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Being a Project Manager in a Multinational Corporation: An Interpretive Perspective On Working Practices and Experiences

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The University of San Francisco

BEING A PROJECT MANAGER IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION: AN
INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE ON WORKING PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Leadership Studies Department
Organization and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Waleed Afndy
San Francisco, CA
May 2013

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Being a Project Manager in a Multinational Corporation: An Interpretive Perspective on
Working Practices and Experiences

Research Topic

Inspired by the lack of research regarding the firsthand practices and everyday lived experiences of project managers, informed by an ontological orientation, this study looked into what it means to be a project manager in a multinational corporation. It provides an interpretive perspective on these practices and experiences, which includes perspectives of self in relation to an organization and the people, incorporating imagination into work, and organizing for an action.

Theory and Protocol

This research follows an interpretive approach to understand the phenomenon in question and is grounded in critical hermeneutics for data analysis. Research conversations with eight project managers representing Micros Retail and Saudi Bin Laden Group served as a primary source of data collection. This kind of approach for data collection and analysis emphasizes the importance of a collaborative relationship between a researcher and the participant(s) to unveil new understandings.

Research Categories

Within the framework of critical hermeneutics, this study investigated the ontology of project management from the perspective of its main actors, whose working practices and experiences are interpreted and analyzed using three research categories: 1) Fusion of Horizons- the process through which individuals come to understand past experiences in

new ways (Gadamer 2004); 2) Narrative Identity– the personal story through which telling and re-telling can provide a unique context to gain perspective on who one is in relationship to others (Ricoeur 1984); and 3) Imagination- the act of “seeing as” and working toward the “kingdom of as if” (Ricoeur 1984).

Findings

This research produced a number of important findings regarding working practices and experiences of project managers to understand valuable insights into the nature of this profession. These included: 1) assumptions about national culture find a minor place in understanding organizations; 2) the project manager as self and the other is significant in understanding character; 3) project managers are able to construct an ideal workplace and environment through the works of imagination by comparing past and present experiences; 4) imagination of an ideal workplace can serve as a means to organize for action; and 5) fusion of horizons becomes an inevitable aim and result of hermeneutically driven research, and it helps produce new understandings on the subject.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER ONE

FOCUS THE RESEARCH

Introduction

In today's international organizational environment, multinational project management (PM) has become a discipline, which is practiced and overseen by highly skilled professionals. These professionals, called project managers, usually oversee a set of complex, interconnected activities and multidisciplinary tasks that are vital for organizational success (Wessels 2007). Being appointed as a project manager commonly involves being granted the sole authority in supervising the project process, but also involves the full responsibility in its completion. Consequently, in the course of their work, project managers undergo a unique set of experiences, which should be closely investigated in order to understand their influence on personal identity and leadership. This research represents an attempt to address these experiences in the lives of selected project managers in The Saudi Bin Laden Group in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Micros System in Cleveland, OH.

Statement of the Research Topic

Within the framework of critical hermeneutics, this study investigated the ontology of project management from the perspective of its main actors, whose work and lives are interpreted and analyzed using three research categories:

1. Fusion of Horizons- the process through which individuals come to understand past experiences in new ways (Gadamer 2004);
2. Narrative Identity– the personal story through which telling and re-telling can provide a unique context to gain perspective on who one is in relationship to others (Ricoeur 1984);

3. Imagination- the act of “seeing as” and working toward the “kingdom of as if” (Ricoeur 1984).

Through a set of conversations with selected project managers of large multinational corporations, I explored how these categories influence the identity, working practices, and every day lived experiences of project managers. Consequently, the following research questions guided the conversations in this research inquiry:

- How do project managers view themselves as authority figures or leaders?
- How do project managers view themselves as subordinates?
- How do their working experiences influence their identity and leadership?
- What is the meaning of project management in their lives?
- How do project managers incorporate imagination into their planning?

Background of the Research Topic

The interest in project management has grown significantly among both researchers and practitioners in the past years (Ramaprasad & Prakash 2003; Price 2004; Thomas & Mengel 2008). In terms of practice, modern businesses, large and small, have long realized the importance of effective project management and introduced the corresponding positions to lead various types of projects as parts of organizational activity. In the academic field, the entire body of research can be divided into the studies focusing on factors that make project management successful (Baccarini 1999; Cook-Davies 2002) and the studies focusing on project managers. The literature on the latter has been growing rapidly recently; however, its focus has been on the qualities and skills of project managers (Dvir, Sadeh, & Malakh-Pines 2006; Anantatmula 2010; Muller &

Turner 2010; Fisher 2011), rather than on the place of identity and imagination in the success of project management.

At the same time, there is a clear lack of studies understanding the phenomenon of project managers from the perspective of project managers themselves. Consequently, existing studies have not been able to show and understand the actual process of managing projects and the experiences encompassing it. This study provided a different angle of view on the phenomenon of project management from what seems to be a common positivistic approach. Inspired by the lack of research regarding the firsthand practices and everyday lived experiences of project managers, informed by an ontological orientation, this study looked into what it *means* to be a project manager instead of what a project manager *should be*.

As a management consultant working with large multinational businesses, I have noticed that the focus of project management has been shifting from purely technical characteristics of the profession to more identity-oriented aspects. Over the course of my practice, I had an opportunity to observe both successful and failed projects and converse with the people who were leading them. Through the conversations, I discovered that many issues related to the process of project management were based on misunderstandings and different point of views among the managers, their subordinates, and, sometimes, their supervisors. Consequently, there was often a certain balance sought between project managers' imagination and the necessity to stay within the prescribed boundaries of their position. However, my attempts to uncover these personal ideas of project management were futile in view of the lack of studies in this regard. Therefore, by analyzing this side of the issue, I hoped to bridge the gap in understanding and, perhaps,

view of project management as a living process and experience that focus on one's identity in relationship to others. From this perspective, critical hermeneutics served as the framework in formulating the appropriate research framework for such analysis.

Significance of the Study

The importance of project managers for organizational success can be hardly overestimated: they allocate and distribute the resources required for a project, oversee the process, and take personal responsibility for its successful completion. As such, understanding the totality of project managers' working experiences and identity could open the door to a new level of meaning of the process of project management and its implications for the individuals engaged in it and the organization as a whole. The findings of this study may also provide new horizons on the nature of leadership through the lens of the multinationals' working experiences. Based on the critical hermeneutic approach to this issue, it may be possible to design and develop creative practices in project management that would reflect the unique nature of the managers' position and identity in an international corporate setting.

Secondly, an analysis of project management in terms of how imagination is used has been inadequately researched, which makes this study belong to a relatively novel field. At the same time, recently, there has been growing interest in analyzing well-known business practices from the interpretive perspective (Rendtorf 2009; Robinson & Kerr 2009). This implies that the selected research orientation may bring to the field of business research deeper understandings that in turn could improve everyday practices in the multinational world.

Summary

The nature of this research lies within the new understanding of what project management is not as a means to meet organizational objectives, but as a process and experience of people who live as a project manager. Such an approach could shed more light on what particular human related issues may and should be taken into account in understanding project management as a whole. To achieve this, the study employs critical hermeneutics to interpret and analyze working and everyday lived experiences of project managers in large multinational organizations.

CHAPTER TWO

COUNTRY REVIEW

Introduction

This section reviews some General Information about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including People and Society, Religion, Politics, Resources and Business. It then discusses which aspects of the country's environment provide the best reflection on the work of project managers.

General Information

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located on the Arabian Peninsula with an area of approximately 830,000 square miles and the population of roughly 27 million (CIA 2011). While it has a rich history dating back thousands of years, as a country and a nation, Saudi Arabia formed only in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The conquests of King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud's starting in the beginning of 1900s unified the majority of the tribes settled in the peninsula, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was proclaimed a nation in 1932 (Mergent 2010).



Figure 1: Saudi Arabia Map. CIA (2011).

Saudi Arabia has many unique features that distinguish it as a nation and a culture. The Kingdom plays a crucial role in the Arabic world as the birthplace of Islam and the upholder of the traditional Muslim values (CultureGrams 2012). Being a relatively wealthy country, the Kingdom also has a position as one of the purveyors of technological development and business innovations in the Arabic world (CultureGrams 2012). The country also plays an increasing role in international relations even despite the relative setback after the 9/11 events (CultureGrams 2012). In general, however, Saudi Arabia is interesting from a socio-anthropological point due to its unique and sometime uneasy interaction of the traditional conservatism and the new cultural values that came from abroad and tried to get a foothold within the Saudi society (CultureGrams 2012). This uneasy relationship of old and new is reflected in every aspect of the country's life.

People and Society

Of the 27 million people populating the Kingdom, about 80% are Saudis, who are, primarily, ethnic Arabs (CultureGrams 2012). Among the resident foreigners, the largest group is represented by Asians from the region encompassing India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, and Indonesia. Westerners represent a very insignificant part of the total population, numbering about 100,000 (Mergent 2010). A large number of foreigners in the Kingdom are contract workers, who represent both low skilled and high skilled professions. However, these groups have very little practical influence on the traditional cultural values in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi population can be characterized by a very high degree of cultural homogeneity and a social stratification. Cultural homogeneity is reflected in the complete dominance of Arabic language, prevalence of Islam, and, above all, values and attitudes

that determine strong family ties. The family can be considered the major social institution in Saudi Arabia. It is the main determinant of one's identity and status in the society. Affiliation with the family can be traced back to tribal times, from where the traditions of strong family alliances and interconnections are still preserved today (Metz 1992). This affiliation means loyalty and dedication to the entire family, including relatives on the far sides of kinship.

Another important feature of Saudi society is the social stratification. This stratification is founded on religious and traditional cultural values that are predominant in Saudi Arabia. It is typical for men and women to be brought up and educated separately. Women and men are also not allowed to visit public events together, and their segregation in a work place is quite common. Based on the doctrines of *Shariah* (Islamic Law – see below), a number of strict ethical rules are applied in the Saudi society. Examples include forbiddance of communication between non-related men and women, mandatory veils for women in presence of males other than their husbands, and male relative permissions to travel abroad for women (CultureGrams 2012).

While to some foreigners these and other rules governing the life of Saudi society may seem somewhat repressive, to Saudis they represent a way of life. The existing rules and traditions are considered to perpetuate the importance of Islamic virtues of modesty, honor, and respect. Nevertheless, the traditional rules of Saudi society are constantly being challenged by non-Islamic cultures. As more and more young people come to understand life outside of Saudi Arabia, there is a constant pressure to change or at least to relax certain rules. This has led to a number of recent revisions of law, especially with

regards to women's rights. The changes opened more doors for Saudi women in terms of education, employment, and enhanced their roles in the society (CultureGrams 2012).

Religion

Saudi Arabia is the center of Islamic religion. It is a place for two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, which have to be visited by each Muslim at least once in a lifetime. As the place where Islam originated and from where it spread throughout the world, the Kingdom is not only the place of the religion's most sacred places and artifacts, but also the most ardent keeper of the traditional Islamic rules and values (CultureGrams 2012). This is reflected by the fact that Saudi Arabia does not have any written Constitution; instead, the supreme law of the land is Shariah based on the *Quran* (the holy book of Muslims) and the *Sunnah* (stories of life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad). Consequently, Islamic religion serves as a foundation for governance and a source of appropriate behavior for every Muslim (CultureGrams 2012). Therefore, any law or act issued by humans is automatically considered inferior to *Shariah* and must comply with it.

Islam is more than just a set of laws in Saudi Arabia; it is also guidance for life in nearly every aspect of it. From family relationships to ethical standards to the rules of business and politics, *Shariah* determines what a Muslim should do and how to do it (CultureGrams 2012). Moreover, Saudis are prohibited from accepting another religion and are required to strictly follow the Five Pillars of Islam: *Hajj* (visit of the Islam's Holy Cities), *Salat* (prayers five times a day), *Zakat* (donation to the poor), *Shahada* (accepting Allah as the only God and Mohammad as his Prophet), and *Sawm* (fasting during the holy month of Ramadan) (CultureGrams 2012).

Despite the omnipresence of Islam in the lives of Saudis, certain aspects of life cannot be interpreted through *Shariah* on its own. This especially concerns new forms of business relations that came from abroad: for example, corporations (Foster 2010). However, even when there is no direct indication of how to govern such issues in either *Quran* or *Sunnah*, secondary sources of Islam are applied, which are *Qiyas* (judgment of Islamic scholars upon analogies) and *Ijma* (consensus of Islamic jurists on specific matters). Only after those, ancillary sources of law are applied, such as Acts and Decrees issued by the government.

Politics

Since its inception as a nation, Saudi Arabia has been governed as an absolute monarchy. The current ruler, King Abdullah, combines the top legislative, executive, and judicial functions in the country being limited only by the laws of *Shariah* (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2011). Consequently, King's decrees have the power of legislation. While the King holds the primary reins of power, representatives of the royal princes hold all administrative positions in the Kingdom, thus concentrating the political power within the family. Political parties and affiliations in the Kingdom are forbidden by law (North & Tripp 2007: 78).

Domination of the royal family in the Kingdom's politics and the absence of opposition create a unique political landscape with two levels of political interactions: between the members of the family and between the King and the general public (Noreng 2006: 97). The royal family is not uniform in their views on governance. Several fractions exist divided by the lines of personal ambitions, clan loyalties, and ideology.

The major points of disagreement are the way that modernization reforms should go, the powers of *ulema* (religious authority), and the throne succession.

The second level of political interactions in the country is between the King and the general public. This level is strongly limited, however, to the small population segment consisting of *ulema* members, representatives of rich families, and tribal sheikhs. The Basic Rules of Governance (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2011) guaranteed Saudi citizens some basic rights, such as education, protection of property, healthcare, and social security; however, included little political rights. As such, general public is severely distanced from the government.

Resources

Saudi Arabia is known as the land of oil. The country possesses about one fifth of known oil deposits in the world (CIA 2011). The abundance of oil reserves and the relative ease of its extraction have led to a very strong but at the same time disproportional and undiversified economy. Oil and oil related industries comprise of over 45% of the country's GDP and account for nearly 90% of exports for Saudi Arabia (CIA 2011). At the same time, the Kingdom strongly relies on imports for many essentials such as various types of foods, clothes, and machinery.

Oil production has aided the Kingdom tremendously, as it turned from a country of nomads to a modern, highly urbanized state with a developed infrastructure, health services, and relatively high level of living conditions. Still, too much reliance on oil has historically turned against the country when plummeting global oil prices caused high unemployment, imbalanced state budget, and social tensions (CultureGrams 2012). As a result, a modernization program has been launched by the government to make the state

economy more diversified and less dependent on fluctuations of oil prices. This inevitably led to introduction of foreign businesses and their growing role in the state's economy (CultureGrams 2012).

Business Environment

The business environment in modern Saudi Arabia more than anything represents a mix of traditions of Islam and modern trends. While Saudi business environment is still governed by the rules of Shariah, a number of government issued acts and decrees largely determine the rules and procedures of business conduct. Arguably, these acts and decrees have played a more important role than *Shariah*. This can be explained by a relatively fast economic transformation of the country in the second half of the twentieth century and introduction of new forms of business to the country. Since the Shariah could not provide candid answers to the rules of governance of the new business entities, and the government had no experience in managing them either, the first major piece of legislation, the Companies Act 1965, was borrowed from Egypt (Peters 1988).

Since the introduction of the Companies Act 1965, the Kingdom adopted several other important legislations, including the creation of Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul), introduce the main principles of corporate governance, and the list of rules determining the requirements of companies to be traded on Tadawul. Still, many issues in Saudi business remain unresolved. One of the most pressing is the dominance of rich families as shareholders in public and private corporations. This means that, in many respects, businesses in the Kingdom are not free in terms of governance, and the rights of minority shareholders as well as social stakeholders in corporations are largely ignored. These and other issues, such as the stock market collapse in 2006 (Yang 2007) have been prompting

Saudi and foreign business community to push for business reforms in the Kingdom. However, within the rigid system of government control, the rapid changes in this sphere are unlikely to occur in the nearby future (CultureGrams 2012).

Summary

This Chapter of the dissertation provides background information on Saudi Arabia. Several key elements of the Kingdom's country environment were discussed. While all of these elements are important in understanding the experiences of Saudi project managers, the most reflective of their work are the family traditions and the modern business environment in the Kingdom. As was mentioned above, family plays an important part of Saudi nationals' identity. They maintain strong ties with the family, put their part in the family welfare, and fully associate personal self with the self as a family member. Large companies in Saudi Arabia are governed very much like family assets largely because the controlling shares commonly belong to one or more family members. Project managers' experiences could be reflected in such companies through the concepts of narrative identity (perspectives of who the project manager is in relation to the company owners), imagination (seeing the present in contrast to "as if"), and fusion of horizons (understanding past managing experiences in new ways, perhaps, as members of a family governed company).

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study offers a critical hermeneutic approach in researching project management activities in large multinational corporations. Specifically, it attempted to provide an interpretive perspective on the field of project management and the activities of its main players: the project managers. This section starts with the Review of Interpretive Perspective on Business Practices. It then presents Project Management as a Business Practice, and Interpretation of Project Managers' Experiences as the subject of this study. The final part of the Literature Review introduces the Critical Hermeneutic Approach as the selected inquiry process of the study.

Interpretive Perspectives on Business Practices

According to Sharma (2004: 332), whenever research in a particular field becomes sufficiently developed in academic circles, it becomes necessary to “pause to evaluate the progress made and reflect on the directions to pursue in the future so as to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon of interest.” Arguably, this notion can be applied to the studies on common business practices, where a number of new research protocols have recently emerged. One of the emerging approaches within the business research paradigm has been the interpretative process. Interpretative studies are founded on the principle that individuals create and relate the subjective meanings in the process of interaction with the environment; consequently, interpretative researchers seek to understand phenomena by uncovering these meanings (Boland 1985; Olikowski & Baroudi 1991).

The interpretative process has emerged in business disciplines as an alternative to the dominant positivist process, which has been widely criticized for its limitations in describing phenomena that are highly subjective in nature (Sandberg 2005). Prasad and Prasad (2002) argued that positivism fails to take into account the complexity of human systems and social dynamics within the organizational context where management studies take place. Similarly, Gill and Johnson (1997: 7) noted that positivism could not be an appropriate process in business research due to “the inherent meaningfulness of management action and its contextual nature.” Additionally, Herda (1999: 5-14) argues that research in the human sciences is of a social and communicative nature that addresses understanding rather than explanation.

The interpretive approach focuses on both *whats* and *hows* of social reality by understanding ways through which individuals construct their experiences and realities as well as “in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality constituting activity” (Gubrium & Holstein 2003:214). Consequently interpretive studies offer a more comprehensive view that focuses on understanding the ways through which individuals in business create, alter, and construe the world.

While being a relatively new discipline within business research paradigm, the number of interpretive studies on various business practices has been growing steadily in recent years. These studies covered a broad range of topics, including corporate affairs (Prasad & Mir 2002; Rendtorf 2009); leadership practices (Robinson & Kerr 2009); entrepreneurship (Seymour 2006; McKenzie & Sud 2008; Barrett, Powley, & Pearce 2011); organizational processes (Hudaib & Haniffa 2009; Lorino 2008); and marketing (Moisander 2011). Through the interpretive approach, these studies primarily

concentrated on answering the questions *why* and *how* in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the business practices on which they focused.

Critical hermeneutics is one of several approaches applied within the interpretivist paradigm. Its major distinction from the other philosophies, such as, for example, ethnography or ethnomethodology is in exclusive focus on text and language. Three decades ago, Herda (1983) recognized that the bureaucratic modality of organizations shape practice into a scientific quasi-reality rather than social action that it actually is. It is in language that actual business actions take place (Herda & Messerschmitt 1991), and a study of moving from mere words to actions will provide insight into what business practice actually is in the everyday social realities of the lives of project managers. Therefore, critical hermeneutic research can provide the requisite meaning needed to promote creativity and imagination on the part of people in “business” as well as other types of organizations to “critiqu[e] existing social realities and create[e] new ones” (Herda 1999:1). This research takes this notion as a basis, as the critical hermeneutics approach is used as the guiding philosophical foundation.

