

Call for Papers: People at the heart of projectification: rethinking agency, identity and value creation

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Aims

In recent decades, “projectification” has transformed organizations, economies and societies, embedding project logic not only in business but also across the public, civic and non-profit sectors (Voros Fregolente *et al.*, 2022; Wald *et al.*, 2025; Moreno Escobar *et al.*, 2023). Wald *et al.* (2025) describe projectification as a response to external challenges that are resolved through projects, which ultimately leads to an increasing shift in thinking and acting towards projects. Projectification is, therefore, about the underlying changes caused by a growing emphasis on projects, rather than about managing the projects. As project-based organizing becomes increasingly ubiquitous, the importance of understanding the human dimension – including, but not limited to, agency, identity and value creation – grows ever more urgent (Jensen *et al.*, 2016; Jacobsson and Jałocha, 2021). Yet, despite acknowledgment that “there are people in there!” (Maylor and Budzier, 2025), existing scholarship has often prioritized systemic, organizational or institutional perspectives at the expense of the individual and the diverse social contexts in which projectification unfolds.

This special issue aims to address this imbalance by highlighting the experiences, subjectivities and contributions of people in the process of projectification. The aim is to address all those who directly or indirectly shape, contribute to, participate in, or are affected by this process, thereby promoting an interdisciplinary and multidimensional dialog on the role of the individual within projectification.

We seek contributions that explore how individual agency shapes and is shaped by the ongoing projectification of work and society. As project-based organizing becomes the dominant logic across sectors, questions arise about how people exercise autonomy, creativity and resistance within temporary, fluid and institutionally constrained settings. We seek studies that illuminate the situated, relational and temporal dimensions of human agency in project contexts – how individuals navigate boundaries, construct meaning and negotiate structures that both enable and limit their action or those of others (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Moreover, how do individuals construct and sustain their identities within the fluid, temporary and shifting contexts of a projectified world, where belonging and meaning are constantly renegotiated through political processes that are at times conflicting or ambiguous (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)? People are central not only to value creation within projects but also to the projectification process. As societies and organizations increasingly organize through projects, individuals actively shape what is considered valuable – economically, socially and symbolically – through their choices, collaborations and sense-making (Weick *et al.*, 2005). Their agency, learning and identity work continuously co-produce and redefine the value of projectification (Lundin *et al.*, 2015).

To meet these aims, the Special Issue will.

- (1) Exploring agency, identity construction and value creation in the context of projectification.
- (2) Soliciting conceptual, empirical and methodological contributions from multiple disciplines (management, sociology, psychology, philosophy, education, arts or science and technology)
- (3) Uncovering novel empirical evidence, developing innovative theories, discovering hidden narratives and identifying neglected practical issues.



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- (4) Facilitating a holistic synthesis of fragmented research strands, bridging business environments with broader social and cultural phenomena.

Encouraging robust methodological pluralism (e.g. ethnography, action research, narrative inquiry, large-N surveys and mixed methods).

Originality

Initially, research on projectification focused primarily on individual organizations (Jacobsson and Jałocha, 2021). Later, the entire economy was considered a subject of investigation (Voros Fregolente *et al.*, 2022). Subsequently, other socially relevant areas, such as public administration (Hodgson *et al.*, 2019) and religion (Christensen and Dille, 2024), as well as society, became the focus of analysis. However, there has been little research at the micro level of analysis, i.e. on the effects of projectification on individuals or how people can influence projectification across diversities on a global level, given the cultural, historical, political and economic specificities and priorities. This is why we chose to focus this special issue on people who directly or indirectly shape, contribute to, participate in, or are affected by the projectification with their agency, identity and value creation capabilities in various contexts such as in business, arts and crafts, sports, culture and volunteer engagement.

Moreover, we aim to encompass a broad range of perspectives, including but not limited to philosophical, psychological, sociological and institutional perspectives. On the one hand, consideration should be given to the contribution individuals can make to the successful implementation of projects. On the other hand, projects and the increasing trend of projectification also have an impact on people, both positive and potentially adverse (Kalff, 2017). Authors will be encouraged to employ interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g. self-determination theory (Deci *et al.*, 2017), existentialist philosophy (Konstantinou, 2025), sociology of professions, identity studies, critical management studies and science and technology studies) and to adopt novel qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method approaches. We actively welcome research from emerging economies, understudied professions (healthcare, creative industries and NGOs), alternative modes of organizing, such as Ubuntu (Marnewick *et al.*, 2018), democratic firms (Markopoulos and Vanharanta, 2018), marginalized populations (Chesser *et al.*, 2019) and global south perspectives (Pretorius *et al.*, 2023).

