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Governance challenges in temporary organizations: a case of evolution and representations

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Abstract:

According to the literature, formal project governance often stops at the steering committee, which is also identified as the main link between the permanent and temporary organizations. Generally, top managers play an active role as sponsors in this committee until the project is approved and launched. Afterwards, the project execution is usually delegated, enabling middle managers to participate in strategy operationalization. As such, they are likely to take part in the project governance and its operationalization. In this study, we are especially interested in the governance zone reporting to the steering committee. Within this zone, formal and informal governance is intertwined, and there is likely to be considerable overlap with the permanent organization. Our study focuses on a specific liaison device within this zone: the Project Coordination Committee, which has rarely been studied. We explore how project governance evolves and is represented by project participants. Our results show a surprising diversity in participants' representations. This allows us to identify a number of conclusions that go beyond the governance form issues and relate to the complexity of this governance zone and its influence on the disruptions between permanent and temporary governance structures within a large organization.

Keywords:

project governance; temporary organization; project coordination committee; sensemaking; project coordination.

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1. Introduction

Projects do not replace existing organizational forms; they overlap with them in permanent organizations (i.e., parent organizations), thus adding complexity to the way we organize [1]. In this paper, we explore this complexity by delving deeper into the project governance structure. Interestingly, in the current literature, studies often stop at the steering committee level [2]. The steering committee, typically chaired by a top manager who acts as the project sponsor, can include such diverse members (e.g., top managers, middle managers, expert domain managers, etc.), knowledge and levels, that it could be argued that it needs further development. Additionally, top managers tend to delegate the execution of a project, following its approval and launch [2]. Through this delegation, middle managers, including supervisors, participate in the operationalization and monitoring of the project strategy, which comes from top managers. As such, they are likely to take part in project governance and operationalization. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the main link between the permanent and temporary organizations (i.e., the organization and the project) is the steering committee [2]. Such arguments add still further reasons to explore the project governance structure beyond the steering committee, which seems to be a particularly inclusive notion in the current literature.

In this study, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the project governance structure by exploring how project governance is operationalized and evolves during the project's execution. We focus especially on the project governance zone located lower down in the structure, below the steering committee, where formal and informal governance is likely to become intertwined. Within this zone, we examine a specific liaison device [3] called the Project Coordination Committee (PCC). This committee is a governance mechanism at the lower management level where project coordination takes place between the various disciplines. This mechanism should be significant, because the coordination of diverse expertise is considered to be an important predictor of a project's effectiveness [4]. The PCC may have different names in practice, and can be more or less formalized. When formalized, it usually reports to the project steering committee and thus is part of the formal project governance structure. Its main purpose is to participate in managing the project's multidisciplinary coordination throughout its execution. This coordination generally involves units of the permanent organization, which is usually the most important resource provider for the project [5]. Indeed, within this governance zone, the boundaries of the permanent and temporary organizations are likely to overlap. This overlap is probably even more significant for projects performed using matrix ways of organizing.

Our case study took place in a large Information Technology (IT) business project, which was planned to result in business process changes. Originally, our study was focused on collaboration within the PCC. However, as we shall see, instead of observing collaboration, we discovered a case of non-collaboration within the project and in relation to its parent organization. This dysfunction required us to broaden our study and explore the project governance structure in more depth. Fortuitously, a crisis arose during our field period [6, 7]. This crisis gave us an opportunity to observe the governance challenges of this project, especially those associated with the PCC. Interestingly, it is during crises that we can observe the basic structure of organizations [8, 9], and it is in change situations that governance principles surface [10]. Within this study, we have explored project governance and multidisciplinary coordination, especially at the PCC level. It enabled us to focus on the people who are responsible for ensuring this coordination; since decision-making tends to occur where information resides [3], this adds to the interest of studying this governance mechanism, which is too often neglected in the current literature.

In this study, our goal is to contribute to a better understanding of project governance, including its relationship with project coordination and its parent organization. It goes beyond the issues of governance forms as we shall see in our concluding remarks. First, however, we will start by presenting our theoretical background, introducing the notions of project and governance, including the relationship between project governance and coordination; then, the sensemaking process and the project's trajectory will be discussed. Next, the study and its methodology are presented. Finally, we conclude by presenting our findings and their implications for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Project and governance

Projects are conceptualized as temporary organizations [11]. The temporariness of temporary organizations is their crucial and unique characteristic, which distinguishes them from other organizational forms, and thus from permanent organizations [12]. A project can exist within a permanent organization or be stand-alone. In this paper, we focus on projects within a permanent organization, also called the parent organization. Such projects are often used to operationalize the strategy coming from the parent organization's senior management [13]. Thus, they can be challenging endeavors, since they usually result in some changes in the parent organization [14].

Both corporate and project governance literature conceptualizes governance as an oversight function. Corporate governance is defined as the system relating to the management and control of companies. Its structure specifies the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different actors and dictates the rules and procedures governing decision-making [15]. The principles of corporate governance are linked to projects by means of project governance [16]. The general purpose of project governance is to ensure that the project will meet the goals and expectations defined by various stakeholders [17]. This purpose should be achieved by consistent and coherent implementation of governance roles and responsibilities by different management levels within the organization [2]. Although, its implementation implies the use of mostly temporary components, which are dispersed throughout the organization in multiple layers of networks; this situation poses a difficult problem of alignment or fit between the components themselves; moreover, the boundaries between these networks are not clear [18]. Thus, the implementation of project governance in the project and the parent organization presents challenges.

Meanwhile, top managers often tend to consider project management as a tactical concept [13] used to operationalize strategy. In fact, top managers normally act as project sponsors and play an active role until they get the project approved and launched. Afterwards, the project is usually delegated, because top managers have little time for projects, and in practice, focus only on the most important ones. Thus, they tend to delegate most projects and their monitoring to intermediaries [3]. Throughout the project's duration, the project sponsor is considered to be the primary point of authority, followed by the project steering committee of which he/she is a member [2]. This committee is viewed as the mechanism for implementing project governance and the main governance link between the temporary and permanent organizations [2]. Normally, this committee is composed of decision-makers who have managerial authority; other participants, such as domain expert managers, can be added as needed for part of the project [2]. In fact, the notion of the steering committee is very inclusive because of its members' potential diversity, principally in knowledge, power and hierarchical level. This situation suggests that the notion needs to be developed further. Nevertheless, the investigation of the formal governance structure of projects in the literature generally stops at the project steering committee, implying that the remaining governance is mainly informal.