In the remaining part of the literature review, I explore the existing research on the topic of project management and provide evidence for the knowledge gap that needs to be filled with the help of interpretive research. The second part of the literature review explores additional research on the topic of project management.

Project Management as A Business Practice

As a discipline, project management emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. Its development is associated with the works of Henry Gantt and Henri Fayol, both students of Frederick Taylor - the father of “scientific management” (Witzel 2003).

Henry Gantt's contribution to modern project management is in development of one of its major tools – the Gantt chart that serves as a project scheduling and planning tool (Stevens 2002). Henri Fayol proposed five primary functions of management (forecasting, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling) that created the foundation of modern project management related knowledge (Witzel 2003).

Project management has become a very popular topic of research among scholars and business practitioners alike (Ramaprasad & Prakash 2003; Price 2004; Thomas & Mengel 2008). According to Turner (2009: 2) “project management is about converting vision into reality.” It is a structured process that helps deliver a desired state of some object, process, or product in the future (Turner 2009: 2). The basic purpose for initiating a project is to accomplish specific goals (Thomas & Mengel 2009: 12). Going far beyond the initial efforts of Gantt and Fayol, modern project management is a comprehensive mix of various disciplines and approaches that organizations employ to plan, control, and coordinate the activities of their projects (Lock 2007: 1). The dependence of organizations on successful project management is enormous. According to Wessels (2007) the value of project management comes from multiple sources, including improved business processes, development of new products and services, responses to changes in market environment and competition.

As a business practice, project management has become ubiquitous in both small and large organizations, which have long realized the importance of effective project management and introduced the corresponding positions to handle various types of projects as parts of organizational activity (Kerzner 2009). However, quite a large percentage of organizational projects fail (Wessels 2007; Cerpa & Verner 2009). This is,

perhaps, because project management is recognized as a rather complex activity, which involves a high degree of uncertainty within the environment it creates (Jafaari 2003; Ives 2005). It is likely, that most of the researchers in project management field have been strongly driven by the idea of improving the conditions to raise the degree of project management success. Consequently, the focus of the vast majority of the studies has been on the ways to make project management successful (Baccarini 1999; Cook-Davies 2002; Muller & Turner 2007; Anantatmula 2010).

An attempt to study the actuality of project managers' daily activities—the business practice— was carried out by Cicmil, Don, Thomas, and Hodgson (2006) with the integration of various philosophies including the interpretive orientation. However, the focus of this work is still on skill development. Such an approach largely ignores the concept of understanding what project management really is, how it is done, and why it is done. Clegg and Ross-Smith (2003) close to a decade ago, realized that what we research in management settings does not bring us to the knowledge and understanding we need: they recognized that we are living in a post-positivist world and need to change the boundaries in our education curriculum for management learning. This kind of inquiry calls for a view of project management from the perspective of people who are directly engaged in the process: in the case of the current research project, organizational project managers.

Interpretation of Project Managers' Experiences

Contemporary project management literature shows that project success is strongly related to the performance of project managers (Patanakul & Milosevic 2006; Muller & Turner 2007; Anantatmula 2010). Thomas and Mengel (2009: 13) specifically

mentioned that project management focuses on “placing the responsibility and authority for the attainment of the goals on an individual or small group.” Turner (2009: 89) wrote that importance of project managers is in their multiple project directing activities: upwards to maintain the support of the owner, outwards to win the support of stakeholders, and downwards to lead the project team.

Muller and Turner (2007) considered project manager’s leadership qualities as an essential element of the project success. Similarly, Anantamula (2010) suggested that the project manager’s leadership role is important in project’s success because of its strong connections to motivation of the project team. Referring to the previously conducted research, Patanakul and Milosevic (2006) argued that choosing the project manager is one of the most important decisions in project management because it largely determines the project’s success.

The interest in the link between project management and project managers may explain a very large body of research within the project management paradigm that focuses specifically on project managers. In addition to the leadership studies mentioned above, a broad range of topics focusing on project managers and their experiences exists. For example, Schmid and Adams (2008) analyzed the role of project motivation from project manager’s perspective. The authors argued that project management success is strongly influenced by project managers due to their ability to “create a subculture within an overarching organization in which team dynamics can lead to higher levels of motivation than in the encompassing organization” (Schmid & Adams 2008: 70). Thomas and Mengel (2007) as well as Patanakul and Milosevic (2006) emphasized the importance of project manager’s education and training to achieve high standards of

project manager's performance. Several studies, like Dvir, Sadeh, and Malach-Pines (2006) and Fisher (2011), argued that personal traits of project managers determine the success of project management initiatives.

Several studies have taken the interpretive approach in exploring the phenomenon of project management. Boddy and Patton (2004) showed that some useful insights may be uncovered for managing complex change projects through the "competing narratives" approach. Sergi (2009) conducted a study of collective practices that led to project completion and interpreted projects as "bounded becoming." Finally, Cicmil (2006) may help highlight how project managers connect with the other members of their organizations to accomplish cooperative tasks and cope with ambiguous goals and multiple voices.

Interpretive research gains subjective perspectives on project managers' experiences without the boundaries typical for traditional positivist and quantitative studies. Within the traditional research paradigm, researchers have suggested a very complex nature of project managers' experiences, which occur at different levels: organizational, group, and personal. Thomas and Mengel (2008), for example, argued that dealing with complexity is an inevitable part of project management experience. Anantatmula (2010) wrote that the complexity of a project manager's work arises from leading diverse teams and managing projects that include many variables.

Researchers have routinely noted that few projects are completely alike (Muller & Turner 2007; Anantatmula 2010). Anantatmula (2010: 14) surmised that "projects are usually unique and often are associated with unknowns, complexity, and uncertainty." Muller and Turner (2007) argued that since no two projects are like each other, different

leadership styles have to be adopted by project managers to cope with various environments and tasks related to those projects. Similarly, Cicmil (2006) wrote that project management experiences cannot be easily generalized because new environments and circumstances make each project a new experience.

The project managers' experiences also involve an emotional side, which is hard to describe in positivistic terms. Cicmil's (2006: 34) research found that "emotions, values, moral and ethical considerations in project management practice came out as an important consideration [in project management]." Aitken and Lynn (2007) emphasized the role of stress in project managers' work as one of the key internal factors influencing managers' productivity. Leban and Zulauf (2004) found that emotional intelligence enhances project managers' performance.

Critical Hermeneutic Approach

Interpretive approach in research includes a number of disciplines, such as ethnography, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and case studies (Lee 1991: 342). Based on the research categories of this study, critical hermeneutics was selected as the process to explore project managers' experiences. Critical hermeneutics is a philosophical tradition with a focus on understanding and making sense of being in the world. Following Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004: 291), understanding is a Interpretive process of moving "from the whole to the part and back to the whole" in order to achieve the unification of "understood meaning." This implies that shared understanding is in the core of critical hermeneutic approach. Paul Ricoeur (1981: 56) clarified that understanding does not mean grasping of the facts, but "the apprehending a possibility of being." Arguably, such approach could be the most suited for project managers' interpretations of their

experiences, thus helping in understanding a number of important concepts related to such experiences, including identity, relation to the others, and prejudices.

Critical hermeneutics questions the feasibility of traditional, positivist approaches to research. In this regard, Gadamer (1990: 153) wrote that “over against the whole of our civilization that is founded on modern science, we must ask repeatedly if something has not been omitted.” It can be argued that this “something” is the conceptual exploration of meanings that critical hermeneutics seeks to uncover and which may substantially enrich and extend our knowledge on specific subjects. In the context of project management research, therefore, critical hermeneutics could add new perspectives on the topic by exploring the largely ignored aspect of experience interpretation.

In its attempt to uncover understanding, critical hermeneutics makes use of conversations as a form of inquiry. According to Gadamer (1992: 65), “hermeneutics is the skill to let things speak which come to us in a fixed, petrified form, that of the text.” Ricoeur builds on this notion by claiming that all behavior – and we can place the behavior of project managers here by analogy – can be interpreted as a text and thus analyzed through the lens of hermeneutics (O’Shaughnessy & Holbrook 1988). The hermeneutic conversation with the text, however, involves language and history as something that forms our pre-understandings and influences interpretations. As Herda (1999: 25) notes, “the prejudice or bias becomes a necessary act of interpretation, because we bring our background and being to the act.” Consequently, critical hermeneutics takes into account influences of certain factors on individual’s understanding and interpretation. This fact could be particularly helpful in researching project managers’ experiences and their identities.

Another particularly important feature of critical hermeneutic approach is its recognition of the situated location of interpretation. This notion defies the idea that a universal view on things is possible and embraces the importance of various perspectives on the same things (Greene 1995; Eisner 1998). Consequently, the active role of the interpreter is recognized, as noted by Gardiner (1999: 63):

The hermeneutic approach stresses the creative interpretation of words and texts and the active role played by the understand. The goal is not objective explanation or neutral description, but rather a sympathetic engagement with the author of a text, utterance or action and the wider socio-cultural context within which these phenomena occur.

As project managers' experiences are inevitably influenced by such factors as social location, practices, and groups, their interpretive perspectives and ways of creating meaning would be altered by the influences thereof. Such influences are fully embraced by the critical hermeneutic approach (Smith 1999).

The review of critical hermeneutics and the opportunities it provides for project management research would be incomplete without the mention of its embrace of ambiguity. Critical hermeneutics rejects the idea of the one "correct" meaning of the text and readily accepts the idea of the complexity of interpretation. In this regard, Gadamer (2004: 399) wrote that hermeneutic analysis of text rejects some fixed point of view and that understanding of a text "means to apply it to ourselves and to understand that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways." Consequently, this means that interpretation from hermeneutical perspective has to adjust within the specific situation to which it belongs (Gadamer 2004). Taking into account the great variety and richness of situations

comprising the project management experiences, emphasis on various perspectives could be the key to understanding their nature.

Summary

This Chapter provides a review of literature related to project management field with the focus on project managers' experiences. The analysis of literature demonstrated the dominance of positivist perspective on the subject. Following the emergent trends in the business processes research and the recent calls for a new, fresh perspective on project management, this study proposed an interpretive approach to study project managers' experiences. Based on the research goals, the critical hermeneutic approach may enhance the general understanding of how project managers attach meanings to their working experiences. Specifically, it may help interpret project managers' distinctive understandings of their working environments and daily practices and discover potentials for the development of specific practical theories that could enhance overall project management practices.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Introduction

This research takes roots in critical hermeneutics, an approach that is useful in uncovering new understandings about the topic at hand. The aim of a critical hermeneutic research, according to Herda (1999: 86), is “to create collaboratively a text that allows us to carry out the integrative act of reading, interpreting, and critiquing our understandings.” The chosen approach is participatory in nature and involves an interpretive approach for data collection and analysis. The focus of the approach is on developing new understandings about the topic between the researcher and the participants.

This research makes use of a critical hermeneutics approach to explore the totality of working experiences of project managers in large multinational corporations. The interpretive participatory inquiry protocol applied in the study allows for a fresh new look on the nature of project management and may increase our understanding of what it means to be a project manager. Specifically, within the framework of the study, the participants had an opportunity to revisit their own stories and take a new look at their position in the organization as well as at their relationships with others. The new understandings were created through the processes of stories exchanged, self-reflection, and re-interpretation of experiences.

Chapter Four presents the research protocol developed for the study. It starts with the Theoretical Framework introduction and review of the research categories. This is followed by presentation of the Choice of the Research Topics and Sites, overview of the

Research Questions, and the Process of Data Collection and Analysis. A brief overview of the Pilot Study is presented in this part of the dissertation as well. Part Four ends with a short Background of the Researcher and a Summary.

Theoretical Framework

The critical hermeneutics orientation that serves as a framework for this study requires an introduction of the research categories that provide an orientation for data collection and analysis. While the hermeneutic tradition provides a number of categories, in this study I use Narrative Identity, Imagination, and Fusion of Horizons to describe, interpret, and understand the experiences of project managers. The purpose of this section is to describe each of my research categories and to explain how they fit into the specific framework of this study. The discussion begins with the category of Narrative Identity.

Research Category One: Narrative Identity

Narrative identity can be viewed and understood as the essential part of personal identity and a key to human self-understanding. The concept of narrative identity is constructed with personal stories and through relationships with other people. Paul Ricoeur (1988: 355) wrote that each story relates to the *Whom* of the action; consequently, “the identity of this *Whom* is no other than his narrative identity.” Consequently, narratives create the identity of characters: their narrative identity.

The importance of the concept of narrative identity is that it allows seeing individuals as both interpreters and recipients of the interpretations. In this regard, Ricoeur (1988: 246) noted that in narrative identity the individual “appears both as a reader and a writer of its own life.” Narrative identity also plays a number of essential mediating roles. For example, it mediates between the act of “what is” and the kingdom

of “what ought to be.” In other words, narrative identity is placed between the ethical prescription and the neutral descriptions, while it is not reduced or stretched to either concept (Ricoeur 1992: 114-115). Further, narratives are both told and lived; consequently, narrative identity mediates between the world of the reader and the world of action (Ricoeur 1984).

One of the key mediating roles played by narrative identity is between selfhood (*ipse*) and sameness (*idem*). *Ipse* identifies “who” the self is; it changes over time and provides “openness to others” (Kearney 2003: 80). In contrast, *idem* represents “what” the self is made of: the phenomenon of character. With reference to narrative identity’s role in mediating these two concepts, Ricoeur (1992: 119) wrote that it goes through “an intervention ... in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness.” Putting all pieces together, narrative identity represents an important construct for self-understanding and human identity, which can be used to gain insights from the experiences of being a project manager.

Specifically, the theory of narrative identity can be placed as an affirmation of self and understanding through narrative as a medium. Narrative identity stresses the nature of individuals as beings and the relationships they have with others. David Rasmussen (1995) wrote that the advantage of narrative is that it helps resolve the argument between identity and action, as well as between plot and character, necessity and freedom. Narrative identity is closely related to another hermeneutical category, which is Imagination.

Research Category Two: Imagination

Imagination can be referred to personal mental picturing of certain things. Imagination plays a crucial role in Ricoeur's (1981) philosophical inquiry through the concepts of text, symbol, metaphor, and narrative; still, he does not seem to provide a comprehensive description of imagination as a concept itself. Rather, it can be said that Ricoeur focused on the productive works of imagination. Ricoeur (1991:123) asserted that, "imagination is 'productive' not only of unreal objects, but also of an expanded vision of reality. Imagination at work – in a work - produces itself as a work." These productive works of imagination can be explored through its functions.

Within critical hermeneutical inquiry, imagination can be said to fulfill two primary functions: re-remembering the past in a new way and providing opportunities to visualize possible futures (Kearney 1998: 148; Ricoeur 1999: 15). With regard to the first function, imagination makes it possible to recall and retell past stories as new understandings emerge and past identities change. Herda (2007: 25) wrote that "our stories change when our relationships change because the new stories contain different experiences and the social imagery comes into play as one re-emplots his or her life." Imagination serves as a way to integrate these experiences and imagery in stories.

With regard to the second function of imagination, it makes possible to place dreams, hopes, and visions into the kingdom of "as if." According to Richard Kearney (1998: 149) "imagination liberates ... into a free space of possibility, suspending reference to the immediate world of perception and thereby disclosing 'the new ways of being in the world.' As such, imagination is rooted in living itself." While being a part of our living, imagination inevitably interacts with our reality. Kearney (1984: 24) wrote

that, “the mediating role of imagination is forever at work in lived reality. There is no lived reality, no human or social reality, which is not already represented in some sense.” This connection of imagination to the lived realities makes it an invaluable research category to interpret the meaning of lived experiences in particular environments, such as organizational settings.

The works of imagination in hermeneutical inquiry not only play an important interpretive role; they also reach deeply into the nature of human existence. According to Venema (2000: 40), “through the creative work of imagination, life is both represented and understood; through discourse that is close to the creative power of the imagination life and self are most certainly revealed.” While the categories of narrative identity and imagination help define living experiences, the third category applied in this study deals with the process of understanding. This category is Fusion of Horizons.

Research Category Three: Fusion of Horizons

Fusion of horizons is one of the key dialectical concepts within Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical inquiry. Fusion of horizons reflects on what Gadamer considered to be the process of understanding. According to Gadamer (2004:301), horizon represents a “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point... A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him.” On the other hand, “to have a horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it.” Therefore, horizons are ubiquitous, but by no means limiting dialectical concepts.

Horizons are rooted in traditions, history, and prejudices, which are undeniable categories influencing each individual. These categories create a context of meaning for

each situation presented. However, since these are different to each one of us, we can speak of horizons, which are typical for every individual and can be evident within each of them. Fusion of horizons in Gadamerian philosophy is the process of understanding: “understanding is always the fusion of ... horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (Gadamer 2004: 305). Such presentation of understanding, arguably, paints a picture of what happens whenever transmission of meaning takes place. This transmission of meaning is an inevitable consequence of hermeneutical dialogue, within which understanding is achieved by creating a common “horizon” through the process of fusion. This can be understood as reaching a common view about what is being discussed (Gadamer 2004: 365).

Importantly, Gadamer considers that “the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language” (2004: 370). Language is an important part of the dialogue through which exchange of meanings occurs. A similar process takes place when a researcher analyzes some text: in this case understanding (fusion of horizons) happens through the process of interpretation. Gadamer (2004:398) explains that, “the text is made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speak if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak.” Consequently, this highlights the notion that no single interpretation can be correct; rather, each one is unique in its own way.

Provided below is a discussion of how the research categories described above guided the process of data collection and analysis.

Research Categories

This section reviews the three research categories, as discussed above, applied in the study and explains how these categories guided the process of data collection and analysis.

Narrative identity was helpful in uncovering the significant events in project managers' experiences that changes their understanding of self and their roles in organizations. Narrative identity is reflected in the shared stories and conversations, which, in turn, may reveal transformations of identities in relation to the organizations in which project managers are employed and in relation to the people they work with.

The second category, imagination, was helpful in highlighting the possible links that the study participants envision for themselves, as employees and individuals, and their organizations. Consequently, the kingdoms imagined, combined with action, may in the future lead to positive changes in the participants' organizations. Appropriation of imagination may also help create understanding of the formation of identity and selfhood. In relation to this particular research, imagination can help discover the possible imageries of oneself and the environment in which project managers exist and do their work.

Lastly, fusion of horizons involves the creation of a new context of meaning. This context allows one to assimilate knowledge of what has been unfamiliar. It "opens possibilities for our new understandings with concomitant actions" (Herda 1999: 109). Project managers can be considered as having their own horizons. However, their interaction with others over the course of project development will inevitably involve

acquiring new understandings. These understandings might influence their personal perspectives of oneself and the world surrounding them.

Choice of Research Topics and Research Sites

The importance of this study for me is twofold: the professional interest comes from my work as a consultant of large multinational businesses, and the personal interest comes from my fascination with the field of project management and close relationships with a number of people employed as project managers. By conducting this study, I hope to bring a new perspective to the field of project management and introduce new understandings of the nature of project managers’ working realities and experiences. With this, I envision project management as a living process and experience that focus on one’s identity in relationship to others.

Research Questions

Within the critical hermeneutic approach, research questions play the role of a conversation guideline. They are normally tied to the research categories applied in a study, but in no way serve the prescriptive question/answer function. The questions presented in Table 1 are grouped within the research categories used in this study. They are not to be assigned in the same manner as during the interview process; rather, they guided the conversation between the researcher and the participant.

Table 1: Research Categories and Research Question Guides

Research Category	Research Question Guides
Narrative Identity	From your perspective: How do project managers view themselves as authority figures? How do project managers view themselves as

	subordinates? How do they happen to become project managers?
Imagination	Do you have any specific dreams or ideas about the way that the projects in this organization should be managed? Would you change anything in your working environment?
Fusion of Horizons	What difference do the experiences at this position make to you in comparison to the past? What difference does the working environment make to you in this and the previous positions?

The questions listed in Table one were used for the pilot study that I conducted prior to this research. The entire study, including the full conversation transcript, is available in Appendix A. The following section provides a brief overview of the pilot study and the summary of the key lessons that I learned from it. These lessons are integrated in the research protocol for the current research project.

