing new insights and expanding both the theoretical and empirical scope of project management. However, the Rethinking program was primarily a UK program and the Scandinavian school has (at least initially) had a focus on Scandinavian/Nordic countries. Taking the research further would include a both a European and global perspective. Research is always international in terms of research collaboration, research networks and publication strategies but can still be domestic in terms of empirical applications and data. This needs to be changed in order to take a real and comprehensive global responsibility in the research program. To be global, and thus be able to address grand global challenges, several different issues need attention: research team should be international, research questions should be designed to cover international issues, priority should be given to empirical cases or data sets that are international or global and platforms for international dialogue between both researchers and project practitioners need to be created.

- A strong global perspective keeping in mind that institutions differ is thus needed to further enrich both theory and practice.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we set out to describe and analyze what we believe to be important parts of the contemporary development of project research, and to outline potential and plausible directions for the future. We took the starting point in the notion of the 'Scandinavian School of Project Management' and juxtaposed that with the ideas of the more structured UK research network program called 'Rethinking Project Management'. Based on a comparative review we wanted to address the questions of: a) what basis these two streams of research have been founded, b) how they have evolved, and c) their influence on contemporary way of thinking.

Through the analysis we could show how the two streams clearly have more similarities than differences, despite the fact that they have been initiated in very different contexts and ways. Based on the responses we got from the questionnaire, we could also conclude that the 'Scandinavian school' today appears stronger on the international scene than in the Nordic countries. Also, the general perception of what the school stands for is somewhat blurred, but centers on foundations related to temporary organizations, strong empirical studies, and projects-as-practice among other things. Finally, based on a Kuhn inspired analysis we highlighted some of the contemporary challenges related to our implicit criticism on the way research is done today, and proposed the need for a more coherent research effort in terms of an multi-perspective research program. The essence of such a program would be: a) an action research profile to improve practice and foresee the future, b) a combined research focus on institutional change and project practice is the key to ensure a both theoretical and empirical progress, and last but not least c) a strong global perspective is thus needed to further enrich both theory and practice. Hopefully, these are appropriate cornerstones for the foundation of new initiatives in general, and a multi-perspective research program on projects and temporary organizations in specific.

8.   REFERENCES

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