

The Dark Side of Projects

Dimensionality, Research Methods, and Agenda

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The Dark Side of Projects: Dimensionality, Research Methods, and Agenda

Abstract

This article presents the dark side of projects, engaging project scholars and practitioners in discussions about sensitive, confusing, uncomfortable, challenging, and questionable phenomena, such as corruption, sexism, money laundering, modern slavery, waste of resources, and organizational politics. The dark side impacts people's lives, questioning the legitimacy of projects as forms of work organization and the political and ideological systems shaping the projects' context. Project scholars and practitioners need to be aware of the harm the dark side of projects may promote. Ultimately, we aim to build awareness, promote research, and help sensitize our community to the dark side of projects.

Keywords

dark side, ethics, philosophy, morality, discrimination, abuse of power, politics, intellectual irresponsibility.

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Introduction: What Lurks in the Dark Side of Projects?

“More than 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have died in Qatar since it won the right to host the World Cup 10 years ago, [...] In other words, the World Cup project counts with direct and indirect a death toll of 6,500 lives.”(Pete Pattisson et al., 2021)

Exploring the dark of side projects cannot be anything but a challenging phenomenon. This is because, firstly, people are involved in projects, and people and their intentions are diverse and multidimensional (Liu et al., 2019). Secondly, the dark side is by definition *dark*, in the sense that it is hiding from us and escapes our awareness in more than one way. Thirdly, because (almost inescapably) the exploration of the dark side necessitates a discussion and deep engagement about morality that frames the ethics of projects and their management. In combination, human nature; underexplored practices, which have not been adequately described and discussed; and notions of morality that frame ethics, have different meanings throughout the world and in different civilizations, at different points in the history of humanity (Bernstein, 1980). People, practices, and ethics can either legitimize or seriously discredit the purpose and meaning of projects, the role of project stakeholders, and the impact and legacy of the project in society and for future generations. As such, we cannot help but observe and, by implication, ask ourselves about those projects where people act in a questionable manner, where phenomena become harmful, and where the morality that frames the ethics of projects is equally questionable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such instances are very frequent. Construction projects are good examples, where some of their workers live under poverty, do not have access to basic worker’s rights, and some even treated as slaves. Such harsh realities go hand-in-hand with the concerns of office workers who lose sleep at night tormented by bribery and corruption problems and pivoting between the boundaries and fault lines of what may be unethical yet legal decision-making options that can cost lives but can reflect common project practices. We can add to these a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, corruption, sexism, money laundering, modern slavery, and, less obvious areas, such as the waste of resources and organizational politics. **The dark side is therefore *wicked*—ambiguous and elusive**—and found at the intersection of diverse notions of morality and ethics, institutional ideologies, and systemic factors that are hard to articulate, grasp, identify, and change. Such uncomfortable topics that relate to unethical or illegal practices is what we call the dark side of projects. As a project studies community, we have failed to shed light on the dark side, and have therefore failed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the

conditions under which our projects are being initiated, built, and approved, some resulting in loss of human life. We believe it is time to change this.

The Dark Side of Projects is Real, Unfortunately

Sadly, the dark side of projects is real and examples are not hard to find. The Rio Olympics—a stereotypical megaproject in a developing country—was the stage of numerous corruption and bribery scandals. The project started with the US\$2 million bribery to buy votes to host the Olympics (Ingle, 2019). The construction of the Olympic Park and its infrastructure also allegedly involved corruption and money laundering (Sandy, 2016). Brazil is not an exception. Transparency International (2014) estimates that €120 billion (around US\$163 billion) is lost each year to corruption and public procurement is particularly vulnerable, which is the phenomenon behind the eliciting and development of projects in the public sector.

According to the World Economic Forum (Johnson, 2018), “The annual costs of international corruption amount to a staggering \$3.6 trillion,” which is roughly the GDP of Germany, the fourth biggest country in the world by GDP (World Bank, 2022). Transparency International (2014 p. 4) also points out that: “the cost of corruption in public contracting is not only measured by money lost. Corruption distorts competition, can reduce the quality, sustainability and safety of public projects and purchases, and reduce the likelihood that the goods and services purchased really meet the public’s needs. When procurement is corrupted by private interests and not directed by the public good, trust in governments is eroded.”

Corruption is only one of the myriad manifestations of the dark side affecting projects worldwide. It is uncomfortable to accept that modern slavery is the engine of some projects, particularly in the fields of construction and infrastructure. For example, Amnesty International, a global movement in the fight against injustice, started an awareness campaign pointing to the vulnerable situation of construction workers employed in the building of stadiums such as Doha’s Khalifa Stadium and the infrastructure servicing the Qatar 2022 World Cup (Amnesty International, 2020). These workers were trapped in abusive working conditions, which led to the deaths of over thousands of workers (*Gulf News*, 2019). The workers received low pay, limited access to justice, and could not exit the country legally. Suddenly we began seeing a whole system of political, intellectual norms and questionable moral frames of ethics, which underlie the decisions and actions of senior decision makers in private and public organizations and individuals across networks and project hierarchies. Surely, workers’ deaths are clear-cut and should always be prevented. Beyond the obvious, however, the darkness in which the project is found thickens. If we are to address the dark side scientifically,

the community of scholars that studies projects and their management needs to unveil the failing political, intellectual, and moral influences that silence or push practitioners and other project stakeholders to the dark side. With scientific vigor and rigor, in addition to human sensitivity that acknowledges that both scholars and practitioners are at the start of this journey, we can articulate and develop the evidence that can help bring the dark side of projects to light.