Pilot Study

The pilot study that preceded this research was conducted during the spring 2012. The purpose of the study was to test the application of the research categories and to practice use of research questions in a participative conversation. The overall experience with the pilot study strengthened my intention to proceed with the current research and also gave me an opportunity to analyze the possible implications of the study for the field of project management.

For my research conversation I initially contacted Dr. Abdellatif Khemakhem, head project manager at the Saudi Bin Laden Group (SBGL); however, due to the workload and lack of time to personally participate in the research, Dr. Khemakhem referred me to Mr. Rahman Khouja, his organization development assistant. Mr. Khouja's substantial amount of experiences as a project manager and his current position

at the SBLG made him a suitable candidate for my study as well. As an organizational development assistant at the SBLG, Mr. Khouja has been directly involved in the company's project management activities. Project management experiences, reflection of the past, and self-placement within the organizational context were the main points of my conversation with Mr. Khouja (Appendix A: the Pilot Study research conversation and Appendix B: Pilot Study Data Analysis).

Over the course of my conversation with Mr. Khouja and the consequent analysis of it, it became apparent that his experiences were reflected through the research categories selected for the study. Through narratives and imagination he was able to envision a broader dimension of what project management experience meant to him. The analysis of our conversation helped reveal his creation of meaning for his work, view of his role within the organization, and the diversity of experiences that project management involves.

In the aftermath of my conversation with Mr. Khouja and the sharing of his personal story and his experiences as a project manager, the power of narrative became evident. It confirmed the idea expressed in this study that by considering working experiences of project managers through the lens of interpretive research, both the researcher and research participants may expand their views and understanding of project management. From the pilot conversation with Mr. Khouja I was able to learn the narratives of project managers in Saudi Arabia may have significant implications for project management in terms of organizational aims, the meaning working experiences, and human relationships. Consequently, new insights about the influences of narrative identity and imagination may expand our conventional understanding of project

management as a purely mechanistic activity and the roles of project managers in the organizations. Furthermore, re-considering project management from a critical hermeneutic perspective may help reveal its diverse nature in different organizational contexts. These considerations prompted me to move on with the current research.

Research Sites

In order to gain better perspectives on project management practices and processes and get a fuller understanding of the roles of project managers, I conversed with eight project managers from two companies: Saudi Bin Laden Group located in Saudi Arabia and Micros Retail located in Ohio, USA. The choice of the companies was determined by personal connections to the companies (on a professional basis) and their extensive engagement in project management activities. I decided to avoid conversations from only one company in order to not be confined by the same perspectives, which could have been brought up by the people working in the same organization. My goal was to select a diverse field of project management professionals, which would also be of different cultural backgrounds.



Figure 2: Courtesy of Saudi Bin Laden Group

Saudi Bin Laden Group

Saudi Bin Laden Group (SBG) is a privately held construction conglomerate headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. SBG is one of the oldest (over 80 years) and largest construction companies in the Middle East.

SBG has been engaged in some of the most massive

projects in Saudi Arabia, including King Abdullah Financial District in Riyadh, Kingdom Tower in Jeddah, Al Jamarat in the Holy Cities and others. The company also takes on construction projects outside of the Kingdom, including countries like Malaysia, Senegal, and UAE.

Project management is one of the essential processes within SBG due to the nature of its business: each construction project, in essence, is a separate instance of a project management activity. Moreover, the complexity of the projects undertaken by SBG means that it has some of the best project management professionals in terms of experience and knowledge.

I conducted conversations with four project managers from SBG, who followed different paths in becoming project managers and who have different views and perspectives on project management processes. These people also come from various backgrounds, and they possess different amounts of working experience inside and outside of the company. For these reasons, my conversations with the project managers from SBG are likely to provide great insights into the nature of project management processes as well as the roles of project managers in organizations, from their own perspectives and the perspectives of the people with whom they interact by nature of their jobs.

Micros Retail



Micros Retail is a subsidiary of Micros System, a US-based company that develops

Figure 3: Courtesy of Micros Retail

and maintains enterprise applications for retailer companies of different tiers: from the largest chains like Wal-Mart and JC Penny, to small shops located in shopping malls. Project management at Micros is also an essential part of the business. Unlike SBG, however, the company deals with a wide range of projects determined by the variety of their clients, ranging significantly in size and types of orders.

As with SBG, my conversation partners were four project managers from Micros, who also came from different walks of life; they had different experiences and views on project management and project managers. Micros Retail projects are different from SBG projects – they involve information systems instead of construction and engineering. For this reason, certain aspects of work of project managers and their roles in the process of project management are somewhat different from those at SBG. This fact is beneficial for my research, because it shows a diverse nature of project management as a discipline on the one hand and it opens doors for more perspectives on project management from a different type of project managers.

Research Conversation Participants

My research included eight conversation partners: four from SBG and four from Micros Retail. Brief information about the participants is provided below.

Mr. Allen Nells

Allen Nells is a project implementation manager at Micros Retail. He has over 20 years of experience in project management of various degrees of involvement. His project management activities varied from software development projects to retail implementations and covered broad range of clients in terms of size and project complexity. Allen has been with Micros for almost 5 years at the date of our

conversation. He provided an interesting perspective of community based vision on project management.

Mr. Charles Smith

Charles Smith is a project implementation manager at Micros Retail with several years of management experience in retail, followed by 5 years of experience as a project manager in a small company. He had been with Micros Retail for nearly 3 years at the moment of our conversation. Charles provided an interesting resource-based perspective on project management.

Mr. Kris Myers

Kris Myers is a project implementation manager at Micros Retail with several years of experience as a retail manager and 7 years of experience as a project manager at Micros Retail at the moment of conversation. Kris provided an interesting perspective on communication as the key factor influencing the success of project managers, instead of a power-based theory.

Mr. Majed Alshumur

Majed Alshumur is a person with the least amount of experience as a project manager. His tenure at Micros Retail has been only 1.5 years. Majed has experience as a technician testing security systems in a bank. Despite his relatively low level of experience as a project manager, Majed considers himself an equal member of the project management team.

Mr. Fayiz Aljuhani

Fayiz Aljuhani is a project manager at SBG with 3.5 years of experience as a project manager there. His previous position was as a project manager at SABIC, one of

the largest public companies in Saudi Arabia. Fayiz provided an interesting contrast between family-based companies and publicly owned companies from the perspective of project management processes.

Mr. Hisham Talab

Hisham Talab is a project manager at SBG with 2 years experience with the company. His previous job was with Saudi Aramco, which he praises for a very well organized project management process. He contrasted project management and the roles of project managers in two companies.

Mr. Hussain Almotairi

Hussain Almotairi is a project manager at SBG with 5 years of experience with the company. He was previously employed as a project manager at SABIC, where he spent almost 10 years as a project manager.

Mr. Nihad Mohammad Ismail

Nihad Mohammad is a self-made project manager with 10 years experience at SBG. He moved upward the career ladder in the company starting as a technical assistant for SBG projects and earning his place among the project management team.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were selected on the basis of their relationship and experience within the field of multinational project management. I used my personal connections as well as recommendations from some of my clients in selecting and choosing the post perspective candidates for the research. In order to bring into account the various perspectives in terms of cultural orientation, the nationals of Saudi Arabia and the United States were included in the study. All research participants were sent a Letter

of Invitation (Appendix C) consisting of the study overview, research questions, and the study protocol. The finalized list of the study participants was formulated by the end of May 2012. Four participants were selected from each of the two research sites. A full list of the study participants is provided in Appendix D – Study Participants. The next section presents the process of data collection, which, in this study, involved conversations with the selected study participants.

Data Collection

Research Conversations

Within a critical hermeneutic approach, research questions become a guideline to the topics that arise in the course of genuine conversations. Consequently, conversations have an important place as a rich source of data for further analysis and interpretation. By engaging in genuine conversations, it is possible to achieve a new level of understanding. As Gadamer (2004: 388) wrote:

Coming to an understanding in conversation presupposes that the partners are ready for it and that they try to allow for the validity of what is alien and contrary to themselves. If this happens, ... they can ultimately achieve a common language and a common judgment in an imprescriptible [sic] and non-arbitrary transfer of viewpoints.

In other words, fusion of horizons requires a number of conditions to occur: it takes place through conversation and assumes the partner's readiness for challenging own pre-conceptions and pre-understandings. Following the theory of a fusion of horizons, conversation served as the foundation for data collection in this study.

Research conversations took place with the project managers who agreed to participate in the research. After consent was given by a study participant, he was sent a

letter of confirmation (Appendix E) including the precise time and location for the conversation to take place. All conversations were audio taped with the permission of the participants indicated by signing the initial letter of consent. The recorded conversations were transcribed and sent to the study participants for the analysis and the necessary edits. After the edits were made, the final version of the conversation transcripts was included in the paper.

Researcher's Journal

A researcher's journal is an essential element in the critical hermeneutic data collection process: it helps both guide the process of data analysis and aid in self-reflections during the study (Herda 1999). I used a researcher's journal in my study for the purposes of taking important notes, recording new thoughts and ideas as they develop over the course of the research, and document the immediate findings that may become useful for the research. The next section reviews the process of analyzing the data collected through conversations.

Data Analysis

In data analysis, this study relied on the critical hermeneutic data analysis approach suggested by Herda (1999: 98-99). The protocol involves two major steps following the data collection: distanciation and appropriation. Distanciation is a category extensively explored by Ricoeur (1981). Referring to Ricoeur, Lee (1994: 149) defined distanciation as "the separation, in time and distance that occurs between a text and its author, its originally intended audience, and/or its originating culture and society. "Applied to the research conversations, distanciation means the ability for the researcher and the participant to separate themselves from the conversation and later return to it in

the form of a transcribed text to develop new understandings and meanings. Distanciation opens doors for a rich secondary analysis of data, during which the researcher develops themes for the narrative at hand by using quotes from the transcript, supported by entries from the researcher's journal, sources of literature, and observations (Herda 1999).

Following data distanciation, the next step in data analysis is data appropriation.

Ricoeur (1981: 158) explained appropriation in the following way:

By 'appropriation', I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who hence forunderstands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself. This culmination of the understanding of a text in self-understanding is characteristic of the kind of reflective philosophy which... I have called 'concrete reflection.'

Therefore, appropriation becomes a counterpart to distanciation: completely exposing oneself to the text to capture new understanding and themes. These themes are crucial to hermeneutic research, because narrative itself has the temporal nature. They allow for discussion of the study with implications and suggested actions in the future. Therefore, appropriation is the critical step in the hermeneutic data analysis because it represents the shift from text interpretation to real action (Herda 1999).

Following the discussion of the data collection and analysis processes, the next section outlines the timeline. This timeline indicates the major research milestones of the current project.

Research Timeline

The research included the data collection and analysis procedures as outlined above. Table 2 presents the timeline.

Proposal Defense and The Final List of The Study Participants	May 2012
Research Conversations	June-August 2012

Analysis of The Transcribed Conversations	September 2012
Participants' Data Review	October 2012
Secondary Data Analysis	December 2012
Full Dissertation First Draft	February 2013
Dissertation Defense	April 2013

Table 2: Research Timeframe

Background of the Researcher

My interest in the field of project management comes from personal experiences and observations. After graduating from the King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, I was employed by the Saudi Zadzin Corporation as a project manager. My working experiences at Zadzin were nothing like I had expected, as many things turned out quite different than I had imagined them. Now, as I look back at that period of my life, I realize that my views on a project manager's work and the project manager's role in an organization have been completely different. At that time, even though I did not know anything about critical hermeneutics, I started questioning what it really means to be a project manager.

My interest in project management resurfaced again after I had graduated from Hawaii Pacific University with double Master degree and started working as an independent consultant for Saudi corporations. As a management consultant working with large multinational businesses, I have noticed that the focus of project management has been shifting from purely technical characteristics of the profession to more identity-oriented aspects. Over the course of my practice, I had an opportunity to converse with the people who were managing projects on much larger scales than I did at Zadzin. Through the conversations, I discovered that many issues related to the process of project

management were based on misunderstandings and different point of views among the managers, their subordinates, and, sometimes, their supervisors.

During my studies at USF, through the philosophy of critical hermeneutics, I became able to analyze and explore my personal experiences as a project manager and as a person working with project managers anew. Now, seeing firsthand how these experiences have widened my narrative and horizons, I believe that by analyzing project management from a critical hermeneutic perspective, it may be possible to view it as a living process and experience that focus on one's identity in relationship to others. Therefore, I hope to bridge the gap in understanding and practice, and view project management with a new perspective.

Summary

The research protocol of the study has been presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Specifically, this part provided an overview of the theoretical framework applied in the study, the research categories and research questions, as well as the process of data collection and analysis. A general timeline for the research was presented as well. Finally, this Chapter included my background, as a researcher and an individual who is interested in the field of project management. It informs the direction of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to give a voice to the project managers who became my conversation partners. Following the selected hermeneutic tradition of data presentation, this Chapter attempts to go beyond the traditional content analysis characterized by a systematic process of coding. Rather, it aims, following Herda (1999: 127), to tell the story about the experiences and transcriptions of data collection with the goal to discover a plot. This plot, in turn, will allow the reader to take account of the narratives that emerged over the course of my conversations through a collaborative text. In this sense, my task in this Chapter is that of a narrator, who, in words of Herda (1999: 128), “calls upon productive imagination in the invention and discovery of plots grounded in quotes from conversation.”

During the conversations that took place in summer 2012, narratives about project managers’ working practices and experiences unfolded. These narratives encompassed the paths towards becoming a project manager, the firsthand accounts of being a “project manager,” project managers as authority/subordinate figures, and project managers as a community. They were reflected through the notions of project management uniqueness, project managers’ place in the organization, their recognition, and imageries of an ideal working environment. Bringing together my perspective and background as a researcher and the narratives revealed during the conversations, several themes emerged: the *baharat* job, “special” form of management, the “reversed” authority, and small “culture” and control as an ideal working environment.

The Baharat Job

Before our conversations, I had never met any of my partners: all the arrangements regarding our meetings were conducted via emails and phone calls. However, I used to have face-to-face interactions with project managers during my tenure as a consultant in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, as I was sitting in an air conditioned room at Micros' divisional headquarters in Cleveland waiting for my first conversation partner Mr. Allen Nells, I tried to create a collective picture of a typical project manager. Somehow I could not, and when Mr. Allen came in, I knew he would not fit into my image anyways: a solid man in his fifties, he dresses casually, wants to be addressed by his first name only, has a great sense of humor, and looks at life and work from the great height of his experience in both. He graduated in the top ten percent of class in a prestigious law school; however, he went for project management because it was a safe bet, both financially and career-wise.

One month later, I finished my final conversation with Mr. Hisham Talab, a young, ambitious project manager at Saudi Bin Laden Group (SBG) with purely technical education, to whom the sky was the limit. Despite relatively short tenure, he passionately talked about changes and reorganization in both project management division and the company as a whole. Once again, I was not able to create a collective image of a typical project manager. And then, when I started going over the images of my conversation partners and the stories they told about becoming project managers, I suddenly realized that there can be no such thing as a universal portrait thereof. Just like the project managers I had made acquaintance with while being a business consultant, my conversation partners were of different ages, they had different educational backgrounds

and became project managers under different circumstances. It is also then, that I thought of project management as the *baharat* job.

Baharat is very popular seasoning in the Arabic world, which consists of many varieties of spices. This metaphor I applied to the project management position, which is held by so many different individuals, who traveled very different paths to land it. As a matter of fact, none of my conversation partners presented project management as a dream job or a goal in life, although none could also explain it as a mere coincidence. Mr. Allen Nells, a lawyer in his dreams and a veterinarian at heart, chose project management after he realized that neither his top law school diploma nor his passion for animals could guarantee a job that would provide decent earnings to support his family. His dreams came in clash with the reality, as he had to choose a long, tedious, and uncertain path of career in law or a shorter, more stable mobility in project management. He explained:

[U]ntil you get to my age, you, probably, won't be able to really get a grasp of it, but at some point you do realize that you are not gonna become a President of the United States. We all have high dreams as we are younger, and the world is your oyster: there is absolutely nothing you, at least what you've been taught at school that a US citizen, an educated US citizen, can't do. You know: go after what you like to do, pursue it, and achieve it... But, frankly, as I look back, I realize that life has taken me to the direction that I have never expected or dreamt of when I was young. I think that my system of values took me to where I am right now. See, I married and had kids at a young age. Early on, I had to feed and take care of my family. I asked my question: where are the jobs? You may not know, but in the early 1980s, manufacturing, factories – that's where the decent, well paid jobs were. When I got there, became a part of the union, I realized that – and my values system was at play – that I could really achieve something that I am aspired to achieve.

Mr. Allen's values seemed to serve him well, as he has been a project manager for over twenty years now. Nor was project management an intended path for another veteran of Micros Retail project management team – Mr. Kris Myers, who has over seven years of project management experience. Mr. Kris' career path was in sales and retail. He

worked his way up from the sales floor to a store manager, and then joined Micros as an account manager. His “promotion” to a project manager took place when a position became vacant and he was temporarily assigned to oversee a project before a replacement could be found. While having no technical background, he was still able to successfully run an IT project, and was, eventually offered a position of the project manager half way through the project. In his own terms, that was not what Micros would typically do in relation to project manager candidates; so he really stood out and “earned” that position, it was not just “another promotion”:

As I look back right now, I would say [it was] not merely a coincidence. Prior to that, I was working as a sales manager at the stores. I dealt with many of the things I do now, and that was a good experience. I think I wanted to do something similar, but, at the same time, more engaging...

I was invited to a meeting with a customer and picked up a project. At about three quarters of the way before the end of the project I was promoted to the position. So, it's not what they typically do in terms of bringing in people as project managers at once. You have to earn the position.

A career in project management was never an intention of Mr. Charles Smith, another Micros PM who became really interested in sales and operations management during his college years. His aspirations, however, came to a halt after taking management assistant internship in a large corporation. He never felt the kind of self-fulfillment, challenge, and diversity at workplace. It was then that he decided to switch to project management, which he considered more suitable for his demands in career path.

Our dialogue revealed:

WA: by the way, speaking of project management, was that the original career path you have envisioned? Or was it something else?

CS: no, I do not think this was what I intended to be or dreamt of. During my college years I did a couple of management assistant internships and was aiming at top management position in a large corporation. I was thinking about sales management and operations management. After all, this was what

I studied and I really liked that. Then, I think that my first job after college provided a certain setback. It was in the field I liked, but, for some reason, it did not feel right. I do not know, what it lacked, frankly. Maybe, it was too routine, or maybe it was not rewarding enough in terms of payment and self-fulfillment... but the fact is that I decided on taking on something more...

WA: challenging?

CS: challenging and interesting. Yes, and also something with a greater degree of responsibility. But, of course, I decided to not jump into serious, large-scale project management at once. Instead, I joined a smaller company, where I could, on the one hand, get a glimpse of the nature of work, and, on the other, acquire the necessary experience and skills.

Project managers from Saudi Bin Laden Group (SBG) also showed different backgrounds and paths towards the project management positions. My first conversation partner, Mr. Hussain Almotairi, a project manager at SBG with five years of experience with the SBG and 10 years of experience with Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) was a member of an engineering team, who were constantly frustrated with their project supervisor:

[A]fter graduating with a Bachelor degree in Electrical Engineering I had my first job, predictably, with an electric company. During my tenure there, I worked in a team of engineers who worked under the supervision of a manager, who was receiving and guiding projects related to electrification of premises. No one particularly liked our supervisor whom everyone considered incompetent in all aspects of our work. I and my colleagues would often discuss how good it would be to have a person from our own background to manage people like us. And then it suddenly came to me. I took a break from work and went on to acquire a Master degree in business administration. After that I was able to land a position with SABIC.

Mr. Husain's aspiration, therefore, came as a result of disappointment and the desire to bring competence and technical background to the project teams. He might have never become a project manager had he had a better project manager in the first place.

