Governance representations in temporary organization: a case of governance sensemaking

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Abstract

In current literature, the formal project governance often stops at the steering committee, which is usually directed by the project sponsor. Normally, Top managers act as project sponsors and play an active role until the project is approved and launched. Afterwards, the project usually gets delegated for its execution. This delegation enables middle-managers and supervisors to participate in the operationalization and the monitoring of the project strategy coming from top managers. As such, they are likely to take part in the project governance, which needs operationalization as much as the project does. Thus, they are included in the project governance zone, which reports to the steering committee.

In this study, we are interested by this governance zone, and our focus is on a specific liaison device in this zone: the Project Coordination Committee, which has rarely been studied. We also explore how this governance zone gets represented by the project's participants. Our results show a surprising diversity in their representations. This allows us to identify a number of conclusions that go beyond the governance forms issues and relates to the complexity and influence of this governance zone on the disruptions between permanent and temporary governance structures within a large organization.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CENTERIS 2014.

Keywords: Project Governance; Temporary Organization; Project Coordination Committee; Sensemaking;

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1. Introduction

Projects do not replace existing organizational forms; they overlap with them in permanent organizations (e.g.: parent organizations), thus bringing additional complexity to the way we organize [3]. In this paper, we explore this complexity throughout diving deeper into the project governance structure. However, the formal project governance structure often stops at the steering committee level [1], in the literature. This committee can include such a great diversity of members (e.g.: top managers, middle managers, expert domain managers, etc…) and levels, that it could be argued that this notion needs to be developed further.

In fact, following project approval and launch, Top managers usually tend to delegate project execution [1]. Throughout this delegation, middle-managers and supervisors do participate in the operationalization of the project strategy coming from the Top managers, and to its monitoring. In this study, we want to explore how the project governance gets operationalized during the project execution, especially by focusing on the project governance zone located below the steering committee. Within this zone, we are looking at a specific liaison device [2] which is called the Project Coordination Committee (PCC). It is a governance mechanism at the lower management level where the project coordination takes place between the various disciplines. This mechanism should be significant, because the coordination of diverse expertises is considered to be an important predictor of the effectiveness of the project [4]. This committee can have in practice varied labels and can be more or less formalized. When formalized, it usually reports to the project steering committee and is thus part of the project governance structure. Its main goal is to participate in the management of the project’s multidisciplinary coordination throughout its execution. This coordination generally involves units of the permanent organization.

Our case study took place in a large IT business project, which was planned to bring business process changes. Throughout our study, we have explored in more depth the governance of the multidisciplinary coordination performed within the PCC. Through this committee, we focused on those who are responsible for ensuring this coordination. Since decision-making tends to be located where information resides [2], this adds to the interest of studying this governance mechanism, too often neglected in the current literature. Originally, our study was focused on collaboration within the PCC. However, as we shall further see, instead of observing collaboration, we discovered a case of non-collaboration within the project and in relation to its parent organization. This dysfunction required us to further our study and explore in more depth the project governance structure. Fortuitously, the outbreak of a crisis happened during our field period1, which gave us the opportunity to observe the governance challenges of this project, especially those associated with this type of committee. Interestingly, it is during crises that we can observe the basic structure of organizations [5]. This allowed to go beyond the issues of governance forms as we shall see in our concluding remarks. Before, however, we start by presenting our theoretical background, introducing the notions of governance and project, including the relationship between project governance and the notion of coordination; then, the « Sensemaking » process and the project’s trajectory will be evoked. They will be followed by the presentation of the study and its methodology. Thereafter, we will conclude with an overview of our findings and their implications for future research.

2. Governance and projects

In both corporate and project governance literature, governance is conceptualized as an oversight function. The corporate governance is defined as the system relating to the management and control of companies. Its structure specifies the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different actors and dictates the rules and procedures governing the process of decision making [6]. Based on the project management literature, the general purpose of project governance is to ensure that the project will meet the goals and expectations defined by various stakeholders [7]. This goal should be achieved by consistent and coherent implementation of governance roles and responsibilities by different management levels within the organization [1].