What is the Dark Side of Projects? The Infinite Shades of Gray

Thus far, we have introduced obvious examples of the dark side, such as corruption (e.g., paying a bribe) or modern slavery, and we raised the need for the scientific exploration of the dark side. However, the dark side is not always black or white (pun intended!). Depending on the space and time of the project, the political, intellectual, and moral dimensions of the project will change. **The dark side is evolutionary, socially constructed, and subjective.** For example, the construction of a stadium can be considered a waste of public resources for some; whereas, for others, this is a good investment in developing a neighborhood or an incentive for participating in sports and promoting healthy lifestyles. Another example is the construction of a ski ramp in the middle of the desert (Victoria, 2017). When compared to slavery, it does not appear to be as dark a phenomenon, yet its prospects in terms of sustainability are questionable. Similarly, the development and use of *management fashions* by *management gurus* (Abrahamson, 1991; Benders & Van Veen, 2001) can be seen as one's livelihood and an attempt to share knowledge with a wider public; whereas for others, it may be defined as selling smoke and mirrors and intentionally promoting false representations and promises about business practices. Closer to projects, institutionalizing the education of project managers via a series of certifications that one needs to be awarded, may be viewed as a career path that is beneficial for the individual project manager and a safeguard of project practices and the society and communities affected by these projects. However, on the other hand, any paid certification can be seen as a manifestation of the market shelter (Freidson, 2001) that professional project managers enjoy, which remains exclusionary for those with interest and perhaps talent in the management of projects but who cannot afford to pay for the certification. Again, our practice of project management could be construed as corrupted in several ways. One might ask: Should professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, and others) be managed by project managers who set priorities such as time, cost, and quality above and beyond, for example, patient needs (in the case of doctors) (Prasad & Prasad, 1994)? A managerialist ideology inherent in project management may run counter to the ideologies of other professions and, as such, project management itself can be construed as a dark phenomenon—in other words, a form of work organization that prioritizes efficiency over other

professional values and virtues. The dark side's evolutionary, socially constructed, and ambiguous nature also becomes important in the evolution of time and when facing Grand Challenges. The unsustainable usage and waste of resources, which were once issues of low productivity for failing management, may be more akin to today's dark side given the climate urgency and the impact of such phenomena on the environment.

As Lightened as it Gets! The Dark Side of Projects

From the previous sections, we understood that the dark side of projects is wicked, socially constructed, and ambiguous. **The dark side is also relevant to project scholars.** The cynics, among us may think:

“This is sad but quite irrelevant for me. After all, we perfectly know even about those children dying in those ‘far away countries’ because of starvation and lack of access to basic water and sanitation infrastructure. Surely, I am not losing any sleep over that. The dark side is irrelevant for me and my ‘so well developed and modern country.’”

However, this would be a simplified view of the intentions of project scholars and practitioners. Apart from the moral considerations of a cynical line of thought, the conclusion is factually wrong when looking at projects and their impact in context. For example, on 15 January 2018, the BBC highlighted: *Construction giant Carillion has gone into liquidation, threatening thousands of jobs* (BBC News, 2018). The fall of Carillion may be a very different phenomenon from the modern slavery in Qatar for the World Cup, but they are both manifestations of the dark side. At the time, Carillion was one of the largest construction companies in Europe, with 43,000 staff worldwide—20,000 in the United Kingdom; 20,000 UK families (in addition to the workers' families involved in the supply chain) lost their income in a few days. Important and needed projects (e.g., construction of hospitals) stopped. Carillion was involved in several major construction projects and programs. So what caused this spectacular disaster? The UK parliament website reports using these strong words:

“Carillion’s rise and spectacular fall was a story of recklessness, hubris, and greed. Its business model was a relentless dash for cash, driven by acquisitions, rising debt, expansion into new markets and exploitation of suppliers. It presented accounts that misrepresented the reality of the business and increased its dividend every year, come what may. Long-term obligations, such as adequately

funding its pension schemes, were treated with contempt. Even as the company very publicly began to unravel, the board was concerned with increasing and protecting generous executive bonuses. Carillion was unsustainable. The mystery is not that it collapsed, but that it lasted so long.” (UK Parliament, 2018)

Carillion is not an isolated case of the dark side in the “first world.” For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Modern Slavery Act dates back to 2015, followed by a similar act in 2018 in Australia. In 2019, according to UK government official statistics, 10,627 potential victims were referred to the (UK GOV, 2020) UK National Referral Mechanism, and the overall number of enslaved people is estimated to exceed 100,000 (Kieran, 2020). Modern slaves in the United Kingdom include several categories (e.g., sex workers, unskilled laborers working in agriculture); a considerable number of modern slaves work in construction, a traditionally project-based sector.

Carillion and the sheer numbers of enslaved people in the United Kingdom paint a grim picture of projects on the dark side. Our theories are silent on the mechanisms underlying such wrongdoings, which keep project managers awake at night. This topic is problematic, difficult to study, and should be more central to our research and teaching practices. Thus, project studies need to be awakened to projects’ dark side. As a project studies community, we have failed to shed light on the dark side and, therefore, have failed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the conditions under which our projects are being built, some at the expense of human life. We believe it is time to change this.

The Dark Side as a Field of Study

As a phenomenon, the dark side has been around since the dawn of human civilization and has evolved ever since. For example, during the Roman Empire, slavery was common and surely not considered a dark side. The manifestations of corruption, such as bribery (even for the construction of public infrastructure), were already crimes with several laws dealing with them. So, while the perception of what *constitutes the dark side* has changed over time and around the world, the dark side—as a phenomenon—has existed for a long time. Now, various disciplines frame the space in which the dark side can be defined as a *field of study*. What is right and wrong is one of the oldest questions we have been asking.

Literature for a Rigorous Approach to Researching the Dark Side

Thus far, we have used the term *dark side* quite loosely; taking a scientific approach, we need a more rigorous definition of *dark side*. Unfortunately, there lacks a coherent definition of what constitutes the dark side in the scientific literature. As a term, it is found in papers in business and organization studies, where it seems to be used almost euphemistically to allude to all things bad, immoral, and/or unethical. For example, Kets de Vries (1985) referred to the dark side of entrepreneurship to explore the personality traits and behaviors of entrepreneurs such as their propensity for control and their suspicion of authority. Noordhoff et al. (2011) identified customer opportunism in supplier relationships as the dark side of innovation projects. D. Liu et al. (2012) sought to delve deeper into the dark side of leadership in relation to employee creativity. Their work accompanied several others such as that from Conger (1990) on strategic vision, communication and impression management skills, and general management practices as the dark side of leadership; Hogan and Hogan (2001) on the dark side of leadership competence and effectiveness; and Haynes et al. (2015) on grid and hubris as the dark side of leadership.