Mr. Fayiz Aljuhani, who has been a project manager at SBG for three and a half years, faced another type of frustration at his work in a bank: it was inability to receive promotion after years of loyal service. From his words, he initially thought of no other

career path but in banking and finance, and his college degrees were earned accordingly: Bachelor in Economics and Master in Finance. However, what seemed a very promising start at the largest bank in the Middle East soon turned into a struggle and, ultimately, disillusionment:

FA: I have a Bachelor degree in Economics and a Master degree in Finance.

WA: wow, this does not seem like a focused education for a project management specialist.

FA: it is certainly not. My initial career goal was in finance and banking. I liked the language of numbers and wanted to find myself in the field of money movements. As I mentioned, I have worked in a bank for nearly 10 years. That was AlRajhi Bank, the largest in the Middle East. I grew up to the position of a department head, focusing on international transactions. So, as you can see, it was far away from where I am today.

WA: it is, actually. What made you change your mind then?

FA: I think that was a host of factors. First, I realized that I could not grow any further with the banking career. The next level would be senior level of management, and that was simply not an option unless you [know] someone already working there. It is really a closed society at the top there, and one cannot get entrance if not privileged enough. Second, I think that family was an issue. I had to travel a lot with my position, and I started seeing my wife and two sons rarely, but family means so much to me; therefore, I had to make that choice: either continue to work where I worked or look for something less time demanding even though it could be less rewarding. Finally, I started having issues with the senior management. Probably, they were not really glad seeing my aspirations for a place there. So, all that, combined, contributed to my leave from Al Rajhi.

Perhaps, guided more by an impulse rather than careful consideration, Fayiz took an opportunity with SBG when it was presented, and he was succinct in emphasizing this:

WA: but you did not consider any other bank.

FA: no, not really. As a matter of fact, when I heard about project management positions in SBG, I was still employed at the bank. Being in a stressful situation that I was at that time, it is not surprising to me that I made this choice three years ago. Another bank was simply not an option, because all of them associated me with the same issues I had at work.

In retrospective, there was nothing like a thorough planning or initial desire to work as a project manager. I simply was informed of an opportunity and decided to try myself here.

Nevertheless, from our conversation, it became apparent that he had no eventual regrets about his decision in switching career paths.

For Mr. Nihad Mohammad, a self-made project manager with 10 years experience at SBG, becoming a project manager was not so much an outcome of disappointment with his previous job as it was hard work and desire to move up. He received an associate degree in a technical field and started out at SBG as a technician. His rise from a lower position could be compared to that of Mr. Hussain, and his upward mobility within the same company to that of Chris Myers. However, he neither received a high-level management education as the former nor held a management position as the latter. However, his desire to become a project management was driven by his belief in sufficient knowledge and skills that he had acquired while working in SBG project management teams. When I asked whether Nihad considered his appointment a “lucky” promotion, he replied:

No, luck has nothing to do with it, but hard work does ... [W]hen our project manager left, and the company started considering a pool of candidates for the position, I decided that I had a shot at this. The thing is that I have worked under his supervision for some time, and I also was with SBG for quite a while. I possessed all the knowledge required for the position. The only thing I, probably, lacked, was the lack of experience in management. Actually, I did not really have any.

And still, despite acknowledging himself as a self-made project manager, who achieved everything by himself, Mr. Nihad did not consider this position as his final goal. He noted:

I can't say it was [my intention]. It was rather a logical outcome of many events and circumstances. I can, however, say that it was my intention to go up at SBG, and I think I succeeded in this.

To understand the perspective of project managers on their jobs, it is first necessary to understand who the project managers really are and how they came to be what they are. Through my conversations it became evident that project manager is a position held by people from various walks of life, who had their own reasons to pursue this career path. Because of the different personalities and backgrounds of these people, it is extremely difficult to accumulate them in a single, monolith project manager persona. Importantly, my conversation partners' views regarding their work came as a result of fusing their past and present perspectives on life, purpose, and the career. Reflections of past in relation to present also became paramount in our discussions on who project managers are in relation to themselves, clients, organization, and the subordinates.

A “Special” Type of Management

I was standing on a side while Mr. Nihad Mohammed engaged in a lively conversation with two construction workers with a project legend in front of them. With a knowledgeable look, he followed the hands of one of the workers on the legend, sometimes throwing a glance at various points of what would become a mall in a month or two. Nihad agreed to have a conversation with me, but due to his busy schedule, asked me if I minded going to a construction site with him, because he needed to inspect it. I readily agreed. Contrary to common beliefs, project managers do not spend their entire time in the office telling the crew what to do. As a self-made PM, Nihad knows that his presence at the site and full awareness of the project process is essential to his success. As we were heading towards the car, he noted: “I think that being a project manager, in itself, is a very unique, engaging experience. Here, at SBG, being a project manager is

also a challenge and a reward for hard work and dedication.” Having conducted six conversations with various project managers by then, I could not agree more.

From my conversations, it was revealed that project management is a special form of management, which differs from the others in several important aspects. At least this is what the project managers themselves thought of it. In this regard, it was particularly insightful to hear opinions of those individuals who worked at other management positions prior to becoming project managers. Charles Smith, who had been a retail manager for several years prior to joining the Micros’ PM team, summarized it best:

I think it is more different, although both [retail management and project management] have the term management to indicate the position. The underlying aspects of these positions are fundamentally different. Projects versus a continuous job, personal work versus team management, slow paced versus fast paced environments, and so on.

He later on confirmed that his experience as a project manager was “more challenging, more demanding” even in comparison to the busyness of a retail store manager. On the other hand, he said he found positive things in this new experience, especially, diversity at work and stronger engagement with the clients.

Mr. Allen Nells went even further in our conversation regarding the nature of project management, and described it as an entirely different culture of work. Coming from two consecutive meetings with different clients to converse with me, he surmised that the nature of project management, realized from retrospective, is about managing projects and people, not resources and forming a multitude of perspectives on things. As a result, to be a project manager one has to determine what drives him/her personally to determine whether project management is right for him/her. He argued:

[P]roject manager is someone who has to be a more organized individual; he has to possess some additional skills, one of which is the ability to manage

multiple perspectives on things. Line managers have one type of interaction, which is within their organization, which has its goals and objectives. Project managers, on the other hand, deal with several customers. At least in my experience, I mean retail project management, we deal with more than one customer at the same time. And, of course, our customers have different perspectives on things. When you talk to a client, which I, for example, did about half an hour ago, they really care only about their own business.

Allen went on with his idea of multitude of perspectives by stating that for a project manager, more than for any other manager, versatility is the key. Versatility allows different types and forms of communication. He even stated that communication versatility was the main thing he would look for when interviewing candidates for the project management positions. He emphasized the essential side of communication and people skills:

Project management is pretty much about lining up what you need to do, who is going to do that, and when we are going to deliver. If you follow these steps, everything else is about human interaction, communication.

The uniqueness of project management, richness of experience, and emphasis on people skills and interaction became evident during my conversation with Mr. Majed Alshumur. Mr. Majed brought a fresh perspective to the nature of differences between project management and other forms of management due to his relatively small (1.5 years) working experience and previous work at a bank. In answering my question regarding the differences between the bank management and project management at Micros, he elucidated:

[F]rom a professional perspective, I am now in charge of a group of people. Before that, I used to do some tasks and get to the other tasks and so on. Right now, as a project manager, I am responsible for all aspects of work on a project. I am responsible for a team, which I build, I am responsible for a project plan, which I coordinate with my client. My workload is not as monotonous as it used to be. I now have to create presentations for my clients, meet with them, explain

things to my team members, guide them and demand from them. From a personal perspective, this is a completely new game.

As our conversation unfolded, Mr. Majed acknowledged that his people skills, communication, and even personality had to change a lot to fit the project management position requirements. The new traits that he had to uncover included openness, attention, and the ability to gain different perspectives on things. He provided a good real life example to demonstrate that:

At the meeting, you have different people: different experience, different personality, different cultural background, and different technical abilities. I now find genuine interest in what each of these individuals has to say. Before that, I wasn't that open with people, probably, because I did not have to. I would simply sit out at the meeting without gaining or even bothering to gain different perspectives on things. Now it is quite different.

When discussing the nature of project management during my conversations, another important thing would always come up, and it is stress. Stress and pressures were emphasized by all project managers as common things for the profession. As if to uncover this topic and give it weight, I was informed during my very first conversation at Micros that nearly half of the project managers had left the company in the period of six months preceding my research. When I suggested that not many people would actually be able to handle the pressures of multiple projects and forming different perspectives on things, Mr. Allen Nell responded:

[P]erhaps, true. Or, more correctly, not everyone is comfortable with this kind of situation. You see, having so much mental pressures all day long is definitely not for everyone.

Multitudes of perspectives, work in an environment full of stress, pressures and responsibilities, and a comprehensive view on people, resources, and client relationships are not the things that could be taught in the classrooms. This, and the fact that none of the project managers I conversed with had an actual project management degree,

prompted me to ask whether project management could be, in fact, a useful discipline to study or whether one could prepare self by relevant experience. Adding to the overall notion of diversity and uniqueness of project management, Mr. Hussain Alotaibi assured:

Project management involves various types of projects. It could be a construction work, or it could be building a power plant, it could be an IT project, or it could be other discipline, including electronic engineering. So, obviously, having a person with a background in the corresponding discipline is always a great plus. So, thinking that a management degree or background in management is the most important thing in project management is mistaken. Having knowledge of the field to which project management applied is more important.

Mr. Hussain was, perhaps, the most eloquent conversation partner when it came to addressing the nature of project management and the role of project managers. Adding to our conversation, he provided, reflecting on his experience, a concluding remark that could be considered as a testament to the people who call themselves project managers and their resourcefulness:

I would like to say that project management, as a field, is a very dynamic and challenging environment on its own. From my multiple years of experience I learned that project managers create success by themselves, meaning that they are like small CEOs, who make or break projects assigned to them. I have seen many successful project managers, and I also saw project managers who failed miserably. It all really comes to one simple axiom: if your project failed, you simply did not do your best, because any project can be pulled. I've been in situations that many would call impossible. I despise such word. Experience, knowledge, and personal will always dominated in the end.

Project management, indeed, seems a special type of management. I became convinced in this by not only conversing with the experienced project managers, who effectively juxtaposed their work to the traditional forms of management, but also by personal observations of how their daily work is conducted. Mr. Kris Myers, a PM from Micros, exclaimed in reference to his project management experiences, "the days are never boring!" However, behind this cheerfulness is hard mental labor, connected to great

amount of responsibility, accountability, and stress. The true nature of project management can be best revealed by examining how project managers see themselves in relation to the organization, co-workers, employees, and clients. This is what I called The “Reversed” Authority paradigm based on my conversations.

The “Reversed” Authority

I once again paused my recorder, as Mr. Charles Smith had to answer a phone call from a client. It was for the third time during our conversation. Mr. Charles explained that the calls were coming regarding what he called a “high risk” project – the one that had a high probability of not being completed on time. When I wondered why projects, in general, would become “high risk,” he responded that in case of Micros that would be shortage of resources and the project managers themselves who were assigned too many projects at once. Then I surmised that projects delay because of resource shortages should be the company’s issue; however, Charles replied: “no, things do not work this way here. Project managers run the project from the start to the end. Therefore, we are given independence and responsibility for the completion.”

To a person who is not familiar with project management, this could come as a real surprise: on the one hand, project managers are given full independence and responsibility for the project completion; on the other hand, they are not given control over the means to do that: everything remains in the hands of the organizational managers. However, following my conversations, this is something quite common in the project management universe. It also seems that treating project managers, not the contractor company, for project completion is a common thing, no matter whether you manage project in the United States or Saudi Arabia. Mr. Charles Smith continued:

You have to look at yourself as someone who is running the project. So, you are the point of contact between the company you work for and the company you are working for as a customer. So, you have to think of this: yes, you are an authority figure; so, if they have questions, concerns, they are coming directly to you, and your company is basically doing the same... So, I mean, if you are trying to figure out meeting timelines and answering questions and these kinds of things then, definitely, you are the kind person that has the answers. So, you are, I do not want to say the most important person, but you are the most important person coordinating resources, coordinating responses, coordinating timelines and that kind of things.

These were the ideas that echoed Mr. Allen Nells, to whom I talked several days before. Allen revealed that he, as a project manager, was supposed to be available to his clients on a 24/7 basis with the answers they needed. He was direct in emphasizing that if something happened to the project, it would be he, not Micros' senior management, contacted. He concluded:

Of course, we are in a position of authority by being directly linked to the clients... They expect you to know right away how the things are, what's the status, what our plans to move forward or resolve the issue are... Basically, any small thing, they want you to be able to have intimate and knowledgeable conversation about it... I mean, we negotiate with them, we plan the project with them, we do the meetings, and we are responsible for everything related to the project. This is the kind of authority that breeds high degree of responsibility, of course.

Mr. Nihad Mohammed, in the largely same manner summed up the position of project managers working for the SBG:

In many cases, project managers are loosely governed and controlled. We are assigned tremendous amount of power over our projects, and with this comes great amount of responsibility.

It soon became apparent from my conversations that despite the tremendous powers vested in them in terms of running projects, project managers always remain just the middle-rank management layer of the organization. In other words, they cannot really

control the strategic planning matters or, more importantly, distribute resources across the projects. They even rarely control the amount of work put upon them. As Mr. Majed Alshumur, a PM with relatively small experience who has been assigned an additional large project to his two high-risk status projects, revealed it is a common thing to be called to the office and given another project because “something has happened.” Going back to my frequently interrupted conversation with Charles Smith, I wondered whether project managers try to make their voices heard:

WA: were any of these issues reported to the top level management?

CS: you mean client problems or project management issues?

WA: project management issues. I mean the problems related to project management and everything that hinders effective performance and project completion.

CS: well, yes, we do this occasionally. However, little is changing. Moreover, I would say that we are getting even more resource-strapped.

This exchange was particularly revealing. After all, project managers are engaged in the kind of work that largely drives their companies’ revenues, at least that was, in my understanding, the case with Micros. I asked Charles whether project managers were recognized at all by the senior management. He replied with a lengthy answer, from which it could be concluded that project managers are appreciated, however, rarely taken seriously:

I see it this way. They [the senior management] do realize that we are the main force driving the company’s success. I mean, they are paying well, and they create all these meetings with us about once a month to discuss the issues surrounding project management. However, I think they are still much distanced from what is really going on. In my understanding, they think that good pay and comfortable working environment can outweigh the tremendous amount of stress and the workloads we are dealing with. This is not so in reality, and, as you know, recent mass leave of the project managers confirms

this. They need to get down here, spend a day or two in this environment where we have no idea what is going to happen to our projects to really see what is lacking. I am not here to propose any solutions: they are the executives, and they should be planning the strategy. However, a person or two of the former project managers sitting on the board would, probably, help. At least we would have our voices not only heard, but also taken seriously. This is my opinion.

In terms of relationships with the senior management of the company, SBG project managers expressed similar ideas of appreciation and respect. Mr. Fayiz, for example, emphasized the fact that the SBG project managers are treated with due honor and respect because of their money making function. Mr. Hussain also expressed an opinion that SBG senior management respects project managers because of their contribution to the company success. At the same time, it became clear that SBG project managers have the same concerns as Micros' PMs regarding executives' distance from their issues and problems and inability to take their perspective on things. These were best summarized by Mr. Nihad Mohammed:

I would say that there is lack of organization and rigor, yes, rigor is a good word. In many cases, project managers are loosely governed and controlled. We are assigned tremendous amount of power over our projects, and with this comes great amount of responsibility... I sometimes have an impression that the owners of SBG have little concern to what is going on within the company for as long as the projects are completed. I do not think this is a good approach. Executives need to be aware of the processes and interactions within the company. Project management is especially important here.

The way that project managers understand themselves in relation to clients and the organization's senior management is important. However, to gain a full insight into the "Reversed" Authority paradigm, it is necessary to see how project management is unique in terms of relationships with the subordinates. In many aspects, these relationships are rather unconventional as well. From my conversations, it was revealed

that project managers are not managing employees in a traditional sense. This is because they do not manage them on a constant basis. As such, no strong subordinate attachments are created in a traditional sense. Mr. Charles explained:

Of course, we do possess some authority. I mean, we are responsible for the project implementation, we select and guide people to complete the goals. However, I would not relate this kind of authority to the same kind that is present in the traditional management hierarchies. This is because we do not manage people on a continuous basis. We work with some people on a project, but then we normally work with other people on different projects... Under these circumstances, you need to be a truly great communicator to get the results done.

Mr. Kris Myers went even further to declare that he, as a project manager, does not really have any subordinates for the reason of constant rotation of project team members. He also emphasized that the people in his teams are considered equal, not someone who would be directly subordinate or reporting:

I do not have any subordinates: no one works for me. When you get a project, you get down to it; sometimes, someone helps you. However, unless this is a really large project, it is you and some other people, who are in other departments: QA, development, technical services, Datacom – the connectivity and network people. So, the people I usually deal with are my equals, only in different departments. Obviously, you deal with directors and you deal with vice-presidents, operations management of your company, but, in general, I do not have any people underneath that have to report directly to me.

The project managers from SBG shared the views of more or less independent project team members and rather weak control and authority over them. In a large sense, despite being fully responsible for the project outcomes before the client, project managers do not exercise much power over their team members. Communication, not power seems to underline the relationships between project managers and their team members. In this regard, it was really insightful to listen to Mr. Fayiz, who had managed

people both as a bank manager at AlRajhi and as a project manager in SBG. Reflecting on both experiences, he observed:

FA: One thing is ... being a department manager ... supervising a constant team of employees. I was, actually, given the rights to hire new people, interview them for the position in my department, and even laying people off. At SBG, I manage people based on a project assigned. So, I do not manage the same people all the time. Our human resources are more mobile, and we do not have this constant type of supervision. Project managers also cannot hire and fire people: this is something reserved for the resource management department. So, as authority people I would say that project managers at SBG have less power over employees... Even this position of authority that I have does not really make me much superior to the others. I mean, each person I work with is a professional in his own field: they know more than I there. So, I cannot tell them what to do in terms of work, I can only guide the entire process towards the successful end... We use communication and persuasion more.

The importance of people skills and communication comes as no surprise in view of project managers' little control over their team members. It also became evident that project managers often have to acquire specific skills that would help them keep better track over what is going on with the projects. Speaking of this, Nihad noted that in the absence of strong authority, control is necessary, and it would come as a product of knowledge. Mr. Nihad Mohammad provided an example from his personal project management practice:

WA: speaking of control, how much of that do you apply to your project team members?

NM: again, I am not directing them into what to do. My control is based on setting clear expectations and having knowledge about various aspects of the project. This helps me jump in and identify issues before they get critical. One of my projects about a year ago involved a team member, who was responsible for creating a virtual marquee of a building complex. Unlike some of the project managers, who normally leave these guys on their own, I, by the nature of habit, asked the guy to share basic ideas with me regarding the process he was following. When the project was in the midway, I noticed a misplaced element, which could have jeopardized the entire structure. The specialist missed that on his own, maybe because it was such an obvious thing that he, as a professional, would never check by default. So, as you can see, I

do learn the basics of each of my team members' works. Sometimes, this is what can ensure that the project is done without delays and post-construction issues.

WA: so, my understanding is that you prefer to be aware of the things, but do not push your subordinates unnecessarily?

NM: yes, I'd say so. I mean, we have no problems with resource allocation at SBG. For each project, we have enough people, technology, and materials. My job is to align them to get the project done, and done in a professional manner. From my experience as a technician of a project team, too much pressure does not help in the human resources' work. A balanced approach is needed: control but do not press too hard to break the people you work with.

The "Reversed" Authority paradigm exemplifies a very different approach to managing projects than in other types of management. It follows from a reversed structure of authority, where project managers, not the senior company managers, have full authority and responsibility over the projects, and, at the same time, have little or no power over the project team members. This is, obviously, different from the traditional management structures where middle managers are subordinates to the senior managers and have full authority with regards to their subordinates.