According to the literature, the multidisciplinary nature of projects means that knowledge is usually dispersed among the various actors within a governance network [19]. There is a move towards more informal collaborative governance at the project level, which depends on the cooperation of the actors involved [20]. Thus, since decision-making tends to be located where information resides [2], projects can also be considered as coordination mechanisms [21], in which governance is used as a horizontal approach to govern and organize [20]. In fact, projects may be considered as temporary organizing processes rather than delimited organizations; actually, they are often composed of streams of activities, which are more interrelated than the theories indicate [21]. These considerations suggest that project governance tends to be horizontal and informal, in order to enable collaboration, cooperation and coordination. The coordination of diverse expertise is considered to be an important predictor of project effectiveness [4].

2.2 Coordination and project governance

Mintzberg [3] suggests that coordination mechanisms are “the most basic elements of structure” (p. 3) in organizations and include both formal and emergent elements. According to Okhuysen and Bechky [22], there are three integrating conditions for coordination: accountability; predictability; and common understanding. These conditions are the means by which people collectively accomplish their interdependent tasks in the workplace. Thus, coordination is facilitated when the interdependence among parties, their responsibilities and the progress of tasks is made visible through accountability [22]. Furthermore, an understanding of the relationship between roles in organizations, or role structure, which is a kind of governance mechanism, has been found to help people acquire a general sense of who does what in the work process [23]. Of course, this understanding needs to show some sort of commonality among actors. Formalization is another means of making sense when coping with problems of understanding in collaborative relationships [24]. Formalization can also play a positive role in helping organizations deal with ambiguous reality [24, 25]. Thus, the formal attribution of a role may be an important enabling condition for leaders or key actors to engage in sensemaking activities [26]. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the formalization of such roles, including coordination committee roles like the PCC. In addition, there is little explanation of the means by which coordination occurs: a focus on the “how” behind the mechanisms [22]. It is also important to note that organizational structure theorization has mainly been developed based on insights from permanent organizations; in other words, organizations that do not have an institutionalized limitation on their existence [2].

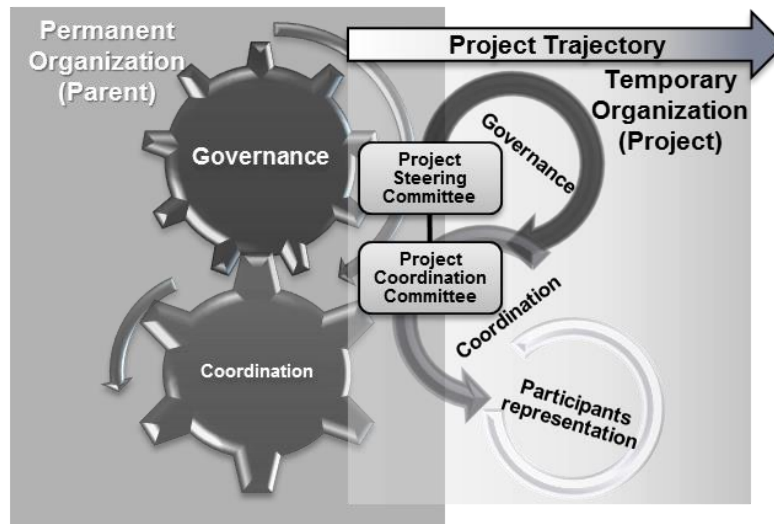


Fig. 1 - The Project Coordination Committee (PCC) context overview

Within the project governance structure, the PCC is a formal governance mechanism, which usually reports to the project steering committee. Its mandate is to coordinate the various multidisciplinary groups assigned to projects and to foster collaboration. While this is the “accepted truth”, it is difficult to find systematic studies on the subject. So far, few authors have focused on structures in temporary organizations [27], and the role system is found to be a governance mechanism that has an important coordinating function [23]. This type of committee includes people who are responsible, formally or informally, for project delivery: being responsible in this context means that they participate directly or via the management of their units in the project’s execution. Fig. 1 provides a generic view of the PCC context. It shows that the PCC is located in the governance zone where the parent organization’s boundaries intersect and are juxtaposed with those of the temporary organization, that is, the project [20]. The PCC represents a lower-level governance mechanism where project coordination takes place between diverse groups. Through the PCC, we want to

explore how members of this committee coordinate the work. This leads us to explore the PCC's formal governance structure and its evolution throughout the project's trajectory.

We also want to observe how the project governance structure is represented by project participants. For coordination to take place, accountability and common understanding are two important conditions [22], implying that the actors' representation of the formal project governance structure, which results from their sensemaking, should be considered. Participants' representations are subject to variations over time, as is the project trajectory, which can influence their representations.

2.3 Sensemaking and the project's trajectory

Sensemaking may be considered to be an evolutionary process, where retrospective interpretations are built upon interdependent interactions between actors and their environments [28]. Weick draws attention to ambiguity and uncertainty, known as "equivocality," in the process of "making sense" [29]. Most of the time, we only have sensemaking [30], which generates a provisional understanding that is plausible, subject to revision, fast, directed towards the continuation of the activity interrupted, available, tentative, infused with ignorance, and sufficient for everyday use [29].

The basic formulation of sensemaking is: "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" It emphasizes that people must do or say something first and then see what they think [29]. The effect precedes the cause [29]. Within sensemaking, enactment is people's insistence on taking action to develop a sense of what they should do next. Thus, behavior is not directed by goals; instead, it interprets goals. Behavior includes writing, editing and reading, which are not very visible in discussions of enactment, although they do enact the environment. Furthermore, the only way to see what one said is literally to read what one wrote [31]. Central to this process is individual identity, which provides a focal point from which judgments of relevance and meaning unfold. Included in this identity is one's association with the permanent and/or temporary organization, which is specifically referred to as organizational identity [32]. Thus, an individual can have multiple organizational identities of varying strengths.

