

Stakeholder agency and grand challenge projects in forced displacement context

Ambi Ambituuni, Kate Davis, Nugun Patrick Jellason and Hannon Amoozad Mahdiraji

Abstract

Grand challenge projects (GCPs) address critical global issues such as poverty, climate change, COVID-19, and forced displacement. However, research reveals that many GCPs often yield limited results when managed through a top-down approach. In this research, we investigate how the agency of external nonmarket stakeholders (i.e., the project beneficiaries), can be useful in aligning GCPs to local needs for successful outcomes. Using participatory action research and interpretive structural modelling, we identify the key agency factors influencing the iterative, the practical–evaluative, and the projective dimensions of beneficiaries’ agency in forced displacement grand challenge context. We show how beneficiaries’ agency influences project legitimacy and urgency. Our findings also demonstrate that active beneficiaries’ involvement can significantly improve project outcomes, emphasising the need for GCPs to meaningfully incorporate beneficiaries’ perspectives to enhance impact and sustainability. Finally, our research provides practical insights for project managers and policymakers on engaging stakeholders in complex, high-stakes contexts.

Keywords: Stakeholder agency; Forced displacement; Project legitimacy; Participatory action research; Grand challenge projects (GCPs).

1 Introduction

Grand challenge projects (GCPs) address critical global issues such as poverty, climate change, COVID-19, forced displacement, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ferraro et al., 2015; George et al., 2016; Holzberg et al., 2018; Howard-Grenville, 2021; Ika and Munro, 2022; Sankaran et al., 2020). These projects are multinational, multidisciplinary, and involve diverse stakeholders, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise. However, research reveals that many GCPs, particularly those originating in the Global North and implemented in the Global South, often yield limited results when managed through a top-down approach (Ika and Munro, 2022; Miković et al., 2020). Engaging stakeholders—especially project beneficiaries, who are external nonmarket stakeholders that stand to benefit from the project—is essential to understanding local needs and ensuring that projects align with these needs for successful outcomes (Bandé et al., 2024; Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2017; Freeman, 2018; Ika et al., 2020).

GCP beneficiaries possess a uniquely comprehensive understanding of the challenges within their environment, as well as the types of interventions required to address these issues effectively. Their daily immersion in these conditions provides valuable insights that can guide the design and implementation of more responsive and contextually relevant interventions (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012; Clarke and Crane, 2018; Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin III, 1987; George et al., 2016; Stadtler et al., 2024). Therefore, engaging with them can potentially harness the views of individuals and groups looking for potential approaches to addressing grand challenges (Diallo and Thuillier, 2005; Quayle et al., 2019). In particular, the determinations of project alignment, intention and value can be better understood, negotiated, and scoped through the agentic actions of the beneficiaries (Crawford et al., 2008; Gagnon and Rodrigues, 2020; Mullaly, 2014; Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2018).

The agentic actions of beneficiaries ensures that they actively participate in, and shape the direction, processes, legitimacy and results of a project (Cornelius and Wallace, 2010; Fraser et al., 2006; Freeman, 2018; Weber, 2009). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggested that agency should be understood as a

configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present. For project managers, a crucial aspect of delivering GCPs lies in managing these agency influences to align beneficiaries' actions with the project's intended outcomes. This becomes particularly significant in GCPs aimed at addressing grand challenges like forced displacement, where beneficiaries' agency may be influenced by the complex and unpredictable project environment, often shaped by active disasters or conflicts (van der Giessen et al., 2022). These situations expose the often already marginalised and underserved people to distressing events that might influence their agentic actions (Alobo and Obaji, 2016; World Bank Group, 2023). Consequently, an important research direction involves examining the underlying drivers of agency in these contexts and exploring how beneficiaries enact agency within GCPs to effectively address such challenges.

However, to the best of our knowledge, the project management literature has not addressed this gap. Most of the research on stakeholder agency has been framed as an internal project executive, managerial and operational level decision making phenomenon (Benitez-Avila and Hartmann, 2023; Eisenhardt, 1989; Mullaly, 2014) or agency in programme integration (Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2018). Those specific to grand challenge focus on aspects of sensemaking (Ferraro et al., 2015; van der Giessen et al., 2022), and the role of advocacy groups (Olsen et al., 2016). Research is, therefore, needed to address aspects of agency of external nonmarket stakeholders (beneficiaries) in grand challenge contexts. Moreover, the current theoretical framing of stakeholder agency in project management literature is mostly focussed on the legal and commercial distinction between principal(s) and agent(s), contractual relationships, and governance and accountability structures (Ahola et al., 2021; Amin et al., 2022; Chang, 2014; Davis et al., 2023; Farrell, 2003; Müller and Turner, 2005; Nwajei et al., 2022; Wang and Liu, 2015). Research into agency in GCPs is important because the agentic actions of project beneficiaries can offer valuable theoretical insights that can contribute to more informed and contextually relevant interventions. It can also practically equip project managers with the aptitude to ensure better engagement with project beneficiaries for equitable value distribution (Gil, 2022; van der Giessen et al., 2022). Hence,

we asked, (1) *How do project beneficiaries enact their agency in GCPs aimed at addressing the grand challenge of forced displacement?* (2) *How might their agentic actions influence the delivery of the GCPs?*

To address these questions, we build on the work of Alimadadi (2022) and Benitez-Avila and Hartmann (2023), adding a project beneficiary perspective to the enactment of agency, with a focus on the context of forced displacement in GCPs. We therefore focus on the theoretical concept of stakeholder agency and how it is realised within the specific context of the grand challenge of forced displacement, shaped by distinct environmental conditions and situations – also referred to as the ecological perspective of agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Hence, we define agency as the ability of external nonmarket stakeholders to make independent choices, participate, influence decisions, and take actions to ensure beneficial project outcomes within forced displacement context. Therefore, instead of conceptualising agency as a quality of project beneficiaries or limiting it to issues of compliance, control, and accountability in projects (Badenfelt, 2010; Liu et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2021), it is understood as a developing phenomenon resulting from the interaction between project beneficiaries and how the grand challenge context impacts their circumstances. We argue that beneficiary agency provides explicit access to greater influence, legitimacy, and urgency pressures within GCP contexts (Agle et al., 1999; Connelly et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 1997).

We employ a *participatory action research* approach to gather and interpret data using Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM). This method enables us to identify and understand the drivers influencing agency and their interactions within GCP contexts. Our analysis reveals how specific factors shape beneficiaries' agency across past, present, and future dimensions, informing their actions and influencing the legitimacy and urgency of GCP outcomes (Mitchell et al., 1997).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we discuss forced displacement as a grand challenge and highlight the role of GCPs in addressing forced displacement on local and global levels. In

Section 3 we redefine stakeholder agency from the beneficiaries' perspective, and theorise how past, present, and future influences shape their agency within GCPs. We then present our research method and results in Section 4 and Section 5 respectively. In Section 6, we discuss the theoretical implications of our results, linking beneficiaries' agency to project legitimacy and urgency pressures. Finally, we present our concluding remarks and the managerial implication of our research in Section 7.

2 Forced displacement as a grand challenge

Forced displacement is a highly complex and enduring societal challenge (van der Giessen et al., 2022; World Bank, 2024). At the end of 2022, the World Bank Group (WBG) reported a total of 108.4 million individuals were involuntarily displaced on a global scale (World Bank Group, 2023). Most of these individuals reside in emerging nations in the global South, with approximately two-thirds experiencing displacement exceeding a five-year duration. The nations and communities that host displaced populations encounter notable obstacles in attaining their own development objectives while simultaneously accommodating individuals who have been displaced (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). Forced displacement can take the form of internal displacement (leading to internally displaced persons, IDPs) or refugees (persons who cross international borders). Causes of forced displacement are multiple, multi-dimensional and complex, encompassing armed conflicts, persecution, discrimination (including gender-based violence), structural violence, climate change, natural/ man-made disasters and inequality (Ayeleru et al., 2020; Martin, 2016; van der Giessen et al., 2022). This also makes forced displacement an outcome of other grand challenges and also a cause of other grand challenges. For instance, the conflict in Syria has resulted in the involuntary displacement of more than ten million individuals, with over four million seeking refuge in neighbouring nations, thereby creating and contributing to other grand challenges in those contexts. Similarly, in 2020 approximately 1.2 million people were displaced due to the grand challenge of climate change related wildfires around the world (UNHCR, 2020).

Like any grand challenge, forced displacement is a “glocal” puzzle that cut across the local and the global, North and South, East and the West (Ika et al., 2020; Ika and Munro, 2022). Forced displacement

has, therefore, provoked major, global, complicated and complex interventions to counter them. Ika et al. (2020) refers to these interventions as GCPs. Examples of areas of target for forced displacement GCPs include projects on health, education, shelter, water and sanitation, disaster defence infrastructures, climate change resilience projects, environmental management initiatives, access to economic opportunities, conflict mitigation programmes, and inclusion in social safety net programmes.

Forced displacement GCPs can take the form of soft and/or hard projects or interventions. Soft interventions involve projects such as environmental zoning, conflict mitigation initiatives, and advocating for policies concerning land ownership, rights and tenure. Hard interventions encompass delivery of infrastructure to support livelihoods such as physical shelter structures, flood defence infrastructure, delivery of emergency refugee camps, the construction of new disaster-resistant buildings, management and operation of the offshore refugees processing centres etc (Quayle et al., 2019) . These projects may also be discrete such as the World Bank Group project in Bangladesh for the Health Sector Support that provides immunisations for over 87,000 displaced Rohingya children in 2018. They may form a component of a portfolio or be included in a programme, where they exhibit interconnectedness and aim to accomplish a shared objective that cannot be attained by a single project or even a few projects individually (Davies, 2017; Ferraro et al., 2015). A typical example is the multi-billion dollar, multi-stakeholder and multi-national approach taken by the Global Programme on Forced Displacement (GPDFD) established in 2009 to enhance the global development response to forced displacement through economically and socially sustainable projects (see World Bank, 2024).

In their review Stadtler et al. (2024) found that dealing with a grand challenge like forced displacement can take two approaches: (1) transformative projects to address factors contributing to grand challenges and initiate transformative change (Dentoni et al., 2018; Gray et al., 2022), and (2) mitigative intervention projects to assist governments, businesses, and civil-society organisations in eliminating grand challenge and help develop resilience capability for affected stakeholders (Bryson et al., 2015). Research also shows that forced displacement GCPs can be subject to contexts with varied levels of uncertainty and vagueness

(Burström and Wilson, 2018; De Meyer et al., 2002). We classified this into three distinctive contexts- pessimistic, routine and optimistic. Pessimistic context is characterised by high uncertainty and vagueness. Projects delivered in this context are subjected to higher levels of complexities (van der Giessen et al., 2022). This can include, for example, projects intersecting with active wars, and active disasters such as flood and earthquake response (Cretney, 2016) in which the causal conditions are still actively unfolding with high levels of uncertainties and vagueness. Routine context is characterised by moderate uncertainty and vagueness allowing for some anticipation, though constrained by uncertainty (Mohagheghi et al., 2015). Here, the projects mostly intersect with recovery efforts to stabilise the victims of forced displacement events. This can include provision of shelters, setting up migrant processing centres, immunisation and health programmes, local integration programmes, etc. Finally, optimistic context is marked by low levels of uncertainty and vagueness that allows for greater predictability. Projects in this context tend to intersect with prevention and preparedness initiatives to mitigate forced displacement events such as the building of flood defence barriers or constructing emergency earthquake shelters (Silva and Belderrain, 2019; Vahanvati and Mulligan, 2017).

