

## Project Management Research Perspectives From Top Management Activists

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**Abstract:** The evolution and trends of project management research are analysed by exploring, identifying, and classifying management journal articles on project management in the allied disciplines. The analysis of project management research in the allied disciplines reveals an explosion of popularity and strong interest in project management research. It examines project management research from the perspective of its relationship to allied disciplines in the management field and provides a view of the progress of project management as a research-based academic discipline. This study which is partially funded by the Project Management Institute specifically investigates project management research in allied disciplines from 10 top management and business activists' and categorizes it into eight allied disciplines. The ranking of occurrences of the eight allied disciplines from most to the least appeared subjects over the last 30 years. This study helps us better understand the evolution of project management as a field of practice and an academic discipline, and allows us to provide suggestions for future project management research opportunities.

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### I. Introduction

The origin, history, and evolution of project management, and its academic background, foundations, and underlying theory, have been debated and studied only to a limited extent from the management field's academic perspective, and supporting literature is limited. As a result, previous research had limitations to transfer the message outside of the project management field to the broader business and management academic audience. There has been a long debate in the management education community as to whether "project management" is a practice or an academic discipline. In the R&D field, tools and techniques of project management are applied and implemented to complete complex projects successfully. In the construction engineering and management discipline, people learn and implement planning, managing, and controlling of engineering construction projects to meet the time, budget, and specifications. In the engineering field, production planning, scheduling and quantitative methods are applied to manufacturing systems to achieve higher productivity. However, when it comes to the business and management field, scholars often appear puzzled and unconvinced of the notion "project management".

There have been important efforts among international project management researchers and practitioners to identify and rethink project management, and the findings were disseminated widely within the project management community. Several other studies aimed at understanding trends in project management research and publication. Betts and Lansley investigated papers published in International Journal of Project Management for its first 10 years and found that papers mainly reviewed practical experience and literature, contributed to interesting insights and new tools and techniques. Paper concluded that the future development of project management as a discipline should be done by building and testing different research models so that a theory of project management may emerge. The trends of emphasis within project management literature by investigating two flagship project management journals, Project Management Journal and International Journal of Project Management. The paper found a reduction in focus on interpersonal issues and quality management and increased research in project evaluation, improvement, and strategic alignment.



More recently, an extensive review of academic research literature on project management and organized the literature into nine major schools of thought on the basis of the key premise that drives each one. These are: optimization, modeling, governance, behavior, success, decision, process, marketing, and contingency schools of thought. They pointed out the overlap in research in project management schools of thought and their inevitable interactions. This study investigates project management research from the perspective of its relationship to allied disciplines in the management field. By exploring, identifying, and classifying top management journal articles related to project management research in the allied disciplines, the origin, evolution, and trends of project management research in the management field are revealed. This study specifically investigates project management research in allied disciplines from the management academy's perspective by not observing project management research trends from the viewpoint of the project management community. The goal of this research is to better understand project management from the perspective of the academic management world and the trends of allied disciplines, and to enhance our understanding of project management as a research-based academic discipline. This will help researchers interested in project management focus their efforts on areas of high impact and relevance to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field. In turn, this will help improve learning, education, and training programs, and ultimately lead to better performance on projects and in organizations.

## **II. Project management in the management field**

By chronologically analyzing and categorizing more than 200 journal articles from the selected 10 top journals in the management and business fields published, this study analysed publications trends of different domains in different journals. Result of this study help us better understand the evolution of project management as a field of practice and an academic discipline, and allow us to provide suggestions for future project management research opportunities.



