Call for papers for the Special paper collection: Novel research methodologies, methods and data in project studies
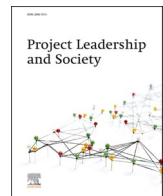
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1. Introduction

The importance and need for adopting and using novel research methodologies, methods and data are recognised in the ever-changing contemporary research space in project studies. At one stage, project management research was dominated by a purely quantitative methodology, typically adopting a survey research method and data. Even though survey studies have advanced the body of project management knowledge, soon the inadequacy of simplistic questionnaires to understand 'deeply held beliefs' was evident (Green and Sergeeva, 2019). They relied on close-ended and pre-categorized items with very little opportunity for respondents to give unprompted opinions and expand upon their answers (Lupton, 1993). Thus, project management researchers quickly transitioned to qualitative methodologies predominately using interview research methods and interview data, as it was the default choice for many research perspectives, like phenomenology, or grounded theory. However, interviews also have limitations. Emerson et al. (2011) highlight that interviewing with questions such as 'what terms mean?' or 'what is important' or 'what is significant' cannot be the primary tool for getting insights on meanings. To overcome the drawbacks of survey-only or interview-only approaches, mixed method research designs have become popular using both quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed method research design is a valuable approach to provide more insightful and comprehensive understanding of projects, project-oriented organisations and society (Jiang et al., 2022; Locatelli et al., 2017). However, it is a challenge to adopt both quantitative and qualitative due to their different methodologies and need for consistency in language used.

Published qualitative research tends to use multi-sourced datasets. For example, they use content analysis of publicly available data and interviews. However, there is also a real need for novel research methodologies and methods to address issues with existing methods and give us new insights on the practice of project management. While questionnaires help us understand 'what researchers think practitioners do,' interviews point towards 'what practitioners think they do', and we need novel research methodologies and methods to unearth 'what practitioners actually do'. Particularly, we need novel qualitative research methods as it enables the researcher to better understand practices and people's lived experiences by generating closer and empathetic accounts of their experiences within a context (Pierce, 2008; Pink et al., 2010). We need the application of research methods that do not just reveal new phenomena but also capture their depth and richness (Arino et al., 2016). This special paper collection aims to explore novel research methodologies and methods in project studies and provide suggestions for future research opportunities to make methodological contributions in project studies. Below we discuss some recent novel research approaches used and their values.

2. The use of digital sources of data to explore projects, project-based organisations and society in the 21st Century

Data compiled from digital sources are recognised as 'new ways of seeing' (Bansal et al., 2018) and provide significant insights on the practice of management in projects and organisations which, in turn, inform how they can be managed better. As more work migrates online, many interactions concerning those work are only doable in the digital environment. Some recent cutting-edge research in project studies have used news media articles (Ninan and Sergeeva, 2021), social media posts (Williams et al., 2015; Lobo and Abid, 2020; Ninan et al., 2019), and digital innovation databases (Ninan et al., 2022) as the novel data source for studying infrastructure projects. The main reasons for using these novel research approaches are the following:

- Data from digital sources are a form of naturalistic inquiry. These data arise without a researcher intervening directly with a group of respondents (Silverman, 2001) and therefore do not have biases due to prodding questions from the researcher during the data collection stage as with interviews or surveys (Ninan, 2020). In contrast to interviews as 'data got up' by the researcher, news articles and social media posts are 'data that are' (Potter, 2002).
- The naturalistic data of online digital data can be analysed from different theoretical lenses and re-used in the future by researchers worldwide. In the world of the digital environment, these types of data have become more and more useful.
- Considerable media interest arises in project settings because of their considerable social impact and effect on the economy, safety, and society (Oswald et al., 2018; Ninan, 2020). These media discourses can be analysed to identify and understand all discourses about projects, project-based organisations, and society from different perspectives.
- News articles are captured and stored in databases and do not rely on the recollection of events by the respondents to an interview (Ninan, 2020). These databases, for example, allow an understanding of what happened during a project while enabling opportunities for a longitudinal study.

☆ This special paper collection explores novel mainly qualitative research methodologies, methods and data recently used in project studies, and discusses future research opportunities for methodological contributions in a project leadership and society research space.

- News media play a key role in perpetuating public perceptions through hyperbolic reportage, images and reporting comments from public officials (Morehouse and Sonnett, 2010). From a narrative perspective, a study of the reportage is recommended to identify coherent and competing narratives that consciously perform and project the future (Dalpiaz and Di Stefano, 2018).

Researchers should seek data where data is present, and digital platforms, online news articles and social media posts are important avenues to explore the project and organisational practices in this modern digital era. The internet is a 'laboratory for the social sciences' as multiple human interactions occur in these digital habitats (Hallett and Barber, 2014). Most of this data is stored digitally, can be retrieved, re-used over time and can therefore supplement any other data gathered by the researcher during the period of physical observation.

One of the limitations of using online naturalistic data is the limited engagement of the researcher within the context, restricting their ability to probe deeper, or ask follow-up questions (Roberts, 2015). Researchers can conduct interviews with respondents to supplement the naturalistic data and create knowledge closely with stakeholders as part of engaged scholarship. Engaged scholarship is co-generative theorizing with an emphasis on knowledge creation through close work with stakeholders (Barbour et al., 2017).