What about the relationships with their colleagues? During my conversations, this topic emerged as well. I was interested in finding out about project managers as a community: whether it was friendly, hostile, or competitive. Both experienced project managers and the project managers who started in their respective companies relatively recently, spoke positively about their colleagues and the overall sense of a closely knit project management community. Charles Smith in this regard noted:

I can only say positive things [about my colleagues]. We all know that we are in the same boat. I mean, you cannot deliberately "poach" resources from the other PMs, because after that you would never receive help when you need it. However, this rarely happens. We try to help each other as much as we can. Also, when a new project manager joins the company, we try to help him get accustomed as soon as possible. After all, he is going to rid us of some workload (*laughs*). I cannot say we are like a family here; however, there is

this [element] of an environment which is of mutual support and help. I really can't say anything negative about my colleagues.

The conversations with SBG project managers further convinced me in the idea of project managers as an organized community. My discussions with Mr. Hussain and Mr. Fayiz in this regard were especially fruitful. This is because both of them came to the project management field from the other management fields (in banking and retail), and they could compare their experiences in the past and the present. Comparing his experiences with the co-workers from AlRajhi Bank and from SBG, Mr. Fayiz stated:

At Al Rajhi, everyone was aiming high, and everyone was ready to jump above your head to land a better position. Maybe this was also because there were so many young ambitious specialists there. They were all dreaming big, just like I did. And then here, at SBG, we have matured specialists, who know their job well, and who prefer to be your friend rather than a competitor. So, the relationships between project managers are more laid back, more friendly.

Importantly, the notion of supportive community became a useful tool for integration of new project managers into the workplace. Mr. Majed, for example, spoke about getting fully integrated into the project management team despite his one and a half years of experience only. When I asked him whether it was only him who felt this way, he replied that a host of new project managers joined the company at approximately the same time as he did, and they all were feeling the same. While he did not consider the project community closely bound outside of work, at Micros, the new PMs would always find help when they sought it:

As I said there are things that I still need to learn. I really appreciate the help I get from more experienced PMs. Of course, sometimes, others are too busy with their own projects; so little time can be assigned to me. However, I always see genuine desire to help. This is, probably, one of the distinctive features of Micros' organizational culture.

A more concrete example of help received from the other project managers was provided by Mr. Mohammed. He spoke of the general atmosphere existing in interactions between project managers and linked it to family-style governance, where everyone helps each other. It seemed to help him a lot in the beginning of his work at SBG:

SBG, as you may know, is a family owned corporation. But it is not only ownership; it is also the style of management. Management is more of a family style... Of course, good advantages of such organizational culture are freedom to share opinions on various aspects of work and, probably, help one can always count on. I remember one of my first projects, where I ran into issues with ... my team: we had a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication with each other. That nearly jeopardized completion of a crucial project part. It was then when I got help from another, more experienced project manager, who resolved the situation effectively. So, this culture of support and help proved really beneficial to me personally.

As is seen, when speaking of project management community and support, both Mr. Fayiz and Mr. Nihad mentioned the word culture. Culture would prove a significant concept in understanding project managers' working environment and their vision of an ideal workplace.

“Small Culture,” Order, and Control: An Ideal Working Environment

Mr. Majed looked stressful and worried. He almost nonchalantly invited me to his office, and I saw that his mind was still somewhere else. Nevertheless, he managed to collect himself and asked me about the nature of my research. “Nothing about the chronic shortage of resources and the chaotic environment?” he wondered, “I could tell you a thing or two about those...” He smiled ironically. Just before our meeting Mr. Majed was with his senior supervisors who, a day before, assigned him to oversee a huge project. Mr. Majed had to deliver two large-scale projects already and thought he did not even have time for those. In the end of our conversation I asked him how satisfied he was,

overall, with his job. He replied five out of ten. I believe if I asked him the same question referring to his new project assignment, we would have gone to a negative scale.

The interpretive perspective on project managers' practices and experiences should inevitably involve their opinions and thoughts of an ideal working environment. Those, in turn, are likely to arise from the positive experiences, which the managers would like to preserve, and the negative experiences, which they would like to change or eliminate. As I went through my conversations over and over again, I could discern that these experiences were almost always related to the organizational culture and working environment.

When Mr. Allen Nells was offered a job at Micros, a relatively small technology company back then, he did not know what to expect. He received similar offers from a bank and from an insurance company – both well established, large businesses. Allen decided to have a shot with Micros, as he explained, not because it was a more promising or better paid position, but because of its culture:

I had two other companies offering me a project management place: one was a bank, and the other one was an insurance company. However, with Micros it seemed more like a closely knit, smaller community, which I got used to so much. Basically, from the CEO all the way down, it felt like a small business.

Five years later, Mr. Allen does not feel any touch of community in his company, which became “very formalized and disconnected.” He talked about the exodus of project managers from Micros because, in his opinion, the sense of the old good working environment was lost. He surmised that in its pursuit of expansion, the company sacrificed strong relationships shared among employees and the clients.

Mr. Allen's concerns were supported by Charles' story and views on changing culture at Micros. Unlike Allen, he, actually, came from a much smaller company, which

took a very conservative approach to expanding. According to Mr. Charles, what he liked most was the fact that the company was “small” not only in term of size, but also culture-wise. This, according to him, was a guarantee of a friendlier, more relaxed, and at the same time, productive working environment:

CS: I always wondered why we never had ambitions to expand, because there was a true potential there. However, as we went with steady, slower growth, we managed to build stronger, more intimate relationships with our clients and we also never had problems with resource allocations.

WA: you also mentioned about relationships with the clients.

CS: oh yes. This is another thing. We did not have that many clients and projects going on. However, the ones we had turned into great business relationships with them. They were strong and long standing.

WA: hmmm, what about now, are you saying...

CS: no, of course not. I am not trying to say that we are incapable of building strong and long lasting relationships with our clients [at Micros]. It's just, should I say, it was more genuine back then? Right now, at Micros, we are more interested in getting done as many projects as possible. This is good for the company's bottom line, but, you know, this is not really contributing to our relationships with the clients. We maintain relationships because we maintain the systems we build, not because our clients are really choosing us over our competitors.

“Small culture” became a dominant concept in my conversations with the SBG project managers as well. All of them joined the company after working in large, public companies that were very successful financially, but did not have the feel of the “family.” Comparing the working cultures of SBG and AlRajhi Bank, Mr. Fayiz pointed out to “friendliness” and mutual respect at SBG:

Al Rajhi, although a private company until recently, has been transformed into a public enterprise with all the consequences. I mean, the shareholders require profit increases, and this determines business orientation. At SBG it is different. It is, as you know, a family owned company... This means that the company is more oriented towards quality work and maintaining relationships with its clients... [O]rganizational culture in SBG is friendlier. At least this is how it seems to me in comparison with the past. Everyone treats everyone with mutual respect, and people are open to help each other. In relation to

project management, this translates into people being eager to share their knowledge and experience in terms project management, and it is very helpful to those who are new in the company. It helped me a lot in the very beginning. At Al Rajhi, the situation was different because of very intense internal competition. People are less helpful, because everyone is trying to get promoted.

A very deep insight into organizational culture and its influence on project management was provided by Mr. Hussain. He focused on another aspect of project management – relationships with the clients. Client intimacy, according to Mr. Hussain, was more important than having more projects. A seasoned project manager at SABIC, he thought that the company started to lose touch with the clients after it went public. Somewhat echoing Allen Nell’s frustration over Micros’ expansion, Mr. Hussain was critical of the SABIC policy of grabbing more projects at the expense of strong ties with the existing clients. He thought that a “smaller company” culture was better, and not only for project management, but for the company as a whole. He explained:

At some point, I got a feeling that SABIC was getting more disconnected, meaning that it was losing the feeling of a family among the employees. It was bothering me, because I prefer close relationships between co-workers and between project managers and their clients. The environment became more stressful, as I was taking on larger number of projects and could not really form these kinds of relationships with my co-workers and clients, if you know what I mean. And then I saw this opportunity with SBG, which is a family business and which is a more closely-knit organization. So, I decided to try myself there... I should say that SBG, indeed, seems like an organization with more intimate relationships both inside the company and with the clients. These relationships are stronger than in SABIC..., [whose] policy was to take on many projects because we needed to expand our market share. But then, the more projects you get, the less attention you can pay to your clients. In many cases, it would be like: “Hello, here is your project done. Please, test it then goodbye, we are moving to another client.” Of course, I am providing an extreme example, but the fact was that the relationships were diluted somewhat. SBG works with fewer clients and takes on large projects mostly. So, the communication is better and more intimate. We have closer relationships, which are later developed in long-term partnerships.

While praising the “small culture” feel and the idea of a closely-knit community, which, apparently, was something project managers tended to create on their own even in the absence of such thing on the organizational scale, two other things appeared consistently in my conversations: resources and orderliness. As I already mentioned, project managers do not control the resources for their projects, which is an important element within the “Reversed” Authority paradigm. Given our pre-conversation exchange with Mr. Majed, it was logical to get into this area of organizational environment. Mr. Majed compared the project management meetings to an optimization model puzzle: how to use limited resources for the best results. The difficulty, however, was that every project manager needed those resources, and getting them for one project would inevitably mean robbing the other. On top of that, the aggressive growth strategy chosen by the company would add new projects to the already overloaded managers, and that was something few people could withstand. Mr. Majed explained:

MA: [I]magine having several big projects in your portfolio: some of them are not finished and some of them are under surveillance after completion. And then you get to know that you are assigned another project to handle. In the situation, where you are under tremendous stress by pleasing the clients you already have, and the team members refusing to take on additional working tasks because they are already exhausted, many people crack under pressure. This is understandable. These people handled 7 or 8 big projects at once. You cannot really have perfect products and systems with workloads like these. For some of the clients, you would not have time to even organize status meetings or update them on the things. In the end, therefore, it is us, the project managers, who are blamed by the clients. Of course, they do not care about our issues with understaffing and workloads. What they want is fulfillment of our contract obligations.

WA: so, from your words, it is stress that really makes it or breaks it for the project managers. Is it really that important?

MA: well, maybe not all the times, but recently it has been like this. In a situation when we were loading ourselves with the new clients with the fear of

losing the market, the quality of our work declined simply because we could not handle that.

WA: bit more than you could chew...

MA: exactly. And since the main responsibility lies on project managers, those people came under fire.

Mr. Charles went even further in his discussion of working environment at Micros and introduced the issue of uncertainty and chaos, which he very much disliked. He mentioned that project managers need to at least have concrete information about the resources distribution planned new projects, and assignment of the priorities. As an example, he talked about his project that was due the coming Friday (the conversation was on Monday), and he was not sure whether he would be given the required resources to complete it. From his words, it appeared that he was completely unaware of what could happen to the project in the upcoming days. Naturally, he was stressed and unable to plan effectively. Here is what he said:

WA: I think it can be frustrating sometimes to lack information on the company resources.

CS: I would say more. It is not frustrating only sometimes, it is frustrating all the times. In my more than three years as a PM at Micros, I never had a single project where there would be no updates, reallocation of resources, movement of priorities and so on. The worst thing about all this is that we, the project managers, often have no idea how the priorities would change and what we would be working on, and with what resources.

WA: I guess, this adds uncertainty...

CS: uncertainty and inability to plan effectively. And this ricochets on our clients. You know, we, the project managers, interact with the company representatives, who also report to their bosses. They would go to them and say “ok, we got this project at Micros, and it will be done next week Friday.” And then this project is assigned a lower priority, resources are moved, and you suddenly realize that you are likely not to meet the deadline.

WA: but how is this explained? After all, in my understanding, Micros signs a contract and has responsibilities under it.

CS: we do. But, see, we have too many of these contracts. Going back to this Friday deadline, we may have projects with deadlines on Wednesday or Thursday, and, obviously, if they are not completed, resources are thrown there to meet those deadlines, which are earlier.

WA: oh, I see now.

CS: and this is, again, planning. How can I plan effectively when I am not sure whether I would have the same amount of resources continuously? Hell, sometimes, I am not even sure I am getting any resources for my project at all!

The problem of resource planning at Micros was linked by Allen to the lack of organization. Reminiscing on his previous job, he shared an opinion that his work back then was much easier because it was much better organized and planned, including clear allocation of resources and projects. I then heard similar opinions from the SBG project managers. While it did not seem like SBG was experiencing shortage of resources, the project managers pointed out to the lack of control and order. While generally criticizing their previous jobs at large public corporations like AlRajhi Bank, SABIC, and Saudi Aramco, they, nevertheless, highly praised the high degree of organization and standardization there. Mr. Hussain, who left SABIC to seek a friendlier, “smaller” culture environment, was really surprised to find out that SBG did not possess strong organization of the project management process:

When I came to SBG, I was really surprised that the company with such long history did not have formal training guides or project management guides. Then I asked how they shared knowledge about project management and how the new project managers were adapting. They answered that it was through communication. Really, they simply had no formalized documents specifying the processes. That was, perhaps, a weakness of SBG... As I mentioned before, SABIC was more organized in terms of project management process. Looking back, I believe my job was easier back then. We had tangible forms of knowledge to refer to when we had questions, we could always ask for

additional resources, and we could, actually, take on more projects because of good organization. SBG has been more challenging because there were no working manuals or written project management procedures. I, however, really enjoy a less formal, family-style atmosphere and closer relationships formed at SBG.

Similarly to Mr. Allen, Mr. Hussain shared an opinion that a more organized environment makes project managers' work easier and more productive. However, as I talked to Mr. Hisham and Mr. Nihad, it appeared that higher degree of organization would be helpful to those who join the company in the first place. With no procedures, training programs, or annuals to support project management decision making process, it seemed to Mr. Hisham that SBG was 20-25 years back system-wise in comparison to Saudi Aramco. It was eventually hard to adapt for the new environment. Nihad shared the feel. He did not work as a project manager prior to SBG, and got promoted after working for a while for the company at a lower position. So, his reflections are reflections of a person who was familiar with various aspects of organizational culture as a regular employee and as a project manager. He recollected the feelings he had after the promotion:

You know, as I look back right now, I think I was a little bit upset... I believe that the newcomers to SBG would benefit from such programs... A little organization in these matters cannot hurt anyone. On the other hand, its usefulness is evident. For the people with technical backgrounds, like myself, and, actually, many other project managers at SBG, such training would give a structured approach to learning the basics of the project management position and setting the stage for future productive work. So, right now I place much more value in the presence of formal training programs for project managers than I did when I was promoted to project manager. This understanding comes from experience and deeper knowledge of the nature of work as a project manager.

As I was wrapping up my conversations, I would ask the project managers to share their views on an ideal working environment. The concepts of culture, resources,

and control would repeatedly be mentioned to various degrees by all my conversation partners. Drawing from their experiences, observations, and even the conversations themselves, they were able to construct an alternative reality of a preferred project management work structures. In expressing his opinion regarding an ideal project management working environment, Charles drew from his unpleasant experiences with Micros recently. He mentioned a balanced approach between the company growth and the quality of work, stating that success cannot be achieved through generic growth only: preserving relationships was just as much important. In this regard, stripping the current project from resources by allocating them to the newly emergent projects was not good from a project management perspective. He emphasized the need for changes in terms of resources and information, while underlining the role of project managers in the company success:

I would say that we just should be given enough resources and information about their use. I mean, we are professionals. We learn how to accomplish a lot with less, but sometimes, it is quality and relationships that suffer. In my opinion, this is not a good way to run the projects. Give us enough resources, and we will lift a project of any size and complexity...

I would definitely emphasize the balance between growth and quality of work. Either we expand and add resources, or we put off our expansion plans and focus on our existing clients. After all, we can profit by making stronger relationships with them. I would also, probably, create some kind of information system that would enable everyone to see how the company resources are allocated. In this case, each project manager would be on the same page regarding the resource availability and an opportunity to get these resources for own projects.

Mr. Majed offered another solution to the resources issue. He suggested that it would be great if there was a separation within the project management community into those who handle ongoing projects and who start the new ones. Mr. Majed argued that a dedicated team to handle the new projects would eliminate uncertainties related to new

project assignments and ease the pressures on those who are in the process of project delivery. As Mr. Majed explained,

that would bring better organization and leave people with a peace of mind. Another thing is that we have a set of project management standards that each manager has to follow. However, we lack organization to match these standards. We need a more detailed focus on the way that the projects are managed. I think there could be some kind of a system that would bring things together in a new perspective.

The SBG project managers also expressed concerns regarding uncertainty and the lack of control and organization. From my conversations, it became evident that SBG was in the process of structural changes; however, as Mr. Fayiz noted, there was no clarity in terms of where the project management was going and how it would look like after the transformation. Similar to Micros' project management team, he sounded doubtful regarding SBG's successful venture into larger number of projects and their diversity. In this regard, he opined that an ideal working environment would be the one where project managers can express their opinions and where they are given control over their resources and teams:

I think we are also focusing a lot on the clients, but the issues of employees are somewhat ignored. I think they should be able to provide their perspective on projects, maybe we can include leading specialists in our meetings with the clients, because their knowledge may help determine better the deadlines, for example. So, if the company is more diligent in providing good organization of the project management process and it also takes into account employees' opinions and suggestions, that would be great.

Similar ideas were summarized by Mr. Hisham, who noted that an ideal project management environment for him meant the possibility to have sufficient knowledge resources for the project and to recruit own teams. His perspective became closely related to the notion of the "small culture," because he wanted an environment "where relationships within these teams are close and strong, and where there are opportunities

for building long lasting, strong relationships with the company clients.” At the same time, Mr. Hisham expressed an opinion that project management would benefit greatly from creation of a tacit knowledge center, to which one would be able to refer. As a matter of fact, Mr. Hisham, Mr. Fayiz, Mr. Nihad, and Hussein were all contributors to the new SBG initiative called Center for Advanced Project Support. He talked very passionately about the Center, and called it the future “lighthouse” for all project managers in their work.

It was noteworthy how project managers used their experience and imagination to create an ideal workplace, which they directly linked to the company success as a whole. While most of these perspectives were a product of fusing past and present experiences at work, I could not but notice the power of our conversations in creating similar perspectives. The importance of conversation in this regard can be pointed out from my exchanges with Mr. Allen, who was at first hesitant to paint a particular picture of an idealized workplace, even despite his evident frustration with the current environment:

WA: so would you change anything in terms of organization at Micros? From your current perspective as a project manager.

AN: ah, I cannot really say I have a ready solution for the company to resolve the many problems. One thing I can say is that we are severely understaffed for the amount of work the project managers are assigned.

WA: but it is not that simple, I guess.

AN: no, not at all. It’s not like we just buy more resources, and all the problems would go away. No. I mean, that could help, of course, but it could not be as the means to solve everything. My answer to your question is that something does need to change, but it is too complex to give the solutions on a fly.

WA: I understand. In my experience with the project managers in Saudi Arabia, it is easier to say that changes are needed than to offer something really tangible.

AN: exactly. I know something needs to be changed at Micros; however, I simply cannot say what it is (*laughs*). In fact, the struggle we are having here... I really doubt anyone in the company has a ready-to-go solution, something that will make things go smoothly tomorrow. But, as an organization, we are trying to figure that out.

WA: but still, do you have any ideas related specifically to project management? Maybe something you envision from time to time...

AN: I certainly do. This comes from my previous job. We had a different approach to scheduling. We were using a product called Lotus Notes.

WA: I heard about this one. It is some sort of a knowledge management software, right?

AN: not only. It was a great scheduling module. For example, I could go in, put in a request, for example, for additional programmers on Tuesday next week, until Friday. I would also explain why I needed those: based upon the nature of the task, our current progress, and the Notes, would give me availability of resources for that time period. If I see that programmers are available, I would reserve them for that time period. So, without any hassles, phone calls, knocking on the doors, I would get an instantaneous confirmation for my resources.

WA: sounds like a constant update at work.

AN: and it is. We are working hour by hour, even minute by minute, all the time expecting changes and resource reallocation. In situation like this, our task is to determine what's the hottest thing that needs to be done and prioritize down from that point. In these terms, we are really struggling. You know, back to your question, one thing I would really change is, probably, having a piece of software similar to Lotus Notes.

As our dialogue unfolded, Allen was able to uncover a particular element of an ideal working environment for project managers.

