

Future Making Through Projects

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The Aim and Scope of This Special Issue

Projects make futures. Central to projects is the intent of a predetermined, future endpoint at which their tasks are to be completed (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995), yet their orientation to the future has not been systematically studied; thus, it is difficult to address questions of how projects can be used to make futures—especially better futures. Do projects only enable teleological movements toward predetermined futures, or do they also leave room for open-ended inquiries? How, then, do projects enable people to make better futures? These questions are particularly timely and pertinent in the face of climate change, societal upheavals, and rapid technological change. All of these require the forming of projects outside the more permanent structures and processes that often participate in the emergence and reproduction of these challenges.

With this special issue, we call for more research on future making through projects. There has been recent interest in futures in organizations (Comi & Whyte, 2018; Wenzel et al., 2020) and sociology (Adam & Groves, 2007; Tutton, 2017) across strategy, design, innovation, research, and other future-oriented practices. In extant work on projects, scholars have studied how narratives make futures (Sergeeva & Winch, 2021), explored the role of the “future-perfect” (Pitsis et al., 2003), and considered the role of project leadership in future making (Whyte et al., 2024). We believe there are considerable opportunities to enrich the understanding of projects by building on a substantial and growing literature on future making.

Do projects only enable teleological movements toward predetermined futures, or do they also leave room for open-ended inquiries?

Recent work on future making explores both how futures are made (Wenzel, 2022; Wenzel et al., 2020) and the deliberate practices through which organizational actors seek to make futures (e.g., Comi & Whyte, 2018; Esposito, 2024; Feuls et al., 2024; Pettit et al., 2023; Thompson & Byrne, 2022; Whyte et al., 2022). This work draws on examples of future making in design projects, accelerator programs, strategic change processes, and megaprojects. It raises new questions about promissory futures and their performativity (Van Elk et al., 2024), the paths through which futures are enacted (Feuls et al., 2024), the use of prototyping and visualization in making futures (Comi & Whyte, 2018), and the multiple practices that can lead to the success or failure of the work of organizational actors to make futures. The focus on practices to make futures brings into view questions of design and innovation, for example, in addressing grand challenges through mission-driven innovation and temporality. At the same time, this focus raises issues of power, including concerns about systemic inequality, indeterminate temporariness (Kodeih et al., 2023), and futurelessness (Tutton, 2023) as a sense of having no future.

Potential Topics of Interest

This call for papers encourages empirical and theoretical papers that consider questions relating to how projects involve future-oriented practices, how futures are made through projects, and how projects can be used to make better futures. Potential topics include:

- How do practices of future making interact within and across projects?
- How can projects be used to make better futures? Why do some projects fail to make desirable futures?
- How does the act of future making in the present engage with and reshape the histories of organizations?
- How can project participants make futures through innovation or mission-driven innovation?
- How can visualization, modeling, prototyping, and design be used in making futures?
- How are futures used to justify or avoid the justification of current choices and decisions in projects?

- What impacts can concerns—for example, about a lack of a future, systemic inequalities, or the achievability of a sustainable future—have on decision-making in projects?
- How in future making practices are futures negotiated across different social groups involved in projects?

We particularly encourage empirical contributions that engage deeply with the project setting and are open to a wide range of contributions to the topic.

Submission Process and Timeline for the Special Issue

All authors should submit a full paper by 15 September 2025, following the same author guidelines as those for regular issues (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/pmj>), and choose the submission alternative: Special Issue: Future Making Through Projects

The paper should cover these points in the text:

1. Background and relevance of the problem (description of the real-world phenomena and need for research);
2. Theoretical underpinnings of the research;
3. Methodology (clear steps of the research design and descriptions of the data); and
4. Contributions to the discipline of project studies and temporary organizing or the broader field of business and management research.

Additionally, authors must highlight the interdisciplinary links and contributions from other fields to the scholarly field of project studies. Submitted papers should comply with

regular *PMJ* author guidelines and will be subject to the standard *PMJ* review process. All authors submitting a paper to the special issue will be expected to perform an anonymized review of up to two papers.

The anticipated timeline for this special issue is:

- Submission of full paper: 15 September 2025
- Review and revision cycle: September 2025 through April 2026
- Approximate online publication: June 2026
- Approximate publication in print: November 2026

Manuscripts submitted for this special issue should follow the same author guidelines as those for regular issues. We expect authors and reviewers to work in a timely manner to comply with the anticipated timeline outlined above.

Please note that this call for papers offers authors the opportunity to submit a near finished manuscript to the European Academy of Management (EURAM) Conference. In 2025 this conference will take place in Florence, Italy (22–25 June 2025). Authors wishing to take this opportunity in 2025 should submit a near finished manuscript to track 10_05, Project Leadership with Purpose (part of Special Interest Group 10, Project Organizing) by 14 January 2025 directly through the EURAM submission system.

A submission to conferences is not a prerequisite for submission to this special issue but is encouraged. Guest editors of this special issue will be present at both EURAM and EGOS¹ in 2025 and 2026 and will seek to provide feedback on the papers.

For further information or additional questions, please contact one of the guest editors of this special issue.

¹ The subtheme of Standard Working Group (SWG) 13 at EGOS 2025 in Athens, Greece (3–5 July 2024) provides another opportunity to discuss potential submissions. The EGOS deadline for submitting short papers is 7 January 2025.

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