The aforementioned forms and contexts of forced displacement GCPs, suggests the need for stakeholder engagement to ensure value distribution that makes significant impact on the project beneficiaries (Gil, 2022). To do so, an agency-based paradigm shift to stakeholder engagement (Chen et al., 2023) is required to support the ways in which organisations and practitioners conceptualise and deliver these projects. We theorise this in the next section.

3 Theoretical framework: rethinking agency for project beneficiaries

GCPs that deal with forced displacement often takes the form of developmental projects with direct or indirect goals centred on supporting sustainable livelihoods for stakeholder beneficiaries (Ika and Munro, 2022). This makes understanding the agentic action of stakeholders an important dimension of the delivery of such projects. We argue that achieving this requires the project management literature to offer

a theoretical understanding of the drivers that shape the development of agency among stakeholders, particularly project beneficiaries.

To theorise stakeholder agency, we cannot ignore the extensive examination of agency in the sociological literature that has refined our understanding of the factors that pertain to social action. This includes Bourdieu's investigation into the notion of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 2008, 1995), Giddens's conceptualisation of 'structuration' (Giddens, 1984), Freeman's stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2018), and Archer's realist social theory (Archer, 1995). In this context, the concept of agency is frequently contrasted with structure, often being equated with action (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). When agency is interpreted in a broader sense, it helps to emphasise the psycho-social structure of the actor, indicating the possibility of purposeful, voluntary behaviours. This interpretation aligns with a broad definition of agency as the ability for independent social action (Calhoun and Calhoun, 2002).

Indeed, GCPs conceptualised through a top-bottom approach is likely to face agency problem because the interests of development organisation might not always align with those of beneficiaries (Fama and Jensen, 1983; Ika and Munro, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2016). This can lead to a problem of utility loss, referring to the disparity between the utility that beneficiaries could attain if management adhered to their interests, and the utility gained when management prioritises its own interests (Hill and Jones, 1992). Hill and Jones (1992) suggests various incentives, monitoring, and enforcement structures to address this agency problem including external oversights and internal commitment processes that create mutual dependence between management and stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2016). Other approaches to dealing with such agency problems include (1) the implementation of stakeholder participation panels and codetermination mechanisms, (2) stewardship governance frameworks, (3) non-hierarchical structures that facilitate communication within organisations, and (4) accounting for stakeholders (Harrison and van der Laan Smith, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2016, 2015; Scherer and Palazzo, 2011). By addressing the problem of agency through the conventional framing of agency theory, these approaches focus, at least to some extent, on monitoring and enforcing management behaviour (Ahola et al., 2021; Farrell, 2003; Mitchell et

al., 2016; Müller and Turner, 2005) and ignores how the project can benefit from the agentic actions of the beneficiaries, particularly in grand challenge context. We argue that by expanding the theoretical framing of stakeholder agency to incorporate insights from sociological theorising of agency, we can enrich the understanding of the effects or implications of the agentic actions of beneficiaries in GCPs.

According to Biesta et al. (2015) agency is rooted in action–theoretical approaches. Here, “rather than seeing agency residing in individuals, agency is understood as an emergent phenomenon of actor-situation transaction” (Biesta et al., 2015, p 626). This ecological conception of agency emphasises the transaction between actors (e.g., the project beneficiaries) and their situations (i.e., the project contexts earlier characterised as optimistic, routine or pessimistic). This transaction shows that agency is not a fixed attribute but is continually shaped and reshaped by the circumstances of the project beneficiaries.

When viewed from the action–theoretical perspective, two aspects to project beneficiary’s agency must be understood in the context of the delivery of GCPs - specifically those aimed at addressing forced displacement. First, agency should be understood as a configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present (Alimadadi, 2022; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). These three dimensions are referred to as the iterative, the practical–evaluative, and the projective dimensions of agency respectively (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Turner, 1994). In different project contexts, these three dimensions are important for the enactment of agency by project stakeholders. The iterative dimension of agency involves the selective reactivation by project beneficiaries “of past patterns of thought and action, routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; p.179). For instance, the experience of forced displacement, provide crucial insights into response and the socio-cultural impact of projects that a beneficiary may prefer.

The projective dimension has to do with “the imaginative generation by project beneficiaries of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; p.179). The practical–evaluative dimension involves the capacity of project beneficiaries “to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of evolving contexts” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; p.179). The configuration of these three influences in project context positions agency as a dialogical process in which project beneficiaries, embedded in temporality, interact with one another within collectively organised contexts of action. Indeed, research shows that project beneficiaries engage with the future and make decisions in the present, while building on the past (Alimadadi, 2022; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2012). The future orientation dimension of action is conceptualised by the notion of projectivity (Mische, 2014). Hence, as Alimadadi (2022) asserted, the front-end of a project is where the highest projective dimension of beneficiary agency is evident, constituting a site of deliberation and “hyperprojectivity” (Mische, 2014). For project practitioners, this important configuration is relevant for understanding how to deal with demands and how to ensure projects are designed to deliver embedded multilevel benefits (Söderlund and Sydow, 2019).

Second is the legitimacy dimensions and urgency pressures that emerges, and is exerted by the agentic actions of project beneficiaries in GCPs (Agle et al., 1999; Connelly et al., 2011; Freeman, 2018; Mitchell et al., 1997). Legitimacy is the perception that an entity’s actions are appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms (Baba and Brunet, 2023; Di Maddaloni and Davis, 2017; Weber, 1978). A project legitimacy reflects whether the beneficiary has a rightful claim or standing to influence, participate in, or be affected by a project (Wilson and Koester, 2008). This may involve moral legitimacy (e.g., normative evaluation of activities), pragmatic legitimacy (e.g., exchange benefits), consequential legitimacy (e.g., social value of products/outcomes), and procedural legitimacy (e.g., social acceptability of operations), among other factors (Aaltonen, 2013; Derakhshan et al., 2019a; Melé and Armengou,

2016). Finally, urgency refers to the level of immediate attention required for stakeholder claims (Agle et al., 1999). This is based on time sensitivity, i.e., the degree to which managerial delay in attending to the claim or relationship is unacceptable to the stakeholder, and criticality, i.e., the importance of the claim or the relationship to the stakeholder (Agle et al., 1999), particularly in crisis situations such as those found in forced displacement.

Combining our ecological conception of stakeholder agency (Biesta et al., 2015; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) with the legitimacy dimensions and urgency pressures that emerges, and is exerted by the agentic actions of project beneficiaries in GCPs (Agle et al., 1999; Connelly et al., 2011; Freeman, 2018; Mitchell et al., 1997), guided the development of our research model shown in figure 1 below. In the next section we present our research method.

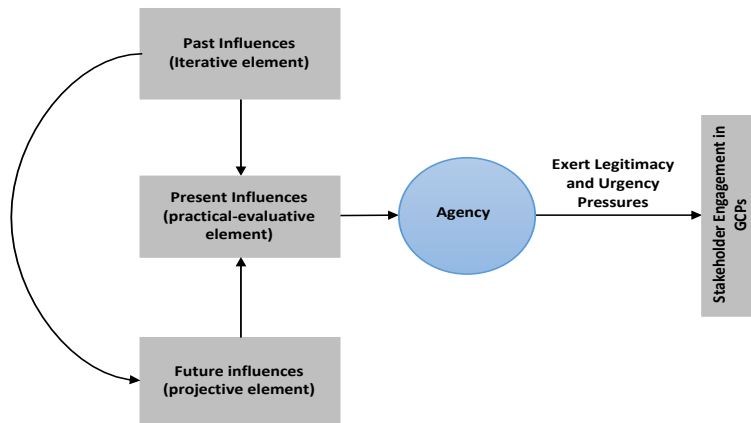


Figure 1. Stakeholder agency framework

4 Method

To address our research questions, we developed a structured, three-phase methodological approach. The following sections elaborate on each phase and justify their methodological suitability.

4.1 Phase 1: Identification of stakeholder agency influencing factors using systematic literature review.

Our research is aimed at developing an understanding of how project beneficiaries enact their agency in GCPs in order to actively participate in, and shape the direction, legitimacy and results of such projects

(Cornelius and Wallace, 2010; Fraser et al., 2006; Freeman, 2018; Weber, 2009) to ensure equitable value distribution (Gil, 2022). Consequently, we theorise stakeholder agency as a configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present (Alimadadi, 2022; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). The methodological question for us, therefore, is how to comprehensively identify the driving factors of the past, present and future influences of agency as a first step towards building an empirical and theoretical framework for agency enactment in GCPs. Hence, we employ a systematic literature review (SLR), as it offers a comprehensive and replicable research protocol for collecting, coding, and analysing information (Thomé et al., 2016).

We use Scopus the database to identify papers based on the following search strings: “agency” (Article title, Abstract, Keywords) AND “project” (Article title, Abstract, Keywords). A total of 2902 papers were identified. We then screen the papers two stages: the first stage used titles, keywords, and abstracts, while the second stage involved full-text screening. We apply inclusion and exclusion criteria such as article type, language of publication, subject discipline and scope of the study to narrow down to the relevant papers as shown in our PRISMA framework in figure 2.

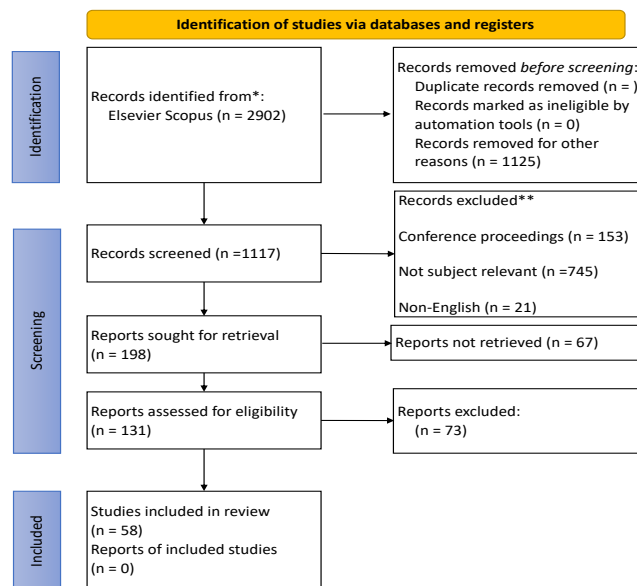


Figure 2. PRISMA flowchart with the different stages of data screening.

In our analysis and synthesis of high-quality research papers, we focus on identifying factors that drive the past, present, and future influences of agency. We employ thematic coding, following the Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, which involves systematically reviewing the papers and noting key elements that may indicate recurring patterns. We then sort the various codes into themes, refining them by excluding irrelevant themes and merging similar ones to create cohesive categories. This process enables us to identify and define ten driving factors that influence agency over time, as shown in Table 2.