In the context of this study, we mobilize sensemaking to observe how the project governance structure is represented by project participants. The project has a mission, a governance structure, etc., which may be understood differently by stakeholders depending on how they make sense of them. Sensemaking is strongly influenced by one's identity. The project follows a trajectory within its parent organization: at different points in time, each stakeholder perceives the project to be following a path to success or failure. This corresponds to their perceived project trajectory, which can differ between stakeholders. In parallel, at each specific time T throughout the project lifetime, a formal project status report is issued, which is usually influenced by the most powerful stakeholders [33] and reflects the formal project state at time T; this is the official project trajectory. This trajectory is part of the context within which sensemaking is performed. It changes over time and should influence sensemaking, since it refers to the potential for success (or failure) in realizing the project's *raison d'être* of the project, which is fundamental.

In conclusion, in this section we have presented the main theoretical notions mobilized by our study. Based on the current literature, analysis of the formal project governance structure generally stops at the steering committee. We want to fill this gap by exploring the governance structure below this committee through the study of a specific liaison device located in the governance zone reporting to the steering committee. This liaison device, often called the Project Coordination Committee (PCC), has rarely been studied and is located in a zone where multiple boundaries intersect: permanent vs. temporary organizations, and formal vs. informal governance. We aim to contribute to expanding knowledge of how projects work by studying project governance and its evolution, including project actors' representations of this governance through time. According to Sjoblom and Godenhjelm [20], the formal and informal composition of a project's governance structure and its fluidity and complexity remain to be better understood, including where the parent organization's structures meet those of the temporary organization – the project. Furthermore, Soda and Zaheer [34] note that the interplay of formal and informal has rarely been empirically examined in depth, nor have its performance implications been investigated at the level of the individual organizational actor. Through this study, we also want to respond Jones and Lichtenstein's [35] request that researchers focus on projects

rather than organizations and networks, which are the subjects of most studies on project-based organizing, and to Söderlund's [36] plea for a more fundamental understanding of projects, such as better knowledge of how they function.

3. The study

Our research approach is a case study with a flexible design, which uses narrative strategy, temporal decomposition, and visual mapping. Its main unit of analysis is the PCC. It also has two secondary units of analysis: the project and the participants' representations of the project governance structure. A theory-based sampling method was used for the project and the coordination committee. The selection criteria we applied were: an IT business project that included software development, with a formal coordination committee composed of business and technical representatives, and with a steering committee. This type of project usually involves two major types of participants: those responsible for business changes and those in command of technological changes. They must coordinate their activities through various formal and informal governance mechanisms. This coordination involves stakeholders from the permanent and temporary organizations and from many disciplines such as project managers, technical leads, domain experts, business analysts, change experts, middle managers, etc.

Our empirical exploratory study was carried out in 2012 in a private telecommunications company, which is a major player in its sector in Canada. The TOBO project was one of the top three highest-priority projects. It was executed in matrix mode and involved around 150 people at the time of the study. These people were from three major sectors of the parent organization, one IT and two business sectors (sectors A and B), distributed in more than 20 units overall. The first author was present in the field to observe meetings and conduct interviews on 13 days out of a potential 25 working days and for durations varying between one and six hours (average three hours). In 2013, additional interviews were conducted to gather supplementary data on the project history and its outcome. The research data sources were semi-structured interviews (interview structure presented in Appendix A), meeting observations, documentation on the project and the organization, the researcher's logbook and notes and memos. The method for these interviews and observations was typical case sampling. Five coordination committee meetings were observed, and 12 participants who were members of the PCC or in a direct relationship with it were interviewed. These participants were considered representative of the different sectors and point of views; indeed, following the original identification of participants by the project manager, the senior manager who was responsible for the project in the permanent organization decided to become directly involved in this activity by adding participants in order to ensure that people with different points of view would participate. Thus, the first author met the project manager, who was also responsible for coordinating the committee, technical people and business people (including both pilots), who were involved in the PCC or in direct contact with members of the committee; they had different perceptions and opinions of the project. Later, we also decided to contact the previous project manager, who was no longer working for this company, in order to obtain more information on the project's past. Thus, emergent sampling was also used. We also got access to the project records, which were quite voluminous since the project had started two years before. The documentation related to project committee meetings since the project's inception was extracted from the records. We received more than one hundred formal documents containing data about the project's status, which included activity progress, issues, risks and points of information.

The main analysis strategy resulted in the use of the traditional scientific research criteria as we sought to describe and explain phenomena as accurately and completely as possible, so that their descriptions and explanations would correspond as closely as possible to the way the world is and works [37]. Validity criteria were mainly fulfilled by data triangulation and by conducting semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions using a single detailed interview guide, ensuring uniformity in the information gathered and questions. In addition, an experienced researcher validated the approach. Since this is a simple case study, it may be pointed out that the main potential limitation of such studies relates to their transferability [38]. Nevertheless, Passeron and Revel [39] note that a case study is at the basis of the first observations we make about phenomena to be discovered. Thus, the deficit of the theory defines the event of narration, whereby narrative is used to explain a situation and understand how we got to the point where there is a problem.

4. Analysis

The analysis was carried out in five major steps. Some of these steps emerged and were progressively adapted during our field observations, because as soon as the field period started, there were some surprises with respect to the PCC, which was called the *Core Team* in this project. In fact, the ambiguous nature of the structure soon became evident. Originally, only one type of meeting for this committee was expected to be observed, but soon after the fieldwork was allowed, two types of meetings were identified: one for IT and one for Business. Shortly afterwards, two other types of meetings were also mentioned. These surprises prompted us to try to understand what the “real” day-to-day project structure was. Therefore, the first step became the analysis of the project structure. We also decided to ask interviewees to draw on paper and then comment on their representations of the project organization chart; the variety of representations obtained confirmed the structure’s ambiguity.