Summary

My conversations with the project managers from Micros and SBG provided significant insights into the nature of their work and how they perceive themselves within a set of relationships encompassing the organization, its employees, and its clients. Being placed in the middle of these relationships, project managers emerged as a special type of

managers, who come from various backgrounds and walks of life, and who are placed in a very unique position in terms of authority.

The narratives of my conversation participants presented a holistic view toward understanding what project management is and who project managers are in contrast to what project managers should be, as is often the focus of the studies based on positivistic research paradigm. These narratives provided perceptive lens directed at project management through the stories of its major actors – the project managers. While these individuals were very diverse in terms of age, experience, and character, their stories and opinions shared similar traits that could be united into four coherent themes: 1) the *baharat* job, which reflected the diversity of individualities comprising the position of a project manager; 2) a “special” management, which revealed fundamental differences between project management and the traditional forms of management; 3) the “Reversed” authority, which presented the unique placement of project managers in the plane of organization-employees-clients relationships; and 4) “small” culture, order, and control as an ideal working environment – the elements perceived as essential for an ideal project management workplace.

The next Chapter provides the analysis of the uncovered themes from the perspective of three hermeneutic categories: narrative identity, imagination, and fusion of horizons. By aligning the narrative data with the theoretical constructs of hermeneutics, it establishes a new perspective on project management and its main actors.

CHAPTER SIX

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This Chapter provides a critical hermeneutic analysis of the data presented in Chapter Five. The data were comprised of the stories shared during my conversations with project managers. Those stories became emplotted to present a comprehensive narrative of what project management is and who project managers are in relation to themselves and the others. According to Herda (1999: 98), “analysis is a creative and imaginative act.” It involves appropriation of a world from the text. As a result, we come to see world differently than before and start looking at problems in a different manner.

By applying critical hermeneutic analysis to the data presented in Chapter Five, this Chapter aims to challenge the reader, especially those who call themselves organizational leaders, into seeing the nature of project management in a new light and gain new perspectives on it, which could manifest in certain actions. I propose that everyone who is somehow related to project management may develop new understandings on what it is and what it means to be a project manager. These perspectives could be practically applied within the larger organizational environment.

Herda (1999: 99) proposed that a hermeneutic analysis should involve development and grouping of themes and sub-themes within each theoretical category in light of the problem at hand. The analysis presented in this Chapter follows this approach, as the topics developed within the themes of the conversation texts are analyzed through the categories of Narrative Identity, Imagination, and Fusion of Horizons.

Narrative Identity

Ricoeur's (1984) theory of time and narrative relationship is helpful in explaining project managers' perspectives regarding the nature of their work as well as their role in the organization-employees-clients paradigm. With regards to narrative identity, Ricoeur (1988: 247) wrote that it "constructs a sense of self-sameness, continuity, and character in the plot of the story a person tells about him- or herself; the story becomes that person's actual story." Narrative identity, therefore, becomes a key category in uncovering the significant events in project managers' experiences that changes their understanding of self and their roles in organizations. Narrative identity is reflected in the shared stories and conversations, which, in turn, may reveal transformations of identities in relation to the organizations in which project managers are employed and in relation to the people they work with.

Ricoeur (1992: 147) wrote that, "the person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her experiences. Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. "For the project managers with whom I conversed in summer 2012, the narratives of their past, including education, previously held jobs, and even places of living uncovered the concrete memories, expectations, and experience of present and future. More importantly, they helped unveil their current views of self and self as a part of a larger community delineated by the organizational senior management, clients, employees, and co-workers.

The Character of Project Manager

The first step in forming an interpretive perspective on working practices and experiences involves answering the questions *Who* and *What* a project manager is. These

questions can be answered by considered the concept of character. Ricoeur (1992: 121) wrote:

Character, I would say today, designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized. In this way character is able to constitute the limit point where the problematic of ipse becomes indiscernible from that of idem, and where one is inclined not to distinguish them from one another.

As I explained in the Literature Review section of the paper, *ipse* identifies “who” the self is; it changes over time and provides “openness to others”, and *idem* represents “what” the self is made of (Kearney 2003: 80).

The first theme I introduced in the previous Chapter was that of a *baharat* job, implying to the diversity of individuals holding project management positions. These individuals are of different age, they came from the different walks of life, and they all have different personalities: from a self made PM Mr. Nihad with only technical background and an associate degree to a mature PM “veteran” Mr. Fayiz, who decided to seek a more intimate working environment; from the experienced, no-nonsense, yet very humorous and outgoing Allen to young, ambitious, and very serious and formal Mr. Hisham; from the stressed, nervous about-the-future Mr. Majed to a very positive and confident in tomorrow Mr. Hussain. This diversity prevented me from drawing a collective picture of a typical project manager. And yet, as an outcome of my conversations with these individuals, I can build a typical character based on their narratives, which shared a lot of common perspectives on who project manager is.

According to Ricoeur (1992: 148), “it is the identity of the story which makes the identity of the character. “In relation to project managers, the “who” part of the character (*idem*) became reflected in the personal stories of project managers within an organization. Therefore, abstaining from any visual portraits of an “average” project

manager, a number of common internal and historical traits may define who project managers are.

First, project managers are typically not *the intentional* project managers: people who land on this career path rarely even plan to do this. They are, more appropriately, *the circumstantial* project managers, which comes as a result of a promotion, changing of the career plans, family matters or something else. Importantly, a typical project manager does not hold a focused project management degree; in fact, all varieties of technical and business majors are present. However, as Kris Myers mentioned, they try to always apply these skills and education at work.

Second, my conversations revealed that a typical project manager considers himself in at least three roles: a communicator, a mediator, and a seller. Due to a non-traditional hierarchy of authority (to which I will return in the next section), a typical project manager has to use the power of persuasion and communication rather than the power of his position. “More than anything, project managers are great people managers,” said Mr. Majed. This inherent focus on human side, however, becomes more than just a professional habit: it becomes something that drives these people and forms their values. In this regard, Allen’s comment is the most revealing:

A very important thing to me, personally, was communication. The first class I took outside of the college was in communicating values: learning to recognize what values the other side has and how to communicate based on these values. That was a little bit of introspect to me... to recognize what also drives me. The most important part, as I stated, is the idea of merging values systems: what I value in this particular thing and what the customer values in it so that we could acquire the same perspective on things.

It appears that this system of values can also determine whether one is fit for a project manager position.

Another important trait of a project manager that can be derived from my conversations is versatility. Project managers are the people who are able to form and maintain multiple perspectives and acquire both technical and management skills. Nearly all of my conversation partners mentioned undergoing additional education in either sphere if they lacked thereof. But they also mentioned that multiple perspectives are essential due to differences in clients' perspectives on things. As Allen noted, some may prefer a fast and detailed update on a project, while others would like to first know about your family and pets, and that would be a routine without which a meeting would not go well.

The project manager's character is also continuously under stress. This is related to many factors, such as inevitable deadlines, demanding clients, shortage of resources, or absence of information. The fact is, however, that the presence of stress is constant, and, therefore, it becomes an undeniable feature of character. Those who do not possess this feature have to leave, often on their own initiative.

All the features described above in relation to project manager are nothing more than the character traits. Ricoeur (1992: 121) referred to traits as distinctive signs "by which a person is recognized, re-identified, as the same – character being nothing other than the set of these distinctive signs." He includes in this definition both possessed and acquired habits, which eventually become traits. By assembling the first part of project manager character, it was possible to answer the "who" question. The next section focuses on project manager in his position to others in order to uncover the "what" part of the character.

Project Manager and The Others

While recognizing certain part of individuality of character in form of *idem*, narrative identity stresses the nature of individuals as beings and the relationships they have with others. According to Ricoeur (1988: 247), “individual and community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history.” The narratives of project managers are inevitably interlinked with the working communities, in which they practice. These working communities include senior management, organizational employees, and colleagues; however, they stretch beyond that to include client relationships as well.

The narratives of my conversation partners presented different stories describing the working experiences before and after work as a project manager. From our conversations, I could deduce that the roles and positions within organization and in relation to others presented in these narratives were similar in a sense that they both involved management as a process; however, more fundamental differences were noted in terms of perceived power of decision making through the notion of authority. This is where the theme of the “Reversed” authority came up: it defined project managers in relation to others in a very distinct manner.

According to Ricoeur (1992: 147), “the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her identity, in constructing the story told.” Two distinct groups of project managers could be defined from my conversations: those with the previous management experience (Allen, Kris, Charles, Fayiz, Hussain) and those with only subordinate experience (Majed, Nihad, Hisham). To the former group, who had been previously vested significant powers with regards to decision making process

through his position of authority, this authority as a project manager, became rather illusory. The role assigned to them as a project manager was much more execution-of-tasks oriented than decision-making oriented. This realization came to these individuals over the course of our conversations, as they admitted having little authority over resources and people. In a rather nostalgic way, Mr. Kris admitted:

I would like to be in a position of authority, I would like to make decisions, and, sometimes, you have to make own decisions. From my previous experience as a store manager, I really enjoyed this kind of a position and authority that it brought along.

Mr. Kris, like the other former managers, was able to re-emplot his own narrative and envision himself not as a decision maker, but as a performer. However, narratives became re-emplotted for the PMs with no management experience, because they were assigned so much responsibility in terms of project governance and client interactions. In this sense, they went beyond the traditional organizational management hierarchies and included close relationships and accountability before the clients.

As such, the project managers, my conversation partners, constructed his new identity within organizational setting that mediated his selfhood and guided his actions ever since they held this position, even though some might not have realized that from the very beginning. And yet, self-knowledge occurred to them. Ricoeur (1988: 246) links narrative identity to self-constancy and proves that self-knowledge is the “fruit of examined life.” My conversation partners’ new roles as project managers, whom Mr. Hussain called “small CEOs,” contained the new narratives, which also changed in relation to the others. As they were assigned these new roles, they had a new sense of self.

The new identity in relation to the others became a very important aspect in the construction of project manager character. According to Ricoeur (1992: 148), “It is the identity of the story which makes the identity of the character. “In relation to project management experiences, character is reflected in the personal stories of project managers within an organization. For my conversation partners, as noted above, visions of self and purpose were determined by differences in working experiences. These experiences could be said to influence *ipse* of the character. In relation to others, at least three distinctive disruptors within the “Reversed” authority paradigm can be identified:

1. Senior managers consider project managers as independent individuals with full responsibility for the projects. At the same time, they may limit the resources at their whim and do not necessarily take their wishes into account;
2. Clients see project managers as the only persons holding responsibility and powers over project implementation and completion;
3. There is little power over employees, who sense the authority vested in project managers, but do not always recognize it,

Because of these, the traditional perspectives and expectations formed by the previous experiences were somewhat shattered by the reality in which they found themselves. Such interpretations can be linked to Ricoeur’s (1992: 3) explorations of the concept of personal identity in relation to self hood and otherness: “selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other. “To those, who had no previous experience in project management, these new forms of relationships were, perhaps, something contrary to the expectations, and this caused shifts in identity characterized by changes in views on project management and, in many aspects, own personalities.

Ricoeur (1988: 246) wrote that in narrative identity the individual “appears both as a reader and a writer of its own life.” Project managers’ old stories were retold, and,

consequently, their narrative was re-emplotted. Eventually, they acquired a new context to gain a perspective on their position in relationship to others, especially their co-workers. The notion of a tightly knit community of project managers resurfaced many times during my conversations. The strong links within this community were attributed to many factors, including common share of resources, release of workloads, and provision of help with the expectations to receive help in return or based on previous experience in receiving help from the others. However, in case of SBG, these links spurred the development of *power in common*.

Ricoeur (1992: 220) defined power in common as the capacity of community members to exercise that capacity of living and acting together. He was careful to distinguish this power from power to do, which is an agent's capacity to constitute oneself as the author of action, and power over, which is linked to domination and violence (Ricoeur 1992). While the third form of power is irrelevant to this study, the distinction between the first two appeared important. It can be said that project managers' power to do has been hindered and limited by inability to control resources and people, as well as inability to influence the senior management's position regarding the matter. At SBG, the project managers, who had working experience in other organizations, organized together to create the initiative group that launched the Center for Advanced Project Support fully backed up by the senior management. Nothing like this sort took place at Micros, where project managers' appeals largely remained on an individual basis – the products of power to do.

Ricoeur (1992: 140-141) posited that character is a dialectic of sameness and selfhood, which are produced by the notions of emplotment, transposed from the action

to the characters in the narrative. As was shown, sameness and selfhood of a project manager, as a character, remain strongly intertwined within the dialectics of relationships with the others and the nature of working environment. The new relationships and understandings of self, in turn, were grounded on the basis of past experiences in comparison to the present, from where differences and issues were produced. As such, it became possible for both my conversation partners to uncover the differences, which also helped me, as the researcher, to formulate them into distinctive themes of the *baharat* job, “special” management, and “reversed authority.” In fact, analysis and interpretation of the past is a very important part of hermeneutic analysis. As Herda (1999: 33) notes:

If we take seriously the act of reinterpreting our world and our past activities, we will realize that we are not simply reviewing and analyzing past theories, policies, or assuming the role of the advocate. Rather we are using our knowledge and understandings to aid in shaping the future and interpreting the past with a pre-orientation that we will use this knowledge to create new possibilities for the future.

The possibilities for the future in the project managers’ narratives were uncovered during my conversations by analyzing, comparing, and interpreting past and present experiences. They are discussed further through the hermeneutic category of imagination.

Imagination

Imagination is a hermeneutic category that involves future possibilities in the kingdom of “as if” (Ricoeur 1984: 64). Imagination works to answer the question what should be in contrast to what is now. It is a category that allows to envision the world differently from our present ideas of it and provides path into “possible worlds” (Kearney 2002: 25). In this regard, imagination, as a hermeneutic category, could be considered a medium through which project managers envision their ideal working environment.

Ricoeur (1984: 68) explains the work of imagination:

The labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms. But the range of solution is vast. It is deployed between the two poles of servile application and calculated deviation passing through every degree of rule-governed deformation.

Imagination works of project managers in their narratives included a wide array of solutions, ranging from organizational culture applications to the concrete examples of the software products that would enable more comfortable and productive workplace. Imagination has served as an important aspect of their ideas and perspectives regarding an ideal project management practice as well as project management practices beyond the scope of their present working competence. The project managers' narratives can be analyzed within the two functions of imagination, as described by Ricoeur (1999: 15): re-remembering the past in a new way and providing opportunities to visualize possible futures.

Re-Remembering The Past Cultures and Working Environments

Imagination makes it possible to recall and retell past stories as new understandings emerge and past identities change. Herda (2007: 25) wrote that "our stories change when our relationships change because the new stories contain different experiences and the social imagery comes into play as one re-emplots his or her life." Imagination serves as a way to integrate these experiences and imagery in stories.

Throughout my conversations with the project managers, they often reminisced about their previous jobs to provide examples of the differences that existed. Some of them, in nature of previous occupations, were able to consider the environments of two different project management companies; others, compared the entire project management practice to the other management practices, such as banking, retail, and IT.

Importantly, through these reflections, my conversation partners were able to step back to re-remember his past experiences while taking into account his current experiences as a project managers to formulate positive and negative aspects of their jobs as project managers.

Within the process of re-remembering the past, project managers plotted their past and present experiences into an imagined future, the process that Kearney (1998: 245) calls a narrative imagination, which allows individuals “to relate to the other as another self and to oneself as another.” They essentially, used experiences from past and present to construct imageries of organizational culture, control, and order. These images included such dichotomies as competitive versus cooperative organizational culture, power versus communication, order and control versus chaos and uncertainty. These dichotomies laid the foundations for the prescriptions of an imagined ideal workplace.

Possibilities of The Future: An Ideal Workplace

According to Herda (1999: 10), in order for imagination to carry a productive character in prescribing the new readings of our lives, it should not be confined to simply understanding one’s past. This understanding has to be served to mediate the past in order to construct the practical imageries of the future. This is where the second function of imagination takes place. According to Kearney (1998: 149) “imagination liberates ... into a free space of possibility, suspending reference to the immediate world of perception and thereby disclosing ‘the new ways of being in the world.’ As such, imagination is rooted in living itself.” The works of imagination within the narratives of my conversation partners, therefore, went further than simply comparing what is good or bad regarding

their working environment: it used these to paint the picture of an ideal workplace, something that *ought to be*.

Past and present experiences of my conversation partners helped us use them to construct imageries of a better project management environment in the future. As such, we were able to unravel “an open ended goal which motivates a free variation of a possible world” (Kearney 1998: 227). My conversation partners were able to envision the “ideal” project management practices not only in what directly related to their position as a project manager, but also to the practices that go beyond that scope. This is most evident in developing the idea of a “small culture” organizational environment that enhances closer relationships within the organization and between the organization and its clients. In this regard, Kearney (1998: 245) wrote that our narrative imagination “enables each one of us to relate to the other as another self and to oneself as another.” Without the capacity for this kind of understanding, little could have been drawn from our conversations to create an ideal workplace for a project manager, which is defined by the notions of “small culture” feel, control over information and resources, and the presence of tacit knowledge references related to project management.

While the experiences of the project managers were still strongly grounded in their narratives, the process of imagination helped them re-emplot the vision of themselves as both project managers and as an individuals within a community of other people within the organization. The explicit connection between narrative and imagination is evident through Ricoeur’s work: he classifies narrative as a form of creative imagination.

Imagination serves as a way to integrate these experiences and imagery into stories. The new stories of my conversation partners included the images of an ideal working environment. However, in case of SBG, imagination also resulted in action. This is no surprising considering that imagination can be linked to action through motivation.

Ricoeur (1994: 126) wrote:

The imagination shares something of the motivational process as well. It is the imagination which provides the milieu, the luminous clearing in which we can compare and contrast motives as different as desires and ethical demands, which in turn can range from professional rules to social customs or to strictly personal values. The imagination provides the mediating space of a common “fantasy”...

He linked the concept of imagination to action, which can encompass both individuals and groups (societies). As SBG, imagination of an ideal working environment has led project managers, as a community, to organize for the purpose of creating such environment, if not fully, then at least certain elements of it. The result was the Center for Advanced Project Support, which seeks to provide tacit information in forms of manuals, brochures, and databanks aiding in the project management process.

The categories of narrative identity and imagination helped define living experiences of and working practices of project managers culminating in establishing the imagery of an ideal workplace. That, however, would not be possible without developing understandings of the past and present and, for the project managers, broadening their views on the process of project management. Therefore, the third category applied in this study deals with the process of understanding itself. This category is Fusion of Horizons. It is discussed next.

Converging Understandings of Project Management: Fusion of Horizons

The goal of this research was to reach new understandings from the perspectives of both the participants and the researcher. New learning and understanding is the process of fusion of horizons. Gadamer (2004:301) wrote that a horizon represents a “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point... A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him.” On the other hand, “to have a horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it.” Therefore, horizons are ubiquitous, but by no means limiting dialectical concepts.

Horizons are rooted in traditions, history, and prejudices, which are undeniable categories influencing each individual (Gadamer 2004). These categories create a context of meaning for each situation presented. However, since these are different to each one of us, we can speak of horizons, which are typical for every individual and can be evident within each of them. It is obvious to me, and I think, it became obvious to my conversation partners that our horizons prior to this research had been defined by our backgrounds and our previous experiences. According to Gadamer (2004: 304), “the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint... the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves us.” It can be said that horizons of the individuals conversing with me were determined by their movement from one organization to another (horizon of culture) and their different jobs (horizon of the nature of job and relationships it entails). Perhaps, because of these horizons, some of them expressed clear disappointment and frustration after becoming project managers.

Nevertheless, this horizon that these individuals had started expanding as the reality of new work came to them, thus providing a set of broader views and meanings related to project management. This process can be considered within Gadamer's theory claiming that the other reality we encounter holds truth in itself and for us (Gadamer 1998: 439). The new meanings that my conversation partners acquired regarding their roles and positions in the company as project managers were the outcome of their interaction and being in the new working environment. This was evident through their imaginary projections of an ideal project management position that involved independence in decision making, something that they had definitely enjoyed at the earlier jobs. As such, the study participants seemed to have had different views and perspectives on project management at different points of time. This is a clear sign of the constant shift in their horizons.

