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Authors	Buchwald, Arne;Urbach, Nils
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EXPLORING THE ROLE OF UN-ENACTED PROJECTS IN IT PROJECT PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

Research-in-Progress

Arne Buchwald

EBS Business School
Institute of Research on Information
Systems (IRIS)
Konrad-Adenauer-Ring 15
65187 Wiesbaden, Germany
arne.buchwald@ebs.edu

Nils Urbach

EBS Business School
Institute of Research on Information
Systems (IRIS)
Konrad-Adenauer-Ring 15
65187 Wiesbaden, Germany
nils.urbach@ebs.edu

Abstract

From the IT governance point of view, one central project portfolio management task is to ensure that official projects draw upon assigned human resources. However, a common phenomenon is that resources thought to be available often turn out to be actually unavailable. Previous research indicates that numerous unofficial initiatives are a typical cause of this observation. These un-enacted projects are those projects that have not been officially evaluated but do exist although they are not known to a company's project portfolio. The result is that unofficial initiatives compete for scarce resources. Despite these resource issues, previous research has barely investigated un-enacted projects. By building on four in-depth case studies, this exploratory study investigates the major drivers of the occurrence of un-enacted projects and their specific characteristics and found a great variety in respect of the type of un-enacted projects and the reasons for them being triggered in organizations.

Keywords: Project portfolio management, resource management, un-enacted projects

Introduction

Over the past decades, project portfolio management (PPM) has increasingly gained importance and offers organizations many advantages (Hunt and Killen 2008). By using PPM as part of their IT governance, organizations can align IT projects with their strategic objectives, thus ensuring a balanced portfolio of projects (Kumar et al. 2008). Although, in practice, using PPM seems to imply challenges for organizations (Jeffery and Leliveld 2004), it helps them maximize their returns from investments in their IT (Cubeles-Márquez 2008). Various PPM models which attempt to support the strategic alignment of projects (e.g., Archer and Ghasemzadeh 1999) have been developed. While early-stage PPM models were mainly based on the central principle of rational decision-making theory (Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008; Reyck et al. 2005), recent research on PPM has shifted from a purely theoretical perspective towards the understanding of PPM as a real-world phenomenon (Dawidson 2006). Examples of the latter include resource-related problems. Focusing on why companies, which are supposed to be the most experienced in PPM, have still not overcome resource-related issues, Blichfeldt and Eskerod (2008) conclude that (1) there are too many projects for the available resources, (2) different types of projects require distinctive management styles, (3) there are un-enacted projects that compete with official projects for resources, and (4) employees face increased pressure due to the conflict between projects and their daily work.

We define un-enacted projects as unofficial projects that have never been subject to any official evaluation process but do exist, although they are not known to or are included in the project portfolio of a company. Blichfeldt and Eskerod (2008) found that even after companies have implemented PPM, official (enacted) projects still face resource constraints. In other words, PPM has officially allocated resources to a project, but, in reality, some resources turn out to be unavailable. They found the cause of this to be numerous unofficial initiatives. These un-enacted projects eventually compete for scarce resources, since project team members want to perform well on both official projects and un-enacted initiatives (Dooley et al. 2005). One small initiative may not negatively impact an organization, but a large number of small activities may consume significant resources (Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008).

