



**Call for submissions for a special issue of *Engineering Project Organization Journal***

## **Internationalization from the inside out: Organizing from emerging countries**

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### **Positioning**

International projects are those where (some of) the resources required to define, design, and execute are drawn from more than one country, requiring that they cross institutional, organizational, and cultural boundaries. Traditionally, international projects in emerging economies have drawn on engineering, finance, and project organization resources from advanced countries -- multinational project owners, financial institutions, and/or design and consulting firms and contractors acting as the bridge between the “home” and the “host” country.

We observe recent trends at the project organization and project vehicle level such that internationalization involving emerging economies now takes on two additional forms:

- a) “pull” internationalization where emerging economy-based firms/project organizations draw on international resources to be applied domestically, and
- b) “push” internationalization whereby internationally originating resources are combined with locally-developed ones and these are collectively projected by emerging markets-based firms/organizations across borders to third countries, typically but not always other emerging economies.

In this call for papers in *Engineering Project Organization Journal* we aim to bring attention to this unresearched inside-out view of internationalization, as seen from the perspective of project organizations based in emerging economies. In this process, firms from countries that were previously host to foreign investments and foreign-driven projects draw on capabilities and collaborations from outside in order to deepen their abilities in their home markets (Luo & Tung, 2007; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016). They can even expand into third countries, perhaps including the initial sources of foreign invention, in what can be considered as reverse internationalization (Ramamurti & Singh, 2009).

The inside out internationalization process can take several forms. “Pull” internationalization occurs when locally-based project organizations in hitherto dependent locations pull in or internalize structures, knowledge, and resources from the outside to advance their home capabilities (Cheng et al, 2014). *Outside* in this case refers to those advanced economies and environments that have historically sponsored projects elsewhere or exported capabilities.

“Push” internationalization is then the outward projection by emerging market-based firms, where the origin of capabilities is no longer presumed to be the advanced world. In this second form, the context of locally-relevant institutions and evolving governance becomes key (Delhi & Mahalingam, 2020). The *owner project capability* framework (Winch & Leiringer, 2016) is one such potentially productive lens which enables a project-centric view while remaining flexible enough to consider the entire value of chain of capabilities, agnostic of project location.

Just as the origin can no longer be presumed, there may also be iteration, loops, and waves of the flow of capabilities, such that a longitudinal perspective is likely to yield insights in relation to location and direction in the trajectory of internationalization (Lessard, 2014). These cases may be insightful for lessons on why otherwise productive transfer mechanisms for capabilities were avoided or missed.

## **Call for Papers**

### *Topics:*

We invite contributions that cover not only “pull” or only “push” internationalization, but also cases where both forms of inside-out internationalization of project organizations and capabilities by emerging markets-based project organizations take place iteratively or simultaneously, including failures or foregone opportunities for inside-out internationalization. We are agnostic as to the value of any individual form, and more interested in highlighting the diversity of phenomena, strategic moves of actors, transfer processes for capabilities, and resulting outcomes and impacts across the forms.

### *Structure:*

The Special Issue will be structured to include at least four major articles reflecting original research in the style of the full *Engineering Project Organization Journal* article, and up to six provocative perspective pieces, to spur thought in the style of a “forum” for discourse. The guest editors will frame the Special Issue with a lead piece that coheres the insights from final contributions.

### *Levels of Analysis:*

We welcome submissions that address inside-out internationalization topics at one or more levels of analysis:

- the overall “project system” – e.g. internationalization trajectory of a substantial population of projects
- regulatory and institutional contexts and their catalyzing or impeding role
- a project or set of projects that provide a lens into the project organization approach of sponsors and service providers
- Methods, tools, or specialized expertise that are productive contributors in internationalization, ex. digital tools, data collection techniques, etc.

### *Domains:*

The projects in question may be in civil infrastructure, extractive industries, manufacturing, supply chains, or large scale industrial, commercial, or residential developments.

*Partial List of Research Questions:*

- What is the role of digital technologies / transformation in “pull” and “push” internationalization by emerging markets-based firms/project organizations?
- How has the Belt & Road initiative altered the locus of capabilities and directional flow in engineering project organization? Is there evidence of cyclicity over time in this evolution?
- How do pervasive disruptions such as COVID-19 lead to innovation in transient or stable organizational forms?
- Do emerging markets firms necessarily move through ‘pull’ internationalization before projecting their capabilities to third countries?
- Are there particular project domains, e.g. civil infrastructure, energy, transport, that are more or less amenable to movements into quadrants II and III?
- Which elements of overall project organization/ecosystems are most likely to lead in the internationalization process?

**Submission Process**

Major articles are expected to:

- Clearly introduce concepts and define phenomena
- Position and ground the work in the relevant literature, and possibly highlight a convergence of fields
- Frame key research questions or hypotheses regarding the phenomenon
- Include primary qualitative and / or quantitative data and observations
- Document methodological analysis techniques employed
- Discuss results and implications, ideally to compare or otherwise link the inside-out internationalization with the wider literature in engineering project organization
- Suggest how future work in this area can address obstacles and limitations encountered

Shorter thought-provoking perspectives pieces may be more descriptive or experience based, e.g. chronicling the trajectory of organizational and capabilities development at the firm or ecosystem level, but at minimum must also:

- Lead with the provocative question
- Clearly introduce concepts and define phenomena
- Position and ground the work in the relevant literature, and possibly highlight a convergence of fields
- Develop a narrative of the specific internationalization experience and implications
- Identify potential areas of original research, on themes which the particular perspective exemplifies

Interested contributors are invited to first submit an Extended Abstract for either a major article or short perspective. It must include (up to 750 words total):

- Research Problem Statement or Perspective Purpose
- Brief Research Methodology, or Basis for Perspective
- Synthesis Approach
- Key Findings
- Implications

The Special Issue process will adhere to the following timeline:

- April 1 – Extended Abstracts due
- April 15 – Shortlisted authors notified
- July 1 – Full draft manuscript submission
- August 1 – Authors receive reviews
- October 1 – Revised drafts due
- November 1 – Second / final reviews returned
- December 1 – Final manuscript submission

The Issue editors will work with interested contributors to work through the submission process. Questions may be directed to Donald Lessard ([dlessard@mit.edu](mailto:dlessard@mit.edu)) and Vivek Sakhrani ([sakhrani@alum.mit.edu](mailto:sakhrani@alum.mit.edu)).

## References:

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