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1 The methodology communication From a methodology exercise to the discovery of a crisis: Serendipity in field research has been presented at EURAM 2014, Valencia, Spain. Additionally, a paper on the development and outbreak of the project crisis is being written.
A project is conceptualized as a temporary organization [8] due to its planned start and end dates [1]. It can exist within a permanent organization or standalone. In this paper, we are focusing on projects within permanent organizations. Projects are often used to operationalize the strategy coming from higher management. This generally leads Top managers to consider project management as a tactical level concept [9]. In fact, Top managers have little time for projects, and in practice, they focus only on the most important ones, thus they tend to delegate most projects monitoring to intermediaries [1]. Top managers normally act as project sponsors and play an active role until they get the project approved and launched. Afterwards, the project usually gets delegated.

Throughout the project’s duration, the project sponsor is considered to be the primary point of authority, followed by the project steering committee of which he is a member [1]. This committee is considered as the implementation mechanism of project governance and the main governance link between the temporary and permanent organizations. Normally, this committee is composed of decision-makers who have managerial authority and other participants, such as domain expert managers, can be added as needed for part of the project [1]. This committee seems to be much inclusive because of its members’ potential diversity.

Meanwhile, there would be a move towards more informal collaborative governance at the project level, which depend on the cooperation of the actors involved [13]. Thus, projects could be also considered as coordination mechanisms [10], where governance is used as a horizontal approach to govern and organize [13]. In fact, projects could rather be considered as temporary organizing processes than delineated organizations; actually, they could be composed of streams of activities, which are more interrelated than what theories indicate [10]. These considerations suggest that governance tends to be horizontal and informal, in order to enable collaboration, cooperation and therefore, coordination. Mintzberg [2] suggests that coordination mechanisms are “the most basic elements of structure” in organizations and include both formal and emergent elements. According to Okhussy and Becky [11], there are three integrating conditions for coordination: accountability, predictability, and common understanding. These conditions are the means by which people collectively accomplish their interdependent tasks in the workplace. However, there is a lack of explanation regarding the means by which coordination happens: a focus on the “how” behind the mechanisms.

Projects usually require multidisciplinary coordination, and the coordination of diverse expertises is considered to be an important predictor of the effectiveness of the project [4]. Coordination is enabled when the interdependence among parties, their responsibilities and tasks’ progress are all made visible through accountability [11]; the understanding of the relationship between roles in organizations, or the role structure, helps people acquire a general sense of who does what in the work process [12]. Thus, in order to observe how accountability is enabled at the coordination level, we want to explore the project governance structure beyond the steering committee.

The PCC is a formal governance mechanism used for the coordination of various multidisciplinary groups assigned to projects and to foster collaboration. While this is an "accepted truth," it is difficult to find systematic studies on the subject. This type of committee regroups people who are responsible, formally or not, for the project delivery: being responsible in this context means that they participate directly or via the management of their units in the project’s execution. Therefore, this type of committee represents a governance mechanism located at a lower management level where the project coordination takes place between diverse groups. Since decision-making tend to be located where the information resides [2], this is adding to the interest of studying this type of liaison device.

Throughout the study of the PCC, we are aiming to further our understanding of the project governance structure, especially at the intersection and the juxtaposition of the structures of the parent organization with those of the temporary organization that is the project [13]. By doing so, we also want to contribute to fulfill the request of Jones and Lichtenstein [14], about focusing on projects rather than organizations and networks, which are objects of most studies on project-based organizing. This as well allows us to observe how the governance structure is evolving throughout the project’s duration; the project following its own trajectory. This includes observing how the members of the PCC are making sense of this structure, and how the project’s trajectory influences their « Sensemaking ».

3. « Sensemaking » and project trajectory

The basic formulation of « Sensemaking » is: « how can I know what I think until I see what I say? ». It underlines that one must do or say something first and then see what he thinks [15]. Thus, to experience something requires to be able to retrieve from the experienced situation in order to pay attention to it, the process of «
Sensemaking » being retrospective. The « Sensemaking » generates a provisional understanding which is plausible, subject to revision, fast, directed towards the continuation of the activity interrupted, available, an attempt, infused with ignorance, and sufficient for everyday use. According to Weick [15], most of the time, we only have the « Sensemaking ». The « Sensemaking » may thus be considered as an evolutionary process, where retrospective interpretations are built upon interdependent interactions between actors and their environments.