At this point, we link the 10 factors identified to our theoretical framework by associating each of the drivers to the influences of agency. For instance, a project participant's life experience (Alimadadi, 2022; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Sewchurran, 2008), professional, occupational experience (McKevitt et al., 2022; Muñiz Castillo, 2014; Tynjälä, 2013) and educational qualification (Esmaeili et al., 2024; Faysse and Thomas, 2016; Muñiz Castillo, 2014) are associated to the past influences of agency. Similarly, the present influence of agency is driven by the participant's shared project norms, perceived autonomous capability, social structure positions, supportive discourse, and locally rooted options (Döringer, 2020; Muñiz Castillo, 2014; Paripurno et al., 2022; van der Giessen et al., 2022; Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2018). Finally, we associate the short and long term goals of the participants to the future or projective influences of agency (Alimadadi, 2022; Amin et al., 2022; Fried and Slowik, 2004; Mullaly, 2014). We use the identified drivers to develop our Hesitant Fuzzy Interpretive Structural Modelling (HFISM) questionnaires, which are administered in phase 2 of our research.

Table 1. SLR Extract of agency influencing factors

Past influences (1)	Driving factors	ID No.	Description (indicative research)
	Life experiences	F1-1	The accounts of a project beneficiary's related lived experiences, decisions, and significant events over the course of their life. These provide insights into how their backgrounds, environments, and personal trajectories shape their choices, and actions. Life experiences are often used to understand the impact of socio-cultural contexts on an individual's actions. Although different people may be subjected to the same experience they may have completely different perceptions of that experience and it influences on their actions (Alimadadi, 2022; Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Hitlin and Elder, 2006; Landes and Settersten, 2019; Sewchurran, 2008; Vargas, 2006).
	Professional/occupational background	F1-2	The accumulated work experiences, skills, qualifications, and roles a project beneficiary or stakeholder has acquired throughout their career. It encompasses everything from formal on-the-job experiences to professional networks and seen as an enabler of undertaking creative initiatives and making suggestions for transforming a given frame of action (Haapasaari and Kerosuo, 2015; Lovett et al., 2015; Lukic et al., 2013; McKeivitt et al., 2022; Muñiz Castillo, 2014; Tynjälä, 2013; Vähäsantanen et al., 2017).
	Educational background	F1-3	Educational background refers to the formal schooling, training, and academic qualifications that a project beneficiary or stakeholder has obtained throughout their life. It is often conceptualised as an agency influencing factor that provides instrumental agency for capacity development leveraging on the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to navigate challenges and pursue goals. The more educated an individual is the more likely they are to enact their agency (Esmaeili et al., 2024; Faysse and Thomas, 2016; Landy et al., 2022; Muñiz Castillo, 2014; Winch, 2014; Winch and Addis, 2022)
Present Influences (2)	Shared project norms	F2-1	The degree to which project beneficiaries and stakeholders understand, internalise, and align with the implicit and explicit norms of a project—such as shared ideas, values, and beliefs—and how this understanding shapes their capacity to act freely and effectively within the project context. The interplay of various norms can complicate decision-making (Baker and Niederman, 2023; Fanzini, 2024; Ferrer et al., 2021; Kadefors, 2005; Stingl and Gerdali, 2017; Vuorinen and Martinsuo, 2018)
	Perceived autonomous capability	F2-2	The extent to which project beneficiaries feel they have the freedom and control to make their own decisions and take independent actions within the project context. It emphasises the subjective experience of self-governance, awareness of own's capacity, and empowerment where individuals believe they can influence outcomes based on their own choices and capacity. This also includes having considerable flexibility to navigate any established rules, possessing decision making prowess. (Ahola et al., 2021; Ambituuni et al., 2021; Apsan Frediani et al., 2014; Benitez-Avila and Hartmann, 2023; Brummel, 2023; Davis et al., 2023; Mullaly, 2014; Muñiz Castillo, 2014)

	Social structure positions	F2-3	This relates to a project beneficiaries' position within a social structure—such as their relationships, access to resources, organisational structures, networks, and power dynamics—shapes their capacity to enact agency. This influences the sensemaking around interrelations within social systems, resilience and collective action (Bresnen et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2008; Ferraro et al., 2015; Iao-Jørgensen, 2023; Müller et al., 2018; Quinn and Worline, 2008; van der Giessen et al., 2022)
	Supportive discourse	F2-4	A project beneficiary's perception of constructive and collaborative communication and dialogue among stakeholders (internal and external) that encourages mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation. It involves sharing ideas, providing feedback, active listening, empathy, the willingness to find solutions and building consensus in a manner that facilitates progress toward common objectives (Burchell and Cook, 2006; Kaptein and Van Tulder, 2003; Paripurno et al., 2022; Tugirimana and Dushimimana, 2024; Welp et al., 2006; Zakhem, 2008).
	Locally rooted options	F2-5	Locally rooted options reflect the possibilities for action that emerge from, and are responsive to, the immediate surroundings and context of the project beneficiaries involved. They enable project beneficiaries to exercise their agency by leveraging local strengths, traditions, and networks, as opposed to being solely dependent on external solutions or influences (Che, 2019; Döringer, 2020; Reuter, 2023).
Future Influences (3)	Short term goals	F3-1	Short-term goals provide immediate focus, priorities and direction, which directly shapes how a project beneficiary or stakeholder exercise their ability to act independently, make decisions, and influence outcomes (Aaltonen and Kujala, 2010; Amin et al., 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2019b; Hadavi and Krizek, 1993; King, 1998; Mullaly, 2014; Ward and Chapman, 2008).
	Long term goals	F3-2	Long-term goals create a framework for sustained decision-making. It offers a broader perspective on how short-term actions contribute to overall aspirations. Long-term goals provide a strong sense of purpose, which can increase an individual's resilience and sustain their agentic actions (Alimadadi, 2022; Amin et al., 2022; Chih and Zwikael, 2015; Diallo and Thuillier, 2005; El-Gohary et al., 2006; Fried and Slowik, 2004)

4.2 Phase 2- Hesitant Fuzzy Interpretive Structural Modelling (HFISM)

4.2.1 Phase 2-step 1: data collection

We took an interpretivist approach in which the agency enactment in forced displacement GCPs takes place through the words and actions of the beneficiaries of these projects. In this view, the stories these beneficiaries narrate provide insights and reflective prompts into how they associate with the agency factors (Klein et al., 2007). Indeed, Gabriel (1998) contends that storytelling “educate, inspire, indoctrinate and convince” (p 135). Pentland (1999) asserts the importance of storytelling in organisation research and identifies the benefits such as a focus on the actor(s); an identifiable narrative voice (to reflect a particular point of view); a ‘canonical’ or evaluative frame of reference (embodying meaning and moral); and indicators of content and context (pp 712–713). The relevance of storytelling in organisation and management research can be seen in the growing corpus of research (Boje, 2008, 1997, 1991; Bowman et al., 2013; Gephart, 1991; Koskinen, 2008). Stories, therefore, offer a window into how the project beneficiaries reflect and interpret their roles, connect with various agency driving factors to contribute to a project’s trajectory (Alimadadi, 2022). Hence, building on the stories of the IDPs as our research participants, we allow reflective opportunities for them to gain insights into factors that might drive them to enact their agency in project contexts. We then leveraged these insights to ensure that the questionnaire was completed comprehensively and aligned closely with participants’ lived experiences.

To achieve this, we utilised storytelling in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Stringer and Aragón, 2020) via a 4-day in-person workshop conducted with the eighteen (18) IDPs in Nigeria. Because of the sensitivity and traumatising effects of forced displacement events such as conflict and natural disasters, Day 1 of the workshop focused on introduction and building trust via ice-breaking sessions between the research teams and the IDPs. Day 2 involved stimulating story projections, sharing and learning from the IDPs’ stories. By day 3 the team began to encourage the participants to share stories from their lived experiences including their participations or contributions to projects or interventions that sought to benefit them as IDPs. At this stage, the team prompted participants to reflect on and relate their agentic

actions to the factors influencing the enactment of agency, using the framework of past, present, and future influences. By day 4 the team explained and administered a HFISM questionnaire, which participants then completed and returned. Each workshop day typically began at 10.00 am and ended at 2.00 pm.

In the HFISM questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to two questions about the relationship between each pair of factors identified from the SLR. The first question was, “What is the nature of the relation between factor (i) and factor (j)?”. The second question was, “How confident each participant was regarding the relationship between factor (i) and factor (j)?”. To respond to the first question, four choices were possible, including:

- (i) Factor (i) results in the factor (j), which is known as (V),
- (ii) Factor (i) emanates from the factor (j), which is known as (A),
- (iii) Factor (i) and factor (j) have mutual impact on each other, which is known as (X), and
- (iv) There is no relationship between factor (i) and factor (j), which is known as (O) (Ghobakhloo et al., 2024).

Table 2 shows the linguistic terms used for the second question and then transferred to hesitant triangular fuzzy values.

Table 2 Linguistic terms and HTF values used for the HFISM questionnaire

ID	linguistic terms	hesitant triangular fuzzy values
EI	Extremely Impressive	$\{(0.7,0.8,0.9); (0.8,0.9,1)\}$
HI	Highly influential	$\{(0.6,0.7,0.8); (0.7,0.8,0.9)\}$
NI	Nearly Influential	$\{(0.4,0.5,0.6); (0.5,0.6,0.7)\}$
MI	Meagrely Influential	$\{(0.2,0.3,0.4); (0.3,0.4,0.5)\}$
NR	No relation	$\{(0.0,0.1,0.2); (0.1,0.2,0.3)\}$

Our methodological approach of storytelling in PAR is justified by its robustness, validity and reliability as reported in other research that address aspects of agency (Hall et al., 2010). The approach ensures

robust findings grounded in authentic, real-world experiences, providing insights into how beneficiaries might enact their agency to influence the trajectory of GCPs for their benefit. Similarly, our approach encourages more open and honest participation that creates reflective opportunities (Anderson, 2017; Emke et al., 2024; Kunt, 2020). Participants convey their experiences within an evaluative frame of reference, which embodies the meanings and values they attach to their agentic actions. Our storytelling approach within PAR involves continuous dialogue and feedback between researchers and participants. This process includes relationship building, establishing a shared understanding of the issue, observing and gathering materials, collaborative analysis, and developing effective working practices (Cornish et al., 2023; Dalziel and Piazzoli, 2019). This ensures the validity and reliability of our data. The active participation of IDPs in validating their experiences and linking them to our theoretical framework ensures that the findings are credible and theoretically relevant. In addition, the validity of the data analysis was enhanced by the diversity of researchers involved and the feedback provided by various external colleagues throughout the development and implementation of the method.

Table 3 shows the profile of the research participants. Each participant was purposefully sampled based on (1) participants must be genuine IDPs registered in a formal IDP camp (2) must be over 18 years old and capable of providing relevant insights to the project. This include, for instance, past experience of being involved, engaged, participated or contributed to any project aimed at dealing with the grand challenge of forced displacement. Eighteen (18) purposively sampled IDPs is considered an optimal number and sufficient for HFISM (Kasanen et al., 2000), as several studies have typically used between ten and eighteen participants (Avella, 2016; De Vet et al., 2005; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2023).

Table 3. Participants' Profile.