Secondly, the case history and the chronology map were drawn up. Thirdly, transcripts and relevant documentation were coded. To ensure validity, transcripts were sent to interviewees for feedback. Interpretations made during analysis were validated with a participant informer to prevent potential biases and distortions. The research data showed that there were major conflicts between the temporary and permanent organizations. The governance zone associated with the PCC was an important area of conflicts, triggering non-collaboration. Initially, we had planned to study cross-functional collaboration, but the observed structure made this difficult. The project coordination seemed rather complex in terms of formal communications arenas. The project coordination was coordinated at various meetings each week. There were two large coordination silos in the project: Business sectors (i.e., customers) and the Information Technology sector (i.e., Information system providers). Some clarification of the project’s governance structure was required, especially the role of the PCC. How did it work and how had it evolved from its initial mandate? Consequently, a fourth step was performed in order to analyze the project documentation and triangulate our findings with observation and interview data, which enabled us to identify some unresolved governance issues. Finally, the last step was to analyze the interviewees’ representations of the project org chart. The case history and chronology map were revised throughout those activities to reflect the latest findings.

The following sections provide an overview of our findings. We start with the changes in the project governance structure throughout the project trajectory, followed by the interviewees’ representation of this structure.

4.1 *The project trajectory and the changes in governance structure*

The research data showed that the project had been in trouble almost since its inception, its trajectory becoming progressively more problematic. However, it should be noted that this project was initially considered to be a great unifying force by all sectors involved, even though significant business process changes were envisioned. Our analysis identified unaddressed issues in the project governance and scope from the start. These unresolved issues added ambiguity throughout the project execution and appeared to have been the source of many struggles. At first, there were issues related to the project scope, as each sector had its own understanding of it. This understanding also varied by hierarchical level in each sector, and was also influenced by certain specific agendas. Thus, while top managers mainly focused on the strategic dimension of the project, which concerned end customers’ services, middle managers aimed to improve their own units’ productivity, and supervisors wanted to make sure their staff would not suffer from the envisioned process changes. Throughout the project execution, problems and tensions gradually accumulated. In parallel, there was an increasing need to minimize the project’s already ambiguous scope for budget reasons. Tensions were especially significant in the governance zone corresponding to coordination, where they were exacerbated by governance ambiguities.

Indeed, the initial project structure, which was publicized in a graphic form to the project’s stakeholders (see Fig. 2) was composed of: 1) the *Strategic Committee*, in command of the project budget and calendar; its members were principally top managers; 2) the *Steering Committee*, in command of the project scope; its members were mainly middle managers; 3) the *Project Manager and Core Team*, which represents the PCC referred to in this study; 4) the three functional sectors involved in the project.

This structure was inherited from the feasibility study that gave rise to the TOBO project. At that time, more detailed information was only provided for the Strategic Committee and Steering Committee. Then, when the TOBO project started up, the Core Team was initially defined. This team, which corresponds to the PCC in our study, was responsible for following up on issues and activities, and also for approving all project deliverables. Although this is not explicitly shown on the chart, this team was divided into two project committees: IT and Business. The project manager was expected to act as the bridge between these two committees. Fig. 3 illustrates this implicit project structure, which was roughly described using text only in the initial project documentation. This documentation specifies that the members of the IT project committee should be IT team managers from the permanent organization; more than 14 IT team units were part of the project. The members of the Business project committee were supposed to be business area representatives (e.g., domain experts); more than five Business team units participated in the project. However, a few months after the project inception, most of this committee's members were business team managers from the permanent organization.

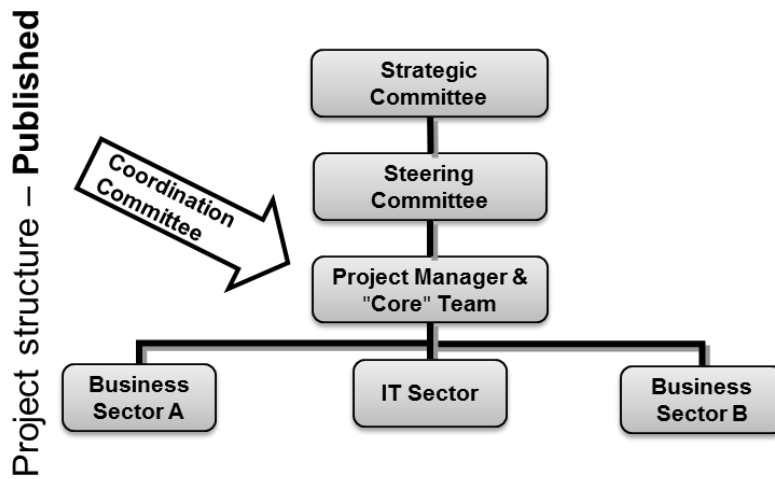


Fig. 2 – Published Project Structure

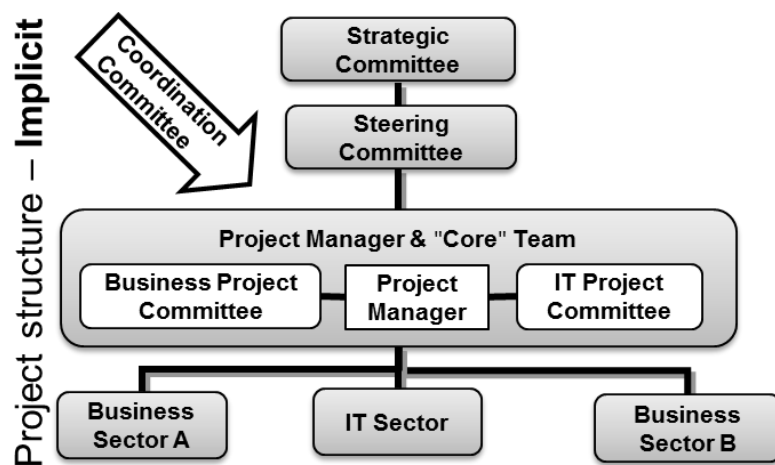


Fig. 3 - Implicit Project Structure

The implicit project structure (Fig. 3) was thus composed of four committees instead of the original three (Fig. 2). Additionally, the initial decision to assign domain experts to the Business Project Committee was not implemented. Nevertheless, during the first months, two domain experts were formally assigned to the project to act as pilots, formally representing their business sectors. However, only the pilot who was a manager in the permanent organization was included in the Core Team, specifically in the Business project committee. The second pilot's supervisor was assigned to this committee instead.