Importantly, Gadamer considers that "the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language" (2004: 370). Language is an important part of the conversation through which exchange of meanings occurs. In this regard, the role of the researcher is to not only create new meanings for him/herself, but also to influence the participants in broadening their own horizons to create the new meanings that did not exist before the research. It occurs to me that at least in one case, fusion of horizons took place during my conversations. In the end of my conversation with Mohammed, he decided to open up about the entire experience. He acknowledged that it made him look back at his views and reconsider them in the new light. He said:

[T]hank you for having this conversation with me. I was able to see how different were my perspectives on project management in the beginning of my career and right now. You know, when one works for a long time in the same company, some things eventually get blurred by the memory and then go unnoticed by us

until we have an opportunity to discuss them with someone. I can see how much the way we treat project management at SBG has changed. We are currently working on systematization of knowledge regarding the process of project management, and that would be a great addition for our company and project managers both currently working and planning to join us in the future. At the same time, I see how executives' attitudes have shifted towards project managers. I think that earlier in a day, they only saw us as tools to make profits. Today, we, the project managers, are seen as real members of the team, I mean the executive team. We may not sit there, but we are definitely recognized as a crucial factor in BSG's progress and ultimate success. I, as a project manager professional, has grown and matured with SBG. My own views and values underwent changes, too. I think that being a project manager, in itself, is a very engaging experience. Here, at SBG, being a project manager is also a challenge and a reward for hard work and dedication.

According to Gadamer (1998: 305), "understanding is always the fusion of ... horizons supposedly existing by themselves." This can be understood as reaching an expanded view about what is being discussed (Gadamer 1998: 365). During our conversation, Nihad was able to realize the differences that existed in his and, apparently, the company managers regarding project management. Project managers can be considered as having their own horizons. However, their interaction with others over the course of project development will inevitably involve acquiring new understandings. These understandings might influence their personal perspectives of oneself and the world surrounding them. The new meanings that Mr. Nihad acquired regarding his role and position as a project manager were the outcome of our conversation.

At the same time, I, as a researcher, was able to identify additional meanings that project managers attach to their position in the company and the process of project management as well. Comparing and contrasting this conversation to my conversation with Mr. Khouja, I was able, for example, distinguish different self-assigned roles of my conversation partners within the paradigm of project management. As such, I believe that

my own horizons regarding project management and the essence of being a project manager keep expanding.

Summary

This Chapter provided an analysis of the themes and concepts uncovered in Chapter Five. Through the lens of narrative identity, imagination, and fusion of horizons, it looked into the essence of project management and being a project manager from the perspective of project managers themselves. In general, the analysis helped unveil the new understandings on these, which could be useful for those who deal with the people and organizations managing projects. In fact, it could be as useful for the project managers themselves: through the work of text presented in this research they may uncover new understandings and interpretations of their practices in the same manner as this study participants did through our conversations.

The conversations conducted over the course of this research, in my opinion, proved to be a great experience for both me as a researcher and the project managers as the participants. They helped us expand our personal horizons regarding project management experiences.

The next Chapter draws practical implications of the study and provides recommendations for future research. It also provides a concluding reflection of my personal experiences as a researcher.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This Chapter provides the main findings of the current research and outlines implications of the study for the organizational theory. By taking the interpretive perspective on working practices and experiences, this study posed the following research questions: 1) who are project managers?; 2) how do project managers envision themselves in relation to others within an organizational context?; 3) how do project managers incorporate imagination to create an ideal working environment?; and 4) how do project managers' working experiences of past and present influence their identity and leadership? These questions are answered in the current Chapter. It starts with a brief research summary, then presents the major research findings and outlines implications for the organizations within the discussion of each finding, and, finally, provides recommendations for future research. The Chapter ends with my personal reflections as a researcher.

Summary of The Research

This study explored project managers' working practices and experiences within a larger organizational context. Guided by the intention to break the positivist boundaries of considering project management and project managers in the organizational context, this study aimed to re-figure the traditional views on both. The essence of the study was in uncovering the *meaning* of project management experiences in contrast to the views of what project management *should be*. In this regard, the study attempted to understand the practice of project managing from the perspective of project managers themselves, not

someone else. By analyzing the issue from this side, I hoped to bridge the gap in understanding and, perhaps, view of project management as a living process and experience that focus on one's identity in relationship to others. From this perspective, critical hermeneutics served as the framework in formulating the appropriate research framework for such analysis.

The review of literature substantiated the selected research topic in terms of the need for a deeper understanding of project management. This assurance came from the recent emergence of interpretive perspectives on business practices as an alternative to the dominant positivist process, which has been widely criticized for its limitations in describing phenomena that are highly subjective in nature. Project management's ubiquity and importance in organizations coupled with its unique, ever-changing nature often associated with unknowns, complexity, and uncertainty requires understanding rather than explanation. Critical hermeneutic approach was, therefore, selected to establish in relation to project management what Herda (1999: 1) called "the requisite meaning needed to promote creativity and imagination on the part of people in ...organizations."

The primary sources of data for this study became my personal conversations with eight project managers: four from Micros Corporation and four from Saudi Bin Laden Group (SBG). I intentionally selected two very different organizations in terms of business focus (Information Systems and Construction), location (the United States and Saudi Arabia), and organizational environment (Micros is managed rather loosely, while SBG has a well defined hierarchy) to avoid the same kind of perspectives on project

management practices and experiences. The conversations resulted in the production of a text, which was analyzed and interpreted within the three critical hermeneutic categories:

1. Fusion of Horizons- the process through which individuals come to understand past experiences in new ways (Gadamer 2004);
2. Narrative Identity– the personal story through which telling and re-telling can provide a unique context to gain perspective on who one is in relationship to others (Ricoeur 1984);
3. Imagination- the act of “seeing as” and working toward the “kingdom of as if” (Ricoeur 1984).

Through a set of conversations with selected project managers of large multinational corporations, I explored how these categories influence the identity, working practices, and experiences of project managers.

Conversations enable the researcher to uncover themes that aid the researcher in his/her analysis. My conversations with project managers helped discover four such themes: 1) The *Baharat* Job, which refers to a wide range of personalities and paths towards project management positions and which makes it nearly impossible to create a unified image of a project manager; 2) The “Special” Work, which distinguished project management from the other forms of management; 3) The “Reversed” Authority, which encompassed a very unusual authority set up, where project managers are vested full power in their interactions with the clients, while being unable to exercise authority over their subordinates; and 4) “Small Culture,” Order and Control, which were displayed as the necessary elements of an ideal working environment by project managers.

My conversations in certain aspects crossed the boundaries of the original research questions that I posed for this study. This was possible through what Gadamer (2004) calls the notion of play. During my conversations, the initial topics at hand

became the primary objects. By applying my own and the participants' views on the matters, understanding was reached through the play of questions and answers. Through this notion of Gadamerian play I believe that I and my conversation partners were able to attain a rich conversation text through the lens of which my research topics at hands could be analyzed.

Research Findings

This research produced a number of important findings regarding working practices and experiences of project managers to produce valuable insights into the nature of this profession. However, before going to these findings, I want to provide some clarifications regarding cultural influences, or rather the lack thereof, that were uncovered during this research.

Assumptions about National Culture

1- As I mentioned previously, the selection of study participants - my conversation partners, was guided by the idea of avoiding obviously similar environments in which project managers did their work. It was assumed that the national culture differences would produce sufficient contrasting environments to guide the analysis. Indeed, cultural differences at the national level have been previously reported as influential on organizational practices (Al-Twajjri, Al-Dukhayyil, & Al-Mukhaiza 1994; Hofstede 1984; Pillai, Scandura, & Williams 1999). In the end, it turned out that culture, indeed, was a very influential factor encompassing project managers' experiences. However, that was organizational not national culture.

During my conversations, the topic of cultural differences came up several times, but it was not deemed as important by the participants. For example, Mr. Allen Nells

talked about the “culture of work” as the key element of organizational and, project management processes; however, he dismissed the presence of a national culture issue and emphasized that the differences in the culture of work are likely to present often among the people of the same nationality. Mr. Kris Myers also talked about cultural issues, especially when dealing with the clients. However, his stated points of differences lay within the plane of project information levels, not anything close to the national culture dimensions. Mr. Nihad Mohammed mentioned an issue he had once with a group of Yemeni workers; however, when asked, assured me that “culture had nothing to do with the actual issue, but workload and deadlines did.”

Perhaps more than with anyone else I talked about culture to Mr. Hussain Almotairi. However, our conversation mostly touched on the difficulties of managing a culturally diverse group of people. When working at SABIC, Mr. Hussain found himself in a very diverse cultural environment, where, according to him, people would group together on the basis of nationality and have little interactions with the other groups. He compared this to a relatively culturally monolith SBG and concluded that his work was much easier there.

While dismissing the importance of national culture as an essential element influencing project management, my conversation partners, all as one emphasized the importance of organizational culture. In their reflections of the past experiences and their working experiences at project managers at the time of conversations, they would normally describe how different their working environments were in terms of culture. To my big surprise, both Saudi and American project managers shared quite similar views in

this regard and argued in favor of what they called “small culture,” where close relationships would be shared across the entire organizations and with its clients.

Although my initial assumption of national culture differences as a factor determining project managers’ views on their profession and organizations as a whole, such differences turned out to be negligible because 1) my conversation partners from different countries displayed similar views on what an ideal culture should be; and 2) my conversation partners did not consider cultural differences as something fundamentally important in their work. This does not mean, however, that the research was a failure in this regard. On the contrary, it for one enabled me as a researcher to broaden my horizon on this topic and for two, it can simply mean that project managers consider differences between their working experiences in terms of organization first and everything else, including national culture, afterwards.

Understanding The Character: Project Manager as Self and the Other

2- Understanding the nature of project management from the perspective of project managers cannot be achieved to a full extent before one starts understanding who and what project managers are. The character of project manager is constructed through narrative identity that comprises of the “who” (idem or self) and the “what” (ipse or self as the other). Despite being represented by a great diversity of personalities, people of different age, ambitions, and backgrounds, there are specific traits of project manager character that are common for all of them.

Project managers are the people who are able to handle great amount of stress due to the nature of their positions. This is related to many factors, such as inevitable deadlines, demanding clients, shortage of resources, or absence of information. The fact

is, however, that the presence of stress is constant, and, therefore, it becomes an undeniable feature of character. These are also rather versatile people who are able to form and maintain multiple perspectives and acquire both technical and management skills. This versatility, however, goes further, into the realm of customer psychology and the ability to maintain different perspectives on communication and interaction needs. As a result, my conversations revealed that project manager character comes in at least three roles: a communicator, a mediator, and a seller.

The *ipse* side of project manager character is determined by project manager's special position in relation to clients (in their eyes, the main person), senior managers (who often appreciate but seldom listen), and employees (who recognize them but cannot be really controlled). Due to a very specific nature of their position, which involves nearly absolute amount of authority over client relationships and yet little authority over the subordinates, project managers dubbed a "small CEO," but, in reality does not have much power and authority. As a result, a typical project manager has to use the power of persuasion and communication rather than the power of his position. This inherent focus on human side, however, becomes more than just a professional habit: it is something that drives these people and forms their values.

Understanding The Vision: Imagination of an Ideal Environment

3- Project managers are able to construct an ideal workplace and environment through the works of imagination by comparing past and present experiences. These are mostly working experiences; however, incorporation of life experiences into this process is also possible: Allen Nell, for example, drew his visions from a closely knit farming community in which he grew up. Imagination of an ideal working place is a product of

seeing the positives and negatives of the past and present experiences and the desire to incorporate the former and eliminate the latter. To my great surprise, there was not much variation among the project managers in this regard. The four commonly expressed features of such environment include “small” culture feel, presence of order, information, and ability to control the resources.

The abovementioned features of an ideal working environment are the products of reflections that my conversation partners expressed in relation to their past, present, and future. Project managers opined that these elements are essential in not only doing their work effectively, but also for organizational environments as a whole. These perspectives, however, have been constructed at much deeper levels than the traditional positivist studies could produce. In this regard, understanding of the project managers’ imageries of an ideal working environment could become paramount in understanding how their work can be organized in a manner that is beneficial to them and to their organizations at the same time.

Imagination at Work: Organizing The Project Management Communities

4 - Imagination of an ideal working place not only serves as a kingdom of possibility, but it apparently could become as a strong motif for action. This became evident through the initiatives launched by the SBG project management community that incorporated the main elements of the imagined ideal working environment into a real reorganization effort. As such, SBG project management community through the work of imagination organized itself for the action through power in common being able to appeal successfully to the senior management for the project management agenda.

It is important to note that despite Micros project managers' team having seemingly identical issues with their working environment as SBG PMs, their efforts of change have been not even nearly as successful. The answer, most likely, lies in the ability to organize the community: at Micros, the issues have been presented to the senior management on an individual rather than a collective basis. At SBG, through the community action, project managers were able to recreate the imagery of an ideal working environment by devising and presenting a concrete plan to the senior management. In contrast, project managers' claims at Micros look more like a collection of disorganized complaints that cannot be well understood by the senior management, which, according to the words of project managers themselves, have been rather distant from understanding the vicissitudes of their position.

Considering the experiences of the project management communities at SBG and Micros, it is possible to construct a new understanding of how and why some imageries come to life and some remain just imageries. The lack of organization and coordinated actions from project managers – the actions that could provide the concrete means of appeal to the senior management, is unlikely to yield the positive transformations. The works of imagination in this sense should be incorporated into the group's consciousness and represent a collective aim, actively pursued by all and having everyone as a participant.

Understanding and Result: Fusion of Horizons Cultural of Project Management

5- New understandings and interpretations of experiences and practices are achieved by the process of fusion of horizons. This can be understood as reaching an expanded view about what is being discussed (Gadamer 1998: 365). During my

conversations with project managers, we both were able to realize the differences that existed in our views on project management. These understandings might influence their personal perspectives of oneself and the world surrounding them. The new meanings that my conversation partners acquired regarding their role and position as project managers were the product of our conversations. They served as a stimulus to re-remembering the past experiences and, eventually, refiguring our current views on the subject. As such, the critical hermeneutic approach was able to effectively aid in constructing the new understandings about project management. I sincerely hope that the text produced as an outcome of our conversations would be able to construct in the same manner new understandings of what project management is to the readers.

Implications and Recommendations

This study helped uncover some deeply rooted but often omitted insights into the world of project management and its main actors, the project managers. The implications and recommendations drawn from this study come out from the stories shared with me by my conversation partners, who are eager to make their voices heard within the otherwise “outsider”-created research perspectives on project management. In other words, the implications and recommendations following this research come from the “inside,” that is, from the narratives of the direct participants in project management process. Such perspective could be most beneficial in constructing the concrete organizational policies to make project management a much more successful endeavor than it is in many cases shown in the literature and in the organizational practice.

The practical implications of this research for project management can be considered at organizational, community, and individual levels. They can be summarized

as: 1) re-imagining the role of project managers for effective organizational solutions; 2) opening the possibilities for an ideal workplace by refiguring past and present experiences; and 3) organizing project manager communities to put imagination to work. Through these actions, individual project managers, project manager communities, and organizational leaders may acquire new aims for sustainable and successful project management practices.

Re-Imagining The Role of Project Managers

Literature review demonstrated that project management remains an area of organizational work that is veiled with the high degree of uncertainty and failure rates. What are the reasons for those? It cannot be project managers, because the high rates of failures would put a big question mark on the professional competence of these individuals, which is simply not the case. It cannot be organizations either because they are genuinely interested in each project's success, since it is strongly tied to organizational success as a whole. The reason, as may emerge from this paper, is the practical misalignment of views on what the role and position of project managers in organizations are.

For a long time, organizational leaders have attempted to answer the question of what a "good" project manager should be. In the pursuit of this goal, they have been trying to uncover specific traits of "good" project managers, means of motivation for them, and means of aligning their goals with the goals of an organization. Unfortunately, this approach lacks understanding of the project management phenomenon, because it plainly takes out project managers' perspectives on the matter out of the equation. So far, as noted by my conversation partners (and I believe everywhere in general),

organizational leaders have not been able to take this perspective and understand the actual process of managing projects and the experiences encompassing it. It is now high time to bridge this gap in understanding.

Organizational leaders, undoubtedly, have an enormous task of overseeing the success of their organizations. For these reasons, some processes remain outside of their scope of vision. However, taking into account the importance of project management for organizational success as a whole, it is imperative to take time and look into the nature of it and re-imagine the role of project managers within the organizational settings. What is needed is a constructive dialogue that would help uncover the gaps in views and, possibly, fuse the horizons limited by the pre-figured understandings of project managers from each side. My conversations proved that this is possible to achieve. Obviously, some of the ideas envisioned within the ideal working environment could be reviewed and analyzed by both sides to reach the new understandings on the matter.

Opening The Possibilities through Past and Present Experiences

During my conversations, a lot of interesting perspectives on the nature of project managers were uncovered as a result of comparing past and present experiences. These explorations, eventually, led to creating the possibilities of a more productive, at least from the project managers' perspective, working environment. How frequent, however, are such explorations at individual level in the workplace? As follows from my conversations, they do take place, although not necessarily lead to productive results. Within the hermeneutic tradition, the analysis of past and present experiences to open the possibilities for the future is possible through a constructive conversation much like I had

with my partners over the course of this study. There is high degree of doubt, however, that such conversations take place regularly within the organizational settings.

Project managers could, by any means, engage in productive conversations with each other and/or organizational leaders; however, it is the organizational environment that would likely to increase or diminish the likelihood of such occurrence. In the worse case, the potentially beneficial ideas based on past experiences could be ignored by inability of an organization to uncover them. Therefore, while individuals should remain open to the possibilities of bringing together past and present experiences for a constructive analysis, they should be encouraged to do so in the environment of openness and acceptance of their ideas.

Organizing to Put Imagination to Work

Practical action, arguably, is the most important implication of each study, because it fuses theoretical discoveries with the concrete achievements. In terms of project management explorations, practical action is not an exception, because it provides a ready to use plan leading to the desired transformations in organizational structure and environment. Unbeknownst to me in the beginning (and, therefore, this did not anyhow influence my selection of the companies), one group of my conversation partners was able to effectively organize and put their imagination of an ideal working environment to work. In this regard, SBG project managers could be considered as a great example of how individuals' tacit knowledge and imageries can be transformed into concrete actions.

The example of SBG project management group is, however, nothing that other project management communities, especially closely knit ones, cannot do. In simplest terms, their organization process included the following steps: 1) identifying strong and

weak sides of their position at SBG based on past and present experiences; 2) recognition that the senior management might not have capacity or time to work on the specific solutions to make their working environment better; 3) organizing to develop such solutions themselves; 4) presenting the ideas as a group in a formal format to gain the senior management attention.

It can be, however, argued that their triumph was in acceptance of the ideas and the ability to put their imagination to work. This is something that project management community at Micros severely lacked, and the issue could be simply inability to organize. In the end, Micros have lost nearly half of their project managers, while SBG provided an opportunity for project managers to test their ideas in practice, giving them along the way another reason to contribute.

Can it be that Micros' senior management is "worse" than the senior management of SBG? I, frankly, doubt that. Their seeming ignorance of the project managers' problems is likely to rest on the idea that each issue is highly individual, which could be supported by individual visits to their offices. However, until project managers organized and presented their issue as a united community, the same situation was prevalent at SBG. In the end, this reinforces the idea that organizing may provide project managers with the so much needed *power in common* to resolve their pressing issues.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research focused on working practices and experiences of project managers through the critical hermeneutic lens, which enabled emergence of new understandings and perspectives on the issue. Through the similar approaches, future research could help

uncover other aspects of project management practices thus continuing the tradition of interpretive research in this area.