Throughout the 1990s, the Critical Management Studies tradition sought to problematize and widen the debate about practices and behaviors, which are somewhat uncritically bundled under the notion of the *dark side*. The distinction here was between maintaining a managerialist assumption that sees all aspects of organizations as the prerogative of managerial interest and authority while it welcomes all contradicting interests of other—perhaps legitimate and rightful—stakeholders as the *dark side* (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 2003). With the turn of the century, wider debates in the fields of philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics were gaining ground in our understanding of what was once uncritically defined as the *dark side*. These debates point to different theories of morality, which can be at play and evolving in the ongoing movement of humanity and its history and justify or

condemn different actions and behaviors. Notions, such as ethical egoism, linked to the notion of enlightened self-interest, utilitarianism, libertarianism, Kantian ethics (and notions of universality and reversibility), ethics of care, virtue ethics, and/or discourse ethics have been noted as extensions of the Critical Management Studies tradition in areas of organization studies such as human resource management (Woodall, 2001) and project management (Konstantinou & Müller, 2016). These accounts are based on a phenomenological, social-interactionist tradition and orientation to understanding evolutionary, wicked, socially constructed phenomena, such as the dark side, as they are constructed in everyday life and studied by researchers who are themselves bound by their own cultural and temporal contexts, (hopefully, largely conscious) biases and subjective interpretations. As such, they seek to extend normative approaches to distinguishing between the darker and brighter sides of organizational life, which suggest that organizational stakeholders hold *prima facie* duties, leading to different views and interpretations of organizational life (MacLagan, 1998). The managerial prerogative, once dominant, is seen as an option—a possible, but not dominant, explanation. Next to the managerial prerogative, philosophy, philosophical thought, and ethics in the study of organizations propose other, more varied explanations. Our thinking has developed to the extent that we stand tentatively to their normative power for all theoretical approaches (mainstream organization studies, Critical Management Studies, philosophy, and ethics). Philosophy and ethics are used to extend rather than replace the dialogues once found in a manager–worker dialectic (Thomas & Davies, 2005; Konstantinou, 2008). Philosophy and ethics are used to bridge, connect, and expand our thinking rather than revile and criticize; they democratize our understanding of phenomena rather than seek to become the new dominant interpretation or discourse. As such, they provide alternative interpretations of the numerous examples in the history of humanity, where a phenomenon constitutes the dark side in one context, while at the same time, not in another. Philosophy and ethics remind and allow us to ascribe to various interpretations, such as in the case of even one of the worst possible acts, taking another’s life; this may be viewed as murder under specific circumstances or self-defense under others. More importantly philosophy and ethics suggest that, in most cases, it is not the action that defines an instance of the dark side but the circumstances in each case, which give a particular action or practice its meaning as corrupt or justified. Thus, scientifically, we are ready; we have the space to study the dark side. Initial observations of the dark side (What is it that has not been explained?) can be met with healthy confidence in the role of scientific judgment and the creation of an answer through *creative artistic imagination* across the sciences and arts (Planck, 1998).

Based on the above reflections and examples of projects on the dark side, we distinguish three dark side dimensions, along with the three types of professional irresponsibility identified in project management (Konstantinou, 2017, based on the political implications of the work of Judt). Table 1

summarizes the dark side's three dimensions, and connects and builds links with the manifestations associated with them.

Table 1. The Three Dimensions of the Dark Side

	Three Types of Professional Irresponsibility in Project Management (Konstantinou, 2017)	Manifestations
The political dimension of the dark side—the political space and time of the dark side	Political irresponsibility or not knowing what is happening arises when a professional practitioner displays a salient and noticeable lack of understanding of their time and place—that is, a lack of understanding of the environment or context of the project. Here, the decisions the practitioner makes are decontextualized. Frequently, this means that the professional practitioner does not have a full view of who is involved and affected by the project. Therefore, the commercial, ideological, or political needs and requirements of a particular group of stakeholders are prioritized over the needs of other rightful stakeholders. As a result, professional practitioners can hardly claim that they act responsibly.	The political dimension of the dark side of the project would include: dominance of the neo-liberal organization, notions of modernity and its priorities (Woodall, 2001; Alvesson & Willmott, 2003); professionalization of managerialism (Noordegraaf, 2015); pervasive inequalities arising from persistent social injustices (Shah, 2021); trade wars between the world's superpowers (Shah, 2021); notions of modernity akin to slavery; vulnerability of public procurement internationally (Transparency International, 2014), the politicization of universal human rights (Terman & Byun, 2021); pervasive underutilization of public resources and infrastructure (Kim & Morgan, 2019); capitalization of management fashions and academic ideas (interpretative viability) (Benders & Van Veen, 2001); stigmatization of difference and diversity (Schein, 1997); political speech and action viewed as idling (Arendt, 1958)
The intellectual dimension of dark side educational space and time of the dark side	Intellectual irresponsibility or not knowing any different arises when a professional lacks an in-depth understanding of their practice and can only unresponsively follow the dominant professional and disciplinary trends. Here, the decisions and actions of the professional practitioner are susceptible to <i>the one—the only—way of doing things</i> , because the practitioner is not aware of different established or innovative approaches to work or they do not feel confident enough to diverge from the conventional way of working in a given industry, sector, or job role.	The intellectual dimension of the dark side would include: Lack of clarity between the phenomenon and practice of the dark side; theoretical and epistemological contradictions; lack of analytical clarity of levels of analysis; fragmented project management literature; lack of creative artistic imagination in research inquiry (Planck, 1998); political speech and action viewed as idling (Arendt, 1958); vast knowledge gap in the diffusion and implications of corruption for projects; only a handful of studies (Henderson et al., 2013; Pinto et al., 2017; Rahman, 2019) in sexism and gender bias in project studies; limited and no studies in money laundering in management and organization studies and project studies, respectively; a handful of studies in modern slavery in project studies
The moral dimension of the dark side—the moral space and time of the dark side	Moral irresponsibility or not knowing the difference between right and wrong arises when a professional practitioner is inclined to commodify their skills—that is, apply their project management skills to projects with questionable, or even unethical, purposes.	Overall, today, the space where the morality that frames projects' ethics can be discussed is very limited today (Konstantinou, 2015). As a result, project managers frequently need to look to other more established professions to familiarize themselves with and develop an understanding of ethics outside the localized interpretations of corporates (own brand professionalism, Muzio et al., 2011) and local cultural norms. Lack of transparency and increased aversion to disclosure/monitoring reflect manifestations of the moral dimension of the dark side.

The Operational Definition of Dark Side in Projects

We propose the following definition of the dark side in projects: “**The dark side of projects is *any illegal or unethical phenomena associated with projects.***”

This definition requires further clarifications on two main aspects: (1) What phenomenon is associated with projects? And (2), what is an illegal or unethical (which includes unsustainable) phenomenon?