The left side of fig. 4 illustrates the changes in the formal project governance over time. It starts with the creation of the initial project org chart, followed by the project launch and a formal governance adjustment period, which lasted around six months. During this period, two changes were made: 1) Change in approval of project deliverables: the Steering Committee transferred the Core Team's approval responsibilities to the two pilots; 2) Formalization of the scope change management process: the process was to ensure that the project scope would be kept at a minimum. Within the Core Team, these changes implied that only the project manager was formally accountable for the project success and subject to some formal control mechanism.

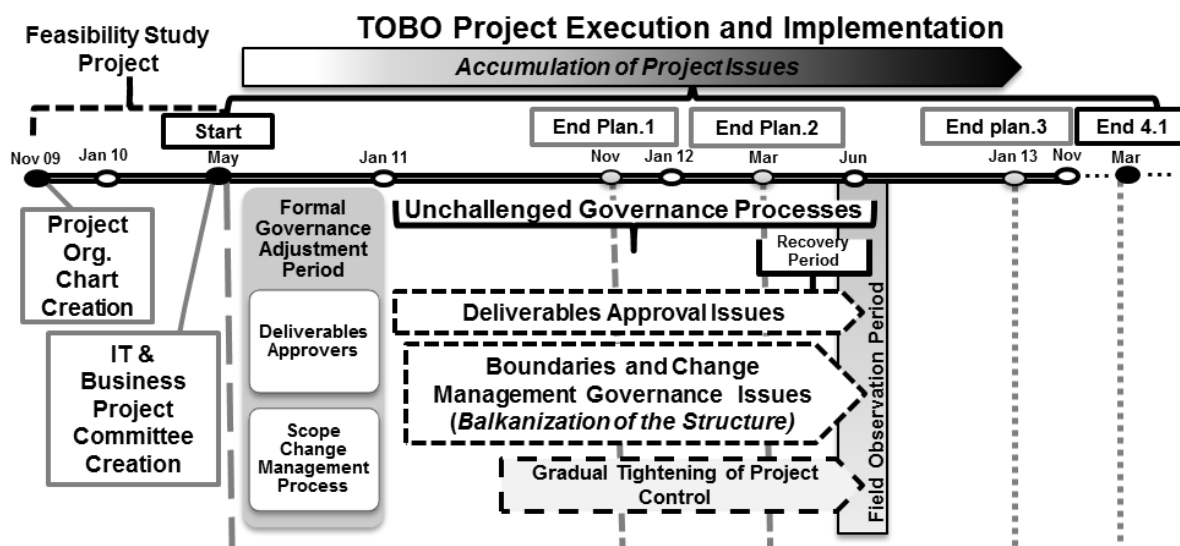


Fig. 4 - Changes in Project Governance

After the adjustment period, the project governance processes remained unchallenged, as illustrated in the central part of the Fig. 4, although two important governance issues were never resolved throughout the project: 1) The deliverables approval process required many kinds of expertise for their understanding and validation, which the pilots were unable to provide. Since they were formally and solely responsible for approving all deliverables, thus the overall solution, this issue made them to be reluctant to approve deliverables that they did not fully understand, especially those which were more technical, as one of the pilots said: "When I read some IT functional document, it's like reading Chinese. I don't understand. And they stressed the importance of the pilots approving these documents. I had nearly a hundred. I can't challenge them; it's internal data processing". 2) The management of the planned changes to be created by the project was also an important issue. Most changes targeted current business processes, and no sector had full control over all the business process changes that would affect it, because some boundaries between the two business sectors were being redesigned by the project. Business managers who were part of the Core Team via the Business Project Committee were formally accountable for their units' operations, but not for the project deliverables anymore. As well, they were increasingly rejecting any real or perceived form of control coming from the temporary organization or other

sectors in respect of these changes. However, they had to coordinate these changes together, which was complex and problematic because their main priority was their own operations.

These two important governance issues, combined with the ambiguous project scope, which had to be increasingly contained in order to respect the budget, progressively exacerbated the existing tensions, decreasing trust in the project. Thus, as time passed, process changes were gradually becoming imminent and scope issues were increasingly discovered and acknowledged. These issues, combined with the intrinsic complexities of the project, were increasing tension and confusion among project stakeholders. It gradually became obvious that the project would not fulfill all expectations. Planned changes were about to have a significant impact on tasks and data ownership, causing some responsibilities to switch between the two business sectors.

As the project's trajectory became progressively more problematic, some control processes were gradually reinforced, at the request of the Steering Committee. Its goal was to try to get more information, especially about the management of the business changes, in which members of the Business Project Committee had to participate. In parallel, decisions that were taken by top managers about resource allocation for the project were not automatically executed down their chain of command by the middle managers, even if they were communicated, as the project manager explained: "Decisions travel down. I can see it when I meet the 'direct report' of a VP (Vice-President). He has been informed. However, execution requires one to go deeper into the subject. It's always much more complex than getting the VP to say: 'Yes, the ball's in my court'... For their 'direct report', my project is among 10 or 20 other projects. So, afterwards, I still need to convince him about the high priority of my project in order to get the requested resources assigned to it".

