



EDITORIAL: Special Issue Appreciating the Contribution of Professor Peter W.G. Morris, Ph.D

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Guest Editors

This special issue of the *Engineering Project Organization Journal* has been the result of a community's respect, admiration, appreciation, and fondness that is felt for a single person – Peter W.G. Morris. Most of us are aware that Professor Morris tragically passed away late in 2021, after a long battle with illness. Whilst there are many deeply impressive individuals who have made significant contributions to the progression of the practice and understanding of projects and their management, very few managed to make a substantial and lasting mark across practice, academic theory and scholarship, and the professional discipline. Professor Peter Morris was such a person, and this special issue is one way that a selection of his colleagues, peers and friends can register the imprint he and his work has made.

The idea for this special issue came from Professor Emeritus Ray Levitt, himself a very highly regarded scholar and a longstanding friend and colleague of Peter. Ray proposed this idea to those who have a hand in the running of the *Engineering and Project Organization Journal* and it was immediately and unanimously supported. The editorial responsibility was established, a team formed, and a plan put

in place. This was all happening at a time when it was clear that Peter's health was becoming more of a concern. We lost Peter at a time when the world was experiencing a pandemic that affected us all. The consequences of that led to disruption to many plans and the editorial team are immensely grateful to those who have managed their time and other commitments to consider and write the papers that comprise this special issue.

Recognising that others had already marked Peter's contribution over his career with awards, events and formal festschrift publications (c.f., Pinto and Winch, 2016), this special issue wanted to follow an approach that recognized Peter's unique style and method. From the outset, the strategy was to pursue two sources of contribution. First, a selection of those who knew Peter, had worked with Peter or who had been influenced directly by Peter were approached to invite them to write essays about whatever aspect of Peter and his work had inspired them or meant the most to them. It is a measure of the regard with which Peter was held in that the response was overwhelmingly positive. The second, was a call for original research that was inspired by Peter's work. The editorial team faced a tough challenge in this selection

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exercise as Peter had worked with many and his work was recognized by many, many more. The one original research paper that that included in this special issue seeks to extend the *Management of Projects* that Peter developed by drawing on systems thinking, an area that Peter Morris had considered and commented on.

The result, this special issue, is to be considered as an illustration of the contribution Peter Morris and his work has made to some but by no means all of those who knew, worked or were inspired by Peter and his work. Each one of the essays that are included here focus on different aspects or facets of Peter's work. Some are more personal, some are more subject focussed, but all share an acknowledgement to the work of, and contribution made by, Peter Morris.

We are delighted that Professor Ray Levitt has contributed to the Special Issue as Ray and Peter were longstanding peers, friends, and both were key players in the Engineering Project Organization Society. Both have made major and indelible marks on project management, and both have influenced many other academics, students, and project management professionals. And as a suitable capstone to this special issue, we invited Professor Donald Lessard to look over the essays and papers that it comprises to give a final reflection on what Peter has contributed to this field of project-based study. We asked Don to provide this reflective piece as Peter and Don were both significant contributors to the Engineering and Project Organization Conference where they had many formal and informal discussions and, as you will see from many of the essays contained in this special issue, it is clear that Peter held the seminal work

of Miller and Lessard (Miller and Lessard, 2001) in the highest regard.

Peter was aware that this Special Issue was in the making and, as ever, was both professionally curious as to what it would result in and somewhat bemused at all the fuss that was being created. Sadly, his health challenges were growing and despite his astonishingly determined and positive attitude, he is no longer amongst us to see the fruit of much labour make it into the public forum. This sadness noted, those who knew Peter would attest that he would be clearly advising us that what matters is the difference we seek to make and to look to the future and build off the knowledge that the past can offer us. This was an area that Peter became extremely well known for through his writing. From the dawn of what we now recognise as the modern era of project management, through to the clear and present global challenge that we all face through climate change, Peter time and again was able to illustrate that we, as a practice-based community, have faced challenges that we can and should learn from. One of his frustrations was why, given this wealth of existing knowledge and hard-won experience, we were not able to learn and improve more quickly, especially as, where we did seek to earnestly apply learning, the results were positive. This variation in performance, across many project-related parameters, is to many, a reason for remaining continually fascinated with this world of projects. The sheer variety of project contexts, forms and issues provides project scholars, project practitioners and project-related policymakers with much to test and challenge them – and all the indicators suggest that this set of challenges is likely



to increase and not diminish as we head into our near and longer-term future.

The focus on the future – and the concern for all that the term ‘climate change’ encapsulates was Peter’s last principal career focus (Morris, 2017). From both this work and many other contributions it is increasingly clear at the scale and scope of what we need to do and the timescale we will need to deliver within. This can be seen as a latent global portfolio and in project and program management terms, the challenge is daunting. But there is clear evidence that we, as a species, can deliver. Although Peter wasn’t able to write about it, conversations with him during the global health crisis recognized that the containment and resolution of Covid 19 pandemic required project and program collaboration and cooperation on a global basis. The results in terms of both vaccine development/roll-out, and the variety of mitigation and control mechanisms used to

contain this virus prove what we can do – when we must. This knowledge, this learning and this ability would be what Peter would remind us of when we face such major challenges in the future.

REFERENCES

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