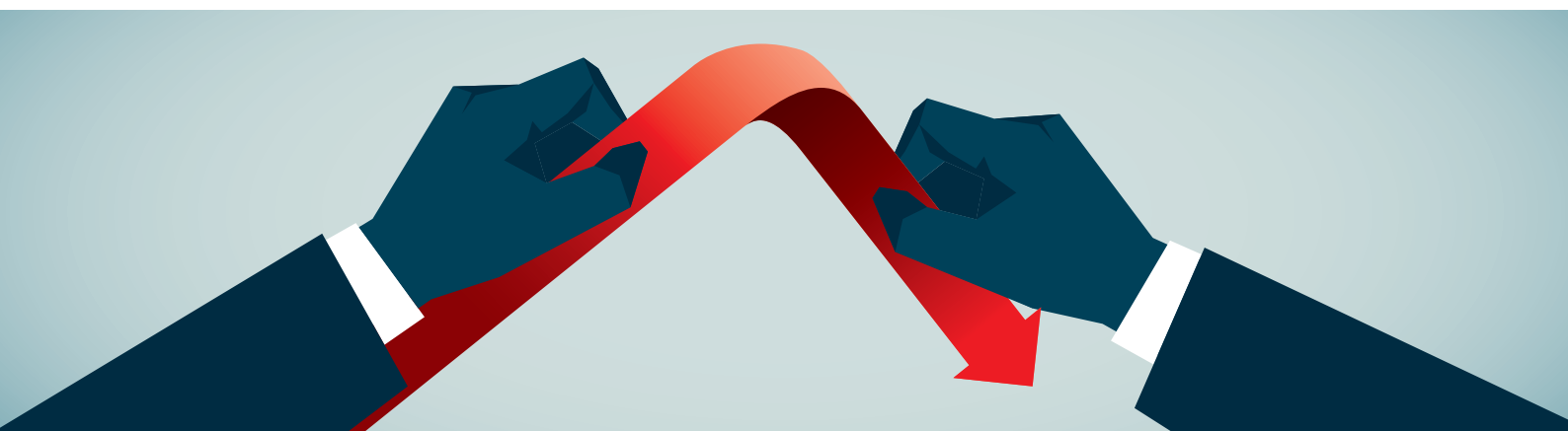


Explicating the dynamics of project capabilities



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KEYWORDS

- Dynamic and operational capabilities
- Ambidexterity

Article Highlight:

Building on the authors' previous work on project capabilities over a decade ago, the article extends and reconceptualises the notion of project capabilities to apply to a broader variety of domains.

By looking at recent literature on the topic, the authors widen their original definition of project capabilities to include recent developments in research on how organisations adapt to uncertain and rapidly changing conditions.

What does the paper cover?

The paper aims to guide future research on project capabilities by providing three contributions to the topic:

1. Both innovative and routine project capabilities should be developed to deal with the stable and rapidly changing conditions often facing an organisation.

2. The difference between project capabilities at an operational level and dynamic capabilities at a strategic level is distinguished, to show that dynamic capabilities determine when and how a firm should adapt their project capabilities.
3. The relationship between dynamic and project capabilities is reciprocal, meaning that the behaviour of project capabilities can predict the future behaviour of dynamic capabilities.

The paper also provides:

- background and theoretical perspectives on project capabilities.
- a review of the main contributions to dynamic capabilities research since the authors' original work on project capabilities.
- suggestions for the concept of project capabilities to be reformulated to include recent advances in research on organisational ambidexterity.
- several directions for future research on project capabilities.

Methodology:

The article proceeds by reviewing the concept of project capabilities from its origins in light of new research. The authors begin with its creation in the late 1990s, when it was used to understand how project-based firms moved into providing bundles of products and services as integrated solutions for their customers.

The authors reviewed the literature on project capabilities since the 1990s, including their own contributions to the field in the early 2000s. They go on to address recent developments in dynamic capabilities and how these can broaden the current definition of project capabilities.

This leads to speculation on a possible new conceptualisation of project capabilities that would show how they can support both routine and innovative projects in an organisation. Links between project and dynamic capabilities are explicated, before directions for new research are delineated.

Research findings:

The authors' review of the literature allows them to reconceptualise project capabilities in a way that opens up several potential avenues for future research. They find that:

- innovative and routine project capabilities can be defined to address exploratory and exploitative conditions within projects;
- a clear distinction can be made between project and dynamic capabilities;
- a model can be developed showing the reciprocal, fluid links between project and dynamic capabilities.

Potential directions for future research include questions such as:

- How are dynamic and project capabilities assembled to manage large, one-off, complex projects?
- How do organisations develop dynamic capabilities to balance routine and innovative tasks in complex projects?
- How do project capabilities evolve and ultimately decline during their life cycle from birth to maturity?

Conclusions:

The authors provide a new conceptualisation of project capabilities that takes new empirical research into account, and point to varied opportunities for future research on the topic.

The paper concludes by acknowledging that organisational skills, experience and knowledge, at both operational and strategic levels, are crucial to projects' successful setup and execution.

Significance of the research:

The paper provides an updated overview of project capabilities since the authors' research over a decade prior. It reconceptualises project capabilities to take into account recent advances in the subject, and provides a foundation from which to build further research on this topic.

Complete article

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Glossary:

- Dynamic capabilities:** An organisation's ability to build and reconfigure internal and external competences to address change.
- Operational capabilities:** Refers to the current or ordinary operations of an organisation.
- Ambidexterity:** the different modes of action that a project leader uses throughout the course of a project.
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