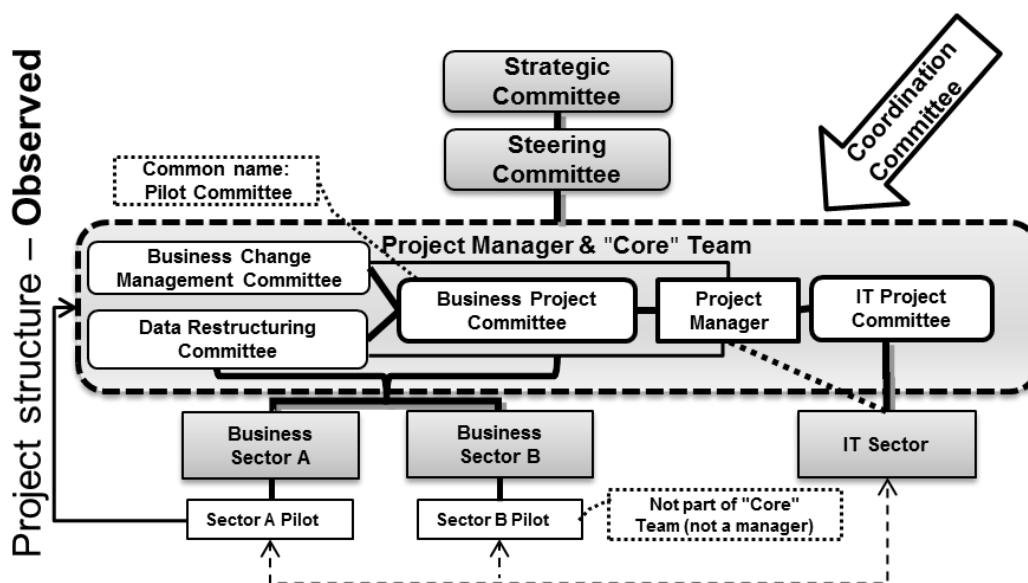


Fig. 5 - Observed Project Structure

Throughout the project execution, the control of information became increasingly significant as issues were uncovered. Old disputes from the permanent organization and its past were brought back into the project, and past project failures and past sector battles gradually resurfaced, creating additional tension and distrust in the project. This situation favored the balkanization of the project structure by creating two additional business project committees associated with two main change issues (business data change and business process change management). This balkanization reinforced boundary protection and information fragmentation not only between the temporary and permanent organizations but also within these organizations. Fig. 5 illustrates the results of this balkanization, presenting the project structure as

observed during the field period. This figure shows that resources were directly controlled by their functional managers. The project manager had only some weak matrix reports coming solely from the IT sector. The two pilots had no reporting link to him and acted as bridges between their sectors and IT. In addition, the Core Team designation was never used; none of the interviewees mentioned this name or recalled it when probed. The Business Project Committee was nicknamed the Pilot Committee, which seemed strange to us, since only one of the pilots was part of it. When participants were challenged about this nickname during interviews, they acknowledged that it was awkward. They realized that the project structure had not been challenged for a long time, as one director admitted: “Actually, this pilot is not on the committee. It might not have been necessary that he be included, or should he be? I don’t know, because the committee was set up over a year and a half ago. And it was decided that it was these people. It was to see where things were going. (Silence) (Sigh) However, we call it the Pilot Committee. (Silence)”.

Finally, as mentioned above, at the start of the field research period, the project’s governance structure was found to differ from what was expected. These expectations were based on our preliminary field access discussions with some managers involved in the project. Consequently, each interviewee was asked to draw and then comment on their own representation of the project org chart. This simple exercise provided an astonishing diversity of representations, which gave us some leads to follow about potential ambiguities in the project structure, roles and responsibilities. This also caused us to analyze the evolution (formal and informal) of the project governance structure, which has been presented in this section. What follows are the results of our analysis of these representations, which we performed from a sensemaking perspective.

4.2 Participants’ sensemaking of the project governance structure

Originally, the interviewees were asked to produce their org chart drawings so we could understand the current project structure. The variations in these drawings surprised us while confirming our feelings about the ambiguous structure. We were also surprised that nobody had produced a drawing similar to the published org chart (Fig. 2). In fact, participants were inclined to draw org charts showing the main units and roles that were part of their own day-to-day project experience. When asked about committees, most interviewees knew about the six committees presented above and illustrated in Fig. 5. Only the Strategic and Steering committees were usually shown on two distinct and higher hierarchical levels. All remaining org chart components were often shown at the same hierarchical level; they included the various participating units, the project manager and the pilots. Even the supervisors of the project manager and the pilots were often considered to be at the equivalent level. The drawings of the hierarchical order in which committees were represented also resulted in some surprises. Some interviewees drew the committees in reverse order of hierarchy; when questioned about the perceived influence exercised by the IT and Business project committees, some interviewees argued that the strategic and steering committees were only there to approve their proposals. When probed to identify the project sponsors, surprisingly, all participants indicated that their own sector’s top manager was the main project sponsor, although it was clearly stated in the project documentation that the top managers of both business sectors were joint project sponsors.

All these interpretations were part of the context within which the participants engaged in their sensemaking; it influenced their representation of the project governance structure. Even if these drawings showed variations in the project org chart, they all represented the coordination level as having a horizontal trend and minimal reporting links, especially to the project manager. The project manager’s role was particularly ambiguous in these drawings. He symbolized the temporary organization, the project, and he was deemed responsible for its delivery. However, minimal or no reporting links (formal or matrix) were drawn from project resources to him: some drawings showed some reporting links from the pilots to the project manager, but there were rarely links from the functional team managers (or their resources) to the project manager. Nevertheless, even in these few cases, the links shown were almost horizontal. Interestingly, when asked about their representations, some respondents were surprisingly candid. For example, an IT manager had this to say: Question: “You have drawn the chart without any reporting links to the project manager, right?” Answer: “I love the fact that you mention that there are no lines between the project manager and the resources. It was unintentional. I didn’t draw lines. I didn’t realize it. But, actually, there are no reporting links”.

However, the project was officially sharing resources in matrix mode with the permanent organization, with a mix of low to high matrix structures, depending on each functional manager's involvement in the project. When probed about the coordination of their resources for the project, though, most managers specified that they themselves were coordinating project activities in their own teams, while the project manager said that he communicated directly with most of the project's IT resources, because he could not usually rely on the IT managers to do so. Furthermore, the project manager had no direct access to the Business managers' resources, only to the pilots participating in the project; yet they did not report to the project manager, who was considered to be part of the IT sector.