ID	Age groups	Education Attainment	Working Experience (years)
E01	30s	Secondary	5-10
E02	30s	BA/BSc/BEng/etc.	5-10
E03	20s	Diploma	Less than 5

E04	30s	Diploma	5-10
E05	30s	Secondary	5-10
E06	50s	Diploma	21+
E07	50s	Diploma	16-20
E08	30s	BA/BSc/BEng/etc.	5-10
E09	40s	Secondary	11-15
E10	40s	Diploma	11-15
E11	30s	Diploma	5-10
E12	50s	BA/BSc/BEng/etc.	16-20
E13	30s	Postgradaute.	5-10
E14	30s	Secondary	5-10
E15	20s	Diploma	Less than 5
E16	40s	BA/BSc/BEng/etc.	11-15
E17	40s	BA/BSc/BEng/etc.	11-15
E18	30s	Secondary	5-10

4.2.2 Phase 2 - step 2: data analysis

Definitions and Hesitant Fuzzy Operators. The Hesitant Fuzzy Set (HFS) was first introduced by (Torra, 2010). It is a robust method for addressing the hesitation of group decision-makers when considering a set of crisp possible values for membership. Notably, the Membership Function (MF) plays a crucial role in avoiding the use of crisp values when evaluating alternatives (Arslan and Kaya, 2001). A variety of MFs exist, but the triangular MFs is often recommended because they perform better (Sadollah, 2018). Consequently, the Hesitant Triangular Fuzzy Set (HTFS), as elaborated below, offers a more convincing framework than HFS when integrated with Multi-Criteria Decision-Making (MCDM) approaches (Zhao et al., 2014).

Let X be a constant set; an HTFS on X is defined as a function that, for each $x \in X$, returns a subset of fuzzy values within $[0,1]$. Mathematically, Zhao et al. (2014) expressed the HTFS as $E = \{ \langle x, \tilde{h}_{E(x)} \rangle / x \in X \}$, where $\tilde{h}_{E(x)} = \tilde{\gamma} = (\gamma^l, \gamma^m, \gamma^u)$ denotes the fuzzy possible membership degrees of the element $x \in X$ to the set E , through TFNs $\tilde{\gamma}$ in $[0,1]$. Ease of use, $\tilde{h}_{E(x)} = \tilde{h}$ is assumed as HTF Element (HTFE), and H includes the set of all HTFEs $(\tilde{h}_1, \tilde{h}_2, \dots, \tilde{h}_n)$ (Mahdiraji et al., 2024).

With the Hesitant Triangular Fuzzy Element (HTFE) $\tilde{h}$ in consideration, the Triangular Fuzzy Score Function (TFSF), $S(\tilde{h}) = \frac{1}{\#\tilde{h}} \sum_{\tilde{\gamma} \in \tilde{h}} \tilde{\gamma}$, is derived from the arithmetic average and is used to compare different HTFEs. Here, $\#\tilde{h}$ denotes the number of Triangular Fuzzy Numbers (TFNs) contained in $\tilde{h}$.

In addition, several aggregation operators have been introduced to combine HTFEs. Among these, the HTF Einstein Hybrid Average (HTFEHA) operator proposed by Zhao et al. (2014) has been effectively applied in group decision-making problems. This operator is particularly suitable for cases where evaluations of an alternative A_i under an attribute C_j by p participants' are represented by the HTFS $\tilde{H}(\tilde{h}_{ij_p}, i = 1, 2, \dots, m; j = 1, 2, \dots, n; P = 1, 2, \dots, K)$, leading to the construction of a group decision matrix $\tilde{D} = (\tilde{d}_{ij})_{m \times n}$. The HTFEHA operator stands out as it not only accounts for the ordered position of each argument but also incorporates their relative importance (Zhao et al., 2014). It is computed using Einstein sum operations, as shown in Equation (2):

$$\begin{aligned} HTFEHA_{w,\omega}(\tilde{h}_1, \tilde{h}_2, \dots, \tilde{h}_n) &= \oplus_{j=1}^n (w_j \tilde{h}_{\sigma(j)}) \\ &= \cup_{\tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(1)} \in \tilde{h}_{\sigma(1)}, \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(2)} \in \tilde{h}_{\sigma(2)}, \dots, \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(n)} \in \tilde{h}_{\sigma(n)}} \times \left\{ \frac{\prod_{j=1}^n (1 + \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(j)})^{w_j} - \prod_{j=1}^n (1 - \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(j)})^{w_j}}{\prod_{j=1}^n (1 + \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(j)})^{w_j} + \prod_{j=1}^n (1 - \tilde{\gamma}_{\sigma(j)})^{w_j}} \right\} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

After gathering the completed questionnaires, the following rules were implemented to construct the Hesitant Triangular Fuzzy Self-Structural Interaction Matrix (HTFSSIM) for each participant.

- V (or A) together with EI, HI, NI, MI, if the driver (i) leads to the driver (j) (or vice versa),
- X together with EI, HI, NI, MI, if driver (i) and driver (j) both lead to each other,
- NR if there is no relationship between driver (i) and driver (j).

Then, the following rules converted three HTFSSIMs into the Initial Hesitant Triangular Fuzzy Reachability Matrix (IHTFRM).

- [1]. If the element (i, j) in the HTFSSIM gets “V” (or “A”) together with EI, HI, NI, MI, the element (i, j) in the IHTFRM will get EI, HI, NI, MI (or “NR”) and the element (j, i) will get “NR” (or EI, HI, NI, MI).
- [2]. If the element (i, j) in the HTFSSIM get “X” together with EI, HI, NI, MI, both the element (i, j) and the element (j, i) in the IHTFRM will get EI, HI, NI, MI;
- [3]. If the element (i, j) in the HTFSSIM gets “O”, both the element (i, j) and the element (j, i) in the IHTFRM will get “NR”.

The linguistic terms were transformed into the corresponding Hesitant Triangular Fuzzy (HTF) value, and the aggregated IHTFRM was obtained by implementing the abovementioned operators and equation 1.

4.2.3 Phase 2 - step 3: Cross-Impact Matrix Multiplication Applied to Classification (MICMAC) and Level-Based Conceptual Frameworks (LBCF)

In the aggregated matrix (IHTFRM), the defuzzified aggregated matrix was obtained by applying the arithmetic mean of six values. Subsequently, based on the participants' opinions, values greater than 0.5 were converted to 1, while values less than or equal to 0.5 were converted to 0. Subsequently, the transitivity rule was verified (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021), deriving the Final Reachability Matrix (FRM).

The driving and dependence power were calculated by summing the rows and columns of the FRM, respectively. Then power mappings were created, depicting four categories of factors: (i) dependent (high dependence power and low driving power), (ii) trigger (high driving power and low dependence power), (iii) linkage (high in both dependence and driving power), and (iv) autonomous (low in both dependence and driving power) (Cherrafi et al., 2017; Yaftiyan et al., 2023). Then, the results were mapped in a MICMAC graph where the x-axis is the driving power, and the y-axis is the dependence power.

Finally, to develop the levels and conceptual frameworks illustrating the correlation between the factors, three categories were identified: (i) reachability (or output), (ii) antecedent (or input), and (iii) a common set (intersection) for each factor. The reachability set includes factors influenced by any other factor, while the antecedent set comprises factors that influence any other factor. The common set represents factors that are both reachable and antecedent. If the intersection and reachability sets are identical for any factor, these are considered high-level factors and are removed from the FRM. This process is repeated until all factors are categorised by level (Beheshti et al., 2023).

4.3 Phase 3: Validation of the conceptual frameworks

In the third and final phase of the research, we validated findings of our MICMAC and LBCF in a one-day workshop and through focus group discussions (FGDs) with the project managers. We purposefully identified government bodies, local, and international development organisations involved in delivering projects addressing forced displacement as a grand challenge, and sent out 15 workshop invitation letters. A total of eight (8) project managers from seven of the invited organisations attended the workshop which took place in Abuja, Nigeria. The workshop began with the presentation of the research questions, methods and results of the MICMAC and LBCF. The participants were then divided into two breakout groups. Each group was given the results of MICMAC and LBCF and asked to discuss how the agentic actions of project beneficiaries can affect or influence project's legitimacy and exert urgency pressures. Afterwards, the two groups merged to discuss the responses of each group. The discussion on each of the two focus groups and the joint discussion was recorded and transcribed. The transcript was then analysed using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) described in Section 4.1. The sets of theme candidates that emerged from our analysis allowed us to make sense of two important aspects of our research questions, i.e., how the enactment of the agency of project beneficiaries in context of the grand challenge of forced displacement can influence the legitimacy of the GCPs, and the ways in which agency can exert pressure on project urgency. Methodological rigour was achieved through precision planning, data collection and analysis. This includes careful planning and tabularising our research data, engaging

our data sources and focusing on verification and validation such as the methodological coherence, appropriate sampling frame and data analysis (Robson, 2015).

5 Results

5.1 MICMAC classification

Our result shows that the enactment of beneficiaries' agency in GCP context is strongly dependent and driven by their life experiences, social structure position, locally rooted options, perceived autonomous capabilities, and short-term goals. These factors serve as link between dependent and autonomous factors of the agency framework and aid in the transmission of agency impact in the projects. Any change affecting their strong driving force and high dependency will influence other factors and, therefore, affect how agency influences emerge as shown in Figure 3. Of similar importance is the professional/occupational and educational background of the beneficiaries which has high driving power and low dependence power. These factors act as agency-enabling triggers and are the key determinants that exert a significant driving impact on other factors. Finally, long-term goals, supportive discourse, and whether the beneficiaries align with the implicit and explicit norms of a project are reactive indicators, meaning they have a high dependency on other factors. They can become critical points of focus for project managers in GCP context where a sudden increase in agency influence is expected or required.

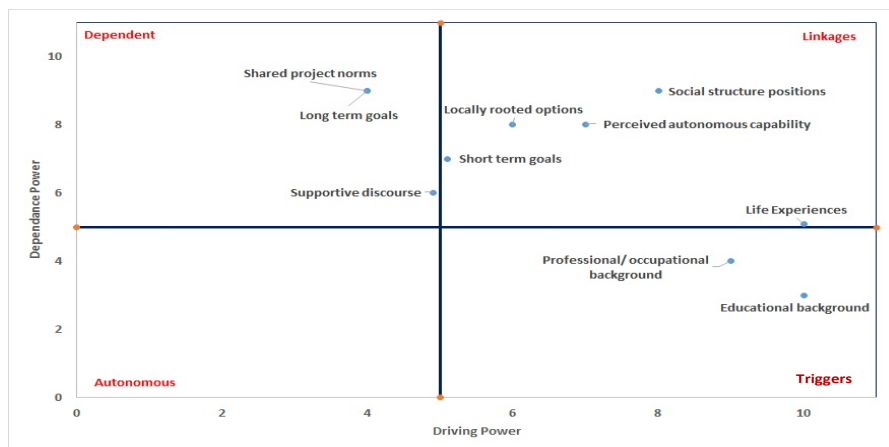


Figure 3. MICMAC classification of agency inflecting factors

5.2 Level-based conceptual framework (LBCF)

Figure 4 shows our LBCF and the organisation of agency influencing factors across distinct levels based on their influence and dependency relationships. Factors related to the past influences or iterative elements of agency all form the prerequisite lowest level drivers for agency enactment by project beneficiaries in GCP context as shown in Figure 4. Notably, the experiences surrounding forced displacement events become intrinsic to the life experience of the beneficiaries. Together with educational, occupational and professional experience, the factors act as enablers of agentic actions. These factors form the prerequisite background of past influences of agency, and are all strongly correlate with each other. The factors complement and synergistically enhance each other while collectively enabling the hierarchical influences of locally rooted options, supportive discourse and short-term goals.

