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The Danish Agenda for Rethinking Project Management

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyze the similarities and differences between the Danish Rethinking Project Management initiative named Project Half Double (PHD) and the rethinking project management (RPM) research stream. The paper furthermore discusses how PHD and RPM can inspire each other in research and practice.

Design/methodology/approach – This is an empirical paper based on collaborative research between industry and researchers. PHD has developed principles and practices driven by industry consisting of 10 leading stars and the impact, leadership and flow (ILF) method. The 10 leading stars and ILF method are compared to RPM research. The comparative analysis is then used in a broader discussion about how the research-driven RPM initiative can enrich the industry-driven PHD initiative and vice versa depicted in a theoretical understanding of translations between global ideas and local implementations.

Findings – RPM and PHD share a focus on value creation, social processes, learning and complexity while PHD also focuses on lean thinking, agile thinking, front-end loading and leadership, which are largely topics beyond the RPM research stream.

Originality/value – The paper presents how stakeholders from Danish industry interpret the actuality in projects and how they want to move forward with a radically different project paradigm. This is expressed in the 10 leading stars and ILF method, which is compared and contrasted to the existing RPM literature providing a foundation for further development of both rethinking project management and Project Half Double.

Keywords rethinking project management, lean thinking, agile projects, front-end loading, leadership, governance

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Rethinking project management (RPM) research (Winter et al., 2006c) can soon celebrate its 10-year anniversary, although alternative thinking to classical project management can be traced back years before RPM was launched (e.g. Lichtenberg, 1983; Lundin and Söderholm, 1995). RPM research is born out of a UK-based research network involving many leading researchers in project management and senior practitioners from industry. The purpose of the network was to develop the field of project management and improve real-world practice as well as to enrich and extend the project management field beyond its current foundations (Winter et al., 2006b: 650).

The RPM research area has received continued attention from scholars and practitioners and appears to be a viable research area (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015), but has also been criticized for its lack of well-grounded empirical investigations (Müller and Söderlund, 2015). An RPM literature review (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) reveals that theorizing about RPM seems well established while only a few studies “*are related to the practice turn in project research, despite its importance for the [RPM] movement*” (Müller and Söderlund, 2015: 252). Svejvig and Andersen (2015: 286) furthermore argue that RPM needs to “*become much more diffused and accepted as a useful enhancement of [classical project management].*”

A Danish RPM initiative has grown out from an informal network started in 2013, which later resulted in Project Half Double (PHD), which started in spring 2015. This is an industry-driven initiative by a consultancy firm involving several private and public organizations including three universities. PHD has produced 10 leading stars for rethinking project management inspired by similar work about a new mindset for management (Hamel, 2009), but also developed a method motivated by lean thinking in manufacturing organizations (Hines, 2004; Womack and Jones, 2003) with a focus on impact, leadership and flow. PHD has a profound desire to change the practices in projects and project management, which at the same time is a very difficult change process as classical project management is highly institutionalized in many organizations and heavily backed up by “*de facto standards*” or “*best practices*” (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015; Morris et al., 2006) such as PMBOK (Project Management Body of Knowledge) (Project Management Institute, 2008) and PRINCE2-2009 (Office of Government Commerce, 2009), thereby challenging the PHD initiative.

Although the RPM research and PHD to some extent share the same goals, such as to improve real-world practices, they have developed in parallel where RPM has grown from research and PHD has grown from industry. It is therefore natural to compare the PHD initiative with the basic tenets underlying RPM research, leading to the following research questions: (1) *What are the similarities and differences between the PHD initiative and RPM research?* (2) *How can PHD and RPM inspire each other in research and practice?*

The study is conducted as collaborative research (Mathiassen, 2002; Van de Ven, 2007) where practitioners and researchers share ideas and are involved in activities to co-produce knowledge about the PHD initiative. RPM research is used as a theoretical lens to understand and explain the PHD initiative. The two initiatives are furthermore depicted in a theoretical understanding of translations between global ideas and local implementations.

The paper shows that RPM and PHD share a focus on value creation, social processes, learning and complexity while PHD also focuses on lean thinking, agile thinking, front-end loading and leadership, which are largely topics beyond the RPM research stream.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a brief summary of rethinking project management research. The research setting and approach are then described including data collection and data analysis. The paper continues with a section presenting the empirical data consisting of the ILF method and 10 leading stars followed by the comparative analysis presenting similarities and differences between the industry- and research-driven initiatives. Global ideas and local implementations are used as a theoretical backdrop for a discussion about how RPM and PHD initiatives can enrich each other, followed finally by the conclusion.

Rethinking project management research

Alternative thinking to classical project management has been around for a long time (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015), not least the Scandinavian school of project management and its focus on temporary organizations (Lundin, 1995), but the launch of the results from a UK-based research network almost 10 years ago (Maylor, 2006) cemented this more holistic and pluralistic understanding of project management (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015). A seminal, and widely cited, paper from this UK-based network is Winter et al. (2006c) with its five directions for future research in project management. The five directions are considered a central foundation for the RPM thinking.

The main findings from the UK-based research network resulted thus in five directions: project complexity, social process, value creation, conceptualization and practitioner development. Each of these has an impact on the themes that were identified as being key: projectification, programs, the actuality of projects, uncertainty, business projects, professionalization and practitioner development (Maylor, 2006: 636). RPM research is generally a response to the shortcomings of classical project management (Koskela and Howell, 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm, 2002; Morris et al., 2011). The five directions are summarized in Table 1 below (Winter et al., 2006c: 642, original emphasis):

