PROPOSING NEW DIRECTIONS ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALISATION – WITH A SOCIAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE

Kun Wang, Dr. Ian Stewart
The University of Manchester, Manchester

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present the potential novel applications of social exchange theory (SET) in theorising project management professionalisation and how this new understanding can guide project management professional associations in engaging their stakeholders and delivering the intentions of the association.

Approach – This paper is literature review based and conceptual. It identifies and applies the tenets of SET, which are resource, power and attachment based on the perception of the beneficial resource. These were used to model professionalisation strategies’ frameworks in a well-researched professionalisation process; American educators. Thereafter it compares current project management associations’ situations with conceptual frameworks developed from the analysis of the established profession.

Findings – The nature of the relationship between project management professional associations and their present and potential members was theorised. This revealed possible explanations for problems of project management professional associations on assisting the field to obtain power. Solutions for professionalising project management suggested by SET include enhancing the value of the resources provided by associations and on understanding the perceptions of value from industry-specific contexts to gain power within certain workplaces and sharing responsibilities for certain organisational goals.

Implications: The paper has presented alternative view on power getting process within professionalisation for project management, also has point out important gaps and question for research into the current status of project management professionalisation.

Keywords: Project management professionalisation, professional association; power; social exchange theory
JEL code: L84, O14, O35

Introduction
Projects are regarded as one of the most appropriate approaches to deliver organisational goals and create value. Increasingly, industries and sectors require project management knowledge and skills to assist in their business success (Konstantinou E., 2015). In response to the needs of employers and stakeholder alike who are seeking guarantees of project management performance and the need for developing project practitioners, it has been seen as desirable that project management develop into a profession (Hodgson D. and Muzio D., 2012). Accordingly, various associations attempt to conduct professionalisation projects within the field of project management such as the Association for Project Management (APM) in the United Kingdom, and Project Management Institute (PMI) in America, which now has successfully expended its global branches (Morris PWG., 2012). These associations attempt to professionalise project management using tactics such as establishing a project management body of knowledge, providing memberships and certifications. Since project management professional associations are the key roles in professionalising project management (Morris PWG. et al., 2006), this article will discuss the insights of professionalisation around the operations of professional associations and associations alike organisations, to propose a new direction on professionalising project management.

For the traditional professions, such as law and medicine, professional associations mainly engage the state stakeholder by demonstrating that their high-level practice delivers public interest, whilst in turn obtaining legitimacy from the state (Suddaby R. & Muzio D., 2015). This public-interest direction was later challenged by the ‘sociological’ research perspective on professions, which claimed that professionalisation can caused by self-interest of the occupational groups. It is argued that one of the main
purposes of professionalising an area is to obtain power that enable professions to take control of their clients and labour markets. Differently to labour unions which find their root in conflicting interests and promote bargaining power of occupations contra their employers, professional associations seek to empower the group by “...dissemination of information, establishment of standards, and improvement of public relations through publications and lobbying” (Hovekamp T., 1997). The power seeking perspective of professionalisation identified the existence of ‘Semi-professions’, which are “manifesting certain characteristics of a profession, however, it falls short of the standing held by such professions as medicine and law” (Horowitz TR., 1985). Semi-professions cannot completely monopolise their area like traditional professions with state legitimacy, due to their roles the workplaces, the most typical of such workplaces is professional service firm.

As predicted by Wilensky (1964), there will be increasing numbers of groups want to be professionalised but the authority of traditional professions is hard to be achieved. However, getting power is a continuing theme in the discussion of professionalising various groups. Project management also work in organisational settings but serves in diversifying workplaces, struggles more to obtain power than the semi-profession (Fincham R., 2012). Furthermore, according to Hodgson, Paton and Muzio (2015), even though the initial discussion of professionalising this area of management dates from 1992, it is still hard to find an effective path to conduct project management professionalisation because it is hard to answer why such managerial occupations “wish to” be professionalised. On the other hand, it is hard for project management to determine the source of power due to project management subject to the strategic requirements of the companies. Therefore, it is hard for project management to find a path to obtain the power as a profession under the existing the perspectives in studying professionalisation.