Scholars who have researched PPM over the past decade often claim to have investigated organizations perceived to be most advanced in terms of their PPM processes and practices (see, e.g., Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008; Cooper and Edgett 1997; Cooper et al. 1999; Cooper et al. 2004). However, also within “advanced PPM” organizations, Blichfeldt and Eskerod (2008) identify un-enacted projects’ serious impacts in the context of resource-related issues. These scholars investigated “why companies that do engage in PPM still experience problems” (Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008, p. 358). They discovered that the existence of un-enacted projects besides enacted ones causes the enacted projects to suffer a resource crunch. Nevertheless, previous research does not provide reasons for the occurrence of such un-enacted projects. With our study, we want to address this research gap. Our investigation therefore attempts to answer the following three research questions: (1) What is the nature of un-enacted projects? (2) What factors are the driving forces behind the occurrence of un-enacted projects? And (3) what are the implications of such un-enacted projects for PPM? The overall goal of this research-in-progress is to pave the way for the development of a taxonomy of un-enacted projects and, finally, find possible solutions for dealing with each type of un-enacted projects. To address the above-mentioned research gap and answer our research questions, we conducted in-depth case studies so far in four companies as part of a larger study. Empirical data was collected by means of interviews and field notes. We analyzed and interpreted the collected data following established qualitative-empirical research methods.

Foundations

In the modern business world characterized by intense competition, it is even more important to complete projects successfully. Organizations increasingly use projects to fulfill their objectives (Hunt and Killen 2008) and in order to respond to fast-changing and increasingly unstable environments (Maylor et al. 2006). Thus, many organizations regard *doing projects right* and *doing the right projects* (Linenberg et al. 2003) as their most crucial objectives. The former primarily refers to the right project management approach, while the latter bridges to a sophisticated PPM. PPM research and practice are developing at a very fast pace (Killen et al. 2007). The meaning of the term PPM has gained increasing interest over time. In the early stages of this domain, the term was synonymous with project selection in Research and

Development (R&D) (Baker and Freeland 1975; Danila 1989; Sanchez 1989). Thereafter, it shifted towards the planning and prioritizing of R&D projects (Cooper and Edgett 1997; Cooper et al. 1999; Cooper et al. 2000; Platje et al. 1994), before the understanding centered on the management of multiple projects (Engwall and Jerbrant 2003; Reyck et al. 2005). Much of the early work in this domain that focused on theoretical models and calculative approaches (such as scheduling optimization and project selection algorithms) towards PPM often had a limited impact on practitioners (Hunt and Killen 2008). As Killen et al. (2007, p. 1868) highlight, many of the methods “have not been adopted by managers despite 40 years of development.” The Project Management Institute (PMI 2008, p. 9) defines PPM as “the centralized management of one or more portfolios, which includes identifying, prioritizing, authorizing, managing, and controlling projects, programs, and other related work, to achieve specific strategic business objectives.” Thus, PPM implies a logical and formalized selection of projects that provide the organization with the most value. The goal of PPM is therefore to identify the selection and sequence of proposed projects to support a firm’s overall goals best. Consequently, the PPM process is based on predefined portfolio management decisions and their prioritization criteria. Independent of the tools or methods applied during the project selection process, the result is a prioritized list of projects (Rad and Levin 2008).

Resource management is a central PPM principle and an ongoing challenge to many organizations in a multi-project environment. One of the challenges is that, on an almost daily basis, resource allocation is subject to shifting priorities between projects and daily work in general and concurrent projects in particular (Turner and Speiser 1992). The effect is that project closing often does not occur at the time originally scheduled. Accordingly, human resources cannot yet be released to the organization’s resource pool. Engwall and Jerbrant (2003, p. 407) found that “since many projects lagged behind their schedules, the resource utilization that was scheduled to a certain point in time was often not possible to activate.” While the reasons above highlight the need for a sophisticated resource management, Cooper et al. (2000) recommend selecting the right number of projects. Organizations need to ensure they are not overwhelmed by too many projects, but rather identify the right number of projects which they are capable of executing simultaneously. Unless they do so, the quality of the pursued projects is likely to be hampered, reducing the probability of all the projects being completed successfully. This means that senior management may have to reject or delay some beneficial initiatives if there are not sufficient resources to complete them well. If no precautions are taken, an organization could find itself in a situation in which a resource is committed to multiple projects and the sum of the projects accounts for more than 100 percent of a resource’s time. In order to avoid people becoming major bottlenecks and slowing down all the projects in which they are involved, organizations have to employ some form of resource balancing (Cooper et al. 2000; Engwall and Jerbrant 2003). By definition, however, resource balancing can only encompass enacted projects of which the organization is aware and thus, un-enacted projects are not included in this consideration.