The « Sensemaking » [15] usually involves the participation of multiple stakeholders. In the context of our study, each stakeholder is being likely to perceive the project, its governance and its status at each given time T, according to their own references that are strongly influenced by one's identity, including their association to the permanent and/or the temporary organizations, which are specifically referred to as organizational identities. Thus, a project follows its proper trajectory within its parent organization. It has a mission, which can be understood differently by stakeholders depending on the way they make sense of it. For each stakeholder, at different points in time, the project follows a perceived success or failure path, which correspond to the perceived project trajectory. In parallel, at each specific time T, a formal project status is provided, which is usually influenced by the most powerful stakeholders [16]). Thus, stakeholders are making sense of the project status and trajectory throughout its execution, via the formal status and other perceived clues in their environment; they are making sense of the project, its mission, its trajectory, its governance, etc. Their « Sensemaking » is influenced by their identity, which includes the organizational identities to which they identify, by the context and by their exchanges with others. « Sensemaking » is an important notion in our study, presented below, especially because of the informal and formal composition of the governance zone that we explore through the PCC, and its evolution.

4. The study

Our research approach is a case study with flexible design, which uses narrative strategy, temporal decomposition, and visual mapping. It has three units of analysis: the project, the PCC and the participant’s representation of the project governance structure. Theory-based sampling method was used for the project and the coordination committee. The selection criteria we applied were: an IT business project that included software development, with a formal coordination committee composed of business and technical representatives, and with a steering committee. This type of project usually involves two major types of participants, those responsible for business changes and those in command of technological changes. They must coordinate their activities through various formal and informal governance mechanisms. This coordination involves stakeholders from the permanent and temporary organizations and many disciplines such as project managers, technical leads, domain experts, business analysts, change experts, middle-managers, etc.

Our empirical exploratory study was carried out in 2012, in a private telecommunications company, which is a major player in its sector in Canada. The project TOBO was among the top three highest priority projects. It was executed in matrix mode and involved around 150 people at the time of the study. These people were from three major sectors of the parent organization, one IT and two business sectors (sectors A and B), distributed overall in more than 20 units. The first author was present in the field to observe meetings and conduct interviews during 13 days over a potential of 25 working days. In 2013, additional interviews were conducted in order to gather supplementary data on the project history and its outcome. The research data sources were semi-structured interviews, meetings’ observations, documentation about the project and the organization, logbook as well as notes and memos. The method for these interviews and observations was Typical case sampling. We observed five coordination committee meetings, and interviewed twelve participants who were members of the PCC or in direct relationship. These participants were considered representative of the different sectors and point of views. We also got access to the project records which were quite voluminous since the project had started two years before.

5. Analysis

Our analysis process has been carried out according to five major steps. Some of these steps emerged and were progressively adapted during our field observations, because as soon as we entered the field, we had some surprises with respect to the PCC, which was called the Core Team in this project. In fact, the ambiguous nature of the structure appeared quickly. At first, two types of meetings were identified: one for IT and one for the Business. Then
shortly after, two other types of meetings were also mentioned. These surprises prompted us to try to understand what the “real” day-to-day project structure was. Therefore, our first step became the analysis of the project structure. We also decided to ask interviewees to draw on paper and then comment their representation of the project org chart; the variety of representations obtained confirmed the structure’s ambiguity.

Secondly, we wrote the case history and chronology map. Thirdly, we coded transcripts and relevant documentation. For validity purpose, transcripts were sent to interviewees for feedback. Interpretations made during analysis were validated with a participant informer to prevent potential biases and distortions. Research data showed that there were major conflicts between the temporary and permanent organizations. The governance zone associated with the PCC was an important area of conflicts, triggering non-collaboration. Initially, we had planned to study cross-functional collaboration, but the observed structure made it difficult. The project coordination seemed rather complex in terms of formal communications arenas. Some clarification on the project governance structure was required, especially about the PCC. How was it working and how did it evolve from its initial notion? Consequently, a fourth step was performed in order to analyze the project documentation and triangulate our findings with observation and interview data, which enabled us to identify some unresolved governance issues. Finally, our last step was to analyze the interviewees’ representations of the project org chart. The following sections provide an overview of our findings. We start with the evolution of the project governance structure throughout the project trajectory and then follow with the interviewees’ representation of this structure.

