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“Abolish, Accept, Apply: Coping With Ignorance in Project Ecologies”

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Appraisal of the Editors of the *Project Management Journal*

The paper is intriguing and insightful in many ways. It goes straight into the debate between Hirshman and Flyvbjerg – one of the most classical debates in modern project studies. However, it suggests a way out of it by focusing on ignorance – in particular three types of ignorance: produced ignorance, known ignorance, unknown ignorance.

The systematic differentiation of distinct modes of coping with ignorance exemplifies specific apprehensions of what we don't know. Ignorance can, then, be framed as a problem, as a fact, or even as an opportunity. Second, the paper identifies three “trajectories of learning” that channel the transfer and filtering of ignorance through the “project ecology”: the project trajectory, the career trajectory, and the field trajectory. The evidence confirms that neither different “notions” (Kreiner, 2020) nor different “types” (Loch et al., 2006; Lenfle, 2016) of projects determine how we cope with ignorance.

Rather, the authors point out, it is the diverse ways of framing ignorance that determine how actors cope with what we do not know. Moreover, the differentiation of three “trajectories of learning” extends the perspective onto coping with ignorance across projects: the project trajectory related to learning in the light of unforeseen events and circumstances; the career trajectory along which particularly implicit and context-dependent knowledge is accumulated; and, finally, the field trajectory involving the examination of the causes of project failures and the explicit articulation of recommendations.

This paper paves the way for a number of novel directions within project research: not only how we could think of the debate between Flyvbjerg and Hirschman, but also how we think about the functioning of project ecologies.