Table 1: Summary of future directions from UK-based research network

Direction	From	Towards (means enhance the “from” position)
#1	The simple life cycle-based models of projects, as the dominant model of projects and project management (this is often an unexamined understanding and assumed to be the actual terrain).	The development of new models and theories which recognize and illuminate the <i>complexity</i> of projects and project management, at all levels (these new theories are partial theories of the complex terrain)
#2	The instrumental life cycle image of projects as a linear sequence of tasks to be performed on an objective entity ‘out there’, using codified knowledge, procedures and techniques, and based on an image of projects as temporary apolitical production processes.	Concepts and images which focus on social interaction among people, illuminating: the flux of events and human action, and the framing of projects (and the profession) within an array of social agenda, practices, stakeholder relations, politics and power.
#3	Concepts and methodologies which focus on: <i>product creation</i> – the temporary production, development or improvement of a physical product, system or facility etc. – and monitored and controlled against specification (quality), cost and time.	Concepts and frameworks which focus on: value creation as the prime focus of projects, programs and portfolios. Note however: “value” and “benefit” as having multiple meanings linked to different purposes: organizational and individual.
#4	Concepts and methodologies which are based on: the narrow conceptualization that projects start from a well-defined objective “given” at the start, and are named and framed around single disciplines, e.g. IT projects, construction projects, HR projects etc.	Concepts and approaches which facilitate: broader and ongoing conceptualization of projects as being multidisciplinary, having multiple purposes, not always predefined, but permeable, contestable and open to renegotiation throughout.
#5	Training and development which produces: practitioners who can follow detailed procedures and techniques, prescribed by project mgmt. methods	Learning and development which facilitates: the development of reflective practitioners who can learn, operate and adapt effectively in

Direction	From	Towards (means enhance the “from” position)
	and tools, which embody some or all of the ideas and assumptions of the “from” parts of 1 to 4.	complex project environments, through experience, intuition and the pragmatic application of theory in practice.

The future directions in Table 1 should be understood as “moving towards” and enhancing the “from position” and not discarding it. This understanding of embedding classical project management in the rethinking perspective was further elaborated by Svejvig and Andersen (2015: 280) into the following conceptual model shown in Figure 1 below:

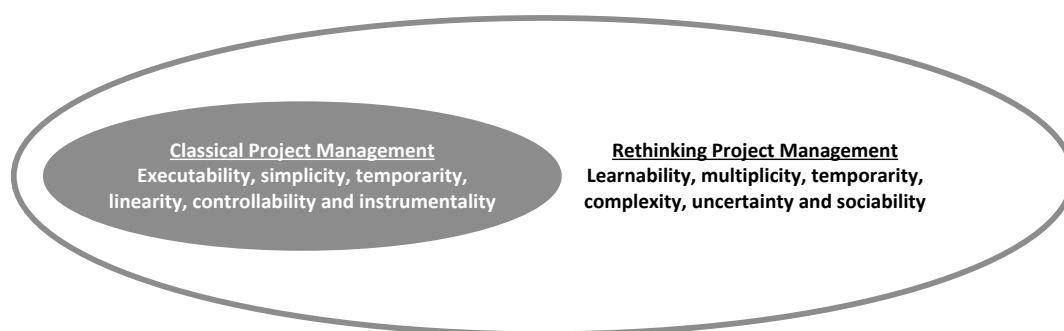


Figure 1: Important features of the classical and rethinking project management concepts.

The important features of classical and rethinking project management in Figure 1 are not meant to be exhaustive for the two concepts, but on the contrary to highlight important key characteristics for RPM and relate to classical project management (CPM) – this complements the five directions from Table 1 (Winter et al., 2006c).

The five directions together with important key characteristics are used as a theoretical lens for the analysis of the Danish initiative Project Half Double (PHD).

Case setting and research methodology

The industry-driven initiative was started in 2013 as an informal network of very committed people at different levels from Danish industry who discussed how to develop project management in the light of the apparent high failure rate of projects (e.g. Chaos Report (Johnson, 2014) and other studies claiming high failure rates), and with the ambition to manage projects in a radically different way. One of the participants from the early period described the initiative as a kind of “*hobby project where project fellows share ideas.*” The initiative was centered on the “Implement Consulting Group” (hereafter Implement), a Scandinavian-based management consultancy company, with more than 450 consultants on board, with global reach that helps organizations change. The initiative matured and began gradually to formalize during spring 2014 – the initiative was at that time called “Project 2.0.” The work manifested into 10 leading stars and other foundational material based on lean thinking. The leading stars have been developed and discussed at four workshops from February 2014 to January 2015 with a broad representation from areas such as manufac-

turing, finance, insurance, IT, public administration, management consultancies, universities and the Confederation of Danish Industry.

Discussions with the Danish Industry Foundation, an independent philanthropic foundation, were started in the fall of 2014, and they agreed to fund the project with 13.8 million Danish kroner (1.9 million euros) with a contract signed in spring 2015. The project was renamed Project Half Double (PHD) as this was more appealing and reflected the high ambition of the project stated as follows:

“Projects in half the time with double impact” and “Together we will develop a new and radical project paradigm to increase the competitiveness of the Danish industry.”

Projects in half the time should be understood as half the time to impact (benefit realization, effect is achieved) and not as half the time for project execution.

The 10 leading stars have served as a good starting point for the PHD project, but they are a mixture of principles, methods and mind-setting statements which are difficult to communicate and apply efficiently in project settings. They were therefore translated into a more operational method based on lean thinking with three focus areas: impact, leadership and flow (ILF).

PHD implies that seven pilot projects from seven organizations will be carried out following the PHD method (ILF and 10 leading stars) in order to test radically different ways to manage projects. These pilot projects are real and important projects in the seven organizations and not “small” experiments. This process is followed by a research team who is responsible for documenting, evaluating and diffusing knowledge from PHD.

The authors of this paper were enrolled in PHD in 2014, and have since then been involved in various activities with a collaborative research approach (Van de Ven, 2007). The first author has been working with the RPM research stream since 2012 (Svejvig, 2012; Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) and was therefore asked to join the project while the other author already had an established relationship with Implement, which made it easy to join PHD.