5.1. The project trajectory and the governance structure evolution

Our research data showed that the project has been in trouble almost since its inception; its trajectory becoming progressively problematic. However, it should be noted that initially, this project was considered to be a great unifying project by all involved sectors, even if significant business process changes were envisioned. Our analysis identified uncovered issues in the project governance and scope from the start. These unresolved issues added ambiguity throughout the project execution and appeared to have been the source of many struggles. At first, there were issues about the project scope; each sector, having its own understanding of it. This understanding was also varying by hierarchical level in each sector, and could, moreover, be influenced by some specific agendas. Thus, while Top managers were mainly focused on the strategic dimension of the project, which was about end customers’ services, middle managers were rather aiming to improve their own units’ productivity, and supervisors were about making sure their staff would not suffer from the envisioned process changes. Throughout the project execution, various problems and tensions gradually accumulated. In parallel, there was an increasing need to keep the already ambiguous scope to its minimum for budget purpose. Tensions were especially significant in the governance zone corresponding to the coordination, where governance ambiguities were exacerbating them.

Indeed, the initial project structure, which was publicized in a graphical form to the project’s stakeholders (see fig. 1) was composed of: 1) the Strategic Committee, in command of the project budget and calendar. Its members were principally Top managers; 2) the Steering Committee, in command of the project scope. Its members were mainly middle managers; 3) the Project Manager & Core Team, which represents the PCC referred to in this study; 4) the three functional sectors involved in the project. This structure was inherited from the feasibility study which gave birth to the project TOBO. At that time, more detailed information was only provided for the Strategic Committee and Steering Committee. Then, at the project TOBO start, the Core Team got initially defined. This team, which corresponds to the PCC in our study, was responsible for the follow-up of issues and activities, and also, for the approval of all project deliverables. Even if not explicitly shown on the chart, this team was divided into two project committees: IT and business. The project manager was expected to act as the bridge between these two committees. The Fig. 2 illustrates this implicit project structure, which was roughly described using text only in the initial project documentation. This documentation specifies that for the IT project committee, its members should be IT team managers from the permanent organization; more than fourteen (14) IT team units were part of the project. For the Business project committee, it was specified that its members should be business area’s representatives (e.g.: domain experts); more than five (5) Business team units were participating in the project. However, a few months after the project inception, its members were rather business team managers from the permanent organization.
The implicit project structure (fig. 2) was thus composed of a total of four committees instead of the original three (fig. 1). Additionally, the initial decision to assign domain experts to the Business Project Committee has not been carried out. Nevertheless, during the first months, two domain experts were formally assigned to the project in order to play a role of pilot, each one formally representing its business sector. However, only the pilot who was a manager in the permanent organization was included in the Core Team, specifically in the Business project committee. For the second pilot, its supervisor was assigned to this committee.

Fig. 1 – Publicize Project Structure

Fig. 2 – Implicit Project Structure

The left part of the fig. 3 illustrates the evolution timeline of the formal project governance. It starts with the creation of the initial project org chart, followed by the project start and a formal governance adjustment period, which lasted around six months. During this period, two types of changes were made: 1) Change in approval of project deliverables: the Steering Committee transferred the approval responsibilities of the Core Team to the two pilots; 2) Formalization of the scope change management process: process was to ensure that the project scope
would be kept at a minimum. Within the Core Team, these changes implied that only the project manager was formally accountable for the project success and subject to some formal control mechanism.