3. The use of narrative inquiry and narrative interviews as a powerful novel way to explore projects, project-oriented organisations and society

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that uses field texts, such as biographies, reports, field notes, conversations, interviews, pictures, videos and symbols as the unit of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning (Clandinin, 2013; Czarniawska, 2007; Vaara et al., 2016). The main method in narrative data is narrative interviews – an open-ended and unstructured interviewing techniques which allow the narrator to produce narratives (Sergeeva and Green, 2019; Sergeeva and Winch, 2020). The main reasons for using this novel research approach are the following:

- In comparison to other types of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured or open-ended, narrative interviews are designed to encourage interviewees to communicate and share narratives and stories about experiences, and situations in their own ways (Mishler, 1991).
- They usually comprise open narrative-generating questions which encourage the interviewees to talk about the phenomena under study.
- Narrative interviews stimulate interviewees to tell narratives and stories about themselves, others, their organisations, their experiences, opinions and visions. They can be individual or group narrative interviews.

Narrative inquiry research has extensively been used in recent project leadership studies, especially in the form of life story interviews with project leaders (Sankaran, 2018; Sergeeva and Kortantamer, 2021). However, although narrative inquiry has made significant advances in project studies, scholars have not yet unleashed its full potential. More systematic forms of narrative inquiry are encouraged that can deal with large amounts of different types of data. Hence the narrative inquiry methodology and its associated methods have huge potential for future research in project leadership and society. Narrative interviews can also be combined with naturalistic inquiry and other novel research data use and analysis.

There is no agreement in the literature about which narrative analysis techniques should be used (when adopting a narrative inquiry methodology and using narrative data). The most influential scholars on narrative analysis are Riessman (1993), Polkinghorne (1995) and

Bamberg (2012), each offering their own interpretation on narrative analysis techniques. One novel approach to interview data analysis is using a cognitive mapping technique (Sergeeva and Duryan, 2021). This opens multiple avenues for novel and shared understanding of the best practice of analysing narrative data.

4. Other novel research methods

Project management research is currently heavily dependent on interviews. The objective of this special paper collection is to encourage the use of novel research methods. Along with digital data research and narrative inquiry, researchers can also explore the use of other novel research methods such as action research, ethnography, and autoethnography. Action research is an engaged form of research and aims to empower the stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the research topic (Kemmis, 2006). It addresses the current problems of society by involving both practitioners and researchers to tackle a challenge (van Marrewijk and Dessing, 2019). Ethnography enables researchers to grasp the meaning of social action from the perspective of the actors involved (Dainty, 2008). The researcher is an observer and a voyeur (Stablein, 2006) on the journey to discovering mundane practices, which has significant importance for project management practice. There are various forms of ethnographic research, including 'classic' long-term observational studies, shorter intense ethnographic encounters, and other alternative approaches including autoethnography, ethnographic-action research and ethnographic interviewing (Oswald and Dainty, 2020). In autoethnography, the researcher is also an employee in the organization and has access to inside experiences (Adams and Manning, 2015). Most decisions in project settings are taken in closed-door meetings due to confidentiality concerns and project scholars have limited access to the inner workings (Datta et al., 2020). The researcher-practitioner undertaking an autoethnography study gets approvals from the organization, observes practices, talks to others in the project daily, and documents insights in a daily reflexive journal (Koch and Harrington, 1998). Another novel research method used in project studies by Unterhitzenberger and Lawrence (2022) is the diary method where participants were asked to write a diary about their perceptions of fairness during their working day. Martinsou and Huemann (2021) make recommendations for designing case study research and how to publish it. This special collection invites researchers to share their experience in using these or/and other novel research methods as well.

5. Guidance for contributing to special collection

This call for papers invites researchers to submit both conceptual and empirical papers that address or use novel research methods and methodologies in the context of projects, project-oriented organisations, and society. We are interested in researchers' thoughts on the most novel research methods and methodologies and how these can be applied in the context of project studies. Some ideas that can be addressed in papers are but not limited to:

- Use of novel research methodologies, methods and data in project studies
- Novel ways of data collection and analysis in project studies
- How the evolution of digital project management changes research methods
- Digital sources of data as a new way of seeing
- Analysis of social media posts in project studies
- Analysis of videos as a novel way of data source
- Benefits and limitations of mixed methods research designs
- Research agenda for future research methodologies, methods, and data
- Exploration of possible future novel research methods

6. Process and key dates

We welcome paper submissions from now until November 30, 2023. Papers will be considered and published on a rolling basis rather than after the deadline. The full papers have to be directly submitted to the journal website (https://www.journals.elsevier.com/project-leadership-and-society/). When submitting your paper, please choose "SI: Novel research methodologies, methods and data in project studies" from the dropdown menu. Articles submitted before the due date to this special paper collection are published as open access and are exempt from any Author Processing Charges (APCs).

Authors are encouraged to submit a 300-500-word abstract by email to the Guest Editors to get feedback on the suitability and relevance of the paper to the special collection. For any inquiries and discussion of potential topics, you may contact the Guest Editors directly (n.sergeeva@ucl.ac.uk; j.ninan@tudelft.nl; david.oswald@rmit.edu.au).

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