In terms of what a dark side phenomenon is, the above definition is intentionally broad to include systemic, group, and individual wrongdoings, including those attributed to questionable character traits or personalities. We wanted our definition of the dark side to be appropriate for macro, meso, and microlevel studies in projects and provide the space for the study of wider populations in society (e.g., professions, industries, or sectors); groups (e.g., organizational teams, networks, digital communities); and individuals (e.g., the study of the dark side in identity and gender studies). Equally, a dark side phenomenon needs to be relevant for projects to be meaningful for project studies. Again, the definition is intentionally broad to include those phenomena that arise beyond projects, as long as those phenomena are relevant to the project(s) in question. The definition includes wrongdoings external to projects that impact their performance or affect how projects are initiated, governed, managed, and executed at any level. This broader perspective enables the researcher to consider contextual conditions, which are not directly ascribable to specific projects but relevant to them.

Concerning illegal or unethical phenomena, more articulated considerations are required. We reflected primarily on the tests to discriminate between legal and illegal phenomena and ethical and unethical ones. We conclude that the socially constructed nature of the dark side allows no universal tests; the legitimacy of phenomena as legal/illegal and ethical/unethical requires the phenomenon of the dark side to be studied in situ only. For instance, what is legal in one jurisdiction might be illegal in others, so the definition would be jurisdiction dependent. The same would apply to morality and ethical standards theories that depend on context and research philosophy guiding any scholarly inquiry into the dark side of projects. The cultural element also has a territorial component but is more ambiguous and subjective as other factors can influence it, including religion, past experience, family values, and so forth. Furthermore, both the legal and ethical standards are dynamic. For example, environmental or safety law becomes stricter over time. Similarly, the ethics underlying a particular

phenomenon also changes; for example, homosexuality has become more socially accepted in many countries but a few decades ago it was not. Then, to clarify the applicability of our definition, we searched for what constitutes the most widely accepted standards.

In the Western world, the most widely accepted standard is universal human rights, as proposed by the universal declaration of human rights (United Nations, 1948). Universal human rights consider reasonable and widely accepted (at least by the vast majority of countries at the United Nations) as minimum rights for individuals. These include the rights to liberty; security; and exclusion of any form of slavery, fair trial, and privacy. These rights provide an international framework for minimum rights associable to both victims (e.g., the right to life) and wrongdoers (e.g., the right to a fair trial). However, outside the Western world, the Declaration of Human Rights may neither be universally accepted nor applied. There are people who, for cultural reasons, do not fully accept the application of some human rights. Perhaps the most debated rights concern abolishing discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, and race. For example, although in many countries it is deeply inappropriate to discriminate against homosexuals; in other countries, homosexuality is a sin to stigmatize or, even worse, to punish. We want to emphasize that we strongly stand for universal human rights, but we are also aware that, at least for us, it is easier to support the Declaration of Human Rights because our legal system and culture are fully compatible with such rights. We accept that those countries and individuals that do not endorse all universal human rights have equal dignity. However, it would be inappropriate for us to superimpose legal and ethical standards on countries and individuals with an alternative system of values, however far from our predisposition. We want our definition to be legitimate and usable internationally and apply to all cultures and jurisdictions, which may give rise to or undermine the dark side. These considerations brought us to an ethical dilemma:

- Either we accept that universal human rights are truly universal so we consider those who do not endorse them as intrinsically wrong and inappropriate. In other words, we discriminate against those people who do not endorse our system of values. We did not like this solution because it potentially excluded some scholars, perhaps in those exposed countries where more research on the dark side is needed; or
- We lower our minimum and legal standards, which for us is very difficult because we truly believe that universal human rights are very basic, and anything infringing on them is unacceptable for our value system.

To solve this ethical dilemma, we propose a system that considers both the international and local perspectives. From the international perspective, we consider the most widely accepted value system and the legal treaties promoted by the United Nations, which include universal human rights. Local standards consider the legal and ethical standards where the project is implemented, which can be very different from international standards. Hence, we define dark-side phenomena as those project phenomena that do not adhere to one or more of the legal and ethical standards available either internationally or locally.

This approach is conservative and inclusive because it considers all those controversial project phenomena because they are inappropriate for international standards while accepted locally or vice versa. Additionally, we believe we solved the ethical dilemma because the double standard recognizes value systems and legal provisions that differ from our background (then it is inclusive for all communities and does not discriminate) and allows us to reaffirm and endorse the universal rights as a minimum standard for assessing the legitimacy of phenomena in projects.

Table 2 operationalizes our definition of the dark side, highlighting possible situations. Certain phenomena are clearly dark side, for example, bribery, as it infringes on both local and international legal standards. Other phenomena are geographically more complex; for instance, the Kafala system is a controversial spectrum of laws and practices (adopted in different forms in different countries) to manage immigration and working visas as it allocates relevant powers to the employers. This system has been criticized internationally because it favors forms of modern slavery and work exploitation (AlShehabi, 2021). Therefore, we consider the Kafala system a dark side because it infringes on the minimum international standard base on human rights. Equally, the Kafala system is legal and ethically accepted in specific countries (Fernandez, 2021). Due to this inconsistency between legal and ethical standards, we accept that considering the Kafala system a dark side is at least controversial and debatable. Another similar example is sexism. In certain countries, gender discrimination against employees is legitimate. According to the international standard, such discrimination is unethical so, as in the previous example, we consider sexism a form of dark side. Another controversial example concerns tax evasion. For example, on some occasions, big tech and other multinational companies might pay very limited taxes to multiple countries where they operate and they do it legally, at least according to the international legal framework that is very prone to globalization and mobility of capital. Yet, some countries feel this behavior is unethical. We consider this controversial phenomenon of tax optimization as a phenomenon that will affect the project and potentially belongs to the dark side as long as it infringes on local laws and customs.