![Fig. 3 - Project Governance Evolution](image)

After the adjustment period, the project governance processes remained unchallenged, as illustrated in the center part of the fig. 3, even if two important governance issues never got resolved throughout the project: 1) The deliverables’ approval process required multiple expertises for their understanding and validation, which could not be fulfilled by the pilots. Since they were formally and solely responsible for their full approval, this issue brought them to feel reluctant to approve deliverables that they did not fully understand, especially those which were more technical, as attested by a pilot: «When I read some IT functional document, it’s like reading Chinese. I do not understand. And they stressed the importance for pilots to approve these documents. I had nearly a hundred. I cannot challenge them; it is internal data processing»; 2) The management of the planned changes to be brought by the project was also an important issue. Most changes were targeting current business processes, and each sector could not have full control on the overall business process changes under way for them, because some boundaries were getting redesigned between both business sectors by the project. Business managers, which were part of the Core Team via the Business Project Committee, were formally accountable for theirs unit’s operation, but not anymore for the project deliverables. Additionally, they were increasingly rejecting any real or perceived form of control coming from the temporary organization or other sectors in regards of these changes. However, they had to coordinate these changes together, which was complex because their main priority was their operations.

These two important governance issues, combined with the ambiguous project scope, which had to be increasingly contained in order to respect the budget, progressively exacerbated the tensions, decreasing trust in the project. Thus, as the project unfolded, process changes were gradually becoming imminent and scope issues were increasingly discovered and acknowledged. These issues combined with the intrinsic complexities of the project were increasing tensions and confusions among project stakeholders. It became gradually obvious that the project would not fulfill all expectations. Planned changes were about to impact significantly tasks and data ownership, provoking some responsibilities to switch between both business sectors. As the project’s trajectory became progressively more problematic, some control processes were gradually reinforced, at the requests of the Steering Committee. Their goal was to try to get more information, especially about the management of the business changes, for which members of the Business Project Committee had to participate. In parallel, decisions that were taken by upper managers about resource allocation for the project were not automatically executed down their chain of command, even if they were communicated, as explained by a project manager: «Decisions travel down. I can see it when I meet the "direct report" of a VP. He has been informed. However, execution requires to enter deeper into the subject. It is always much more complex than getting the VP saying: Yes, I take the ball... For their "direct report," my project is among ten or twenty other projects. So, afterwards, I still need to convince him about the high priority of my project in order to get the requested resources assigned to it. ». 
Throughout the project execution, the control of information became increasingly significant as issues were uncovered. Old disputes coming from the permanent organization and its past were brought back into the project; past projects’ failures and past sectors’ battles gradually resurfaced, which brought additional tension and distrust to the project. This situation favored the balkanization of the project structure by creating two additional business project committees associated to two main change issues (business data change and business process management change). This balkanization was not only enforcing boundaries’ protection and information fragmentation between the temporary and the permanent organizations, but also within these organizations. Fig. 4 illustrates the results of this balkanization by presenting the project structure as we observed it during the field period. This figure also shows that resources were directly controlled by their functional manager. The project manager had only some weak matrix reports coming solely from the IT sector. The two pilots had no reporting link to him and were acting as the bridge between their sector and IT. Additionally, the Core Team designation was never used; none of the interviewees mentioned this name, and had no recall when probed for it. However, the Business Project Committee was nicknamed Pilot Committee, which seemed strange to us, since only one of the pilots was part of it. When we challenged participants about this nickname, they acknowledged that it was awkward. They realized that the project structure has not been challenged for a long time, as stated by a director: «Actually, this pilot is not on the committee. It might have been necessary that he’d be included, or should it be? I do not know, because the committee has been set up over a year and a half. And it was decided that it was these people. It was to see where things were going (Silence) (Sigh). However, we call it the Pilot Committee... ». Finally, as stated previously, at the start of the field research period, we discovered that the governance structure of the project differed from what we expected. Our expectations were based on our preliminary discussions with some managers. At that point, each interviewee was asked to draw and then comment on their own representation of the project org chart. This simple exercise provided an astonishing diversity of representations, which gave us some leads to follow about some potential ambiguities in the project structure, roles and responsibilities. This also brought us to analyze what was the evolution (formal and informal) of the project governance structure, which has been presented in this section. What follows are the results of our analysis of these drawings, which we have performed from a « Sensemaking » perspective.