Un-enacted projects have rarely been addressed by the academic community. When the concept was mentioned the first time (Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008), the nature of the term was not detailed any further. Much rather, scholars described un-enacted projects as if there was the one and only un-enacted project. Later, the term *un-enacted project* was only mentioned in a few articles (e.g., Eskerod and Riis 2009; Filippov et al. 2010; Turner et al. 2008). However, since the publication by Blichfeldt and Eskerod in 2008, only one other study has explored this topic. Mors et al. (2010) found that their case organizations do not consider un-enacted projects as problematic and that un-enacted projects do not lead to resource shortages. However, their study only reports about half of the case organizations presenting solutions to the challenge of un-enacted projects, with the rest not mentioned. Our paper therefore attempts to clarify the dilemma of the conflicting findings.

Research Design

We employed a qualitative research method to paint a rich picture of the origin of un-enacted projects. Case study research is particularly applicable to “sticky, practice-based problems where the experiences of the actors are important and the context of action is critical” (Benbasat et al. 1987, p. 369). This is supported by Yin (2009, p. 4) who points out that the case study method “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events.” Since research into the domain of un-enacted projects is still at an early stage, this exploratory study’s goal was to pave the way for further

investigation of the concept of un-enacted projects. We used a multi-case study design in order to mitigate the challenge of idiosyncratic findings of a single case study and to provide a richer picture of un-enacted projects. The research method followed the Eisenhardt (1989) approach of building theories from case studies. In addition, we followed the suggestions offered by Myers and Newman (2007) on conducting qualitative interviews in information systems.

Using a multi-case setup, our sample includes four companies and is based on convenience sampling as only these few organizations allowed us to gather confidential data from their key PPM personnel so far. Table 1 presents high-level details about each case organization. All the organizations operate worldwide and are publicly traded. Although our study encompasses different industries, our case data stems primarily from an IT context, since PPM is performed as a part of the IT department in all the organizations with the exception of the automotive company.

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Industry	IT and consulting provider	Financial services	Chemicals and consumer goods	Automotive
Headquarters	USA	Germany	Germany	Germany
Employees	420,000	2,500	48,000	100,000
Revenue (Euros)	100 bn.	11 bn.	15 bn.	60 bn.
Interviewees	2	4	2	2
Interviewees' roles	One project manager, one project sponsor	One project portfolio manager, three project managers, one project sponsor	One project portfolio manager, one PPM team member	One project manager, one project sponsor

We conducted semi-structured interviews to collect empirical data. For triangulation purposes, we chose to not only interview the project portfolio manager in an organization, but also to extend the interviews to other roles. More specifically, we interviewed the project portfolio manager, project manager, and project sponsor in the case organizations. We began the data collection in March 2011. The interviews lasted between one and two hours each; we conveyed the one-hour length of the interview to the interviewees beforehand, thus taking their time constraints into account and enhancing the likelihood of cooperation. Furthermore, all the interviewees were briefed on issues of anonymity and gave permission for the interviews to be recorded. Additionally, we took field notes to support the analysis process. Thereafter, we transcribed all the interviews and returned them to the interviewees for revision and acceptance. Finally, we coded the transcripts for further analysis. In total, we interviewed ten employees, which resulted in 155 pages of interview transcripts.