Table 2. Operationalization of Dark Side Definition

		Local Perspective	
		The phenomenon is <i>illegal or unethical</i> for local standards	The phenomenon is both <i>legal and ethically acceptable</i> for local standards
International perspective	The phenomenon is <i>illegal or unethical</i> for the international standards	Clearly, a dark side (e.g., bribery)	The phenomenon is controversial; we consider it a dark-side phenomenon because it does not respect international standards (e.g., Kafala system, sexism)
	The phenomenon is both <i>legal and ethically acceptable</i> for international standards	The phenomenon is controversial; it is a dark side because it does not respect local standards (e.g., tax avoidance)	The phenomenon is not a dark side. (everything else)

Looking Back: The Dark Side of Projects in Project Management Journals

We have clarified the dark side concept thus with this section we provide a brief account of the literature regarding the dark side of projects (and project-based organizations). Far from being exhaustive, this section intends to provide the big picture for scholars approaching this topic. The community counts on project scholars who developed an interest in dark phenomena and scholars, typically studying dark phenomena, and who have a project as an empirical context. For example, a dark side topic, such as corruption is widely discussed, even in the context of projects. For instance, Olken (2007, 2009) wrote two seminal papers discussing corruption in the context of road construction in Indonesia. Celentani and Ganuza (2002) wrote a theoretical paper investigating corruption in the context of procurement projects. Gender discrimination and to some extent modern slavery (an established phenomenon but a new field of study) could also be given similar consideration. Therefore, these dark side topics are sometimes discussed even in the realm of projects but not by project scholars or in project management journals. Project studies' journals have been almost silent concerning the dark side. Since 2000, approximately 4,000 articles have been published in these core project management journals: *Project Management Journal*[®], *International Journal of Project Management*, and *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*. Among them, perhaps 1% (or less) relate to the dark side. The only topics on the dark side discussed in project studies are corruption and, to some extent, gender discrimination, as summarized in the following sections.

Corruption in All its Forms

The published research about the dark side of projects focuses prevalently on corruption, which is a growing topic. In particular, since 2010, relevant papers have paved the way for further research on corruption in projects, looking specifically at developing countries (Osei-Tutu et al., 2010; Bowen et al., 2012, 2015; Tabish & Jha, 2012). Locatelli et al. (2017) emphasized the insufficient research on corruption in project management given its relevance for project performance. Despite the growing interest in the topic, there remains a vast gap in knowledge concerning the diffusion and implication of corruption in projects. Compared with other disciplines, project management is almost silent concerning corruption.

Conversely, there is extensive published research on corruption in other disciplines such as social science and economics. Since 2000, more than 2,000 Scopus articles have been published on corruption, with only 10 articles on project studies. Corruption is a relatively mature topic in some disciplines but in project management significant research is still needed, for example, on anti-corruption in projects.

Sexism: Yes, it Still Exists

As discussed in Hajikazemi and Locatelli (2021), although sexism is generally discussed in male-dominated professions, research focusing on sexism and gender bias within projects, particularly in engineering and construction projects, is extremely limited. For example, a simple search in Scopus with the keywords “Sexism” OR “Gender bias” AND “Project management” reveals that only three articles that have been published in “project management journals.” These articles include the work done by Pinto et al. (2017), Henderson et al. (2013), and Rahman (2019). Pinto et al. (2017) report on a study examining attitudes toward male versus female candidates applying for a project manager position. In this study, the authors use a scenario-based assessment to sample project professionals in several organizations to determine their reactions to male and female candidates applying for the same project manager position. The findings show that the only evidence of gender bias relates to the candidate’s perceived technical competence. In situations where the technical competence of the job candidate was perceived as low, the female candidate was less likely to be hired than her male counterpart. On the other hand, as a candidate’s perceived technical competence increased, opinions favored the female job seeker, who was more likely to be hired over a male candidate.

Henderson et al. (2013) explore women project managers as a group to develop a new understanding of the current project context within which women work and promote new research-based ideas to enhance their potential in business organizations. Their study explores demographics and project

characteristics, project challenges, alongside women's perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of this profession. The research results reveal clear associations among women project managers' careers, ages, project costs, and their professional certifications. In addition, the results show women's perceptions of advantages and disadvantages in the project management profession, and women project managers continue to experience marginalization from gender bias.

Rahman (2019) investigates the adoption of participatory monitoring and evaluation in the Bangladesh development sector to show how sexism, social inequality, power hierarchies, and discrimination against women become barriers to participatory development phenomena. Discrimination against women is particularly prevalent in rural areas, particularly for low-income subjects.

In summary, these studies confirm that women are underrepresented in project management roles in traditional project-based industries, such as construction and engineering, in addition to being underrepresented in upper management positions.

Looking Forward: A Research Agenda

In the previous sections, we set the scene by discussing the need to investigate the dark side of projects. Research on the dark side of projects is particularly challenging; therefore, with this section, we want to help scholars move forward. We propose topics for research, followed by potential theoretical lenses. These are neither examples meant to inspire nor restrict research in the field. We conclude by discussing the challenges pertinent to research on the dark side of projects and potential solutions.

The Black List: Topics Related to the Dark Side of Projects

The dark side involves myriad topics. One of the most researched topics thus far has been corruption and bribery. Yet, even here, more questions are unanswered than those being addressed; for instance, anti-corruption strategies in projects are remarkably under-investigated. In this section, we would like to prompt the discussion toward other dark side topics relevant in the realm of projects.

Conflict of interest concerns “a situation in which someone’s private interests are opposed to that person’s responsibilities to other people” (*Cambridge English Dictionary*, 2022). Unlike other dark sides in projects, a conflict of interest does not require malicious actions by the wrongdoer; it materializes passively whenever the wrongdoer is called on decisions with incompatible vested interests. This phenomenon is frequent in projects, because decision makers are often exposed to multiple interests, in other words, the many individual stakeholder interests and joint interests vested in the project (Sainati et al., 2020). For example, the project manager might be appointed by a permanent project-based organization but is expected to commit fully to the interests of the temporary project’s organization. As a result, the interests of the two organizations can be conflicting, generating a conflict of interest. Therefore, project governance is particularly important to prevent and resolve conflicts of interest in projects. Relevant research questions about conflict of interests in projects include:

- In which conditions do conflicts of interest materialize?
- What are the most common conflicts of interest?
- What governance do remedies reduce the presence and impact of conflicts of interests?
- How frequent and damaging are conflicts of interest for project performance?

Money laundering is “the process by which criminals attempt to conceal the source and ownership of the proceeds of their illicit activities; if successful, the criminal maintains control and access to these funds when and where (s)he chooses” (Pieth & Aiolfi, 2004, p. viii). Money laundering is

critical in construction projects because it can be directly associated with all illicit funds in construction, including bribes and incomes derived from frauds, modern slavery, and tax evasion. Without money laundering, criminals cannot enjoy illegal profits (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019), which can be assumed as the primary motivation underlying most crimes in construction projects.