This paper is focused on comparing the PHD thinking with the RPM research stream, and not covering the larger scope of PHD as mentioned above. The specific research design for this paper is qualitative comparative research with the aim to describe similarities and differences (Bryman, 2008: 58-61). The primary data collection methods included participation in workshops and meetings from February 2014 to October 2015 with pilot organizations, the Danish Industry Foundation and Implement. There are three artifacts that are particularly relevant for the analysis in this paper: (1) the 10 leading stars (finalized June 2015), (2) kick-off documentation (June 2015), and (3) the impact, leadership and flow method (September 2015). The workshops and meetings are documented by written material, videos and field notes taken by the authors. The second author has furthermore been involved in developing the 10 leading stars, which underlines that practitioners and researchers co-produce knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007). Informal talks with members of the PHD network have also broadened the understanding of PHD thinking and how practitioners relate this to their lifeworld (Schutz, 1967; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). These sources were to some extent complemented by a variety of documents such as books, web pages and other written material as secondary data.

The following conceptual model has served as a framework for the analysis (Figure 2):

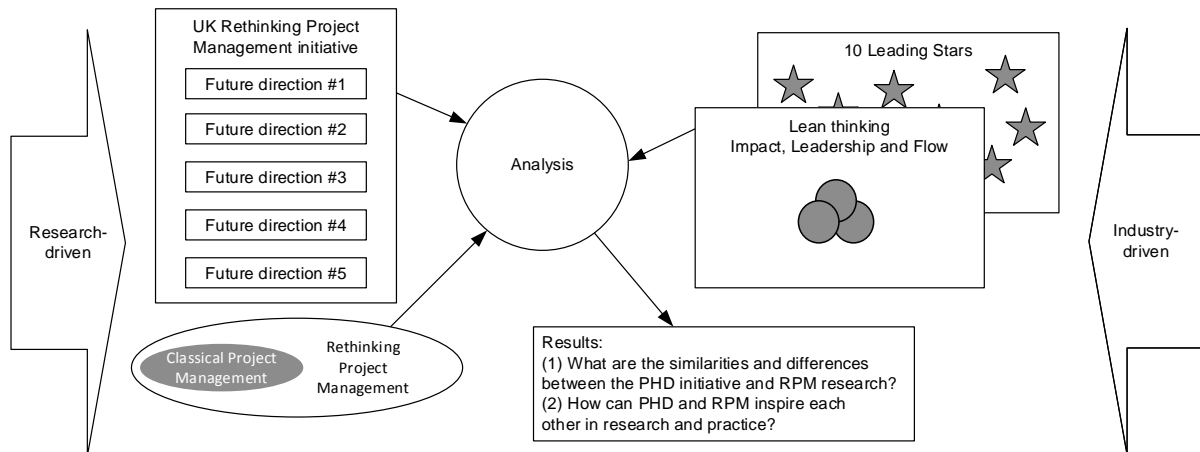


Figure 2: Conceptual framework for analysis.

Written documents from PHD and other data were coded and analyzed in NVivo (Bazeley, 2007). Deductive coding was used to develop codes (Neuman, 2014) from RPM literature (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015; Winter et al., 2006c) in order to analyze similarities between industry initiatives and RPM. Inductive coding was used to “let the data tell their own story” (Patton, 2002: 457) with the purpose of understanding topics beyond RPM. The coding scheme has developed over several iterations where the number of codes has been reduced by merging codes; the resulting coding scheme is available in Appendix A. The study is the result of an iterative research process where data collection and data analysis overlap to some extent (Myers, 2009: chapter 13). Finally, the Danish Industry Foundation and Implement have been invited to verify factual descriptions of empirical data.

Impact, leadership and flow method and the 10 leading stars

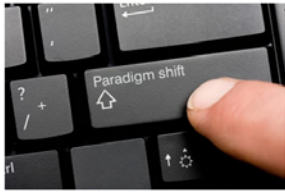
This section describes the intellectual foundation for Project Half Double where the project’s overall story is as follows:

Projects are important. They are all about introducing things we have never done before. New solutions with better results. But we have a problem. A problem related to how we should run our projects. The methods we use today originate from a time where the world was far more predictable than what it is today. We need innovation and a new set of thinking in the way we lead and carry out our projects. A new method. That is why we have named our project Half Double. We will as the name indicates define a method for the future that can help us lead projects to effect within half the time with double impact.

That is our ambition with Project Half Double.

Figure 3 presents the vision and mission for PHD, which sets the bar extremely high (kick-off June 2015):

We want to revolutionize the existing project paradigm



The vision for Project Half Double:

- Revolutionize the existing project paradigm
- Increase the impact of project work in Denmark
- Increase the competitiveness of the Danish industry



The mission:

How do we lead projects that deliver within half the time with double impact? We will...

- Eliminate **half the lead-time to impact** for projects in the Danish industry by...
- ...**doubling the rate of successful projects** from 30% to 60%, achieving a...
- ...30 bDKK GNP contribution from more efficient investments in innovation and development.

Figure 3: Vision and mission for Project Half Double.

The intention set out in Figure 3 is elaborated by the managing director from the Danish Industry Foundation, who says:

"I think that we should have extremely high aspirations for Project Half Double... let's reach for the stars... and if we only make it well into space, we have ventured to a place where no one has gone before" (video produced for communication about PHD in connection with the kick-off in June 2015).

The 10 leading stars grew gradually out of the pre-project activities that took place from spring 2013 to spring 2015 and could be described as the PHD intellectual foundation. An overview is shown in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4: 10 leading stars as the intellectual foundation for Project Half Double.

The 10 leading stars from Figure 4 are elaborated below.

Leading star no. 1 – Focus on customer value: Focus on project benefits not on the execution model. A project is a pitch into the future. You no longer want “business as usual,” you want to create something new that will impact the surrounding environment. This is why the project leader, the project team, the steering committee and everybody with a hand in the project must maintain focus on the value that the project is actually creating.

Leading star no. 2 – Put people before execution models: Human behavior is not a mathematical statement that can be solved by means of intricate models. The prevailing execution models often see projects as linear systems aimed at respecting the rules and phases as strictly as possible to reach the desired results. But a project is a social entity that involves people with different professional expertise, experience and personalities, and who even may be located in different parts of the world.