5.2. Participants’ « sensemaking » of the project governance structure

At first, the different variations of these drawings surprised us while confirming our feelings about the structure ambiguity. We were also surprised that nobody had produced a drawing similar to the publicized org chart (fig. 1).
Participants were aiming to represent a chart showing the main units and roles which were part of their project day-to-day. When asked about committees, most interviewees knew about the six committees presented previously and illustrated in the fig. 4. Only the Strategic and Steering committees were usually shown in two distinct and higher hierarchical levels. All remaining org chart components were often shown at the same hierarchical level; they were including the diverse participating units, the project manager and the pilots. Even the supervisors of the project manager and the pilots were often considered to be at the equivalent level. The drawings of the hierarchical order in which committees were represented also brought some surprises. Some interviewees drew the committees in reverse order of hierarchy. When questioned on the perceived influence exercised by the IT and Business project committees, some interviewees argued that the strategic and steering committees were only to approve their proposals. When probed to identify the project sponsors, surprisingly, all participants indicated that it was their own sector’s Top manager, which was the main project sponsor; however, it was clearly stated in project documentation that the Top managers of the two business sectors were both assuming the project sponsorship.

All these interpretations were part of the context within which the « Sensemaking » of the participants was made; it influenced their representation of the project governance structure. Even if these drawings showed diverse variations of the project org chart, they were all representing the coordination level as having a horizontal trend and minimal reporting links, especially to the project manager. Many ambiguities were about the project manager in these drawings. He was symbolizing the temporary organization, the project, and he was deemed responsible for its delivery. However, minimal or no reporting links (formal or matrix) were drawn from project resources to him: some drawings showed some reporting links from the pilots to the project manager, but rarely from the functional team managers (or their resources) to the project manager. Nevertheless, even in these few cases, the links shown were almost horizontal. However, the project was officially sharing resources in matrix mode with the permanent organization, following a mix of low to high matrix, depending on each functional manager’s direct implication in the project. Although, when probed about the coordination of their resources for the project, most managers specified that they were coordinating project activities themselves in their own teams, while the project manager specified that he communicated with most project IT resources, because he could not usually rely on IT managers. For Business Managers, the project manager had no direct access to their resources. Pilots were participating in the project, but they were not reporting to the project manager, considered to be part of IT sector.

For Business participants, their operations were clearly considered as their main priority, and the project was representing a threat for their operation’s stability: « The project will not give us a fun solution that will save us time. It will rather be the opposite. The best we can do is to fight as best as we can in order to get the maximum. The maximum being well below what is needed. » For IT participants, the project was seen as a priority by those who were in the direct chain of command of the senior project director in the permanent organization. However, for the others, the project was seen as consuming critical resources, consequently delaying all other major projects, which was annoying them: «We are told, I do not have resources, so I cannot deliver to you. Everyone is caught on this project... ». They all managed teams in the permanent organization and also participated to and shared their resources with diverse ongoing projects. This sharing is typical of matrix organizations, which are prone to conflicts. Participants were more associating themselves with the permanent organization at the time of the field period. Since the project trajectory was showing important signs of future failure, many were dissociating themselves from the project, which was said to never end: « So this project is like ... (Sigh). It may have a life by itself».

Finally, the remuneration system seemed ill-suited for the temporary organization. No project-specific goal was systematically part of annual appraisals. There were generic goals for projects and when some goals were more precise, they were highly negotiable. Thus, most functional managers giving higher priority to the permanent organization goals, which favored their identification to this organization and their focus on its operations.

6. Discussion

This study shows how ambiguity in the formal project governance structure, especially at the coordination level, can have a harmful influence on the relationship between the temporary and permanent organizations, not to mention the impact on the organizations themselves, especially the project survival. It is also an example of a collective amnesia in the initial project governance structure which has been replaced, by its participants, with their various representations. When confronted with their representation, some answers were surprisingly candid. For example,
Almost since the project inception, the influence of the permanent organization hierarchy was forcing its way into the project governance structure, progressively trying to force the reproduction of its silos via the balkanization of the Core Team. Conflicts’ components from within the permanent organization were enforcing boundaries’ protection and information fragmentation, mainly between the temporary and the permanent organizations, by mimicking the permanent structure. The permanent organization tending to reject any existing or perceived form of control coming from the temporary organization, even regarding business change management. Additionally, each business silo was tending to reject any real or felt control form coming from the other silo also. Two underlying logics were competing for the management of business changes to be brought by the project: the permanent organizational logic, where all business process change must be under the only direct management of its managers. The temporary organizational logic, where all process change coming from the project must be under its control, although being done in partnership with the permanent organization representatives.