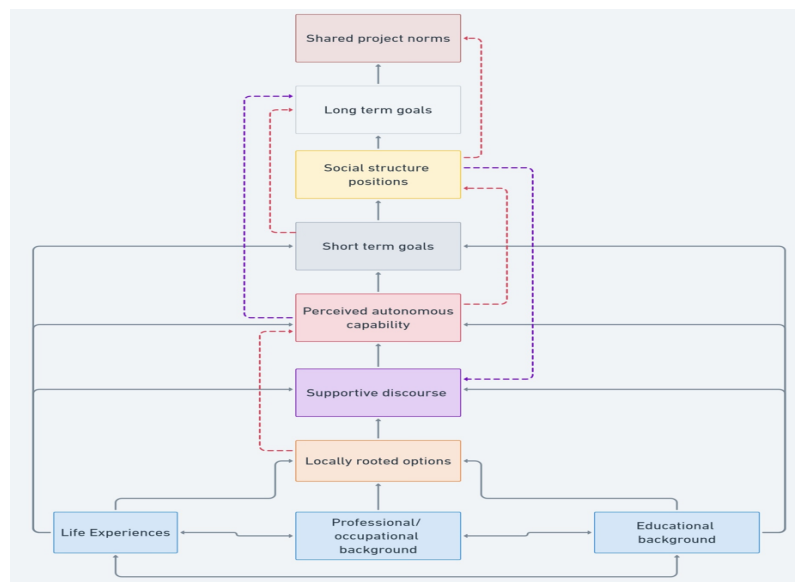


Figure 4. Level-based conceptual framework

The hierarchy of the next four (4) agency influencing factors reveals a dynamic structure that critically informs stakeholder engagement with project beneficiaries. Locally routed options – i.e., the possibilities for action that emerge from, and are responsive to, the immediate surroundings and context of the project beneficiaries – emerged as the prerequisite for the perception of constructive dialogue (i.e, supportive discourse) and, therefore, supports the practical evaluative element of agency enactment. Subsequently,

beneficiaries perceived autonomous capability and projective evaluation of short-term goals follow this hierarchy. Such an ordering aligns with our ecological conception of agency, which situates agency enactment within pessimistic and routine forced displacement scenarios where GCPs converge with forced displacement response and recovery measures aimed at stabilising displaced victims, who are, in this case, the beneficiaries of projects. This ordering aligns with our ecological conception of agency, which situates agency enactment within challenging and routine forced displacement scenarios. Here, GCPs converge with response and recovery measures aimed at stabilising displaced individuals, who are, in this context, the project beneficiaries. Hence, the emergence of short-term goals as a practical-evaluative element of agency at this point shows the beneficiary's priority to attain some level of livelihood stability in the immediate aftermath of the displacement event by leveraging the potential outcome of the GCPs.

The hierarchical succession of social structure position from the predecessor (short-term goals) brings to bear the inherent ties between the beneficiaries' relational and resource-based standing within the socio-organisational context of GCPs. This factor introduces a relational dimension to agency enactment. Beneficiaries' positions within social structures are seen as a practical evaluative element that informs their capacity to influence outcomes. In particular, social structure position shapes how beneficiaries enact and interpret their agency, embedding it within a network of relationships that either constrain or amplify their potential for meaningful action. As the successor to the social structure position, long-term goals frame beneficiaries' agentic actions within a broader temporal and aspirational context. It forms a projective element that reinforces the beneficiaries' commitment to their agentic pathways by imbuing their immediate actions with a sense of continuity and purpose that extends beyond the project context. Finally, shared project norms occupy the highest level of this hierarchical structure known as the outcome driver. Leveraging this driver, beneficiaries negotiate both individual and collective imperatives within the context of their understanding objectives of the project. Hence, an alignment between this factor and a

project's objectives can amplify the beneficiaries' capacity to act supportively towards the project, whilst misalignment may lead to resistance or delegitimisation of the project.

With the MICMAC and LBCF understanding of the driving and dependency power of the agency influencing factors and their hierarchical interactions respectively, we sought to understand how the contextual enactment of agency by GCP beneficiaries might exert legitimacy and urgency pressures on GCPs. Based on the framework of our thematic analysis of data from the FGDs with project professionals, the findings are structured around the process dynamics of the exertion of legitimacy pressures. We present our findings using the themes and indicative quotes in Section 5.3 and 5.4.

5.3 Project legitimacy dimensions

Project managers perceive that the beneficiaries' (which in this context are IDPs) positive agentic actions aligns the project with local ethical standards and social norms, as shown in Table 4. It ensures that the GCPs respect local norms which reinforces the project's credibility and moral standing. Beneficiaries' agency is also essential for pressure on GCPs to create tangible benefits and reciprocal value, which in turn strengthens the project's appeal. Finally, procedural legitimacy arises from the agentic actions that entrenches perceived fairness and acceptability of how the projects operate. The agentic actions of beneficiaries reinforce project accountability and inclusiveness, and enhance the project's support within the community and other stakeholders.

Table 4. Project legitimacy dimensions and agency enactments.

Legitimacy dimensions	Agency enactment themes	Indicative quotes
Moral legitimacy (Normative evaluation of activities)	Aligns the project with ethical standards and social norms	<i>"When IDPs bring their views forward, it grounds us in what's ethically right for this community. They ensure we're sensitive to their values and customs, which is essential for us to act responsibly". [Participant 3, FG1]</i>
	Respect for local norms	<i>"Their perspectives keep us aligned with the local moral compass. This way, we're not imposing an outsider's view of 'right' but letting them guide us on what's appropriate and respectful". [Participant 1, FG1]</i>

Pragmatic legitimacy (Exchange benefits)	Building reciprocal project value	<i>“It’s a win-win because we gain from their input, and they gain ownership of the interventions... which enhances the project’s success”. [Participant 5, FG2]</i>
	Increased buy-in and social support	<i>“When IDPs take ownership, they also advocate for the project, which helps us gain acceptance from the rest of the community.... The opposite might also be the case”. [Participant 2, FG1]</i>
	Local knowledge for adaptive solutions	<i>“Without their input, we might miss critical details about what truly works here”. [Participant 7, FG2]</i>
Procedural legitimacy (Social acceptability of operations)	Accountability in projects	<i>“Abuse does take place in some of these projects. So where possible it makes sense to engage and empower the IDPs to ask questions and give feedback”. [Participant 3, FG1]</i>
	Inclusive processes	<i>“If they know what’s going on [in the project] and are part of the conversation. It creates an open environment where everyone feels heard.... we’re signalling to the whole community that the project respects local voices”. [Participant 8, FG2]</i>

5.4 Urgency pressure

The way in which the beneficiaries’ agency exerts pressure on project urgency is dependent on the context of the forced displacement within which the project is situated. Our result, shown in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**, suggests that in a pessimistic context, often involving active crises such as wars, natural disasters, or ongoing civil conflicts, where GCP conditions are volatile and ever-changing, agency enactment reflects immediate survival needs and heightened vulnerability. Agency emerges as demands for urgent, adaptive responses from project managers. It mandates that project managers develop improvisational capabilities to address the urgent needs of beneficiaries', emanating from their agentic actions, while coordinating the rapid delivery and supply of relief materials from donors organisations. In a routine context, GCPs aim to stabilise and recover from forced displacement events. Here, beneficiaries enact agency with a focus on rebuilding stability to regain control over their livelihoods. While some uncertainties remain, project managers are generally able to anticipate and respond to this with more structure and consistency than in the pessimistic context. Lastly, in an

optimistic context, the pressure exerted by agentic actions is more about the projective pre-empting of urgency to deliver projects that mitigate future vulnerabilities.

Table 5. Project context, agency and urgency pressures

Project context	Themes: agency influences on urgency	Indicative quotes
Pessimistic context, characterised by high uncertainty and vagueness	Adaptive project responses	<i>“They advocate for survival resources not just for the day but for the next few hours. This level of urgency pushes us to rethink our project processes and outcomes, and be ready to respond in real-time.” [Participant 7, FG2]</i>
	High-level of pressurised improvisation in project coordination	<i>“... we are attempting to balance IDP needs with the rapid delivery of relief materials from donors with very little time to plan. It’s almost like we improvise as we go.” [Participant 3, FG1]</i>
Routine context, characterised by moderate uncertainty and vagueness, allowing for some anticipation	Structured approach to building stability from project outcomes	<i>“IDPs advocate strongly for economic opportunities here; they want training and job access immediately, to avoid dependency on aid. This sense of urgency is able delivering projects that focus on resilience and makes us focus on implementing, for example, of vocational programmes.” [Participant 6, FG2]</i>
	Conflict management of project delivery	<i>“Some projects aim to ensure integrating the IDPs with the local community... often pushing us to mediate or intervene when tensions arise.” [Participant 4, FG1]</i>
Optimistic context, marked by low levels of uncertainty and vagueness that allows for greater predictability	Projective urgency	<i>“...their involvement signals an urgency to prepare for what they’ve already experienced. Their agency here is less about immediate need and more about empowerment—they’re looking ahead, wanting tools and knowledge that will allow them to protect themselves in the future.” [Participant 5, FG2]</i>

6 Discussion and theoretical implications

In our inquiry, we expand the theoretical conception of agency to illustrate how project beneficiaries enact their agency in the context of GCPs and how their agentic actions impact project legitimacy and urgency pressures. Thus, we make three contributions.

First, we contribute to the streams of research on agency in projects (Benitez-Avila and Hartmann, 2023; Ferraro et al., 2015; Mullaly, 2014; van der Giessen et al., 2022) and expand Emirbayer and Mische’s

(1998) theoretical conception of agency to the context of GCPs. Specifically, we identify the driving factors of the iterative, practical–evaluative, and projective dimensions of agency in GCP context. We show the characteristics of these factors as dependents, triggers and linkages and illustrate how they interact in GCP contexts. In particular, our MICMAC classification reveals that in GCP contexts, agency does not manifest in a vacuum. Factors like beneficiaries’ educational and professional backgrounds, social positions, and life experiences are high-driving factors (Alimadadi, 2022; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Landes and Settersten, 2019; Muñiz Castillo, 2014). Similarly, social positioning ensures a sensemaking process through which beneficiaries evaluate and adapt to the social environment, facilitate a collaborative framework for resilience and collective action, and envision their short and long-term goals (Bresnen et al., 2005; Brown et al., 2008; Ferraro et al., 2015; Iao-Jørgensen, 2023; van der Giessen et al., 2022). For example, beneficiaries who faced forced displacement have specific life experiences, short- and long-term goals that affect their perception of autonomy and the practical actions they take within a project context. Hence, we clarify agency as a cumulative construct with an enduring impact of past experiences on current action, and a projective outlook of what the GCP offers the project beneficiary from the perspective of their short- and long-term goals. With this ecological conception of agency in GCPs (Biesta et al., 2015), we argue that the agency of project beneficiaries can be nurtured to align their expectations with the project’s intended outcomes. This is relevant for the bottom-top broadening of stakeholder engagement (Fraser et al., 2006; Weber, 2009) and for the local adaptation of projects to deliver contextual value for the beneficiaries (Andres et al., 2016; Cornelius and Wallace, 2010). It is also relevant for influencing the effectiveness of some project initiation decisions (Mullaly, 2014).