Money laundering is relevant in economics and business, but very little in published research. Since 2000, only 107 papers have been published in Association of Business Schools (ABS) journals; as of January 2022, only 25 publications in top journals (scoring ABS 3) and 14 ABS 4/4*; and approximately 615 articles in non-ABS journals. Considering the relevance of the money-laundering phenomenon, there is limited research on this topic. For instance, despite the relevance of money laundering in construction and real estate (FATF, 2008; OECD, 2019), not a single paper concerning money laundering has been published in relevant project management journals. Money laundering is a critical financial source for real estate development in some contexts, as demonstrated by several scandals (FATF, 2018a, 2018b; OCCRP, 2019a, 2019b). Despite the relevance of money laundering in some construction projects, not a single paper has been published in project management journals about this phenomenon. Given this extensive knowledge gap, there is a plethora of relevant research questions, including:

- How does money laundering influence projects (particularly construction projects)?
- To what extent does money laundering contribute to financing (construction) projects?
- What types of money laundering schemes affect projects and how?
- What measures are most useful in preventing money laundering in (construction) projects? Why?

Modern slavery is a relevant and emerging topic in management literature. Modern slavery can be defined as “*the recruitment, movement, harboring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation*” (Such et al., 2019, p. 1). It has been conservatively estimated that there were approximately 40.3 million people in modern slavery in 2016 (International Labour Office, 2017) and many of them work on projects, especially in the construction sector. Hitherto, modern slavery has been overlooked in project management journals but is a booming topic in other disciplines, as demonstrated by journals including the *Journal of Human Trafficking*, *BMJ Online*, and *British Journal of Criminology*. Other journals include the *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, *Supply Chain Management*, and *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*. Potential research questions include:

- How does modern slavery take place in projects? What are the different forms of modern slavery related to projects (e.g., workers doing the construction, sexually exploited individuals)?
- How is it possible to reduce modern slavery in projects? What are the effects of modern slavery at the industrial level?
- What about at the project level? (e.g., unfair competition from companies exploiting modern slaves)? How is it possible to detect modern slavery in projects?
- How are stakeholders in general and those enslaved in particular affected by this phenomenon (even after the enslaved are set free)?
- How do different ethnicities and religious backgrounds relate to modern slavery in projects?

Gender discrimination involves antipathy, negative stereotypes about agentic women (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and other genders. This phenomenon has the effect of handicapping select gender groups regarding salary and access to jobs, promotions, and power (Reid & Clayton, 1992). This problem is particularly relevant in male-dominated professions, such as the construction industry, one of the most male-dominated industries in every developed society (Loosemore et al., 2003). Considering the long-term perspective on investigating this phenomenon widely across the project management discipline, the relevant research questions can be:

- To what extent does gender discrimination exist in projects and in which sectors?
- What are the forms of gender discrimination in projects?
- What are the effects of gender discrimination at the individual and project levels?
- What are the causes and strategies to move toward gender equality in projects and how do they unfold?

Organizational and Project Power and Politics (OPPP). Currently, “power” and “politics” are value-laden terms viewed as the root cause of the dark side in all organizations, including the project as a temporary organization. If one thinks about power and politics, the connotations that instinctively come to mind are about greed; hubris; abuse; different types of misappropriation of resources; poor, corrupt cultures; and Machiavellian and/or narcissistic personalities that have been blinded by power while being masters of a political agenda and maneuvering. A scientific explanation would acknowledge the presence of all the above, as they have been widely documented in empirical studies. Yet a scientific explanation would also note that the definition of power is the ability of A to make B do something that B would otherwise not do (Dahl, 2007)—which reflects circumstances we all find ourselves in and would find very hard to qualify as manipulative. A mother who dresses her baby exercises power, as the baby would otherwise not get dressed. A student who studies the reading list

is subject to a power relationship, which may be abusive but is not by definition abusive. Equally, a project manager who is excellent at motivating their team to go the extra mile is exercising power, yet we would not necessarily define their intentions or actions negatively. Thus, power—in itself—is not a value-laden term. It is naïve to ignore that both good and honorable deeds and dark side phenomena need power to materialize. Equally, Aristotle defined politics as a process of consultation and negotiation that aims to reconcile divergent interests to pursue the common good (Morgan, 1998). Politics and relevant notions of citizenship are the cornerstones of democracy, yet in organization and project studies we see them as signs of an organizational, project, and individual demise only. With the caveat that we do not view power and politics as the primary antecedents of the dark side, we accept that they may give rise to the dark side. We also accept that power and politics are sensitive topics because their research could have implications on:

1. Participants who are called to share experiences of power imbalances, abuse, and wider misappropriation, or abusive political behavior;
 2. The researcher, who approaches an organization and asks such questions; and
 3. For participating organizations and their narrative/discourse, built around a set of egalitarian, humanistic, socially aware, and respectful values. The relevant questions can be:
- Under what conditions does OPPP give rise to the dark side?
 - Are OPPP the antecedents of the dark side?
 - How do OPPP contribute to the social inequalities that give rise to the injustices that frame projects and organizations?

These are a few examples of relevant topics. We could go in-depth into several others, such as fraud in its myriad incarnations, for example, contract rigging, waste of resources on vanity projects, fictitious vendors, unbalanced bids, false representation, and tax avoidance. Researchers might also be interested in investigating more subtle wrongdoings, such as the abuse of power or greenwashing. This is a starting point and we hope these examples will help project scholars expand their thinking to the dark side phenomena currently hidden.

Theories and Epistemologies to Investigate the Dark Side

Up until a few years ago, relatively few papers published in project studies adopted and/or explicitly declared their theoretical lenses or contributions to theory. Nowadays, both the explicit theoretical

lenses and contributions to theory are becoming essential in leading journals in project studies (Söderlund, 2004; Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018; Müller & Klein, 2018; Martinsuo & Geraldi, 2020). This section aims to help scholars identify some possible theories relevant to studying the dark side of project management. We are aware that there are several potential theories one could use. Naming specific theories could therefore be constraining creativity. Truthfully, in our wish to inspire research, we build on Habermas's work and its application to project studies (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). Habermas suggests three ways of knowing that satisfy different intrinsic human interests. Each knowledge interest shapes our research in different directions and toward different methodologies; together, they provide a good onto-epistemological map to consider possibilities to researching the dark side of projects:

Technical (type 1) refers to the anthropologically deep-seated interest to control and predict the environment, which frequently motivates positivistic research and the study of law-lie regularities in search of the truth and verified facts. Research on the dark side of projects following this knowledge interest will unveil the facts and regularities in specific dark side phenomena such as corruption. Examples of the research questions here are the most common conditions that incentivize corruption if in place. The research could be based on cross-sectoral desk studies and use a grounding theory, such as contingency theory. Such research can lead to useful normative guidance and knowledge, curb malpractices, or understand why they are prevalent in certain contexts over others. Other theoretical lenses, such as the "Fraud Triangle theory" (Cressey, 1973), can be used to explain why good people behave unethically or why certain dark side practices are common in certain contexts but not in others.

