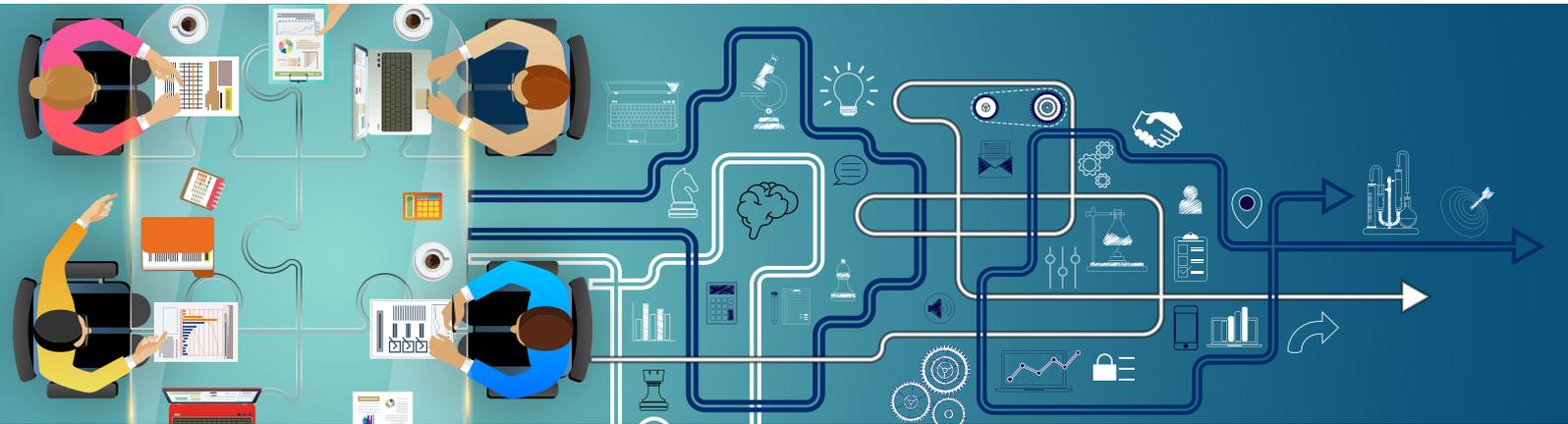


Exploring the dynamics of project management office and portfolio management co-evolution: A routine lens



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KEYWORDS

- Project management office
- Portfolio management
- Organisational capability
- Co-evolution
- Process theories of change
- Dynamic equilibrium

Article highlight:

This paper supports extant literature on the dynamic evolutionary nature of PMOs, adding to the literature through the analytical lens of routines, which enrich our conceptualisation of project management offices (PMOs) and portfolio management (PfM). It contrasts prior research in two ways: it suggests that focusing away from types of PMOs to look for types of change patterns between PMOs and organisational context may yield more valuable insights, and it suggests that a dynamic view of evolution may better capture the changes observed empirically.

What does the paper cover?

This paper addresses a recurrent topic of organisational project management research, that in principle, PMOs are perceived to be instrumental in implementing strategy through portfolios of projects, but empirical evidence also shows that PMOs are often short-lived and their value is hard to quantify. The authors argue that an explanation may lie in the processes of co-evolution that PMOs undergo over time in interaction with organisational capabilities and context.

Methodology:

The authors established their conceptual process model in three steps:

- 1.** PfM was conceptualised as a collection of routines forming an organisational capability.
- 2.** PMO was conceptualised as an organisational meta-artefact, an organisational sub-system designed to provide a solution to a type of problem (in this case, PfM).
- 3.** The relationships between the PMO, PfM and the broader organisation were mapped onto a process model of routine (re)creation.

Proteus was used as a case study of a project-based organisation to test, refine, and validate the process model, with data collection using interviews, observations, and documents.

Research findings:

The research leads to the formulation of six propositions related to patterns of change in PMOs, two conceptual (P1, 4) and four theoretical (P2, 3, 5, 6):

- P1:** The PMO, as an organisational sub-system, can be conceptualised as a meta-artefact.
- P2:** Changes of artefact element of PMO routines impact PfM through influencing the artefact element of PfM routine.
- P3:** Changes in the performative element of PMO routines impact PfM through influencing the performative element of PfM routine.
- P4:** PfM as an organisational capability can be conceptualised as a collection of routines.
- P5:** Changes in the ostensive elements of PfM routines impact the PMO through influencing the ostensive or performative elements of PMO routines.
- P6:** Changes in the performative elements of PfM routines impact the PMO through influencing the ostensive or performative elements of PMO routines.

The process change model suggests that managerial interventions may trigger multiple changes, some of which may not be intended. It reinforces the value of managerial reflectiveness and the need for organisational learning and knowledge management to capitalise on beneficiary evolutions.

Conclusions:

Starting from the observation of the short life-span of many PMOs and their questionable performance, the authors highlighted that studying the evolution of PMOs alone was not sufficient, and that considering the dynamic interplay between the PMO and the organisational context and systems was more appropriate.

The authors proposed an initial conceptual framework of PMO and PfM co-evolution, which was tested and refined using a single empirical case study. After discussing the findings, they then offered a revised conceptual framework for the co-evolution of the PMO and PfM. Based on this framework, there were six propositions outlined. Both the conceptual framework and the propositions need to be strengthened, and three concomitant and complementary research projects are underway.

Significance of the research:

Research to date has found it difficult to reliably measure the value created by PMOs, which have been widely observed to be unstable, changing or closing rapidly. Some general factors of influence have been identified, but no stable patterns have been found. This paper argues that our understanding of PMO evolution would be improved by taking into consideration the broader organisational context. The authors propose that the analytical lens of organisational routines provides an innovative approach to map the processes of interaction between the PMO and the organisation, as well as document patterns of change.

Comment from the authors:

This paper sets the scene to a second paper published in *IJPM* (Bredillet, C, Tywoniak, S, & Tootoonchy, M (2018): Why and how do project management offices change? A structural analysis approach. *International Journal of Project Management* 36 (5), p744-761), which describes a structural analysis approach enabling to unveil the dynamics at stake. Based on this paper's model, applying a structural analysis approach allows us to simulate the dynamics of a routine's system and unveil the role of key routine elements supporting PMO organisational design.

Complete article

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Glossary:

Project management office:

An organisational innovation initiated to assist project-based organisations better manage and coordinate portfolios of projects.

Portfolio management:

A collection of routines forming an organisational capability.



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