Second, we show how the enactment of agency by GCP beneficiaries can have implications on the normative (moral), exchange benefit (pragmatic) and procedural legitimacy of the project. This contribution situates the argument of legitimacy within the context of temporary organisation (Baba and Brunet, 2023; Suchman, 1995) as opposed to the focus of research that is rather on the taken-for-granted

immortal forms of organizing (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). In our work, we show how the “micro” level of project legitimacy can be influenced by the beneficiaries’ agentic actions that align the project with ethical standards and social norms (moral legitimacy); build reciprocal project value, social support and contextual solutions (pragmatic legitimacy), and enhance project accountability and inclusive processes (procedural legitimacy) (Aaltonen, 2013; Derakhshan et al., 2019a; Melé and Armengou, 2016). With this important contribution, we further add to the debate on assessing legitimacy (Bitektine et al., 2020) and argue that a beneficiary’s agency is an important dimension of a GCP legitimacy. The extent to which the beneficiaries of a GCP enact their agency might provide a better framework for understanding both the individual and collective dimension of their trust and belief in its value and purpose. Moreover, with our MICMAC classification and hierarchical understanding of the factors that drive the iterative, practical evaluative and projective elements of agency, we show that it is possible to develop conditions suitable for the enactment of beneficiaries’ agency in GCPs, and therefore, nurture conditions for the legitimisation of projects. Agentic actions aligned with the project can influence its social acceptability, while those that contest the project can, in the worst cases, lead to project failure (Aaltonen, 2013; Orr and Scott, 2008).

Our third contribution focuses on the project management capabilities that arise from the urgency pressures due to project beneficiaries’ agency in GCP contexts. Beneficiaries’ agency increases the pressure on both the time sensitivity and criticality of GCPs within challenging forced displacement contexts (Agle et al., 1999). This prompts the development of adaptive project responses and improvisation capabilities by project professionals to deal with the prioritised needs of the beneficiaries. Improvisation involves dealing with the unforeseen without the benefit of preparation (Hadida et al., 2015) and, in this instance, improvisational actions at the individual level and complex collective improvisation at the team and organisational levels are relevant (Pavlou and El Sawy, 2010). It ensures that project professionals develop acumen for adapting and moving quickly and smoothly (Ambituuni et al., 2021; Cunha et al., 2020), including in unexpected forced displacement contexts where it is

impossible to accomplish detailed plans. In routine contexts where the focus is on stabilising and recovering from forced displacement events, project managers develop capabilities to address conflicts that may arise from projects potentially creating tension between displaced persons and host communities. Moreover, the capability for projective urgency becomes essential in optimistic contexts. These projective urgency capabilities enable project managers to respond to agentic actions that anticipate the need for urgent delivery of projects aimed at mitigating future vulnerabilities. In this instance, the agency of project beneficiaries plays a crucial role in initiating GCPs (Mullaly, 2014).

7 Concluding remarks

In this study, we investigate the agency influencing factors of project beneficiaries and how these factors shape the enactment of agency in GCPs aimed at addressing forced displacement. We contribute to the project management literature by expanding the concept of stakeholder agency to include nonmarket stakeholders (i.e., beneficiaries) in forced displacement context, thus offering a more nuanced understanding of relevance of understanding of project beneficiaries' agency in complex GCP environments. We show how beneficiaries' agency—shaped by past experiences, present circumstances, and future aspirations—affects project legitimacy and urgency, and emphasise the importance of engaging stakeholders as active participants rather than passive recipients in GCP contexts. Our findings reveal that specific factors influencing agency, such as life experiences, social structure position, locally rooted options, perceived autonomous capabilities, and short-term goals, can significantly affect how project beneficiaries enact their agency to ensure that project align with their needs. Ultimately this ensure the delivery of contextual and equitable value distribution of project outcomes.

7.1 Managerial implications

The findings of this study suggest that project managers overseeing GCPs, especially those addressing complex, high-stake issues like forced displacement, should actively encourage the enactment of beneficiary agency into project design and execution. Engaging beneficiaries as partners in the process can increase project legitimacy and improve responsiveness to local needs. By focusing on factors that

influence agency—such as life experience, short- and long-term goals, and social structure positioning—managers can enhance alignment with beneficiary priorities and address legitimacy and urgency issues more effectively. Project managers also need to develop strong adaptive project responses, conflict management, and improvisational capabilities to deal with the prioritised needs of the beneficiaries when delivering GCPs in forced displacement context.

7.2 Limitations and directions for future research

The limitation of the study should be noted. Whilst the study provides valuable insights into beneficiary agency in GCPs in forced displacement, the context-specific nature of the study may limit its generalisability to other grand challenge contexts. Future research could build on these findings by examining beneficiary agency in different grand challenge contexts, such as climate change, public health, or poverty alleviation, to test the applicability of this framework in these contexts. Finally, the research briefly addressed agency factors linked to cultural dimensions, such as social structure and locally rooted options. However, it did not provide detailed exploration of cross-cultural differences in agency. Exploring these differences could help project managers develop culturally sensitive strategies to understand beneficiaries' agency that is useful for effective engagement across diverse regions.

Funding source: UK Research and Innovation, AHRC AH/W00979X/1.

Reference

- Aaltonen, K., 2013. The establishment of legitimacy: the case of international projects. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 6, 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538371311291008>
- Aaltonen, K., Kujala, J., 2010. A project lifecycle perspective on stakeholder influence strategies in global projects. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Part Special Issue “Global Projects: Strategic Perspectives” 26, 381–397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2010.09.001>
- Agle, B.R., Mitchell, R.K., Sonnenfeld, J.A., 1999. Who Matters to Ceos? An Investigation of Stakeholder Attributes and Salience, Corporate Performance, and Ceo Values. *AMJ* 42, 507–525. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256973>
- Ahola, T., Ståhle, M., Martinsuo, M., 2021. Agency relationships of project-based firms. *International Journal of Project Management* 39, 713–725. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2021.06.005>
- Alimadadi, S., 2022. A pragmatist perspective on front-end project organizing: The case of refurbishment of the Palace of Westminster. *International Journal of Project Management* 40, 763–777. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2022.08.008>

- Alobo, E., Obaji, S., 2016. Internal Displacement in Nigeria and the Case for Human Rights Protection of Displaced Persons. *J.L. Pol'y & Globalization* 51, 26–33.
- Ambituuni, A., Azizsafaei, F., Keegan, A., 2021. HRM operational models and practices to enable strategic agility in PBOs: Managing paradoxical tensions. *Journal of Business Research* 133, 170–182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.048>
- Amin, H., Scheepers, H., Malik, M., 2022. Project monitoring and evaluation to engage stakeholders of international development projects for community impact. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 16, 405–427. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-02-2022-0043>
- Anderson, G., 2017. Participatory action research (PAR) as democratic disruption: new public management and educational research in schools and universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*.
- Andres, L., Biller, D., Dappe, M.H., 2016. A Methodological Framework for Prioritising Infrastructure Investment. *Journal of Infrastructure Development* 8, 111–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974930616667886>
- Apsan Frediani, A., Boni, A., Gasper, D., 2014. Approaching Development Projects from a Human Development and Capability Perspective. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 15, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.879014>
- Archer, M.S., 1995. *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Arslan, A., Kaya, M., 2001. Determination of fuzzy logic membership functions using genetic algorithms. *Fuzzy Sets and Systems* 118, 297–306. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0114\(99\)00065-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0114(99)00065-2)
- Austin, J.E., Seitanidi, M.M., 2012. Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part I. Value Creation Spectrum and Collaboration Stages. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 41, 726–758. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012450777>
- Avella, J.R., 2016. Delphi Panels: Research Design, Procedures, Advantages, and Challenges. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 11, 305–321.
- Ayeleru, O.O., Dlova, S., Akinribide, O.J., Ntuli, F., Kupolati, W.K., Marina, P.F., Blencowe, A., Olubambi, P.A., 2020. Challenges of plastic waste generation and management in sub-Saharan Africa: A review. *Waste Management* 110, 24–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasman.2020.04.017>
- Baba, S., Brunet, M., 2023. Project legitimacy: Towards a theoretical framework. *European Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12620>
- Badenfelt, U., 2010. I trust you, I trust you not: a longitudinal study of control mechanisms in incentive contracts. *Construction Management and Economics* 28, 301–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446191003587745>
- Baker, E.W., Niederman, F., 2023. Practitioner Application of Ethics in Ethical Decision-Making Within Projects: A Process Theory View. *Project Management Journal* 54, 334–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728231166917>
- Bandé, A., Ika, L.A., Ouédraogo, S., 2024. Beneficiary participation is an imperative, not an option, but does it really work in international development projects? *International Journal of Project Management* 42, 102561. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2024.102561>
- Beheshti, M., Amoozad Mahdiraji, H., Rocha-Lona, L., 2023. Transitioning drivers from linear to circular economic models: evidence of entrepreneurship in emerging nations. *Management Decision* ahead-of-print. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-02-2023-0279>
- Benitez-Avila, C., Hartmann, A., 2023. Managerial agency (re)producing project governance structure and context: Public-private partnerships in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Project Management* 41, 102468. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2023.102468>
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., Robinson, S., 2015. The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching* 21, 624–640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325>
- Biesta, G., Tedder, M., 2007. Agency and learning in the lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 39, 132–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545>

- Bitektine, A., Haack, P., 2015. The “Macro” and the “Micro” of Legitimacy: Toward a Multilevel Theory of the Legitimacy Process. *AMR* 40, 49–75. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2013.0318>
- Bitektine, A., Hill, K., Song, F., Vandenbergh, C., 2020. Organizational Legitimacy, Reputation, and Status: Insights from Micro-Level Measurement. *AMD* 6, 107–136. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0007>
- Boje, D., 2008. Storytelling Organizations 1–288.
- Boje, D.M., 1997. Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A Postmodern Analysis of Disney as “Tamara-Land,” in: *Postmodern Management Theory*. Routledge.
- Boje, D.M., 1991. The Storytelling Organization: A Study of Story Performance in an Office- Supply Firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 36, 106–126. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393432>
- Bourdieu, P., 2008. Outline of a Theory of Practice, in: *The New Social Theory Reader*. Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P., 1995. Structures, Habitus, Practices, in: *Rethinking The Subject*. Routledge.
- Bowman, G., MacKay, R.B., Masrani, S., McKiernan, P., 2013. Storytelling and the scenario process: Understanding success and failure. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Scenario Method: Current developments in theory and practice* 80, 735–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2012.04.009>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bresnen, M., Goussevskaia, A., Swan, J., 2005. Implementing change in construction project organizations: exploring the interplay between structure and agency. *Building Research & Information* 33, 547–560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09613210500288837>
- Brown, A.D., Stacey, P., Nandhakumar, J., 2008. Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations* 61, 1035–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094858>
- Brummel, L., 2023. Stakeholder involvement as a form of accountability? Perspectives on the accountability function of stakeholder bodies in Dutch public agencies. *Public Policy and Administration* 09520767231203283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767231203283>
- Bryson, J.M., Crosby, B.C., Stone, M.M., 2015. Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed and Challenging. *Public Administration Review* 75, 647–663. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12432>
- Burchell, J., Cook, J., 2006. Assessing the impact of stakeholder dialogue: changing relationships between NGOs and companies. *Journal of Public Affairs* 6, 210–227. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.229>
- Burström, T., Wilson, T.L., 2018. The texture of tension: complexity, uncertainty and equivocality. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 11, 458–485. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-01-2017-0005>
- Calhoun, C., Calhoun, C., 2002. *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York.
- Chang, C.-Y., 2014. Principal-Agent Model of Risk Allocation in Construction Contracts and Its Critique. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 140, 04013032. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)CO.1943-7862.0000779](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0000779)
- Che, C., 2019. Community agency, needs mapping and solidarity economics in resource depleted communities. Presented at the 7th CIRIEC Conference, Romania.
- Chen, V.Z., Duran, P., Sauerwald, S., Hitt, M.A., van Essen, M., 2023. Multistakeholder Agency: Stakeholder Benefit Alignment and National Institutional Contexts. *Journal of Management* 49, 839–865. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063211054403>
- Cherrafi, A., Elfezazi, S., Garza-Reyes, J.A., Benhida, K., Mokhlis, A., 2017. Barriers in Green Lean implementation: a combined systematic literature review and interpretive structural modelling approach. *Production Planning & Control*.
- Chih, Y.-Y., Zwikael, O., 2015. Project benefit management: A conceptual framework of target benefit formulation. *International Journal of Project Management* 33, 352–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.06.002>