Very few analyses specifically focus on the factors behind the motivations of conducting project management professionalisation and how professional associations assist the profession to get the power that emerges in the process. This leads the authors to explore the value of the tactics of and the source of power of project management associations, through a lens of social exchange theory (SET). Exchanges exist in both daily life and markets. They include, but are not limited to, economic transactions of tangible goods. According to Turner (1978), social exchanges are distinct from pure monetary exchanges, it can be extended into more complex social settings, they can occur among both individuals and groups (Blau PM., 1964). SET demonstrates that behaviours are motivated by rewards, through the giving and receiving of material or non-material goods (Homans GC., 1958). A similar thought was included by Lawler (2001) when defining social exchanges as aimed at generating benefits, specifically those which cannot be achieved by one side alone, occurring when “each actor has something the other values”. Effective exchanges bring commitment and make actors think the effects are tight with the relationships (Lawler E., 2001). What is more, SET provides alternative views on the power within a relationship. Different with purely focusing on explicit power which is taking control, power in SET an also be implicit, which is an ability of attracting other actors to join the exchange networks and make other actors depending on a resource provider. In exchange relationships, power is not necessarily is ‘winner power over losers’, it provides a convincing approach for analysing power (Baldwin et al., 1978) and it is not necessarily being bargaining power(Cook KS. et al., 2006). Under the view of social exchange, it is believed that the actors that have more valued resources will have more power (Cook KS., Cheshire C. and Gerbasi A., 2006). According to Turner (1978) when a side of actors have more choices, they have more power in decision making during setting the exchange relationship. Specially, according to Cook et al. (2006), power is derived from the resource of connections. Therefore, under the perspective of SET, professionalisation is a process of gaining commitment by providing valuable resources. Meanwhile, the alternative understanding of power proposes that the power of a profession is not necessarily fully taking control of the clients or markets; it could be the motivations for engagement and increase the dependence from others.

Unclear motivations for project management professionalisation according to Hodgson, Paton and Muzio (2015) and potential novel understandings lead the core question of this article: what is the resources motivate actors within project management professionalisation? The two fundamental objectives this article addresses are in what new value can be revealed in the application of this novel theoretical framework to researching the status of project management professionalisation and what new tactics could be suggested for project management professional associations in developing project management as a profession with the new framework. In order to develop a framework of the strategies for project management associations which categorise the resources valued by the participants during the process of professionalisation, an in-depth analysis of American teachers’ professionalisation will be
performed using SET. According to Saks (2016), in America, “teachers and other educational professionals were seen as having power to define the situations for their students and to impose the identity on them”. American teaching effectively built its identification as a semi-profession and has obtained commitment of the professionalisation process, which reflected effective exchange relationship according to SET. Teaching is an appropriate model as it has been investigated for a long time and the research materials are fruitful. Also, it shares similarities with project management, which are: the teachers are subjected to the needs for the local school just as project practitioners have to service their company’s strategic requirements, they both not depend on the professional services firms to professionalise the area; the factors impacting the professional performances are complex.

Research results and discussions

Categorising resources for exchange during professionalisation: the case of American teaching

The actors in exchange relations within teaching professionalisation in America are the state, schools and individual teachers, which establish the exchange links with the professional associations. These actors are engaged into relationships with the profession by the rewards they wish to obtain. Teaching is not a traditional profession that enjoys a high-level of legitimacy rights from the state, however one of the main actors asking for the exchange relationship is the state. Demands of the state led to the development of certification programme by the professional teaching associations and association alike union in America, such as the North Central Association, Cooperative Committee on Science Teaching, the National Education Association (Jonas R., 1943). Similarly, the discussion of teacher performance was mainly related to the state’s considerations for maintaining the quality of public education (Popkewitz T., 1994). Schools also looked for help from professional associations. It is noted that in the environments of teaching practice, schools, were tightly associated with the building of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, (Goldhaber D., Perry D.and Anthony E., 2004), for example, a community to arrange the staff development plans and better evaluate the progress of the schools (Belson SI. and Husted TA., 2015). Similarly, Hutt, Gottlieb and Cohen (2018) identified that, by supporting the standardised assessment developed by American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, schools wanted to increase the accountability of the teachers. Individual teachers, participated in the teaching communities and obtained certification to develop their skills as well as assisting their career development (Goldhaber D., Perry D.and Anthony E., 2004), hence teachers were also involved in the exchange relationships with the professional associations. Certified teachers or teachers with memberships of the professional associations, representing the profession, exchange with the state and schools as the ‘ecology of the profession’, individual teachers, by obtaining resources such as certification, training and educations to improving their performance, were seeking for improve their “substantial workplace authority, relatively high compensation, and high prestige” (Ingersoll RM. and Perda D., 2008). According to SET, obtaining benefits is the key motivation to building and maintaining an exchange relationship. From the examination of the categories in the case of American teaching professionalisation, the key intended rewards and the exchange relationships state and schools can be identified.

