OLD THEORIES, NEW CONTEXTS:

EXTENDING OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT THEORIES TO PROJECTS

Call for papers for a Special Issue of the International Journal of Operations and Production Management

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Objective:
The objective of this Special Issue is to provide a forum for works at the nexus of OM and project contexts. Project contexts provide particular challenges for both theory and practice, due to the variable levels of complexity\(^1,2\) present in those contexts. In addition, project contexts have received little attention in OM journals\(^3\).

For the development of OM, this represents an opportunity for theory development, testing and extension. For instance, how well do OM theories translate into the projects context? In addition, where project contexts demonstrate novel theoretical insights, these can subsequently be tested in other operations domains. Our purpose then is two-fold: to enrich the discussion of OM and Operations Strategy by focusing on a neglected context, and to develop specific insights for projects by using established OM lenses.

The papers:
This SI seeks innovative research that has the potential to significantly advance the field of OM theoretically and/or practically. Papers are welcome to address but are not limited to one of the following topic areas:

1. Operations strategy for projects
Organisational aspirations for projects are regularly no more than ‘internally neutral’. This presents a number of opportunities. Firstly, projects are a means by which organizational strategies\(^4\) and operations strategies\(^5\) are delivered. Secondly, (how) can organisations move from an internally neutral stance to gaining competitive advantage from their project operations\(^6\)? This approach proved highly beneficial for both theory\(^7\) and practice\(^8\) development in repetitive operations but is still at an early stage in projects. In addition, what constitutes project (dynamic) capabilities, how are they configured, and what are the organisational design choices?

2. Projects as ‘change operations’
Projects are temporary endeavours outside the routine work of the organization for the purpose of implementing change (strategic and tactical). For example, lean projects seek to improve an existing, ongoing operational process. What theories can OM offer to help with this effort in comparison to other theories of change that haven’t yet been advanced by areas such as “new product development,” “innovation,” “strategy,” and “managerial change”? In addition, does an organisation or an operation that is being transformed, as opposed to a product (manufacturing), a person, or ownership (service), represent a new category of general operations\(^9\) or perhaps a subset of service operations?

3. Temporariness in operations processes
Whilst many operations can be viewed as having a degree of permanence, most definitions of projects highlight their temporariness. Organization Studies, for instance, has approached projects by considering them as “temporary organisations”\(^10\). How does this relative impermanence differentiate approaches to managing operations, trade-offs, and operational dynamics? Moreover, what are the particular challenges of managing temporary operations spanning the boundaries between temporary and permanent organisations?
4. Novelty in operations processes
Relative to ongoing, repetitive operations, projects tend to have higher levels of uncertainty, ambiguity and novelty. This complicates the application of conventional OR and OM approaches to modelling and optimization. How do these characteristics differentiate the approaches to planning and managing operations from those of more established and understood repetitive organisational structures? What are the implications and challenges for agility, adaptability, and managerial control in such dynamic operations that require rapid generation and assimilation of new information?

5. Operations management in projects
Tools and concepts routinely used in the analysis of repetitive processes require reinterpretation in projects. This is in itself an area with significant potential. Further, managing even simple projects requires the use of social capital and engagement with behaviours in addition to processes. Have we therefore reached the limits of the current approach of ‘fix the process’ in our pursuit of measuring and improving project performance? For instance, optimism bias has been well studied, but what else can projects learn from behavioural operations?

6. Project concepts useful for operations
What concepts useful in project management might have use in traditional operations dealing with “permanent” organizations? For example, what project concepts such as phase gates, project maturity, risk management, project portfolios, programmes, organisational project management, project capabilities or agile project management, might be useful in OM and under what conditions? What are the operational conditions necessary for these and are these more flexible, crowd-based or open approaches useful more generally in information-intensive operations?

Timescales
Deadline for full paper submissions: Tuesday, 2nd January, 2017, 17:00 GMT
Decision to authors: Friday 10th March, 2017
Deadline for revised papers: Monday 8th May, 2017
Second round decisions to authors: Monday 3rd July, 2017
Deadline for final papers: Monday 4th September, 2017
Publication: early 2018.

Papers must be within the scope of this Special Issue, conform to the requirements for IJOPM papers, and be submitted through the ScholarOne system.

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