The coding of the case material followed the grounded theory technique (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Since we want to investigate the types of un-enacted projects, the reasons for them, as well as their implications for PPM, we opted for the grounded theory approach, as it provides prescriptions for the coding of causality patterns. No fixed coding scheme was used; all the data was open coded. When applying the open coding technique to the transcripts and field notes, we discovered and named key concepts that could be relevant to this study (for example, *strategic secrecy*, *immediate need for action*, and *wheeling and dealing*). Thereafter, the codes were used to develop constructs for theory building. In order to ensure inter-coder reliability, two researchers coded the data independently. Later on, the codes were reconciled by merging analogous codes and resolving conflicting codes. During axial coding, the constructs identified in the open coding process were grouped into three synthesizing categories: types of un-enacted projects, reasons for un-enacted projects, as well as the implications of un-enacted projects for PPM. The synthesized categories help reveal patterns of causality, which facilitates the building of preliminary theory. Eventually, we applied selective coding in order to iteratively refine and corroborate the theory.

Results

Our results indicate that the term un-enacted projects comprises a variety of un-enacted project types and not merely a single type. On the basis of the empirical data collected so far, we identified the following five types of un-enacted projects in this study's case organizations: (1) pilot studies, (2) project finalizations, (3) bottom-up initiatives, (4) strategic un-enacted projects, and (5) executive level orders. Table 2 summarizes the types of un-enacted projects with their characteristics and major drivers, which we could derive from the interviews. The following paragraphs outline the project types in further detail.

Project types	Characteristics	Major drivers	Cases
Pilot studies	Low-profile objectives, high uncertainty	Bureaucracy avoidance, definition of a project, immature governance structure	1, 2, 4
Bottom-up initiatives	Limited scope, depends on available expertise, more interesting and challenging than enacted projects	Employee enthusiasm, employee's intrinsic motivation, bureaucracy avoidance, independent thinking and conviction	1,2
Project finalizations	Wheeling and dealing, close personal relationships, non-transparency	Face-saving issues and negotiation, lack of adequate status reporting, immature governance structure	1
Strategic un-enacted projects	High-profile objectives, large impact on the organization, cutting-edge projects, emotionally challenging, distrustful atmosphere, inadequate project planning	Need for secrecy, need for timely action, bureaucracy avoidance	2
Executive level orders	Expanding workday, strong pressure, immature PPM	Management's lacking commitment to implement PPM, short timelines, command and control hierarchy	3

Pilot Studies

The first type of un-enacted projects, pilot studies, was found at the IT and automotive company. Findings from the interviews conducted at the IT company indicate that it does not distinguish between normal project proposals and pilot studies. Pilot studies thus have to fulfill the same extensive, formal documentation requirements as regular project proposals. As a consequence of these formal requirements, the project manager does not submit a formal request to PPM but conducts pilot studies as un-enacted projects within his projects. The project portfolio manager of the financial services company pinpointed the occurrence: *"As such, pilot studies don't have any economic benefit because their objective is to evaluate whether the implementation of the proposal is beneficial to the organization. If a company sets the same formal requirements for pilot studies as well, this procedure is doomed to failure. Likewise, if pilot studies have to submit thorough business cases, the figures are based on a roll of the dice."* Likewise, interviewees in the automotive company stressed the importance of a lean process for conducting pilot studies. For instance, the company has dedicated start-up finance available in every development department for pilot studies. Overall, both interviewees pointed out that where there is a high potential of success, organizations have to ensure that pilot studies can be developed quickly to avoid them being negatively impacted by extensive formal procedures. Thus, the definition of a project and bureaucracy avoidance can be considered the major drivers of this type of un-enacted project in each of the organizations.

Bottom-Up Initiatives

The second type of un-enacted projects we identified refers to a bottom-up initiative. Our findings show that the characteristics of these bottom-up initiatives vary significantly among the organizations' industries. In the IT company, an example of a bottom-up initiative is a tablet computer integration initiative, whereas bottom-up initiatives in the financial services company primarily refer to ideas for new financial services and products. The project manager summarized: *"We can only think about and plan*