Leading star no. 3 – Colocation: The right people do not only work on the same project – they collaborate. Project work should be about collaboration in the fundamental sense of the word. A supply flow where one specialist solves his part of the task and sends on the project to the next one is not collaboration. On the contrary, it is a throwback to the days of assembly lines.

Leading star no. 4 – Leadership is hard-core trust: Hard-core trust is superior to toughness and trust separately. Future leaders of project organizations are tough but trust inspiring. They focus on the objective and

less on telling people what to do to reach the objective. In fact, the best leaders have an exceptional focus on creating fabulous and unique solutions that are delivered on time. They manage to do that because, on the one hand, they are tough when making demands on their project workers while at the same time fully trusting them to live up to the demands.

Leading star no. 5 – Lead inwards: If you want to create results as a leader, use your energy in the project. Successful projects require leadership. Therefore a project organization has no use for leaders who focus too much on leading outwards or upwards. A project organization must have leaders who have a burning passion for leading projects.

Leading star no. 6 – From steering committee to chaos committee: The term “steering committee” indicates that a group above the project can steer it. In the real world this is not so, because it is impossible to steer a project top-down. If a steering committee wants to create value for a project, it must be used for other things than making go/no-go decisions. The project leader must include the steering committee in discussions on the true challenges of the project. One way of ensuring this is by relabeling them from steering committees to chaos committees and viewing them as a forum where the project can get mentoring, wild ideas and external perspective.

Leading star no. 7 – Quick insight: Effective project execution amounts to a steep learning curve. In all projects we learn something new right up to the time where the project is concluded and the result launched. The awareness we reach along the way helps guide the project – often in a different direction than anticipated. This may imply delays and increase costs but it is also a necessary aspect of development work.

Leading star no. 8 – Short and fat projects: Allocate fewer people with more time. Many organizations like to run more projects than their resources actually permit. Often this implies that each project is allocated fewer resources but in turn a longer time. As a consequence, projects are long (throughput time) and thin (resource allocation), which will affect the quality of the project.

Leading star no. 9 – Work with visuals: Make it easy and intuitive to share insight. Visual communication is an important tool in modern project work where there is a need to share knowledge in a quick and intuitive way. Instead of spreadsheets and diagram communication, a large visible plan can be an important tool when you have to reach an agreement on goals and work processes.

Leading star no. 10 – Kill complexity: Focus on simplicity in solutions, not complexity in organizations. The simplest solution is often the best one but many solutions end up being rather complex. Most people have a need to flaunt their professionalism. Often the simple solution is neglected because people worry about not seeming clever enough or professionally competent. Simple solutions require guts.

The 10 leading stars served as a good starting point for PHD, but they were also at too high a level and therefore not operational enough to be used directly in projects, so a practice-oriented method was needed. The consultants thus developed the “impact, leadership and flow method” (ILF method), which is described in headlines in Figure 5 below:



We need an extreme focus on Impact, Leadership and Flow to succeed with Half Double

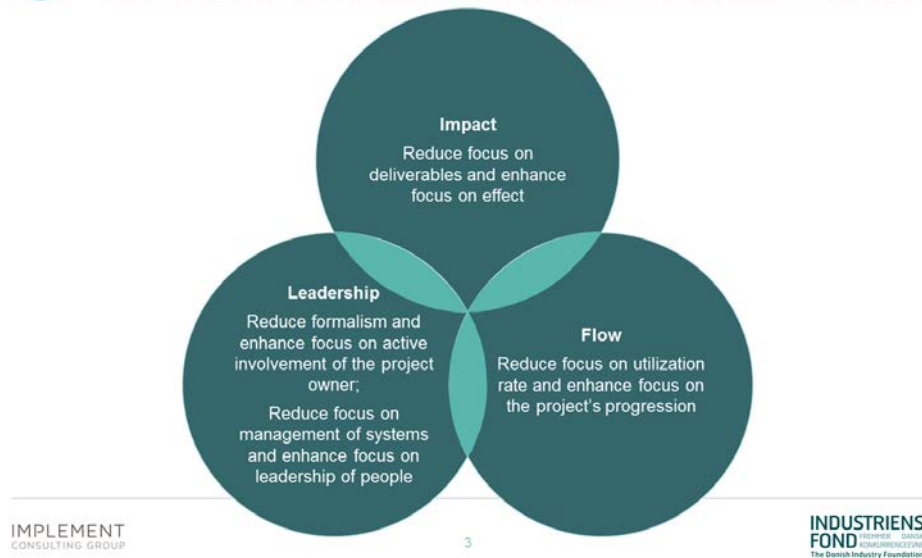


Figure 5: Headlines for impact, leadership and flow.

The three headlines from Figure 5 are detailed in the following.

Impact is the essential keyword in PHD, where it is understood as a synonym for value (value is again related to benefit and cost (Morris, 2013: 83)). Creating impact is all about time to impact, focus on value creation and stakeholder satisfaction. There is an immense focus on reducing time to impact (see vision and mission in Figure 3 above), and impact should drive the project. Energy amongst key stakeholders should be established in order to support project impact, and stakeholder satisfaction has to be the ultimate evaluation criterion and measured frequently (pulse check). One statement from the ILF method is “*The new project triangle is circular with impact in the center,*” which metaphorically indicates the move from the triple constraint (iron triangle with scope, time and cost) (Turner et al., 2010) to something different. The ILF method suggests several tools for working with impact in projects such as “impact case with success criteria” and “monthly pulse check” supported by impact reinforcement activities.

Leadership is the least developed discipline within the ILF method, but it deals with executive management where the “*chief executive owns impact and the project owner is active and close to the project,*” labeled active project ownership. This is further elaborated into the idea that an active project owner has an informal and trusted relationship with the project manager similar to the dynamic duo (metaphorically described as the partnership between the superheroes Batman and Robin). The project owner should allocate sufficient time to help the project and project manager whereby the rule is that an active project owner participates in a maximum of three steering committees at the same time. The next level of management is the project manager, who should be a firm project manager with authority and business focus. The project manager has to be inspirational and dare to persuade people to believe in the same dream about the project – a sense giver. The project manager should have a business focus articulated with the sentence “show me the money.”