The formal governance was symbolized by the steering and strategic committees, and remained unchanged throughout the project. Project participants were all knowledgeable about it. These two committees are corresponding to Muller’s [1] definition of the steering committee notion which is said to be the principal entity of project governance. In this study, the project governance evolution tends to acknowledge that formal systems tend to be fixed for the duration of a project and that informal systems are much more flexible and evolve [18]. However, in this study, this evolution was not for the good of the project. Additionally, the PCC, which corresponds to the Core Team in this study, is located in a governance zone that requires accountability for enabling coordination, implying some kind of governance process. Our study has shown the complexity of this zone, suggesting a need for specific and adapted governance process, either formal or informal, while being commonly understood by participants.

This study suggests that the temporary nature of a project seems to influence managers in not questioning the existing formal project governance structure: once the project is in execution, the focus being on its ending, especially when the project is having a problematic trajectory. However, recent research on project governance had emphasized the need for a "flexible strategic process" [19] in which the governance structure adapts / evolves in response to changes in the project environment, the emergence of unforeseen events, and the requirements of the various stages of the project [19]. We can add that especially at the coordination level, the horizontal nature of the structure combined with the power provided by knowledge are adding to the challenges faced by upper managers in their quest to get project information and to support it. In this case study, we have also illustrated how these managers were isolated from the project day-to-day and dependent upon their chain of command to get information and action. Additionally, the project manager was lacking formal power, especially on resources. However, project managers get often compared to CEOs in the literature [20]. For projects operated in a mix of matrix modes, is this kind of model applicable? According to Mintzberg [2], the matrix mode is prone to conflicts. Larson & Gobeli [21], among several authors, are adding that matrix mode is inefficient. However, organizations are still using matrix modes in projects, and according to Pettigrew and al. [3], projects do not replace existing organizational forms; they overlap with them in the permanent organizations, thus bringing additional complexity to the way we organize.
7. Contributions

The main contribution of our study lies in the description of a case of ambiguous project governance practice and its formal coordination mechanism — the PCC (identified as the Core Team in this case study). This ambiguity leads in time to non-collaboration between the permanent and temporary organizations and produces significant negative impacts in the project, showing the importance of studying in more depth the project governance, especially at the intersection and the juxtaposition of governance and coordination. The literature states that project governance structures tend to be horizontal, informal; that they are coordination mechanism. However, in parallel, in order for coordination to happen, accountability is needed [11], which usually implies some form of governance. Thus, our analysis highlights the importance to study further project governance mechanisms, which are enabling coordination, and especially project liaison devices such as PCCs, for which there is a paucity of study in the literature. In project management literature, the steering committee is an important project governance entity. Nevertheless, it is only one piece of the puzzle. The project governance and coordination need to be further understood, including the governance frameworks’ interaction between temporary and permanent organizations, where many governance issues reside. It is, therefore, important to further our understanding of these various governance mechanisms.

The coordination committee represents a governance mechanism at the lower management level where the management of the project coordination takes place between the various disciplines. It is where numerous frontiers intersect, including those between the temporary and permanent organizations. We believe that this study does not reflect a unique case, but rather describes a widespread problem, especially in organizations using matrix structures. Project management norms like PMI tend to present matrix structures relatively basically, which implies that the complexity brought by this way of organizing is often overlooked. Finally, this case study is also an example of a collective amnesia in the initial project governance structure which has been replaced, by its participants, with their various interpretations without even knowing about this variety, therefore, without any attempt at a consensus. Some studies have already highlighted the diverse understandings of project goals, scope, etc. But project structure representations, especially within the governance zone located at the coordination level seem, somewhat messy and even questioning the project manager role at this level. With the reinforcement on horizontal processes in project literature, what is the impact to be envisioned for the project manager role?

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