- Clarke, A., Crane, A., 2018. Cross-Sector Partnerships for Systemic Change: Systematized Literature Review and Agenda for Further Research. *J Bus Ethics* 150, 303–313. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3922-2>
- Connelly, B.L., Certo, S.T., Ireland, R.D., Reutzel, C.R., 2011. Signaling Theory: A Review and Assessment. *Journal of Management* 37, 39–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310388419>
- Cornelius, N., Wallace, J., 2010. Cross-Sector Partnerships: City Regeneration and Social Justice. *J Bus Ethics* 94, 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0780-6>
- Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U., Delgado, J., Rua, M., de-Graft Aikins, A., Hodgetts, D., 2023. Participatory action research. *Nat Rev Methods Primers* 3, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1>
- Crawford, L., Cooke-Davies, T., Hobbs, B., Labuschagne, L., Remington, K., Chen, P., 2008. Governance and support in the sponsoring of projects and programs. *Project Management Journal* 39, S43–S55. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pmj.20059>
- Crawley, H., Skleparis, D., 2018. Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe’s ‘migration crisis.’ *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, 48–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224>
- Cretney, R.M., 2016. Local responses to disaster: The value of community led post disaster response action in a resilience framework. *Disaster Prevention and Management* 25, 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-02-2015-0043>
- Cunha, M.P.E., Gomes, E., Mellahi, K., Miner, A., Rego, A., 2020. Strategic agility through improvisational capabilities: implications for a paradox-sensitive HRM. *Human Resource Management Review* 30, 100695. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2019.100695>
- Dalziel, F., Piazzoli, E., 2019. “It comes from you”: Agency in adult asylum seekers’ language learning through Process Drama. *Language Learning in Higher Education* 9, 7–32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/cercles-2019-0001>
- Davies, A., 2017. *Projects: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Davis, K., Maddaloni, F.D., Pinto, J.K., 2023. Drawing New Cards or Standing Pat: Antecedents, Dynamics, and Consequences of Project Manager Replacement. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management* 70, 1670–1692. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2021.3064609>
- De Meyer, A., Loch, C.H., Pich, M.T., 2002. Managing project uncertainty: From variation to chaos. *MIT Sloan Management Review* 43, 60–67.
- De Vet, E., Brug, J., De Noijer, J., Dijkstra, A., De Vries, N.K., 2005. Determinants of forward stage transitions: a Delphi study. *Health Educ Res* 20, 195–205. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyg111>
- Dentoni, D., Bitzer, V., Schouten, G., 2018. Harnessing Wicked Problems in Multi-stakeholder Partnerships. *J Bus Ethics* 150, 333–356. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3858-6>
- Derakhshan, R., Mancini, M., Turner, J.R., 2019a. Community’s evaluation of organizational legitimacy: Formation and reconsideration. *International Journal of Project Management* 37, 73–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2018.10.004>
- Derakhshan, R., Turner, R., Mancini, M., 2019b. Project governance and stakeholders: a literature review. *International Journal of Project Management* 37, 98–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2018.10.007>
- Di Maddaloni, F., Davis, K., 2017. The influence of local community stakeholders in megaprojects: Rethinking their inclusiveness to improve project performance. *International Journal of Project Management* 35, 1537–1556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2017.08.011>
- Diallo, A., Thuillier, D., 2005. The success of international development projects, trust and communication: an African perspective. *International Journal of Project Management* 23, 237–252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2004.10.002>
- Döringer, S., 2020. Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: individual agency in Austria. *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 7, 550–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2020.1842801>

- Eisenhardt, K.M., 1989. Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review. *AMR* 14, 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4279003>
- El-Gohary, N.M., Osman, H., El-Diraby, T.E., 2006. Stakeholder management for public private partnerships. *International Journal of Project Management, Governance Issues in Public Private Partnerships* 24, 595–604. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2006.07.009>
- Emirbayer, M., Mische, A., 1998. What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology* 103, 962–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231294>
- Emke, H., Vandendriessche, A., Chinapaw, M., Deforche, B., Verloigne, M., Altenburg, T., Anselma, M., 2024. Facilitating co-research: lessons learned from reflection forms within three participatory action research projects. *Health Research Policy and Systems* 22, 117. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-024-01210-x>
- Esmaili, R., Shakerian, M., Yazdi, M., 2024. Decision-Making in Project and Operations Management, in: Yazdi, M. (Ed.), *Progressive Decision-Making Tools and Applications in Project and Operation Management: Approaches, Case Studies, Multi-Criteria Decision-Making, Multi-Objective Decision-Making, Decision under Uncertainty*. Springer Nature Switzerland, Cham, pp. 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51719-8_2
- Fama, E.F., Jensen, M.C., 1983. Agency Problems and Residual Claims. *The Journal of Law and Economics* 26, 327–349. <https://doi.org/10.1086/467038>
- Fanzini, D., 2024. Shared planning in the norm-project combination. *TECHNE - Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment* 60–65. <https://doi.org/10.36253/techne-15112>
- Farrell, L.M., 2003. Principal-agency risk in project finance. *International Journal of Project Management* 21, 547–561. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863\(02\)00086-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863(02)00086-8)
- Faysse, N., Thomas, L., 2016. Getting Technical: Farmers' New Strategies to Exercise Agency in Negotiating Development Projects in Morocco. *Forum for Development Studies*.
- Ferraro, F., Etzion, D., Gehman, J., 2015. Tackling Grand Challenges Pragmatically: Robust Action Revisited. *Organization Studies* 36, 363–390. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840614563742>
- Ferrer, P.S.S., Araújo Galvão, G.D., Monteiro de Carvalho, M., 2021. The Missing Link in Project Governance: Permeability and Influence of Governance Precepts on Decision Making in the Project Domain. *Project Management Journal* 52, 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972820941649>
- Finsterbusch, K., Van Wicklin III, W.A., 1987. The contribution of beneficiary participation to development project effectiveness. *Public Administration and Development* 7, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.4230070102>
- Fraser, E.D.G., Dougill, A.J., Mabee, W.E., Reed, M., McAlpine, P., 2006. Bottom up and top down: Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management. *Journal of Environmental Management* 78, 114–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2005.04.009>
- Freeman, R., 2018. *Stakeholder Theory: Concepts and Strategies*, Reprint edition. ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Fried, Y., Slowik, L.H., 2004. Enriching Goal-Setting Theory with Time: An Integrated Approach. *AMR* 29, 404–422. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2004.13670973>
- Gabriel, Y., 1998. *The use of stories* - University of Birmingham. SAGE Publications.
- Gagnon, J., Rodrigues, M., 2020. Towards more sustainable solutions to forced displacement: What measures are donor countries applying to forced displacement in developing countries? *OECD*, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d1d44405-en>
- George, G., Howard-Grenville, J., Joshi, A., Tihanyi, L., 2016. Understanding and Tackling Societal Grand Challenges through Management Research. *AMJ* 59, 1880–1895. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4007>
- Gephart, R.P., 1991. Succession Sensemaking and Organizational Change: A Story of a Deviant College President of a Deviant College President. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 4, 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000001196>

- Ghobakhloo, M., Mahdiraji, H.A., Iranmanesh, M., Jafari-Sadeghi, V., 2024. From Industry 4.0 Digital Manufacturing to Industry 5.0 Digital Society: a Roadmap Toward Human-Centric, Sustainable, and Resilient Production. *Inf Syst Front*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-024-10476-z>
- Giddens, A., 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. University of California Press.
- Gil, N., 2022. Megaprojects: a meandering journey towards a theory of purpose, value creation and value distribution. *Construction Management and Economics*.
- Gray, B., Purdy, J., Ansari, S., 2022. Confronting Power Asymmetries in Partnerships to Address Grand Challenges. *Organization Theory* 3, 26317877221098765. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221098765>
- Haapasaari, A., Kerosuo, H., 2015. Transformative agency: The challenges of sustainability in a long chain of double stimulation. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, The emergence of transformative agency and double stimulation: Activity-based studies in the Vygotskian tradition* 4, 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2014.07.006>
- Hadavi, A., Krizek, R.J., 1993. Short-Term Goal Setting for Construction. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 119, 622–630. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)0733-9364\(1993\)119:3\(622\)](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(1993)119:3(622))
- Hadida, A.L., Tarvainen, W., Rose, J., 2015. Organizational Improvisation: A Consolidating Review and Framework. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 17, 437–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12047>
- Hall, N.L., Taplin, R., Goldstein, W., 2010. Empowerment of individuals and realization of community agency: Applying action research to climate change responses in Australia. *Action Research* 8, 71–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750309335203>
- Harrison, J.S., van der Laan Smith, J., 2015. Responsible Accounting for Stakeholders. *Journal of Management Studies* 52, 935–960. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12141>
- Hill, C.W.L., Jones, T.M., 1992. Stakeholder-Agency Theory. *Journal of Management Studies* 29, 131–154. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1992.tb00657.x>
- Hitlin, S., Elder, G.H., 2006. Agency: An Empirical Model of an Abstract Concept. *Advances in Life Course Research, Constructing Adulthood* 11, 33–67. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-2608\(06\)11002-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-2608(06)11002-3)
- Holzberg, B., Kolbe, K., Zaborowski, R., 2018. Figures of Crisis: The Delineation of (Un)Deserving Refugees in the German Media. *Sociology* 52, 534–550. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518759460>
- Howard-Grenville, J., 2021. Grand Challenges, Covid-19 and the Future of Organizational Scholarship. *Journal of Management Studies* 58, 254–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12647>
- Iao-Jørgensen, J., 2023. Antecedents to bounce forward: A case study tracing the resilience of inter-organisational projects in the face of disruptions. *International Journal of Project Management* 41, 102440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2023.102440>
- Ika, L.A., Munro, L.T., 2022. Tackling grand challenges with projects: Five insights and a research agenda for project management theory and practice. *International Journal of Project Management* 40, 601–607. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2022.05.008>
- Ika, L.A., Söderlund, J., Munro, L.T., Landoni, P., 2020. Cross-learning between project management and international development: Analysis and research agenda. *International Journal of Project Management, When Project Management Meets International Development, What Can We Learn?* 38, 548–558. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2020.10.005>
- Jafari-Sadeghi, V., Amoozad Mahdiraji, H., Bresciani, S., Pellicelli, A.C., 2021. Context-specific micro-foundations and successful SME internationalisation in emerging markets: A mixed-method analysis of managerial resources and dynamic capabilities. *Journal of Business Research* 134, 352–364. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.027>
- Jafari-Sadeghi, V., Amoozad Mahdiraji, H., Budhwar, P., Vrontis, D., 2023. Understanding the De-internationalization of Entrepreneurial SMEs in a Volatile Context: A Reconnoitre on the Unique