ideas; we cannot implement them because, at some point, we face too many formal hurdles. I mean that a financial services organization like ours cannot circumvent its IT department. At some point, if an idea is to be implemented, a change request has to be submitted, or new software needs to be installed in the production system.” In contrast to the IT company, which has technical expertise available to implement bottom-up ideas, the financial services company has IT control constraints. Thus, bottom-up initiatives in this organization can only take the shape of conceptual pilot studies but not that of implementation projects. In contrast to bottom-up initiatives in other organization, the particularities of the IT company can be attributed to its employees having sufficient domain knowledge. The major driver in this organization is its software developers’ high intrinsic motivation. The interviewees reported that the developers do not ask for budget, nor do they coordinate with the organization’s responsible product manager. Their available expertise allows them to not only plan an idea, but also to develop and implement it themselves. One project manager of the IT organization summarizes the behavior of the developers: “There are ideas that they perceive as very useful. They then simply do it because they think that following official processes to get their idea approved takes as much effort as simply doing it straight away.” This highlights the employees’ independent thinking and conviction which, according to the project sponsor, is explicitly appreciated in this organization. Overall, the employees commit to bottom-up initiatives, as these make them feel more appreciated and valued. However, if these team members’ superiors were to micromanage and follow strict law-and-order procedures, their intrinsic motivation, suggestions for improvement, and bottom-up initiatives could diminish and disappear, all of which can be observed in the chemicals and consumer goods company. Accordingly, the major drivers of bottom-up initiatives are appreciation of the individual employee and un-enacted projects’ interest and challenge.

Project Finalizations

The third type of un-enacted projects, project finalization, is an unofficial initiative comprising a previous project’s tasks that still need to be completed in a following project but without the involvement and knowledge of PPM. In the IT company, the IT vendor of a client company fulfills a previous project’s objectives as part of (and using the budget of) a subsequent business initiative. The following four factors characterize this type of un-enacted project: (a) projects undertaken by an external provider, conducted under strong time pressure in domains characterized by uncertainty and mostly involving both parties’ shortcomings, (b) two highly integrated parties, (c) parties working on an ongoing basis, and (d) close personal relationships between both parties’ project managers. All four requirements could also be fulfilled in other industries (e.g., the automotive or financial services industry). The project sponsor of the IT company commented: “Owing to the complexity involved in these technological projects, this type of un-enacted project occurs frequently after an official project.” This type of un-enacted project is unique across this study’s case organizations. More precisely, it does not need to be representative of what occurs in other IT companies, but might be a particularity of an IT service provider with very close ties with a customer, with which it works on an ongoing basis. The major driver of this type of un-enacted project is avoiding disclosing both sides’ shortcomings. Rather than transparently signaling to the respective superiors that the project closure will be delayed, the project managers of both the IT vendor and the client then engage in wheeling and dealing. The project manager summarizes: “Superiors do not want to know about those details as long as the regular follow-up business and the un-enacted project are successfully accomplished. If, in turn, all results in a catastrophe due to too much wheeling and dealing it’s crying time.”

Strategic Un-Enacted Projects

The fourth type of un-enacted projects is a strategic un-enacted project. Strategic un-enacted projects are normal, but secret, projects. They are not supposed to be part of any official system or report, nor known to the common body of employees across the organization. Information about such projects has to be restricted due to their nature. Their typical goals are the acquisition of another company or business process outsourcing considerations. In our study, this type of un-enacted project is unique to the financial services company. The interviewees of the automotive company explained that the organization has a detailed PPM process that explicitly includes high-profile strategic projects, which is why this type of un-enacted projects does not exist in this organization. The major drivers of strategic un-enacted projects are

the need for timely action and strategic secrecy. A project manager of the financial services company summarizes: *“Since the organization is not waiting for un-enacted projects to occur and since all parties in the organization have their regular daily business or project assignments, strategic un-enacted projects have a strong negative impact on the organization. All of a sudden, resources are somehow removed from my enacted projects or from other assignments and be allocated to un-enacted projects. Consequently, enacted projects are often confronted with a crunch in resources.”* Overall, the interviewees explained that, as soon as strategic opportunities occur, there is a first and immediate need for action, which regular organization processes cannot ensure. Secondly, the early disclosure of information about acquisitions would impact the company’s stock prices. Similarly, it would negatively impact the motivation of employees in a department considered for outsourcing.