The **flow** part of the ILF method is started by an example of breast cancer case management and how it was possible to reduce a 42-day chain of events to a two-hour consultation. The focus is on optimizing the chain of events seen from the patient's (customer's) perspective in order to meet customer needs instead of moving from one hospital unit to the next (e.g. mammography, breast clinic, pathology). The focus is on flow efficiency instead of resource efficiency. However, the flow focus will imply two opposing forces, which have to be balanced: (1) Increase freedom where the project team is free to solve the task how they see fit, they can build their own infrastructure, and they decide how to act on feedback; (2) Increase restriction with fixed time boxes of one month (sprint thinking), no scope changes during sprints and structured feedback, daily and weekly (scrum and sprint meetings) (see Schwaber, 2004). The flow part is supported by five key events (sprint planning, visual status etc.), five clear roles such as project owner, five non-negotiable rules where, for example, *"team members should be allocated more than 60% on a given project during sprint cycles,"* and finally five values (learn from reality, keep it simple etc.). Visual planning is a foundation for the ILF method as seen in agile thinking with sprint boards (for example a flip chart with post is categorized into to do, doing and done), and front-loading is used as a way to accelerate the knowledge where front-loading is defined as a *"problem-solving...strategy that seeks to improve development performance by shifting the identification and solving of [design] problems to earlier phases of a product development process* (Thomke and Fujimoto, 2000: 129).

The ILF method is supported by a number of tools, which are generally known from classic project management and agile project management, although few are novel. Some examples are front-loading brainstorm with 200 questions, goal hierarchy and pulse check (see Appendix A for a complete list).

The paper continues with an analysis of similarities and differences between the above-mentioned leading stars and ILF method compared to RPM research.

Analysis of similarities and differences between industry- and research-driven initiatives

Before presenting the analysis it is appropriate to explain the different levels that the two initiatives are positioned on. RPM research is general and at a higher abstraction level than the ILF method and 10 leading stars, which are more particular and linked to practice (Neuman, 2014: 72-73). Some translation has therefore been necessary between the two levels in order to overcome apparent incongruence.

Table 2 below shows the similarities and differences between RPM research and the intellectual foundation of PHD, where the gray cells indicate that there are no identified similarities or differences:

Table 2: Similarities and differences between RPM and Project Half Double

	Similarities to RPM	Differences from RPM
#1 Focus on customer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value creation at project, program and portfolio level Focus on customer value (Winter et al., 2006a) 	
#2 Put people before execution models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social processes and the project manager's ability to navigate, motivate and lead people (Winter et al., 2006c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership at all levels where the project manager can act as a military chaplain

	Similarities to RPM	Differences from RPM
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> But also acceptance of instrumental thinking when it is done in balance with social thinking 	
#3 Colocation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colocation or physical proximity is perceived as highly important to create appropriate conditions for projects (Carmel, 1999: 42-45; Pinto et al., 1993) Flow in projects related to lean thinking (Womack and Jones, 2003) Sprint in agile thinking (Schwaber, 2004)
#4 Leadership is hard-core trust		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Hard trust” imposes a leadership style where you trust people, but at the same time demanding tough goals To inspire to innovative solutions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012)
#5 Lead inwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actuality in projects: A leadership style where executive management and project management are close to project members in order to understand the actuality in the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership style – lead inwards (Briner et al., 1996)
#6 From steering committee to chaos committee		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change role of steering committee to become “chaos committee” Establish close contact with project board / chaos committee Brain trust to discuss with (a kind of expert panel)
#7 Quick insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The acceptance and ability to learn in project work (learnability) (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) Handle uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flow in projects related to lean thinking (Womack and Jones, 2003) Sprint in agile thinking (Schwaber, 2004) Learn fast related to learning cycles and radical innovation (O'Connor and DeMartino, 2006; Rice et al., 2008)
#8 Short and fat projects		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design short and fat projects with many resources in short time Focus resources on few projects Avoid project constipation Faster project execution
#9 Work with visuals		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visualization Apply physical artifacts in project room to visualization
#10 Kill complexity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on simplicity to reduce complexity Innovation: Innovative approach for customer involvement
Impact – ILF method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact is equated to value in the ILF method, and this is a key essential in the ILF method, which is well supported by RPM research focusing on value creation, although value has a broader meaning in RPM research (Winter et al., 2006c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The focus on impact and value appears on the surface to be similar to RPM, but turning to a more detailed level reveals differences PHD has focus on business value stereotypically expressed by “show me the money” and the overall intention with PHD is that the project delivers double the impact in half the time

	Similarities to RPM	Differences from RPM
Leadership – ILF method		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership in projects is not directly referred to in RPM although the ontological understanding of project management will necessarily shape the leadership role • The role of project owner is explicitly described, and has to devote much energy and time in the given project • The project manager should be a firm project manager with authority and business focus
Flow – ILF method		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flow in lean thinking (Womack and Jones, 2003) is the intellectual foundation for the guidelines for PHD • Agile project management (Larson and Gray, 2014) and Scrum (Schwaber, 2004) with colocation and visualization • Front-loading to accelerate knowledge early in the project (Thomke and Fujimoto, 2000)

Similarities: Both PHD and RPM have a profound focus on impact (value, benefit, effect etc.) and underline the general increasing focus on value creation, value capture, value stream (Laursen and Svejvig, 2015; Lepak et al., 2007) and related topics such as benefit realization management (Serra and Kunc, 2015; Breese, 2012).

Social processes in projects are underlined in PHD with the sentence “*put people before execution models,*” and this statement is possibly translated from the Agile Manifesto (Fowler and Highsmith, 2001), but shares the RPM thinking with social interaction among people with agendas, interests, politics and power (Winter et al., 2006c).