It can be seen that the state and the schools attracted by the similar perceptions on the value of professionalisation of teaching, which are the tactics of professional associations can create higher-level educational performance of the individual teacher. The value of the education, training and certification tactics of the national professional associations were assessed by whether they directly impacted the grades of the students (see: Goldhaber and Brewer (2000); Belson & Husted (2015); Kusumawardhani (2017)). By using cases of music teacher certifications from National board, Standerfer (2007) observed that in getting certifications, the teachers can effective reflect the assessment content in their practice and interaction with other colleagues, and finally further benefit in-classroom performance (Sato M., Wei RN. & Darling-Hammond L., 2008). Likewise, Cheng, Hsu and Chiu (2012) that when compared to non-certified teachers, the certificated teachers show a positive judgement in their teaching performance due to the assistances of national board. In a different view, Belson and Husted (2015) used students’ performance to explore the certificated teachers’ achievements, and found a the scores of students are improved by certified teachers. Competences such as creativity, flexibility (Sachs J., 2010), and discretionary judgement (Hargreaves A. & Fullan M., 2012), were also examined by the scholars. Specially, apart from valuing the high-level performance, the schools also sought to obtain better accountability of teachers (Solbrekke TD. and Sugrue C., 2014) and standardised procedures for teaching practice (Bourke T., Ryan M. and Lloyd M., 2016). Thereafter, it can be concluded that what state and
schools were looking for was direct and indirect improvements on the performance of the teacher while the school may have more interest in standardising procedures of governance.

These positive relations show that the programmes of professionalising teaching are able to deliver the value expected by the school and the state. Mok (2010) noticed that teaching can be considered as a semi-profession which is well-developed. According to Horoi and Bhai (2017), schools depend on the effective evaluations of teachers to ensure the quality of teachers’ performance, the importance of the certifications was increasing in the relationship. This indicates professional operations are getting the power under the view of SET, which is getting the reliance from other actors. In the meantime, the initial intention of National commission to develop certifications project is to set the tight connections between the standards and performance which shows the high commitment on developing professionalisation project of teaching (McConney A., Schalock M. and Schalock M., 1998). Under the view of SET, it asserts that the effective relationships are based on the perception on effects, hence this became strong power basis for the profession with such kind of standard based resources in the exchanges during professionalisation process. Finally, the power emerging process during the exchange relationships between the profession and the ‘ecology of the profession’ where existing multiple actors, within professionalising teaching in America can be concluded as the following figure:

Fig. 1. SET framework in teaching professionalisation

Discussion: similarities and differences in professionalising project management

According to SET, project management associations need to provide the valuable resources to engage the participants into the relationships and to obtain the power within exchange relationships. Similar resources are provided by associations within the area of project management. The Association for Project Management (APM) in the United Kingdom, state that one of the goals of membership is to ‘enhances your status with colleagues and employers alike and help you stay ahead of the competition’ (APM, 2018). PMI stating ‘Making project management indispensable for business results’ (Maritato M., 2012).

It is found that in the field of project management, provided resources cannot guarantee the claims from the beginning of the exchange. Certification was a key resource in the status improvement of US teaching and in strengthening the role of firstly the unions and later the professional associations in the area. However, in a survey of IT project managers and the outcome of their projects, Joseph and Marnewick (2017) indicated when a project manager was in possession of professional certification of
PMI, there was no associated improvement in successful project outcomes in terms of time, cost and quality. Likewise, Catania, Armstrong and Tucker (2013) found that the certifications have not made the activities of project managers in project scope management, project time management and project cost management more effective. In addition, Tucker (2013) argues that the formal training and certification cannot lead to better conduct, due to the changing environments that application of knowledge and skills in project management face. Apart from discussing the delivery of projects, it was also expected that project management certification was able to add competencies (Hodgson D., Paton S. and Muzio D., 2015).