The Business participants clearly considered their own operations as their main priority, and the project was perceived as a threat for their operations' stability: "The project will not give us a fun solution that will save us time. Instead, it will be the opposite. The best we can do is to fight as best as we can in order to get the maximum – the maximum being well below what is needed". The IT participants viewed the project as a priority if they were in the direct chain of command of the senior project director in the permanent organization. However, the others saw the project as consuming critical resources and delaying all other major projects, which annoyed them: "We are told, I don't have resources, so I can't deliver to you. Everyone is caught in this project..." They all managed teams in the permanent organization and also participated in and shared their resources with various ongoing projects. This sharing is typical of matrix structures, which are prone to conflicts. The participants associated themselves more with the permanent organization at the time of the fieldwork. Since the project trajectory was showing clear signs of future failure, many people were dissociating themselves from the so-called never-ending project: "So this project is like... (Sigh) It may have a life of its own".

Finally, the remuneration system seemed ill-suited for the temporary organization. No project-specific goal was systematically part of annual appraisals. There were generic goals for projects and, even when some goals were more precise, they were highly negotiable. Thus, most functional managers gave higher priority to the permanent organization's goals, which favored their identification with this organization and their focus on its operations.

5. Discussion

This study shows how ambiguity in the formal project governance structure, especially at the coordination level, can have a harmful impact on the relationship between the temporary and permanent organizations, not to mention on the organizations themselves, and particularly on project survival. It is also an example of collective amnesia of the initial project governance structure, which its participants had replaced with their various representations. This amnesia may be caused by the atemporality of projects [40], within which participants are more focused on the present; thus, memory is absent or unimportant. This detachment from the past may be the result of the lesser legitimacy of the project as an entity [40], which is quite possible because of its problematic trajectory. However, what is unusual in this case is the collective nature of this amnesia: nobody could recall the official project org chart that had been presented at various project meetings at the project's inception, not even after participants were shown a copy from the project records during interviews.

This diversity of participant representations shows the lack of a common knowledge base of the inner project governance; especially in the governance zone where coordination should take place. In fact, the day-to-day execution of the project and its coordination between the units were mainly informal, and thus lacked formal accountability. This left space for members of the Core Team to build their own representation of governance, without being aware of the diversity of their representations. The research data showed that these representations were somewhat incompatible [24], especially at the PCC level. The creation of a common knowledge base is the first mechanism of inclusive governance, enabling consensus on the project and ensuring its progress [19]. Our study suggests that the project governance structure is a significant component to consider within this common knowledge base. Additionally, accountability is an important parameter for coordination [22], and most people involved in coordination were not formally accountable for the project. In fact, coordination meetings were progressively transformed into areas of negotiation for resource availabilities, dates and budget. Thus, these meetings became purely administrative and

disconnected from the project, enabling non-collaboration instead of collaboration; the managers were more accountable for their operations in the permanent organization.

Almost since the project's inception, the influence of the permanent organization hierarchy infiltrated the project governance structure, progressively trying to ensure the reproduction of its silos via the balkanization of the Core Team. Conflicts from within the permanent organization enforced boundary protection and information fragmentation, mainly between the temporary and permanent organizations, by mimicking the permanent structure. The permanent organization tended to reject any existing or perceived form of control coming from the temporary organization, even regarding business change management. Additionally, each business silo was likely to reject any real or felt form of control coming from the other silo. Two underlying logics were competing for the management of business changes to be created by the project: the permanent organizational logic, where all business process change must be the sole responsibility of its managers, who were responsible for the permanent organization's operations, and the temporary organizational logic, in which all process change coming from the project must be under its control, although executed in partnership with the permanent organization representatives due to the temporariness of the project.

The formal governance was symbolized by the steering and strategic committees, and remained unchanged throughout the project. All project participants were aware of them. These two committees corresponded to Müller's [2] definition of the steering committee, which is viewed as the principal entity of project governance and which is responsible for the classic project triangle (i.e., budget, schedule and scope). In this study, the changes in project governance acknowledged that formal systems tend to be fixed for the duration of a project, while informal systems are much more flexible and can evolve [41]. However, in this study, this evolution was not for the good of the project. As well, the PCC, which corresponds to the Core Team in this study, is located in a governance zone that requires accountability for coordination, implying some kind of governance process. Our study has revealed the complexity of this zone, suggesting a need for a specific, adapted governance process, either formal or informal, that is commonly understood by all participants. In this zone, middle managers have the challenge of grasping a change they did not design and negotiating the details with other people who are equally removed from the strategic decision-making [24]. These details can have a major impact on the project's design and trajectory.

This study suggests that the temporary nature of a project seems to influence managers not to question the existing formal project governance structure: once the project is underway, the focus is on its ending, especially when the project has a problematic trajectory. Within projects, time is a limited resource, and time is usually needed to change a governance structure; role systems need time to stabilize [12]. Thus, changing the formal structure of a project entails using resources that were previously planned for the delivery of the project. In the case of a project that already has a problematic trajectory, this type of unplanned change is likely to be difficult to envision. Indeed, during field interviews, the discussions about the org chart made it clear that our open questions were triggering sensemaking from participants, making them realize that the structure showed some deficiencies. In fact, during that time, the participants considered the project delays to be the most important issues, not its structure.

However, there is a need for a "flexible strategic process" [42] in which the governance structure adapts and evolves in response to: changes in the project environment, the emergence of unforeseen events, and the requirements of the various stages of the project. Conversely, the finite duration of projects may imply that they cannot easily adapt to changes, because there is always an interval between change and structural adjustment [43]. This is quite a paradox and may imply that members' awareness of the limited project duration [27] could prevent it from adapting, even though the project is viewed as a vehicle for change.

Finally, we can add that, especially at the coordination level, the horizontal nature of the structure, combined with the power provided by knowledge, adds to the challenges faced by top managers in their quest to get project information and to support these projects. In this case study, we have also shown that top managers were isolated from the project's day-to-day situation and depended upon their chain of command for information and action. Meanwhile, the project manager lacked formal power, especially over resources. Nevertheless, project managers are often compared to CEOs in the literature [44]. For projects operated in matrix mode, is this kind of model applicable? According to Mintzberg [3], the matrix mode is prone to conflicts, and Larson and Gobeli [45], among others, add that matrix mode is

inefficient. Nevertheless, organizations are still using matrix mode in projects. Furthermore, according to Pettigrew et al. [1], projects do not replace existing organizational forms; instead, they overlap with them in the permanent organization, thus adding complexity to the way we organize. Interestingly, according to Jansen et al. [46], there is an emergent dialogue regarding the hierarchical level at which integration of exploratory and exploitative efforts needs to happen; the idea that differentiated exploratory and exploitative efforts are integrated at the senior team level needs to be expanded by incorporating lower-level cross-functional linkage devices as well. In addition to the senior team social integration, formal organizational integration mechanisms are needed to provide the necessary horizontal linkages across differentiated exploratory and exploitative units [46].