Actuality of projects is another central tenet from RPM where research should take practitioners’ lived experience of projects seriously (Cicmil et al., 2006) in the meaning to understand what is really going on in projects. PHD expresses the same sense for actuality, but at a more practical level where the project owner and project manager have to be close enough to the project to understand the actuality of the project, and not rely, for instance, on stage-gate models and project plans only.

Learning in projects is important for developing projects, changing goals and generally coping with uncertainty in projects (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015), but also for seeing learning as an important, often intangible, result of projects (Schlichter et al., 2014). The PHD advice is to get quick insights (i.e. learn fast) and focus on addressing the steep learning curve from the beginning of a project. Quick insights in PHD are furthermore linked to uncertainty management and coping with uncertainty in projects, which aligns well with RPM with the understanding that management of uncertainty is a necessary condition for effective project management (Atkinson et al., 2006).

Complexity is at the heart of RPM where models and theories should be seen as only partial theories of the complex terrain (Winter et al., 2006c: 642). The 10 leading stars address complexity and complex terrain several times, e.g. with the chaos committee “*who should be a gifted sample of people representing the social and political complexity, which the project must relate to.*” However, there is a lack of details about

handling complexity in both RPM and PHD, which means that it is more about understanding complexity than handling complexity. Other sources take a more comprehensive approach to coping with complexity (Cooke-Davies et al., 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

Differences: The gray cells in Table 2 above indicate that there are more differences than similarities between RPM and PHD, which is most likely because PHD was developed eight to nine years later without taking RPM literature into account, but also the more practice-oriented approach might be a reason. In addition, if RPM was developed today then themes as agile, lean, leadership and governance might most likely have been addressed in some way.

The main themes for the differences are lean thinking, agile thinking, front-loading and leadership, which will be elaborated below.

Lean thinking is part of the storytelling about PHD, for instance with this statement: *“With the HALF DOUBLE methodology we will influence projects in the same way LEAN influenced production”* (the capital letters appear in the original text). Lean thinking is a broad discipline (Hines, 2004), which is difficult to encapsulate but lean principles have been put forward by Womack and Jones (2003) as *“the identification of customer value, the management of the value stream, developing the capability to flow production, the use of “pull” mechanisms to support flow of materials at constrained operations and finally the pursuit of perfection through reducing to zero all forms of waste in the production system”* (Hines, 2004: 995). It is clear that the lean principles have production as their target, and translation is needed to adapt lean thinking to management of projects. The focus in PHD is on flow and value to ensure that the project is in motion so nothing stops the progress in the project, but at the same time ensures that value is delivered (impact). Several ideas are mentioned in the leading stars and ILF method such as *“faster project execution,” “flow in project work,” “focus resources on few projects”* and *“design short and fat projects with many resources in a short time”* (a complete list is available in Appendix A).

Agile thinking impacts PHD, however on a more practical and artifact-oriented level than lean thinking. The agile concepts are scattered in PHD where one of them is colocation, which is described as important for building team relationships, improving communication and coordination, where one of the specific rules is *“core team is colocated 60% of the week.”* Colocation is expected to increase productivity, which is supported by research (Kim and Kim, 2009), but is also being challenged by a globalized world that sometimes demands working in virtual teams, where the suggestion is hybrid teams (i.e. sometimes colocated and other times distance work). Visualization and visual communication are stated as important tools in modern project work, where there is a need to share knowledge quickly and intuitively. This is supported by the following quote:

Instead of communication through a spreadsheet, a large visual plan will be an important tool when we should agree together on objectives and work processes. The visual overviews also provide much faster insight into the project for both participants and guests and strengthen the team identity.

The agile thinking in PHD is also exemplified by the five clear roles, the five key events and the five values – which could more or less be tracked back to current literature about agile project management and scrum (Schwaber, 2004; e.g. Larson and Gray, 2014: chapter 17). Finally, lean and agile thinking are not two separate strands but on the contrary overlap and influence each other, and scholars even talk about *“leagile”*

(Lemieux et al., 2015), but the distinction is probably of lesser importance for practitioners who are more focused on getting things done.

Front-loading or front-end loading for problem solving (Thomke and Fujimoto, 2000; Belay et al., 2014) is a topic briefly touched on by PHD and articulated by the method “Front-loading brainstorm with 200 questions” dealing with issues about business, organization, solution and product life cycle. The basic idea is to move or (load) problems and issues early in the project life cycle when it is relatively cheap to change the project or even cancel the project if it does not meet the strategic intent. Front-end loading has been described within manufacturing (Artto et al., 2001), oil sands construction projects (Jergeas, 2008) and ship-building (Shlopak et al., 2014) to mention a few project types, but as a principle appears to be applicable to many areas. The focus on the front end in projects has continuously and for a long time been advocated by Morris (2013; 1994) because of its importance for project success (Morris, 2011), and it seems to be a relevant area for PHD to develop further.

Leadership is the last topic of differences between RPM and PHD, and the least developed within PHD. RPM does elaborate on leadership mainly as part of practitioner development (Crawford et al., 2006; Winter et al., 2006c), but it plays a minor role in RPM, which is in contrast to the focus on leadership in PHD albeit currently described at a rather basic level in the ILF method, which calls for elaboration. Leadership style is described as follows: (1) being close to the project for both project owner and project manager, (2) being hard and creating trust at the same time, (3) reducing the focus on management of systems and enhancing the focus on leadership of people, and (4) business focus with a “show me the money” mindset. Leadership in PHD operates at several levels spanning strategy and portfolio level, project board (steering/chaos committee including project owner) and finally program/project level. Leadership in projects is well described in the literature whether it is competency profiles of successful project managers (Müller and Turner, 2010), cross-cultural leadership (Grisham and Walker, 2008) or a strategic leadership approach focusing projects on creating competitive advantage and winning in the marketplace (Shenhar, 2004), to mention some studies, which might inspire the further development of leadership in PHD.