Executive Level Orders

The last type of un-enacted projects we observed is an executive level order. The decisive characteristic of this type of project is micromanagement and law-and-order procedures. The PPM is not allowed to evaluate such orders according to normal project criteria, or to analyze whether the organization has sufficient resources to conduct such projects, but simply has to execute them. Employees therefore constantly work to capacity and are overburdened with tasks. An interviewee from the chemicals and consumer goods organization explains: *“The tasks which are most likely to be escalated, and which involve the highest risk in terms of personal career disadvantages, receive priority over other tasks in our organization.”* The results always have to be delivered at short notice, and this type of project is often large in scale. Since these un-enacted projects are often multi-disciplinary in nature, multiple employees are involved, and activities from un-enacted projects are added to their normal schedule. The major drivers are a command-and-control hierarchy, an immature PPM, and short timelines. Likewise, interviewees from the financial services company pointed out that their organization was also impacted by executive level orders. In the past, these orders also turned their project portfolio upside-down. However, as the organization’s project portfolio manager explained, the organization learned from this effect, and there are no longer executive orders, merely suggestions, which are also transparently evaluated according to normal project portfolio criteria.

Implications for Project Portfolio Management

On the basis of our findings, we derive the following implications for PPM and provide suggestions on how to deal with un-enacted projects. The first implication concerns pilot studies. In order to resolve this governance problem, we suggest including pilot studies as a distinct type of project in the PPM process. Our results show that pilot studies are conducted in organizations regardless of whether or not they are incorporated as a distinct type in the PPM. Thus, in order to make them and their specific resource demand more transparent to the organization, we suggest adequately lowering the formal requirements of pilot studies in comparison to those of regular projects. In addition, if the PPM actively supports and acknowledges pilot studies, the prospective business cases are likely to be better grounded, the calculations will have more credibility, and, the implementation project’s uncertainty will be decreased.

Furthermore, this study’s findings suggest that motivation plays an important role in the context of un-enacted projects. Interviewees from the financial services and the IT company highlighted that employees are often fascinated by bottom-up initiatives, which means there is a great deal of energy behind such initiatives. Although this might also lead to enacted projects having insufficient resources, the findings suggest that superiors should be cautious about hindering bottom-up initiatives, since they are likely to put their employees’ motivation at risk. Supporting the bottom-up initiatives, Twiss (1992) argues that companies need to have loosely-controlled funds which will allow employees to work on side projects. This concession will, in turn, give employees the room to be creative and allow them to fulfill their self-realization needs.

Another major implication is that transparency should be part of PPM. The client representative from the financial services company stressed the importance of a transparent PPM process in order to avoid resource wheeling and dealing. Such transparency includes a traceable prioritization process and a credible resource management. If these are not in place, resources are constantly overburdened and put

under pressure, which occurred in the chemicals and consumer goods company. An immature governance structure is also a major driver of one of the types of un-enacted projects found at the IT organization, namely project finalization. Since some objectives from one project are always unofficially transferred to the subsequent project, more and more delays occur, resulting in an inability to clearly distinguish between the follow-up projects' actual start and finish. The data quality with which the PPM works then becomes increasingly less reliable. Consequently, if resources have to be cut suddenly due to unforeseen events, such as economic crises, it is almost impossible for the PPM to take appropriate measures and, more generally, to steer the project organization.

The fourth implication concerns strategic un-enacted projects. In order to resolve the challenges that such projects present, organizations should set up a separate project portfolio dedicated to high-profile, strategic projects. A limited number of employees, who are kept separate from the normal project portfolio, could be fully allocated to this project portfolio. Moreover, projects that are part of this portfolio could be exempted from the regular processes that are often major bottlenecks for them.