Topicality

Over the past three decades, the phenomenon of projectification has received increasing attention in academia (Voros Fregolente *et al.*, 2022). What began with studies in the context of industrial organizations (Midler, 1995) is now being researched at the societal level (Moreno Escobar *et al.*, 2023) and even explained as an institutional phenomenon (Wagner and Radujković, 2025). While a growing number of studies examine the effects of projectification at the macroeconomic level (Wald *et al.*, 2025), research on the impact of projectification at the micro level, specifically on the individuals affected, is still in its infancy (Jacobsson and Jałocha, 2021). While some researchers describe projectification as a “human condition” (Jensen *et al.*, 2016) that affects everything, everyone, everywhere and every time, other researchers paint a more negative picture of its consequences (Aguilar Velasco and Wald, 2022). Interestingly, researchers outside the project management discipline have been studying the role of people in the context of project work for years. Examples include art (Sansi, 2019), urban development (Rommel, 2024), education (Heimo *et al.*, 2025) and religion (Christensen and Dille, 2024), to mention just a few. In this context, people and their role in projects and projectification are increasingly becoming the focus of attention (Maylor and Budzier, 2025). Views range from the ontological assumptions of “homo projecticus” (Jacobsson and Söderholm, 2022) to the being, doing and leading in the project society (Jensen *et al.*, 2019), while looking at people’s driving forces (Deci *et al.*, 2017), to a philosophical take (Konstantinou, 2025). There is also the prospect of a project class emerging (Kováč and Kučerova, 2009). Furthermore, an increasing number of scientific articles are critically

examining the effects of projectification on individuals (Jalocha, 2023). These range from the “disciplining” of people through project work (Kalff, 2017), the effects of vulnerability and unsustainability of project-based work on people (Cicmil *et al.*, 2016), modern slavery in projects (Alzoubi *et al.*, 2023) and precarity caused to people by projects (Cairns, 2025). Moreover, the most recent ongoing research on projectification suggests that there is considerable diversity in how projectification is understood, conceived and implemented in a global world, influenced by national cultures, needs, economies, politics and visions for social development.

Therefore, we seek studies for this special issue that illuminate how individuals navigate tensions between autonomy and control, stability and fluidity or short-term delivery and long-term meaning. By focusing on agency, we aim to understand how people act creatively within the structural constraints of temporary organizing (Packendorff, Crevani and Lindgren, 2014); by addressing identity, we examine how project-based work reshapes belonging and professional self-conception (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2011), and by engaging with value creation, we consider how individuals contribute to and redefine what is valuable in and through projectification itself.

Social impact

Although all 17 goals can be pursued through projects, the following goals are particularly relevant in the context of this special issue: Goals 4, 8 and 10, specifically “quality education,” “decent work and economic growth” and “reduced Inequalities.” Other societal challenges addressed could be

- (1) Work precarity and “gigification” (Cairns, 2025; Cicmil *et al.*, 2016);
- (2) Inequality and new forms of professional exclusion/inclusion (“project class” – Kovách and Kučerova, 2009);
- (3) Positive pathways: self-realization, lifelong learning and identity growth (Deci *et al.*, 2017);
- (4) Ambivalent subjectivities: neoliberal modes of subjectification and responsabilization (Kalff, 2017) and
- (5) Ethical dilemmas in project leadership (Alzoubi *et al.*, 2023; Konstantinou, 2025).

Impact on voluntarism, creative agency, civic engagement or academia and research (Lundin *et al.*, 2015; Dollinger, 2020; Sansi, 2019; Rommel, 2024)

Indicative list of themes:

- (1) How do individuals implement and negotiate their agency in the context of increasing projectification by navigating between structure, temporality and autonomy?
- (2) How do individuals build and maintain their identities amid the fluidity and temporality of projectified work in a complex social environment?
- (3) How do people co-create and redefine value through their participation in – and contribution to – the ongoing projectification in our society?
- (4) What role do projects play in the development of people, from childhood to old age? Is there any difference between personal and occupational development?
- (5) How do different levels of education and educational opportunities affect people’s participation in projects and projectification?
- (6) What expectations, aspirations and objectives do individuals pursue through their involvement in projects, project management and projectification?

- (7) What impact (positive and/or negative) does engagement in projects – as temporary endeavors – have on the people involved?
- (8) Which prerequisites have to be created by organizations, government or society so that people engage in projects and turn them into success stories?
- (9) How much projectification can people tolerate, or is there a point at which over-projectification is reached and de-projectification starts?
- (10) How do cultural factors affect people's involvement in projects and projectification?
- (11) What are the main differences in projectification across the globe, and how does it influence individuals involved or eager to enter the project world?
- (12) To what extent is the use of professional project management beneficial or detrimental to the implementation of projects in the different areas of society?

Opening date for the Special Issue: 15/01/2026.

Closing date for the Special Issue: 30/10/2026.

Final acceptance date: 30/06/2027.

Target number of articles: 10–15.

Promotional activities:

- (1) LinkedIn Groups
- (2) Individual (LinkedIn) distribution lists
- (3) IPMA Newsletter with global reach
- (4) University-specific distribution lists
- (5) EURAM Conference
- (6) IRNOP Conference

Reinhard Friedrich Wagner and Mladen Radujković

Alma Mater Europaea – Evropski Center Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia

Taryn Bond-Barnard

Department of Industrial Engineering, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Helgi Thor Ingason

School of Technology, Reykjavik University, Reykjavik, Iceland, and

Yannick Kalff

HTW Berlin University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany

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