Understanding (type 2) is geared toward the interpretation and understanding of one's self, others, and the world around us. The interpretive or cultural–hermeneutic sciences are driven by the practical interest to maintain or increase oneself and a mutual, and develop an intersubjective understanding of their context and relationships. Truth here is, to a greater extent, conceptualized as consensus or coherence oriented: something is considered true if multiple people consider it to be true. This type of research lends itself to studying the many shades of gray in project malpractices. This research type fits qualitative and particularly ethnographic studies that help unfold complex social realities and theorize on them. The core objectives here are not to find communalities but rather to understand and explain the differences while also respecting them as different.

Emancipatory (type 3) intends to espouse and potentially rectify what is seen as unjust and challenge and change the status quo. This interest aims to realize autonomy from defective actions and utterances arising from social relationships of power, domination, and alienation, and hence, with a core interest in the desire to overcome dogmatism, compulsion, and domination. Therefore, Habermas suggests a third human interest of self-reflection and reasoning. Habermas's emancipation is not about critical reflection for its own sake. His emphasis is on the potential for transformation through human reasoning rooted in language and discourse analysis. The role of the researcher is clearly different. Here the researcher becomes more of a political actor, be it through the choice of research topics or through their direct intervention in researched contexts. Research in the dark phenomenon is likely to strive here. As discussed as follows, this kind of research is bold, personal, and vested; therefore, the researcher becomes more than a neutral player who will also engage with the context, for example, action research or auto-ethnography.

The Escape Manual: Challenges and (Possible) Solutions

Given the relevance of projects' dark side, the reader might ask: Why is the published research on this topic so limited, and what can we do about it? There are evident challenges in researching such controversial topics. Firstly, studying the dark side connects to the researcher on a personal level. Scholars investigating dark side topics could be exposed to significant risks, which is a disincentive to pursuing research on such topics. The most severe threat can involve physical risk, particularly for those researchers who contribute to disseminating scandals involving dangerous criminal organizations. A good comparison is journalists and essayists who disseminated unspeakable phenomena and, consequently, killed or live under police protection. Relevant examples include the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, killed in October 2008 in Istanbul, Turkey, apparently for his journalistic activity describing the corruption and repression in Saudi Arabia. Another example is Roberto Saviano, who has lived under police protection since 2006 for his published work about organized crime, specifically for the book "Gomorra: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples' Organized Crime System," which explains in detail Camorra, a form of organized crime originally from Campania, Italy (Saviano, 2008). These two are extreme cases of risks exposure. However, more subtle risks are frequently associated with empirical research on dark side phenomena: slanders. Researchers and their associated organizations may be sued for slander, particularly when they report on existing organizations and people who are still alive, which is often the case in empirical research. Legal liability is also common with journalists, often sued and sometimes fined for journalistic imprecisions or disseminating unproven facts. Besides such risks, researching such topics evokes personal emotional reactions in the researcher, raising feelings of rage, resentment, and sadness.

We believe that all these challenges deserve special consideration from authors, reviewers, and editors. For instance, increased political skill is needed to navigate murky waters and gain access; when the researcher arrives at their destination, the anonymity and confidentiality requirements are more stringent, as revealing contextual information might pose a relevant threat to authors, informers, the journal, or disclose sensitive information about victims. However, we believe that research on the dark side is neither to expose people nor inform the public but to investigate phenomena to generate meaningful knowledge for project professionals and scholars. We aim to better understand the dark side phenomena in order to detect and eradicate them to improve projects' ethical and legal standards. This might imply a detailed assessment during the paper review, including the evidence and contextual information, to ensure the rigor and credibility of research, but publish completely anonymized case studies, also deprived of contextual information that would allow third parties to

recognize a specific circumstance. This is perhaps the most conservative approach in dealing with confidentiality requirements and advised for primary data collection.

WAY FORWARD: It is incredibly important to be rigorous and knowledgeable during the research process. This knowledge is not only about the literature research method but also about the context. As stated, legal and ethical aspects depend on the country/territory. If the research is based on data from a specific country or territory, at least one of the researchers should be from that area or have lived there for a considerable time. Additionally, asking for the legal support of the institution (e.g., the university) is important. It would be ideal if someone with a legal background reviewed the paper and assisted during the research. This mitigates the risk of being sued by companies or organizations mentioned in the research.

Secondly, data are difficult to obtain and their quality and trustworthiness can be questionable and difficult to verify. Potential informants are hard to find, as people do not feel comfortable speaking about dark side phenomena, because these topics can be detrimental to the image and reputation of companies and public institutions. Where crimes and unethical behaviors are present in projects, people have limited incentives to promote and support research. Conversely, people expose themselves and their colleagues, creating new enemies. Consequently, it is more common to find people eluding transparency and accountability than whistleblowers; therefore, collecting empirical data is particularly challenging, because people oppose transparent research.

It is also difficult to discern whether the data collected are trustworthy when informants are found; information is murky, and institutional stakeholders are very sensitive when dealing with these topics. For instance, although several sources (*Gulf News*, 2019; Pete Pattison et al., 2021) spoke about thousands of deaths in the Qatari World Cup case, the local authorities had a very different narrative regarding numbers and facts. Their version suggests:

“Of the 33 fatalities recorded in the Supreme Committee’s five Annual Workers’ Welfare Progress Reports to date, 18 cases included no reference to an underlying cause of death, instead of using phrases such as “natural causes,” “cardiac arrest,” or “acute respiratory failure.” 10 of these cases involved men in their twenties or thirties.” (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 8)

The contrasting versions of the facts alone should be a reminder about the transparency and legitimacy of reporting in that context and, therefore, the quality of data available to researchers.

The data quality is particularly problematic, because the topics are complex and difficult to understand fully without proper contextualization and analysis. Again, going back to the Qatar example, “The vast majority of deaths from work-related accidents and diseases occur not from industrial accidents (14%)” as unfortunately common in construction,” but from diseases or illnesses contracted as a result of exposure to risk factors arising from work (86%)” (Amnesty International, 2021). Allegedly, modern slaves in the construction industry are overexposed to health risks at work. Compared with other topics in project studies (e.g., digital technologies, project performance), discussing these fatalities and working conditions is far more complex and sensible.