The fifth major implication concerns executive level orders. In order to overcome this type of un-enacted project and to advance PPM, the management needs to empower the PPM. A credible PPM process needs to be introduced and the management also needs to adhere to it. An organization facing this type of un-enacted project has usually just started implementing PPM. According to the interviewees of the other case organizations, this type of un-enacted project is very typical of organizations with an immature PPM. An immature PPM's impact on both the employees and the enacted projects is severe, since the employees are constantly overburdened and enacted projects face a resource crunch.

A final implication is that this study's empirical evidence suggests that resource management is a key determinant of successful PPM. The interviewees from all the case organizations mentioned that resource management is or was their weakest point, which they are currently improving or which they have already improved. For instance, the project portfolio manager of the chemicals and consumer goods organization put it in a nutshell: *"We are still not very good at resource management. Nevertheless, we see resource management as the key PPM success factor. In other words, we have to advance our resource management before we can ultimately tackle implementing advanced PPM."* The financial services organization also experienced the positive impact that a solid resource management has on an organization: Since their resources have been properly managed, the phenomenon of people trying to require resources on the quiet has diminished significantly. In essence, proper resource management stopped people from unmanageably injecting un-enacted projects to the department.

Conclusion and Outlook

This first part of our study set out to illuminate the salient factors behind the occurrence of un-enacted projects and their implications for PPM. While previous literature discovered the concept (Blichfeldt and Eskerod 2008), only referred to it (e.g., Eskerod and Riis 2009; Filippov et al. 2010; Turner et al. 2008), or briefly discussed it (Mors et al. 2010), this study investigates the concept in more detail by means of case study research. The four cases provide an overview of the concept of un-enacted projects. One of the most striking contributions of this research is the uncovering of a variety to un-enacted projects, while previous literature solely describes an un-enacted project as the one and only. In our quest towards a taxonomy of un-enacted projects as a first step, five distinct types of un-enacted projects were discovered with this study, while the context of their occurrence is described and analyzed. Clearly, we do not claim that all projects have to be formally enacted, since, for instance, innovation initiatives specifically require more organizational leeway (Ahmed 1998). However, in order to mitigate their impact on enacted projects, they also need to be governed proactively. Thus, the overarching contribution of this study is to help resolve the resource crunch by making resource assignments more transparent.

The current state of this research acknowledges some limitations. First of all, not all roles described in the data collection section were interviewed in all of the case organization. This would have further strengthened the research, as, for instance, the project portfolio manager in the IT company could have provided enlightening insights into the finding that PPM in this organization (a) allows neither official pilot studies, (b) nor official extensions of projects that have not yet fully achieved their objectives. In the same vein, in the next phase of this research project, we will extend the interview roles by also including project team members to gather insights from human resources directly affected by un-enacted projects.

Similarly, interviewees are not necessarily aware of all un-enacted projects in their specific organization. The second limiting factor regarding generalizability is that this study encompasses organizations across industries, and only includes one case for every industry. Even though a cross-industry study allows us to draw a broad picture across organizations, it should also be highlighted that some of the findings might be idiosyncrasies limited to the respective organizations. In order to address this limitation, we will increase the sample size in the next phase, both in width and in depth.

Moreover, while our study's small sample only allows us to describe the five types of un-enacted projects, there are probably more types that might be discovered by our future research activities. Similarly, our future research will also investigate the relation between the occurrence of (specific types of) un-enacted projects and an organization's progress with regard to its PPM maturity. Last but not least, we will focus on the theoretical integration of our findings. Theories originating from, for instance, IT governance, resource management, and innovation management could help further enlighten the academic discourse. While keeping the limitations in mind, our current results contribute to both theory and practice – the academic discourse on the concept of un-enacted projects is advanced, while practitioners are given preliminary, but specific, advice on how to deal with each type in terms of our findings' implications for PPM.

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