- Compositions of Internal and External Factors. *British Journal of Management* 34, 2116–2137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12688>
- Kadefors, A., 2005. Fairness in interorganizational project relations: norms and strategies. *Construction Management and Economics* 23, 871–878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01446190500184238>
- Kaplan, S., Orlikowski, W.J., 2012. Temporal Work in Strategy Making. *Organization Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0792>
- Kaptein, M., Van Tulder, R., 2003. Toward Effective Stakeholder Dialogue. *Business and Society Review* 108, 203–224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8594.00161>
- Kasanen, E., Wallenius, H., Wallenius, J., Zionts, S., 2000. A study of high-level managerial decision processes, with implications for MCDM research. *European Journal of Operational Research* 120, 496–510. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-2217\(98\)00388-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0377-2217(98)00388-9)
- King, L.A., 1998. Personal Goals and Personal Agency, in: Kofta, M., Weary, G., Sedek, G. (Eds.), *Personal Control in Action: Cognitive and Motivational Mechanisms*. Springer US, Boston, MA, pp. 109–128. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-2901-6_5
- Klein, J.H., Connell, N.A.D., Meyer, E., 2007. Operational research practice as storytelling. *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 58, 1535–1542. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jors.2602277>
- Koskinen, K., U., 2008. Storytelling as a means to acquire and share knowledge in project-based companies - Tampere University of Technology. *International Journal of Knowledge Management Studies* 2, 236–247.
- Kunt, Z., 2020. Art-based methods for Participatory Action Research (PAR). *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture* 11, 87–96. https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc_00008_1
- Landes, S.D., Settersten, R.A., 2019. The inseparability of human agency and linked lives. *Advances in Life Course Research* 42, 100306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2019.100306>
- Landy, K., Flaming, A.L.B., Tapp, S., Kaldor, E.C., 2022. Contexts for agency: A framework for managing educational development work. *To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development* 41. <https://doi.org/10.3998/tia.445>
- Liu, L., Borman, M., Gao, J., 2014. Delivering complex engineering projects: Reexamining organizational control theory. *International Journal of Project Management* 32, 791–802. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.10.006>
- Lovett, S., Dempster, N., Flückiger, B., 2015. Personal agency in leadership learning using an Australian heuristic. *Professional Development in Education*.
- Lukic, D., Margaryan, A., Littlejohn, A., 2013. Individual agency in learning from incidents. *Human Resource Development International* 16, 409–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2013.792490>
- Martin, S.F., 2016. The Global Refugee Crisis. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 17, 5–11.
- McKevitt, D., Carbery, R., Collins, S., 2022. Job crafting in project management: Implications for project success and career satisfaction. *International Journal of Project Management* 40, 741–749. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2022.08.004>
- Melé, D., Armengou, J., 2016. Moral Legitimacy in Controversial Projects and Its Relationship with Social License to Operate: A Case Study. *J Bus Ethics* 136, 729–742. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2866-z>
- Miković, R., Petrović, D., Mihić, M., Obradović, V., Todorović, M., 2020. The integration of social capital and knowledge management – The key challenge for international development and cooperation projects of nonprofit organizations. *International Journal of Project Management, When Project Management Meets International Development, What Can We Learn?* 38, 515–533. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2020.07.006>
- Mische, A., 2014. Measuring futures in action: projective grammars in the Rio + 20 debates. *Theor Soc* 43, 437–464. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9226-3>
- Mitchell, R.K., Agle, B.R., Wood, D.J., 1997. Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of who and What Really Counts. *AMR* 22, 853–886. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9711022105>

- Mitchell, R.K., Van Buren III, H.J., Greenwood, M., Freeman, R.E., 2015. Stakeholder Inclusion and Accounting for Stakeholders. *Journal of Management Studies* 52, 851–877. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12151>
- Mitchell, R.K., Weaver, G.R., Agle, B.R., Bailey, A.D., Carlson, J., 2016. Stakeholder Agency and Social Welfare: Pluralism and Decision Making in the Multi-Objective Corporation. *The Academy of Management Review* 41, 252–275.
- Mohagheghi, V., Mousavi, S.M., Siadat, A., 2015. A new approach in considering vagueness and lack of knowledge for selecting sustainable portfolio of production projects, in: 2015 IEEE International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management (IEEM). Presented at the 2015 IEEE International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management (IEEM), pp. 1732–1736. <https://doi.org/10.1109/IEEM.2015.7385944>
- Mullaly, M., 2014. The role of agency in project initiation decisions. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 7, 518–535. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-09-2013-0043>
- Müller, R., Sankaran, S., Drouin, N., Vaagaasar, A.-L., Bekker, M.C., Jain, K., 2018. A theory framework for balancing vertical and horizontal leadership in projects. *International Journal of Project Management, Festschrift for Professor J. Rodney Turner* 36, 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2017.07.003>
- Müller, R., Turner, J.R., 2005. The impact of principal–agent relationship and contract type on communication between project owner and manager. *International Journal of Project Management, Selected papers from the Sixth Biennial Conference of the International Research Network for Organizing by Projects* 23, 398–403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2005.03.001>
- Muñiz Castillo, M.R., 2014. Development Projects from the Inside Out: Project Logic, Organizational Practices and Human Autonomy. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 15, 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.837034>
- Nwajei, U.O.K., Bølviken, T., Hellström, M.M., 2022. Overcoming the principal-agent problem: The need for alignment of tools and methods in collaborative project delivery. *International Journal of Project Management* 40, 750–762. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2022.08.003>
- Olsen, A.Ø., Sofka, W., Grimpe, C., 2016. Coordinated Exploration for Grand Challenges: The Role of Advocacy Groups in Search Consortia. *AMJ* 59, 2232–2255. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0730>
- Orr, R.J., Scott, W.R., 2008. Institutional exceptions on global projects: a process model. *J Int Bus Stud* 39, 562–588. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400370>
- Paripurno, E.T., Mahojwala, G., Prabaswara, G., Khabibah, S.U., 2022. Agency-driven and community-driven impact in livelihood recovery: Beneficiaries stories. *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 14, 10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v14i1.1200>
- Pavlou, P.A., El Sawy, O.A., 2010. The “Third Hand”: IT-Enabled Competitive Advantage in Turbulence Through Improvisational Capabilities. *Information Systems Research* 21, 443–471. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1100.0280>
- Pentland, B.T., 1999. Building Process Theory with Narrative: from Description to Explanation. *AMR* 24, 711–724. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1999.2553249>
- Quayle, A., Grosvold, J., Chapple, L., 2019. New modes of managing grand challenges: Cross-sector collaboration and the refugee crisis of the Asia Pacific. *Australian Journal of Management* 44, 665–686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0312896219872234>
- Quinn, R.W., Worline, M.C., 2008. Enabling Courageous Collective Action: Conversations from United Airlines Flight 93. *Organization Science* 19, 497–516. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0331>
- Reuter, T.A., 2023. SDG localization: finding the middle ground to top-down and bottom-up approaches with the help of digital networking. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 19, 2207372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2023.2207372>
- Robson, C., 2015. *Real World Research*, 4rd edition. ed. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester.

- Sadollah, A., 2018. Introductory Chapter: Which Membership Function is Appropriate in Fuzzy System?, in: *Fuzzy Logic Based in Optimization Methods and Control Systems and Its Applications*. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.79552>
- Sankaran, S., Müller, R., Drouin, N., 2020. Creating a ‘sustainability sublime’ to enable megaprojects to meet the United Nations sustainable development goals. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 37, 813–826. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2744>
- Scherer, A.G., Palazzo, G., 2011. The New Political Role of Business in a Globalized World: A Review of a New Perspective on CSR and its Implications for the Firm, Governance, and Democracy. *Journal of Management Studies* 48, 899–931. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2010.00950.x>
- Sewchurran, K., 2008. Toward an approach to create self-organizing and reflexive information systems project practitioners. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 1, 316–333. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538370810883792>
- Silva, G.F.P. da, Belderrain, M.C.N., 2019. Prioritization of strategic initiatives in the context of natural disaster prevention. *Brazilian Journal of Operations & Production Management* 16, 473–489. <https://doi.org/10.14488/BJOPM.2019.v16.n3.a10>
- Söderlund, J., Sydow, J., 2019. Projects and institutions: towards understanding their mutual constitution and dynamics. *International Journal of Project Management, Projects, Organizations and Institutions* 37, 259–268. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2019.01.001>
- Stadtler, L., Seitanidi, M.M., Knight, H.H., Leigh, J., Clarke, A., Le Ber, M.J., Bogie, J., Brunese, P., Hustad, O., Krasnikolakis, I., Lioliou, E., MacDonald, A., Pinkse, J., Sehgal, S., 2024. Cross-Sector Partnerships to Address Societal Grand Challenges: Systematizing Differences in Scholarly Analysis. *Journal of Management Studies* n/a. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13053>
- Stingl, V., Geraldi, J., 2017. Errors, lies and misunderstandings: Systematic review on behavioural decision making in projects. *International Journal of Project Management* 35, 121–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2016.10.009>
- Stringer, E.T., Aragón, A.O., 2020. *Action Research*, Fifth edition. ed. SAGE Publications, Inc, Los Angeles London New Delhi.
- Suchman, M.C., 1995. Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches. *The Academy of Management Review* 20, 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258788>
- Thomé, A.M.T., Scavarda, L.F., Scavarda, A.J., 2016. Conducting systematic literature review in operations management. *Production Planning & Control* 27, 408–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2015.1129464>
- Torra, V., 2010. Hesitant fuzzy sets. *International Journal of Intelligent Systems* 25, 529–539. <https://doi.org/10.1002/int.20418>
- Tugirimana, J.B., Dushimimana, J.D.D., 2024. Effect of Beneficiary Participation on Project Performance: A Case of an HIV Peer Education Project in Gicumbi District, Rwanda. *SCIENCE MUNDI* 4, 87–99. <https://doi.org/10.51867/scimundi.4.1.8>
- Turner, S., 1994. *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Presuppositions: Tradition, Tacit Knowledge and Prepositions*, 1st edition. ed. Polity, Cambridge.
- Tynjälä, P., 2013. Toward a 3-P Model of Workplace Learning: a Literature Review. *Vocations and Learning* 6, 11–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-012-9091-z>
- UNHCR, 2020. Frequently asked questions on climate change and disaster displacement [WWW Document]. UNHCR UK. URL <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-and-disaster-displacement> (accessed 6.30.24).
- Vahanvati, M., Mulligan, M., 2017. A new model for effective post-disaster housing reconstruction: Lessons from Gujarat and Bihar in India. *International Journal of Project Management* 35, 802–817. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2017.02.002>
- Vähäsantanen, K., Paloniemi, S., Hökkä, P., Eteläpelto, A., 2017. Agentic perspective on fostering work-related learning. *Studies in Continuing Education* 39, 251–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2017.1310097>



DSPACE

<https://dspace.org/>

Stakeholder agency and grand challenge projects in forced displacement context

Ambituuni, Ambi; Davis, Kate; Jellason, Nugun Patrick; Mahdiraji, Hannan Amoozad

2025-06-25

European Academy of Management (EURAM)

<https://conferences.euram.academy/2025conference/>

Ambituuni A, Davis K, Jellason NP, Mahdiraji HA. (2025) Stakeholder agency and grand challenge projects in forced displacement context. EURAM 2025 Annual Conference: Managing with purpose, 22-25 June 2025, University of Florence, Italy