WAY FORWARD: We propose using more secondary data to address this first challenge about data availability. For instance, the Panama papers material (OCCRP, 2019a) is very rich, and many researchers around the globe are using and publishing it. This can include investigative journalist materials, regulators and governmental agencies' documentation, parliamentary enquiries, and judicial cases. An alternative way forward is to take a positive perspective, for example, in investigating modern slavery, asking questions such as: “Which policies in your company prevent modern slavery?” or “What would you do if you learned that a subcontractor was employing modern slavery?”

Thirdly, research ethics concerns are relevant and particularly sensible. The data may not be publishable as they often involve either confidential or compromising information, which is difficult to obtain. For example, money laundering can involve complicated, offshore transactions involving multiple organizations and nominees. These transactions are difficult to trace, even for public officials with the right to collect information and sophisticated investigatory means, such as rogatory, phone tapping, and inspections. Therefore, collecting information ethically is undoubtedly more difficult for academic researchers with limited resources and means of collecting empirical data. Moreover, institutionalized research ethics procedures can further inhibit research on the dark side. Scholars are bound to ethical rules, often formalized in terms of bylaws, such as university regulations. These ethical rules force scholars to conduct ethical and transparent research, which implies obtaining the informed consents of the individuals (and their associated organization) involved in the data collection. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain the informed consents of both individuals and organizations associated with illegal phenomena. Research ethics can also limit the use of publicly available information.

WAY FORWARD: A key strategy to dealing with these challenges is interdisciplinary collaboration. For instance, the topic of money laundering is new in project studies, whereas it is an established field per se; the *Journal of Money Laundering Control* is an established peer-reviewed journal indexed in

Scopus. There are, therefore, researchers who regularly investigate and publish about money laundering. Therefore, a project scholar keen to study money laundering in projects should engage with those experts to frame the literature, understand which data to collect, and which theoretical lens to adopt.

Finally, when possible and appropriate, the disclosure of public secondary data is suggested. In particular, the information provided by relevant sources includes judicial cases, parliamentary inquiries, and regulatory assessments, for example, criminal agencies. Using official documentation reduces the risk of defamation for both the author(s) and the publishing journal. However, a conservative writing style is required even when using public and official data; for example, until a person is proven guilty, any consideration about wrongdoing is alleged, and the authors shall acknowledge this explicitly. Careful, legal proofreading is recommended to minimize potential defamatory statements resulting from incomplete and misunderstood statements associated with specific people and organizations. Suppose the authors are not completely sure that a statement is defamatory. In this case, it is advised to drop it and consider minimizing (or excluding completely) any direct reference to people and organizations, similar to what is advised for anonymized primary data reporting. All these suggestions are based on the experiences of other disciplines, which are more exposed and experienced with such research challenges, particularly criminology and legal studies.

Conclusions: “Thence we Came Forth to Rebehold the Stars”¹

Phenomena, such as modern slavery, corruption, money laundering, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, and illegal waste disposal are common in several contexts, and projects are no exception. For example, some construction projects use modern slavery to reduce labor costs (Russell et al., 2018); information and communications technology (ICT) and media production projects exploit people desperately looking for a job (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010); and corruption is pervasive in the planning and delivery of infrastructure, particularly in megaprojects (Locatelli et al., 2017). We group illegal and/or unethical phenomena, such as those listed above, under the umbrella term “the dark side of projects.”

In other cases, identifying a phenomenon as the dark side is vaguer. For example, daydreaming—a natural human instinct—is translated into misconduct in the human resource management literature. Daydreaming opposes notions of efficient production focuses on developing and maintaining competitive advantage and dynamic capabilities for work purposes. Similarly, all political notions—such as freedom, speech that is political, emotional action—are considered irrelevant, which in itself denotes that which is not seen as relevant to organizational priorities as these are defined by management, who themselves are the rightful rulers of organizational life. Finally, organizational life remains divorced from other parts of life. While companionship and sports lend themselves well to relationship management and good competitive organization, issues such as sexuality, sexual orientation, desire, pleasure, and romantic affairs champion in the dark side, and only recently we have accepted maternity and, even more recently, paternity as validly relevant to our lives when these are thought of in organizations.

There is a small yet, growing community of projects scholars studying what we call *the dark side of projects*, which we define as the following: “The dark side of projects is any illegal or unethical phenomena associated with projects.” Such topics, however, have been traditionally considered inconvenient and uncomfortable to research; therefore, they tend to remain hidden as a phenomenon and a field of study. We aim to promote research to unveil the phenomenon and open space for a discussion (and more research!) about the dark side of projects. Furthermore, this article provides the foundation for scholars interested in joining our efforts to shed light on the dark. Therefore, we introduce the dark side of projects, their relevance, potential avenues for future research, and potential methodological strategies to see in the dark.

¹ “Thence we came forth to rebehold the stars” is the English translation of the last verse of Dante’s *Inferno* in *Divina Commedia* “E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle” (*Inferno* XXXIV, p. 139). Dante and his guide Virgilio, completed their journey in the *Inferno* and are now ready to start a new journey with hope and light. As modern “Virgilio,” we are taking the reader to complete their journey in the dark side of projects.

Researching the dark side of project management is particularly challenging, which explains the limited published work on these relevant topics. Consistently, this article encourages reflections on methodological innovations to overcome these research challenges. We hope our article encourages more people to write intriguing and high-quality work on the dark side of projects. This is important not only in understanding the dark side but also in understanding the nature of projects in general and holistically. We believe that future research in the area should not be paradigmatically circumscribed, but instead benefit from the complexity of the topics. We see the need and opportunity for research from varied onto-epistemological traditions and research across academic fields, particularly more collaboration between project scholars and scholars studying dark phenomena elsewhere. Such interdisciplinary work can lead to interesting contributions to both scholarly communities. We understand that opting for research on the dark side is a daring choice, with potential personal ramifications. We need to adapt not only in terms of our reading but also in ways of understanding and publishing data. Type 3 research (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018) is therefore particularly encouraged because it sees the research in and for society and aims to uncover and transform taken-for-granted assumptions. It is hard work, but we believe it is worthy, timely, and relevant.

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