### **III. Project management research trend analysis**

It assumed that it was important to use the broadest definition of “project management” to incorporate papers related to project management research from top management and business journals. However, we broadened that definition because scholars, practitioners, and academic and professional societies have different definitions and interpretations of the subject “project management” and it was necessary to take into consideration their viewpoint adequately. For example, in discussing project management, behavioural scientists may think of the matrix organization or emotional intelligence, operational researchers may think of network analysis, queuing theory, or optimal plant design, and strategy scholars may think of strategic alliances among different organizations during project execution. It thinks that adopting the broadest definition of project management would be essential to better understand and analyse project management research interest to the allied disciplines. It is important to note that we analysed and tabulated occurrences of specific disciplines that were identified in each paper, so the total numbers shown in the tables are different from the actual number of journal papers because many articles discuss more than one area of allied disciplines. As an example, if there was a paper dealing with “Identifying critical success factors of implementing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in a hi-tech manufacturing company”, we coded the paper as covering IT/ IS (ERP system implementation), OR/DS/MS/SCM (Used advanced statistical analysis to identify critical success factors), and TECH/INNV/NPD/R&D (Hi-tech manufacturing environment). In other cases, papers were coded for only one or two categories. For any given paper, we limited the coding to a maximum of three allied disciplines. One can argue that evaluating and determining proper codes for these papers could be subjective in nature. We appreciate the concern but in most cases, it was quite clear and obvious as to where those papers belonged as they were being categorized. There were a handful of papers to which it could be difficult to assign proper codes. However, since the size of the data set is large, we believe that this did not affect the overall trend analysis. By analysing key management journals and revealing the trends of project management research in allied disciplines, we could better understand the trends of project management research in allied disciplines as well as the evolution of project management theory.

#### ➤ **Academy of management**

The Academy of Management is a leading professional association for scholars dedicated to creating and disseminating knowledge about management and organizations. Founded in 1936 by two professors, the Academy of Management is the oldest and largest scholarly management association in the world [12]. AOM publishes four journals: AOM Perspectives (AMP) (formerly AOM Executive), AOM Journal (AMJ), AOM Review (AMR), and AOM Learning & Education (AMLE). We selected AMP, AMJ, and AMR to analyse the publications related to project management.

#### ➤ **Informis**

The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS) is “the largest professional society in the world for professionals in the field of Operations Research (OR). It was established in 1995 with the merger of the Operations Research Society of America (ORSA) and The Institute of Management Sciences (TIMS). The Institute serves as a focal point for OR professionals, permitting them to communicate with each other and reach out to other professional societies, as well as the varied clientele of the profession’s research and practice”. From the 12 scholarly journals published by INFORMS, we selected five journals to analyse project management research trends in their representative fields. They are Interfaces (practice-oriented), Operations Research, Management Science, Organization Science, and Information Systems Research.

#### ➤ **Interfaces**

Most papers related to project management in INTERFACES were published in the 1980s, particularly related to computer applications, then publication of papers declined during the 1990s and is starting to slowly catch up again in terms of project management research. OR/DS/OM/SCM (38%) and STRATEGY/PPROJECT MANAGEMENT (37%) were the two main areas that project management related research was most published. This can be explained by the fact that the goals and objectives of INTERFACES are providing practical applications to practitioners and educators and the fact that INTERFACES is part of INFOMRS journals where the focus is on OR/MS issues. There was no article related to EC/CONTRACT/LEGAL.



TECH/INNOV/NPD/R&D (20%) and OR/DS/OM/SCM (10%). There were no papers from the QM/6SIGMA/PI area.

#### IV. Conclusions

Scholars and practitioners in the project management community may need to further promote project management as an academic discipline by being more vigilant of other allied disciplines and continue to spread understanding of project management not only within the project management domain but more to other management fields. It suggested the importance of practitioners' involvement in management research and proposed the addition of a second loop which interacts with practitioners directly to share research insights and results. The value of reflection in learning by understanding theory through challenging it and testing it in practical ways both reflection on action and reflection in action. The analysis of project management research in the allied disciplines shows strong evidence that this phenomenon is happening now and we are witnessing that the future has arrived. Result of this study will help us better understand the evolution of project management as a field of practice and an academic discipline, and allow us to provide suggestions for future project management research opportunities.

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