Morris et al. (2006) questioned whether these soft skills and situated knowledge could be effectively standardised and be taught. Although Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas (2017) concluded from surveys conducted among project managers that motivations behind individuals getting project management certification are related to a desire for improvement to capabilities, when comparing certification with soft skills such as leadership, communication skills, writing, and verbal reporting abilities, which Stevenson and Starkweather (2010) identified as the hiring criteria for employers, having certifications is not necessarily sufficient without other, more direct competencies asked by employers such as communication in multiple levels and attitude. Finally the proposed project management standards of the project management associations do not correlate with performance (Crawford LH., 2005). Therefore, Zwerman et al. (2004) further pointed out it is hard recognise project management as a profession despite having traits of the ‘trait theory’ of professions.

As the positive effects were not associated to the resource, it is hard for project management professional associations to make the exchanges effective. The failure to guarantee or deliver better practice by the value proposed by the associations, makes professional associations undermines the value of this resource in the exchange, hence power cannot be obtained from the exchange process. Therefore, Fincham (2012) suggested project management as a quasi-profession as it is with attempts on professionalisation but cannot follow a clear path. It can be briefly concluded that, in terms of certification and training, project management professionalisation cannot guarantee positive impact on practice. In terms of the membership and network opportunities, there is less evidence of the valuable resources from the profession in the area of project management professionalisation research.

The following table presents categories of exchange extracted from the case of US teaching professionalisation and a comparison of the current value exchanges in PM professionalisation as identified by authors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources of Social Exchange in Professionalisation offered by associations</th>
<th>Identified value in professionalisation of US teaching</th>
<th>Basis for power according to SET</th>
<th>Matching evidence from project management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional education/training</td>
<td>Positive influence on students’ academic achievement (Goldhaber D and Brewer D., 2000) Moral conducts and adaptability (Hargreaves M. and Fullan A., 2012)</td>
<td>Perception of value; Connection to positive effects</td>
<td>No influence on project outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accredited education</td>
<td>Standardised procedure Accountability (Belson S. and Husted TA., 2015)</td>
<td>Connection to positive effects</td>
<td>Missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional certification</td>
<td>Positive influence on students’ academic achievement (Kusumawardhani I., 2017)</td>
<td>Perception of value; Connection to positive effects</td>
<td>No influence on project outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Network opportunities from professional communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community of practice</th>
<th>Shared experiences</th>
<th>Perception of value</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Better means diagnosis on education practice

Portfolios of work experience are used at the highest level of APM/PMI certification


Perception of value; Connection to positive effects

Source: Authors’ construction

According to SET, the alternative choices owned by another side also can negatively influence the power emerging in exchange relationships. The authors argue that, in the field of project management, the participants of the professionalisation are facing various alternative choices rather than engaging in the exchanges in professionalising the area of project management, which is rarely observed in the traditional professions and well-developed semi-professions. These alternatives weaken the power of project management professional associations. There is a widely accepted argument that when compared to a systematic body of knowledge, the soft skills and the lessons learned from experience are more essential in developing a successful project manager (Pant I. and Baroudi B., 2008). Therefore, rather than choosing to follow the hard skills recorded in the body of knowledge published by professional associations, learning and applying experience may be preferred in managing projects. In addition, project management is customer-oriented, which means that the knowledge of project management is somehow localised rather than generalised. As it was stated by Hodgson and Paton (2016), there are many project managers that will also rely upon company and industry dominated knowledge as well as a formal and generalised one. The issues of localisation also bring alternative choices on engaging exchanges with professional associations. For example, during interviewing project managers, Hodgson and Paton (2016) found that the strong local-orientation of project management leads to strong in-company communities, which become a strong ‘competitor’ of the communities built by project management professional associations. The internal training run by large organisations themselves also become an alternative when project management practitioners are seeking beneficial exchanges. What is more, project managers are usually being temporarily transferred into a project, which may weaken the awareness on the importance of managing projects This will lead to the feelings that the resources provided by project management associations are less valuable. Also, project management nowadays is chosen as alternative career choice by those who previously worked in technical positions (Konstantinou E., 2015). Under this situation, the former work and education background competes with the project management communities in building exchange relationships.