This concludes the analysis of the similarities and differences between PHD and RPM, and opens for discussion how the two concepts can enrich each other.

Global ideas and local implementations

Ideas, names, objects and practices travel around between organizations and in societies in general (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005) and sometimes ideas become global, traveling the global space over time (Abrahamson, 2006: 513), but even though the same idea travels around the globe at a high speed, local implementations are still different, because the ideas undergo many translations during the journey (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). Sevón (1996: 51) explains it so:

“...an organization picking up an idea, translating it into something that fits its own context, and materializes it into action. The result of this action may or may not be similar to the idea that was originally conceptualized ... whatever is spread is not immutable; it may change in an ongoing process of borrowing ideas or practices.”

The term “ideas” is used here to embrace ideas or management fashions (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999) such as agile and lean thinking, which should not be understood in a derogatory way, but on the contrary as useful concepts available for organizations to translate and implement.

The following addresses the second research question about how RPM and PHD can inspire each other depicted in a theoretical understanding of translations between global ideas and local implementations as shown in Figure 6 below:

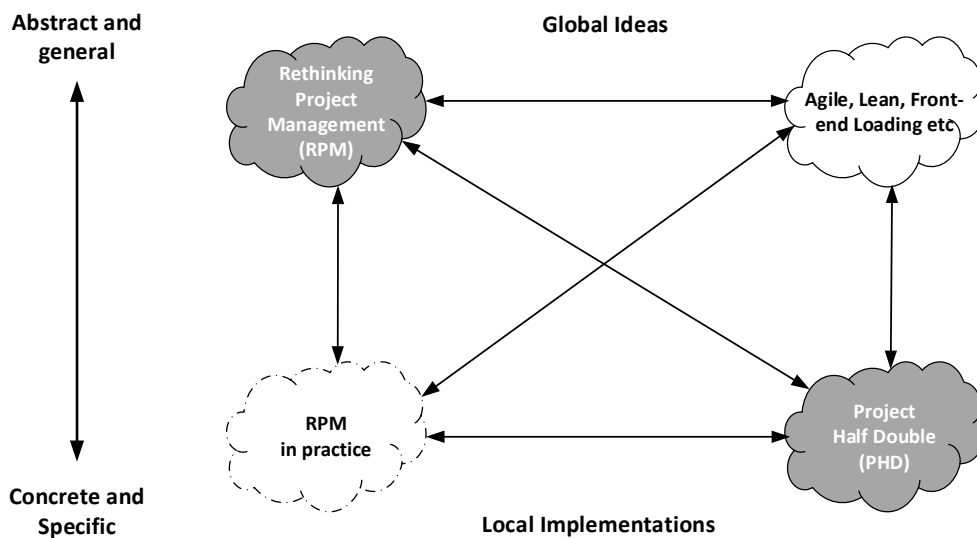


Figure 6: Global ideas and local implementations.

The bidirectional straight lines in Figure 6 indicate potential translation paths, although the straight lines are misleading as such translation processes follow tortuous and to some extent unpredictable paths. All domains (e.g. Project Half Double) shown in Figure 6 are well described either in literature or empirically except RPM in practice (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015), which is shown with dashed lines.

RPM thinking as a global idea might be inspired by several sources. The global ideas covered in this study are highly relevant to inspiring RPM thinking, namely agile thinking (Aguanno, 2004; Schwaber, 2004; Beck et al., 2001), lean thinking (Hines, 2004; Womack and Jones, 2003; Nekoufar and Karim, 2011) and front-end loading (Belay et al., 2014; Thomke and Fujimoto, 2000). An example is sprints in agile thinking, which amongst other things helps in coping with project uncertainty (Larson and Gray, 2014: chapter 17) and this links well to the RPM discussion about how to manage uncertainty in projects (Atkinson et al., 2006). PHD can also stimulate RPM and address the issue that “we know very little about the ‘actuality’ of project-based working and management” (Cicmil et al., 2006: 675). PHD highlights how stakeholders from Danish industry interpret the actuality in projects and how they want to move forward. This understanding does not necessarily fit well into the academic distinction between classical project management and RPM

(Winter et al., 2006c; Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) as certain parts of PHD rely on a functional/instrumental view, but it does certainly “rock the boat” and provide a much needed translation path from global ideas to local implementation. PHD can, at a more specific level, add areas where RPM is fairly silent such as leadership, governance (chaos committee) and organizing projects at a more practical level (colocation, short and fat projects, work with visuals).

PHD as a more specific implementation might also benefit from being developed further. RPM thinking can help to broaden the understanding and implementation of value creation, multiplicity, learning and complexity (Winter et al., 2006a; Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) or even more generally enhance a functional/instrumental view to include a more holistic and pluralistic understanding of project management theory and practice. Multiplicity is one of the keywords in RPM indicating that any models or practice express a partial understanding of a complex terrain (Winter et al., 2006c), where PHD currently is promoted as “*a method for the future that can help us lead projects...*,” and this is a too narrow consideration not in line with RPM thinking. Another related discussion that is lacking in PHD, and partly in RPM, is characteristics of projects and the associated management style – it is a paradox that projects are quoted as unique and different (Turner et al., 2010: chapter 10), but managed with general standardized models and methods backed up by formal bodies of knowledge (Morris et al., 2006). A classic example of a misfit between a project and management style is the Denver International Airport project, which was characterized as a complex construction project with low technology and was managed accordingly, but the automatic bag-handling system was a different project with new technology never applied before on a large scale, which caused excessive delays and massive cost overrun (Shenhar and Dvir, 2007: 15). This underlines the need for multiplicity. PHD draws on agile, lean and front-end loading ideas, but a more systematic evaluation of these global ideas is needed in order to stipulate a broader palette of local implementation strategies that takes the multiplicity into account. Another area where PHD might be extended is from its current project focus to also including an organizational wide focus related to RPM’s broader conceptualization (Maylor et al., 2006) and thereby on how organizations organize.

