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Bricolage, Improvisation and Sustainable Innovation in Projects and Operations

Thematic Area: Business, Society and Sustainability

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Summary:

Projects and operations are central to industrial transformation, innovation and sustainability transitions. From product and process development to digital transformation and circular operations, their success depends not only on formal planning, engineering and control, but also on the capacity to adapt, creatively recombine resources and respond to unforeseen circumstances through bricolage and improvisation (Pina e Cunha et al., 1999; de Mattos Nascimento et al., 2024; Núñez-Merino et al., 2025; Da Silva et al., 2026).

These processes involve persistent, interdependent tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011), including planning–improvisation, engineering–bricolage, standardization–flexibility, and openness–closure (Iivari, 2021; Wiewiora & Desouza, 2022). Such tensions emerge in operational projects and strategic operations decisions, as organizations seek to combine efficiency and reliability with experimentation and innovation. They also extend to competing expectations concerning short-term performance and long-term sustainability.

Rather than treating these demands as trade-offs requiring definitive resolution, we invite research examining how actors navigate their interdependencies and how formal and emergent organizing practices interact (Berti & Cunha, 2023). Particular attention is given to bricolage and improvisation as potential sources of innovation, organizational learning and adaptive capacity, while recognizing their possible unintended consequences for coordination, accountability and sustainability.

The track welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions investigating these dynamics across project management and operations contexts, including product and process innovation, operational improvement, capacity and location decisions, digital transformation, circular operations and management systems implementation. It also encourages reconsideration of project and operational success beyond conventional performance indicators, incorporating stakeholder experiences and longer-term economic, social and environmental value.

By connecting project management, operations management, organization theory and sustainability research, the track seeks to advance understanding of how organizations navigate competing demands to achieve sustainable innovation and transformation.

Keywords:

Project and operations organizing; Bricolage; Organizational improvisation; Paradoxical tensions; Sustainable innovation; Project success; Operations management.

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