Conclusion and recommendations

Professionalising project management is expected to response the expected value of various participants, yet there is no clear trajectory for project management to follow. Under previously power gaining perspective, the research of professionalisation strategies is usually limited to rhetorical tactics within the groups, such as identity of being a member (Leigh J., 2013). However, it is argued that the identification of professions are emerged from discourses rather than established upon a real foundation. Furthermore, to focus more on the process of becoming professional in interacting with multiple actors, leads to the discussions on how project management professional association effectively understand the motivations of professionalisation and better engage the participants in the ecology of profession. Since effectively building relations using identified organisational needs is essential for project management today, this requires researchers and professional associations to rethink the current project management professionalisation status and what indeed the certification and other professional programmes are delivering.

It is argued that project management is hard to be fully professionalised like law, medicine, engineering and accounting, hence the power owned by project management is hard to reach the widely
discussed power in the researches of profession, which is taking full control over the clients and labour market. SET is a theory which was applied in various disciplines, to identify the value for motivating establishing the relationships. Also, power can be analysed under new perspectives such as the ability of engagement and based on value, which is different with the power in the researches of profession. Therefore, the authors believed that the application of SET can provide fruitful distinctions. By applying SET in American teaching professionalisation, the resources provided by professions which are valued by another side in the exchange relationships is mainly concreted on the outcome of professional practice. Teaching as a profession in America is able to guarantee the performance and contribute to the competences of teachers hence indirectly improves the practice by a set of strategies of professional associations. While in terms of project management, it was concluded that in term of delivering better practice, project management professional associations still not able to provide more evidence on its effectiveness on guaranteeing better projects’ outcome, as well as not being able to contribute on competences of project practitioners.

Since providing the resource which is valued by other actors is essential in building and developing the relationships and gain the power, it is essential for project management association to rethink the strategies to deliver better practice. Difficulties arise, however, with standardised systems. Currently, project management associations seek to certify project practitioners more effectively by validating their knowledge, competence factors and experience. Nevertheless, in a survey of IT project managers, Joseph and Marnewick (2017) indicated even when project managers were in possession of professional certification, there was no improvements on project success in terms of time, cost and quality, suggesting that associations claims for the value of their certifications are possibly empty, with no evidence that a certified project manager is further capable of managing projects successfully. In the meantime, it is asserted in terms of training and education, the competences of being a good project manager, such as leadership and effective communication skills, should be developed from these processes.

As the knowledge is the basis for the certification and building the occupation, the knowledge need to be more tightly affect on expected, which is delivering better practice. To make this resource more valuable, it is suggested by Konstantinou (2015) to better involve the project management knowledge which is highly oriented by application, engaging practitioners when developing body of knowledge could be a help approaches. Another main reason for the current phenomenon in project management professionalisation is the nature of project management, which is highly dependent on specific companies, and the desirability of the career path and identity of the project manager is still not the first choice in many industries. This leads to difficulty providing distinguishing resources in order to compete with other choices. The authors suggest that project management associations should further narrow their service according to the preference of different industries or types of employers, which is to understand different perceptions of value in exchange. Given that different skills have different application approaches in the various type of project (Joseph N. & Marnewick C., 2017), there can be different level of branches of the standards for the applications in governance and operations. In addition, the strategies also need to be adjusted according to the different conducts. Especially after identifying that the project management is usually chosen as secondary position in organisations, the value of certification can be better marketed if demonstrating the function of assisting the role transformation from technical roles to management positions.

In terms of researching project management professionalisation, there is greater recognition of the interactions between professions and their locations, leading to the current concern with how to better establish relationships with the external stakeholders of professionalisation process. Furthermore, there are several gaps in the research which can be identified from the table, such as there are missing evidences on examine the value of memberships and networks in professional communities within the field of project management. Also, as current debates are focusing on the knowledge and certifications, the further questions raised: how can such associations with no currently provable impact on certificated project managers’ performance wield power?
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their money’s worth? Information Technology and Management.

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