This discussion about enriching the RPM and PHD domains in this study is a partial and fragmented input to a more general discussion on how to develop and enrich global ideas and local implementations of project management theories and practice.

Implications and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to analyze the similarities and differences between Project Half Double (PHD) and the rethinking project management (RPM) research stream, and furthermore to discuss how PHD and RPM can inspire each other in research and practice. The findings are that RPM and PHD share a focus on value creation, social processes, learning and complexity, while PHD also focuses on lean thinking, agile thinking, front-end loading and leadership, which are largely topics beyond the RPM research stream. RPM can be stimulated in several ways by global ideas such as lean and agile thinking as well as front-end loading. Furthermore, PHD can add more specific areas such as leadership, governance and practices for organizing projects at a more practical level. PHD can also be developed further by adapting a more holistic and pluralistic understanding of project management, not least a broader conceptualization moving PHD from its current project focus to also including organizational wide focus.

There are several theoretical implications of this study. *First*, there has been a claimed need for practice turn in project research (Müller and Söderlund, 2015) related back to RPM thinking which stated that the current knowledge about the “actuality” of projects and project management is limited (Cicmil et al., 2006: 675) and later articulated as projects-as-practice research (Blomquist et al., 2010; Hällgren and Söderholm, 2011). This paper presents the conceptualizations from practitioners mediated in the 10 leading stars and the ILF method, the paper furthermore elaborates on translation paths between global ideas and local implementations. The practice turn literature (e.g. Blomquist et al., 2010) has thus asked for detailed bottom-up accounts on what practitioners do, episodes, processes and reasons for what they do, but has overlooked or at least downplayed the translations paths between global ideas and local implementations, which might also be valuable to study in order to understand how theories are enacted in practice (top-down) and how practice influences theory building (bottom-up) subscribing into the larger discussion about relationship between theory and practice (Checkland, 1985) as well as between micro and macro levels (Scott, 2008: chapter 8). *Second*, the translation paths between global ideas and local implementations are so complex and tortuous that it might be difficult to relate it back to e.g. the ideas in RPM thinking, which in fact might have the implication that RPM thinking has had a greater impact on practice than what is currently recognized and described (Svejvig and Andersen, 2015) where one of the potential candidates is focus on value (Office of Government Commerce, 2010; Laursen and Svejvig, 2015). *Finally*, lean thinking has its roots in the manufacturing industry and at the shop floor (Hines, 2004), but travelled into project management (Nekoufar and Karim, 2011), and agile methods were developed for software development and IT-projects, but have spread to non IT-projects due to their success (Serrador and Pinto, 2015; Conforto et al., 2014) where some of the more significant signposts are “PRINCE2 Agile” (Axelos, 2015) and becoming a “PMI Agile Certified Practitioner” (Project Management Institute, 2015) although the adoption by traditional project management has been slow (Indelicato, 2016). This indicates how global ideas and local implementations travel and translate between industries, project types and beyond with paths as bottom-up, side-ways and top-down. The three implications are all candidates for future research where the conceptual framing in Figure 6 can serve as a starting point for mapping global ideas, local implementations and not least the translation paths.

The above mentioned are also related to practical implications, especially Aaron Shenhar’s famous phrase (Müller and Söderlund, 2015) “One size does not fit all projects” (Shenhar, 2001), which underlines that projects are not similar, and he suggests a contingency approach, which was later developed into the diamond approach (Shenhar and Dvir, 2007). Whether a contingency approach is viable is probably in itself a discussion (Scott and Davis, 2007: 311-312), although out of scope here, but being able to apply a multiplicity of methods with different project terrains (Winter and Szczepanek, 2009; Winter et al., 2006c) including tailoring and adapting methods (Office of Government Commerce, 2009) appears anyhow to be paramount. In this respect PHD needs to be scrutinized and evaluated as to what extent it covers various project types, project sizes (Turner et al., 2010: chapter 10) as well as organizational maturity (Project Management Institute, 2003; Axelos (Office of Government), 2013) and sizes, which appear to be relevant factors to consider for practice.

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Bibliography

To be inserted.

Appendix A – NVivo coding scheme

01 Rethinking Project Management (RPM)

- Actuality in projects
- Broader Conceptualization
- Complexity
- Learnability learning cycles
- Multiplicity
- Practitioner development
- Projectification
- Sociability
- Uncertainty
- Value Creation

02 Classical Project Management (CPM)

- Instrumentality
- PMI Project definition
- PRINCE2
- Rational, universal, deterministic model
- Triple constraint quality cost and time

03 Lean thinking Agile thinking and beyond

- Agile sprint thinking
- Avoid project constipation
- Brain trust to discuss with
- Co-location
- Continuous Improvement Maturity evaluation Pilot projects for improvement initiatives
- Design short and fat projects with many resources in short time
- Develop a radical project paradigm to increase competitiveness
- Executive leadership
- Faster project execution
- Flow in project work
- Focus on simplicity to reduce complexity
- From Project Board to Disturbance Board
- Frontloading accelerating the knowledge in the project
- Hard trust
- Increase freedom Increase restriction two opposing forces
- Leadership skills for project manager
- Learn fast radical innovation
- Meeting a sharp deadline can increase motivation and commitment
- Reduce time to impact
- Roughly is better than precise
- Stakeholder satisfaction
- Virtualization hybrid teams and global teams
- Visualization

04 Specific tools

- Dream Expectations and Learning Potentials
- Five key flow events
- Frontloading brainstorm 200 questions tool
- Goal hierarchy
- Impact and benefit tracking
- Impact case and success criteria
- Impact Enforcement Plan
- Milestone plan and team plan
- Pulse check
- Stakeholder analysis
- Visualization chart as physical artefact

05 Cases and examples

- Change project at global engineering company
- Optimization of breast cancer course in healthcare
- Project per developer decrease efficiency

06 Evaluation and benchmarking

- Evaluation approach
- Key performance indicators
- Knowledge from reference projects

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