6. Conclusion

In the project management literature, the steering committee is seen as an important project governance entity. Nevertheless, it is only one piece of the puzzle. The main contribution of our study lies in its description of a case of ambiguous project governance practice and its formal coordination mechanism – the PCC (identified as the Core Team in this case study). This ambiguity led in time to non-collaboration between the permanent and temporary organizations and had a significant negative impact on the project, showing the importance of studying project governance in more depth, especially where governance and coordination are juxtaposed and intersect. It also shows the influence of the interaction between temporary and permanent organizations, where many governance issues originate.

The literature states that project governance structures tend to be horizontal and informal; they are coordination mechanisms. However, in parallel, in order for coordination to happen, accountability is needed [22], which usually requires some form of governance. Thus, our analysis highlights the importance of studying further project governance mechanisms, which allow for coordination, and especially project liaison devices such as PCCs, on which there is a dearth of studies in the literature. Indeed, few studies have focused primarily on coordination in temporary organizations [12], and Söderlund [36] calls for us to deepen our understanding of how projects work. Additionally, our study aims to help bridge the gap identified by McEvily et al. [47], who suggested that the interplay between formal and informal is often disconnect in research, and that we need to reconcile the two in order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon.

The coordination committee represents a governance mechanism at the lower management level, where project coordination is managed between the various disciplines. It is where numerous boundaries intersect, including those between the temporary and permanent organizations. We believe that this study does not reflect a unique case, but describes a widespread problem, especially in organizations that use matrix structures. Project management norms like those of the PMI [48] tend to present matrix structures relatively basically, so that the complexity created by this way of organizing is often overlooked.

This case study is also an example of how project atemporality [40] can lead to collective amnesia of the initial project governance structure, which participants replaced with their various interpretations without even being aware of it, and thus without any attempt at a consensus. Some studies have already highlighted the diverse understandings of project goals, scope, etc. But project structure representations, especially within the governance zone located at the coordination level, seemed somewhat messy and even questioned the project manager role's at this level. With the reinforcement of horizontal processes in the project literature, what impact can be envisioned on the project manager's role, particularly in matrix ways of organizing?

Lastly, as a note for practitioners, the governance ambiguities encountered in this case study underscore the significance of adapting and publicizing the formal project governance structure throughout the duration of a project. It also acknowledges the influence of middle managers throughout the project execution, especially because of their control over resources. The multidisciplinary nature of projects has many impacts on the permanent organization and on project governance, which add to the complexity of managing projects. Even when a project may seem straightforward, the accumulation of simple elements (or issues) can lead to complexity: "The devil is in the details".

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Appendix A. Semi-structured interview structure

A.1. General guidelines for the interview

This guide is to be used during semi-structured interviews of members of the Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) and of other participants who are in direct relationships with them, especially members of the project steering committees. Prior to interviews, each participant should have been met, either during a preliminary meeting or at least during the phone call to schedule the interview. During interviews, the same themes will be applied to all types of participants, but adapted to their hierarchical level. Thus, interviews of participants who are members of the project steering committee will be at more macro, strategic levels than those of participants who are members of the PCC, which will be at more micro, operational levels.

A.2. Beginning the interview

- Welcome the participant and present the purpose of the research;
- Specify the terms of this research with the participant: 1) Ethics form; 2) Confidentiality agreement; 3) Get approval to record interview: transcript will be sent for approval and comments;
- Present the main themes to be discussed during the interview;
- Start the interview with the following question: Can you tell me about your current role in the organization?

A.3. Ending the interview

- Summarize the discussions and ask if there is any other information that should have been discussed;
- Ask for feedback on the interview;
- Ask if participant can be contacted if additional information is required, and explain the terms for the validation of the transcript. Get unavailability dates, if applicable (e.g., summer vacation, business trip).

A.4. Themes of the interview

A.4.1. Contextual factors

- Project context –general project description: project goals, characteristics (priority, resources, budget, complexity, duration), history (reason for project creation, initial hypothesis, main issues, involvement of sectors, and evolution);
- Project structure: ask participant to draw the project organization chart, including committees, and to comment on it;
- Organizational factors: usual integration of projects into organizational structure (Business versus IT projects). History of similar business IT projects. Main characteristics of projects portfolio (e.g., average project duration, budget). Main project management processes in use (types and uniformity of use).

A.4.2. Project Coordination Committee

- For committee members: role, tasks, responsibilities, expertise, sector and unit. Project and committee seniority;
- For all participants: description of the committee and of its level of influence. Participant's expectations for: committee, project, other;
- Interactions: description of the usual course of this type of meeting. Description of a significant event (agreement, disagreement, compromise). Description of the influence of the committee in the project (course of the project, business change, technical change, steering committee). Evaluation of this type of meeting (collaboration, knowledge sharing, commitment, respect).

A.4.3. Business and technological changes

- Identification of major changes created by the project (business and IT) and of their main characteristics (size, units involved, processes);
- Description of the main change management activities and actors. Identification of the main related coordination and management activities.

A.4.4. Project results

- Identification of current work activities in the permanent organization that are impacted by the project (participant's unit and other units);
- Evaluation of the project's overall performance and goals;
- Evaluation of the main changes created by the project (past, current, future), and at which level (and/or committee) they are managed within the project and the organization.

A.4.5. Characteristics of the participant

- Job position, unit and seniority in the organization. Quick overview of past experience, when applicable;
- Experience working in projects versus in functional mode;
- Participation in committees and associated experience;
- Sex, age range (25–35, 36–45, 46–55, 56+).

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