By no means, this study would be able to cover all possible aspects of such a wide topic as project management. It only opened the door to the great area of possible investigations that could encompass this dynamic and, at the same time, so important topic for organizational practical reasons. The following research areas and topics could be explored:

1. Future research could consider how project managers are able or not able to align their own perspectives and causes with the organizational aims;
2. Another possible area for the research is to uncover the possible barriers to project management community organizing. For example, this study noted the fact that SBG was successful in organizing and taking action, while Micros' community was not; however, it did not delve into the reasons why that happened in both organizations;
3. Much has been said about project management character in this study. However, how does one determine who and what a successful project manager is? What is needed to become one? How do project managers pursue the goal of becoming one? These are just few questions among the multitude of possible areas to create new understandings of project management and project managers;
4. Critical hermeneutics provides a wide spectrum of opportunities to investigate the phenomenon of project management further. These opportunities are presented by application of various critical hermeneutic categories that could

guide the research. This study took narrative identity, imagination, and fusion of horizons as the core categories. By taking a slightly different perspective on the issue, future research could apply other categories with the goal to uncover the new meanings. For example, Ethical Aim could be used to uncover the new meanings of how project managers exist within the organizational groups. The category of Language could be used to uncover various aspects of communication, in view of its importance noted by several participants of this study. Praxis and Communicative Action could be the categories to apply in creating understandings regarding practical steps in resolving certain issues in project management. The possibilities are, indeed, boundless in this regard.

Personal Reflections of The Researcher

Project managers can be considered as having their own horizons. However, their interaction with others over the course of project development will inevitably involve acquiring new understandings. In the same manner, my perspectives as a researcher on the topic of project management were bounded by my own horizons as results of my past experiences in this field and personal prejudices. As an example, I consider my pre-understanding of project management as a product of national culture differences, something that my conversation partners did not share. They, on the other hand, provided me with knowledge of why national culture might be irrelevant and why project managers in different cultural backgrounds would have similar views on the process of project management and mention nearly similar issues related to it.

At the same time, I, as a researcher, was able to identify additional meanings that project managers attach to their position in the company and the process of project

management as well. Comparing and contrasting this conversation to my pilot conversation with Mr. Khouja, I was able, for example, to distinguish different self-assigned roles of my conversation partners within the paradigm of project management. As such, I believe that my own horizons regarding project management and the essence of being a project manager keep expanding.

According to Herda (1999: 33),

If we take seriously the act of reinterpreting our world and our past activities, we will realize that we are not simply reviewing and analyzing past theories, policies, or assuming the role of the advocate. Rather we are using our knowledge and understandings to aid in shaping the future and interpreting the past with a pre-orientation that we will use this knowledge to create new possibilities for the future.

My conversations with the project managers in the course of this study were inevitably related to reinterpretations of the past to create new knowledge and understandings in the project management field. It is my utmost hope that the perspectives on project management introduced in this study would be beneficial not only from theoretical, but also from practical point of view to create the new possibilities for the future. These possibilities are not confined by producing ideal working environment for project managers or organizing them to take imagination to work; rather, that they would reveal the value of fusing the perspectives for mutual understanding and achievement of common goals. This is something that can be taken far outside the project management field and into the realm of organizational relationships and practices.

I express such hope because I, fortunately, was able to firsthand experience in attaining new profound understandings of the project management field through the process of fusion of horizons. At the same time, I was able to observe how such understandings emerge for my conversation partners, who would, like me, directly

benefit from our conversations. This effect of knowledge creation for both the participants and the researcher is a truly amazing thing, which only reinforces our constant odyssey towards an understanding of self and the other.

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Appendix A: Pilot Study Conversation Transcript with Mr. Rahman Khouja

Provided below is the transcript of my conversation with Mr. Khouja. The notes related to each research category are highlighted as the following:

- Narrative identity – yellow
- Imagination – green
- Fusion of Horizons - blue

WA: So, Mr. Rahman, I would like, first of all, to thank you for your time and information sharing with me. [Introduction of the researcher, explanation of the research goals, and explanation of the rights of the conversation participant]. I would like to start with you. Please, if you can, introduce yourself and if there is anything you would like to share with me and yourself and your position.

Mr. R: Ok, my name is Rahman Khouja, I am, basically, an organization engineer. I have two Master degrees, and I am doing my PhD right now. I am the assistant to the organizational development manager in Saudi Bin Laden Group, based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. I am a Certified Project Manager. And... I am willing to answer your questions.

WA: It is a pleasure, Mr. Rahman. So, how did you happen to be an assistant project manager at Saudi Bin Laden Group?

Mr. R: About six years ago I joined this department in Saudi Bin Laden Group.

WA: Uh-huh.

Mr. R: With the manager of organization developments. Prior to that, I was in Saudi Aramco, for 15 years... almost. And when I came to this department, this department was sponsored for re-organizing, the whole group. So, I thought it was an opportunity for me to share my experience in reorganization, processing, and change management. That's why I joined this department.

WA: Ok, sounds great. And so, is it any different right now... You've said you were in Saudi Bin Laden, it's a big multinational project management company. What difference it makes to you?

Mr. R.: Well, it's a big difference, actually. I came from the semi-government type of organization, which is Saudi Aramco to this kind of family business group. So, it's totally different: there is a big challenge in handling things when it comes to project assistance here in Saudi Bin Laden. The priority here is for big clients, and the second priority goes to the quality of the projects. And then, of course, third priority goes to budgeting of the projects. So, here, in Saudi Bin Laden, you have to keep an eye on those three priorities and to have to maintain the balance between those priorities. Of course, the work stress in

such kind of environment is big, and sometimes we have to work day and night, as I said, to meet the deadlines. So, it's a big difference, actually.

WA: How can you compare the difference in working environment between Saudi Bin Laden and Saudi Aramco?

Mr. R.: Well, as I said, It's aaa... Saudi Aramco is a very well-organized company, a very big company and, aaaa, in Aramco, we are almost cost-oriented organization rather than profit oriented organization, while in Saudi Bin Laden Group we are profit-oriented organization. So, you can imagine the difference between two companies when it comes to this issue, which is profit-oriented or cost-oriented. What I mean, in Aramco, we used to reduce costs but we cannot intend to increasing the profits, while here, in Bin Laden Group, we have to maintain increasing the profits. So, in Saudi Bin Laden Group, we have to work harder, we have to work smarter in order to increase our profits.

WA: Ok, what about the relationships between supervisors and colleagues? Let's focus on Saudi Bin Laden Group right now.

Mr. R.: Well, in such a kind of family business companies you can imagine that the organization is more flatter than the organization in big companies like Saudi Aramco. What I mean, in Saudi Bin Laden Group, you will find parent relationships between supervisors and subordinates. There are not many layers between the top managers and the laborers, the workers in the field. Because, as I said, we have to increase the profits, so we have to maintain big relationships and strong relationships with the field people. This, again, goes back to working harder and smarter with those people. I think that relationships in such kind of environments are stronger than the relationships in a semi-governmental where organization is hierarchical, and it takes a lot of routine, you know, to reach the end of assignment. The boss, who goes to his boss... So, it takes a lot of time to even sometimes send a message, upload or download, while in this kind of environment, in Saudi Bin Laden Group, it's easier, faster: the message will reach to top management or down to the labor faster.

WA: Ok, so I see that right now you are totally satisfied with the Saudi Bin Laden Group, and so is there anything you can add with regards to the quality of working environment here?

Mr. R.: Well, the thing I hope to see in family business is more kind of organization... In administrative issues, for instance, this is what I have learned from Saudi Aramco: in Saudi Aramco we used to be very well-organized people, especially administrative wise and there are fixed, stable systems. Employees can find their rights easily, they can search for the rights systematically, while in the family business, you know, because the concentration goes to the profits and to the clients, the rights of the employees and their

issues are a little bit ignored. So, this is what I hope, what I wish to see more is that organization will be more systematical in these kinds of issues.

WA: Ok, so Saudi Bin Laden Group manages projects inside and outside of the Kingdom. What can you say about the difference between managing projects inside and outside of Saudi Arabia?

Mr. R.: Well, there are so many differences. Let's see... in general with the projects inside the Kingdom, you work locally, you can watch it closely, you can ask for regular reports from the sites, from the fields, while managing international projects is a bit harder and more difficult, because the sites would be far away from you and you cannot visit them regularly. Even the reports will reach maybe late, not on time, maybe missing some information; the communication would be harder also in the field. Saudi Bin laden Group do manage international projects, but our focus is more on the local projects, actually.

WA: In Saudi Arabia, ok.

Mr. R.: In Saudi Arabia, yeah.

WA: Ok, Mr. Rahman, I would like to really thank you. This conversation was short, but it had a lot of information and valuable information from you.

Mr. R.: Thank you. I wish you all the best with your research.

Appendix B: Pilot Study Data Analysis

Introduction

The presence of narrative identity, imagination, and fusion of horizons surfaced during my conversation with Mr. Khouja. To a large extent, his past experiences and new reality have helped him see himself in a new way, while also assessing the working environment differently. Below is the analysis of our conversation using theoretical concepts from my research categories. The analysis begins with the discussion of Mr. Khouja's narrative identity through the lens of the organizational environment.

Narrative Identity

Mr. Khouja's narrative comprises events, places, and time: the elements that determine the narrative's plot. Consequently, these elements have strongly affected his experiences as a project manager. Ricoeur (1992: 147) wrote that, "the person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her experiences. Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted." Two narratives revealing Mr. Khouja's identity can be distinctly identified in his experience as a project manager: one when he was employed by Saudi Aramco and the other one as a member of Saudi Bin Laden Group.

Mr. Khouja's story about working at Saudi Aramco defines the working environment as "hierarchical" and very formal. His visions of self can be identified as a cost cutter and a link in the chain largely because of the primary goals of his organization and the role assigned to him in the organization. Such interpretations can be linked to Ricoeur's (1992: 3) explorations of the concept of personal identity in relation to selfhood and otherness: "selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree

that one cannot be thought of without the other.” Mr. Khouja’s own idea of the role of a project manager gradually came into conflict with the reality of his working environment. He consequently joined another company, which had a different organizational structure and presented new challenges commensurate with Mr. Khouja’s skills and experience.

Mr. Khouja’s experiences as a project manager at SBLG significantly differed from those at Aramco, which in turn altered his views of self in relation to others, specifically, in the organizational context. His narrative became re-emplotted as he started envisioning himself as a profit maker. He identified this new role as more demanding in terms of both effort and intelligence. His new narrative constructed the new identity of his character. Ricoeur (1992: 147) wrote: “the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her identity, in constructing the story told.” This identity of character is nothing more than the narrative identity, which has mediated his selfhood and sameness.

Our identities change with each new narrative. In relation to project management experiences, character is reflected in the personal stories of project managers within an organization. While in his story Mr. Khouja identifies his character as a project manager for a large organization, his working environment seemed to strongly influence ipse of his character. According to Ricoeur (1992: 148), “It is the identity of the story which makes the identity of the character.” The companies that Mr. Khouja worked for had different narratives; as a result, his identity changed in relation to the narrative of the company. As he was assigned the new roles in organizational narratives he had a new sense of self.

Ricoeur (1987: 246) wrote that in narrative identity the individual “appears both as a reader and a writer of its own life.” Mr. Khouja’s old stories were retold, and, consequently, his narrative was re-emplotted. Mr. Khouja acquired a new context to gain a perspective on his position in relationship to others, including the organizational heads, clients, and co-workers, and to himself. It is clear that Mr. Khouja’s narrative identity has undergone changes as he heard new stories, built new kind of relationships, and acquired new roles as a project manager. In this regard, not only organizational environment became different for him but his sense of self changed as well.

Imagination

The experiences as a project manager at SBLG, in Mr. Khouja’s words, redefined the imagery of the project manager position as he envisioned it. Herda (2007: 25) wrote that “our stories change when our relationships change because the new stories contain different experiences and the social imagery comes into play as one re-emplots his or her life.” Consequently, imagination serves as a way to integrate these experiences and imagery into stories. This new imagery was that of a communicator and a contributor. Mr. Khouja’s new working experiences involved new kinds of relationships and stories, which were based on a completely new approach to organizational management. Venema (2000: 40) wrote that “through the creative work of imagination, life is both represented and understood; through discourse that is close to the creative power of the imagination life and self are most certainly revealed.” Mr. Khouja’s experiences called him to reconsider his past as a project manager and reveal a completely new view of himself and his work.

Mr. Khouja's experiences as a project manager can be analyzed within the two functions of imagination, as described by Ricoeur (1999: 15): re-remembering the past in a new way and providing opportunities to visualize possible futures. Mr. Khouja re-remembered his past experiences as a project manager in Saudi Aramco to gain new perspectives of his previous work from the vantage point of his current position. This step away from the traditional is rooted in the hermeneutical aspect of distanciation, which has been extensively developed by Ricoeur. According to Lee (1994: 149), distanciation can be understood as "the separation, in time and distance, that occurs between a text and its author, its originally intended audience, and/or its originating culture and society." Mr Khouja was able to distanciate himself from being submerged in past experiences and look at them from a different vantage point, this time from a perspective of a project manager who operates within the environment less guided by the rules but more demanding in terms of deliveries.

With regard to the second function of imagination, it makes possible to place dreams, hopes, and visions into the kingdom of "as if" (Ricoeur 1984: 64). According to Kearney (1998: 149), "imagination liberates ... into a free space of possibility, suspending reference to the immediate world of perception and thereby disclosing 'the new ways of being in the world.'" He specifically emphasized the lack of organizing and ignoring the interests of employees at the expense of profits and clients. Mr. Khouja's experiences of the past helped him construct imageries of a better project management environment at present.

Mr. Khouja's work of imagination, however, stretches beyond simple applications to working environment. Kearney (1984: 24) wrote that "the mediating role of

imagination is forever at work in lived reality. There is no lived reality, no human or social reality, which is not already represented in some sense.” Mr. Khouja’s imageries of past and present working experiences helped him define his living experiences in a larger context. These experiences were strongly grounded in his narrative, while the process of imagination helped him re-plot the vision of himself as a project manager and as an individual within a community of other people within the organization. The explicit connection between narrative and imagination is evident through Ricoeur’s work: he classifies narrative as a form of creative imagination. According to Wood (1991: 40), “the rule governed nature of the creative imagination permits the literary imagination to be placed under the rubric of understanding and explanation. Insofar as what is said or presented in narrative form is subject to rules ... the products of creative imagination may be ‘explained.’” From this standpoint, Mr. Khouja defined his identity in the present and imagined who he wants to be in the future. The process of understanding his experiences in a new way is further analyzed within the fusion of horizons framework.

Fusion of Horizons

Mr. Khouja’s narrative reveals a fusion of horizons. His description of past and present experiences as well as imageries of what his ideal experiences could be provided a strong orientation toward new understanding about his life and work. According to Gadamer (2004: 305), “understanding is always the fusion of ... horizons supposedly existing by themselves.” This can be understood as reaching an expanded view about what is being discussed (Gadamer2004: 365). Through the discussion, Mr. Khouja came to a new realization about his past experiences, which was enriched by his present experiences and environment. He, for example, was very clear on what did and did not

work well in the past while, at the same time, critically reflecting upon his current experiences as a project manager.

Mr. Khouja's horizon was limited by his experiences as a project manager at Saudi Aramco and the organizational environment, in which he worked. However, when the environment undertook significant changes at his new place of work, the same tasks and activities within the project management paradigm seemed to acquire new, broader meanings. Gadamer (2004: 439) claimed that the other reality we encounter holds truth in itself and for us. Mr. Khouja uncovered new truth about his past. His interaction with the new environment over the course of the project development and management created new meanings about that process and his role in it.

Through the reflections of his past and present working experiences, Mr. Khouja was very clear about what challenged his past views on realities of project management. His new experiences helped him formulate a broader picture on the concept of a project manager's work and role in the organizational setting. This was evident within the context of his comments about the nature of the project managers' job, his relations with the people up and down of the organizational ladder, and the organizational framework. The change in experiences that took place at SBLG opened the possibility of Mr. Khouja's new understanding with concomitant actions (Herda 1999: 109).

Over the course of the conversation and the consequent analysis of the transcript, Mr. Khouja's horizons have been expanded as he had an opportunity to look at his past experiences as a project manager through the lens of the present based on his new experiences and the new working environments. It became apparent to me that by sharing his narratives about working experiences of past and present, Mr. Khouja has

significantly expanded my own horizons regarding project management and the meaning of what it means to be a project manager.

After the conclusion of our recorded conversation, Mr. Khouja confessed that the way he spoke to me about his working experiences was in itself a very engaging and revealing experience. He went on to say that, while his past as a project manager at Aramco was quite different from his present as a project manager at SBLG, he never openly shared and contrasted them in an open manner. At the same time, the very fact of Mr. Khouja having different views on project management at different times indicates his shift of horizons. As Gadamer (2004: 303) pointed out, human life “is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint ... The horizon is ... something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving.” As Mr. Khouja moved through life and acquired different experiences related to managing projects in various environments, he was able to uncover some new meanings about his work and identity in an organizational environment. He responded that it, probably, helped him understand the nature of project management as a very “multifarious action” [sic]. In this comment I saw acknowledgement that the process of fusion of horizons took place.

Conclusion

Following the critical hermeneutic tradition, my conversation with Mr. Khouja was analyzed through the lens of my research categories. Through narratives and imagination he was able to envision a broader dimension of what project management experience meant to him. The analysis of our conversation helped reveal his creation of meaning for his work, view of his role within the organization, and the diversity of experiences that project management involves.

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation and Study Research Questions

Date

Study Participant's Name
Organization's Address

Dear Mr/Mrs,

I am a doctoral student at the University of San Francisco in the Organization and Leadership Program. I am conducting my dissertation research on working experiences of project managers in large multinational corporations.

My research is grounded in interpretive theory and has a participatory orientation. In place of formal interviews or surveys, I engage in conversations with project managers employed in large multinational corporations who are willing to discuss their insights on and experiences and identity. Upon your approval, the conversations are audio and/or video recorded and then transcribed. You may request the recording device be turned off at any time during the conversation. I will send you a copy of the transcript for your review. At that time, you may add, delete or change any of the transcribed text. Upon receipt of your approval, I will analyze the data. Please note that participation in this research, including all data collected, the names of individuals, and any affiliations is not confidential. Before participating in the research you will be required to sign a consent form.

I am particularly interested in discussing how experiences in project management shape project managers' understanding of self and the role of oneself in an organization. Some of the concepts related to this study are narrative identity, imagination, and fusion of horizons.

To give you a sense of the research conversation, here are a few questions that will guide our discussion.

Fusion of Horizons:

1. What difference do the experiences at this position make to you in comparison to the past?
2. What difference does the working environment make to you in this and the previous positions?

Narrative Identity:

1. How do project managers view themselves as authority figures?
2. How do project managers view themselves as subordinates?
3. How do they happen to become project managers?

Imagination:

1. Do you have any specific dreams or ideas about the way that the projects in this organization should be managed?
2. What can you say about the working environment? Would you change anything?

If you are willing to participate in this research, or if you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached via email at wafndy@usfca.edu or by telephone at (415) 999-6506.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Waleed Afndy
Research Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Organization and Leadership Program
wafndy@gmail.com
650-703-5982

Appendix D: List of Participants

Name	Company	Position
Mr. Fayiz Aljuhani	Saudi Bin Laden Group	Project Manager
Nehad Mohammed Ismail	Saudi Bin Laden Group	Project Manager
Hussain Almotairi	Saudi Bin Laden Group	Project Manager
Hisham Talab	Saudi Bin Laden Group	Project Manager
Mr. Allen Nells	Micros Retail	Project Implementation Manager
Mr. Kris Myers	Micros Retail	Project Implementation Manager
Mr. Charles Smith	Micros Retail	Project Implementation Manager
Mr. Majed Alshumur	Micros Retail	Project Manager

Appendix E: Research Participant Confirmation Letter

Date

Participant's Name
Address

Dear (Participant's Name)

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about the research I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. I look forward to hearing your insights about being a project manager in a large multinational corporation.

This letter confirms our meeting on ***Day, Month ##*** at ***Time***. As discussed, we will meet at ***PLACE***. Please contact me if you would like to arrange a different time or meeting place.

With your approval, I will be recording our conversation (audio and/or video), transcribing it into a written text, and providing you with a copy of the transcripts for your review. After you have reviewed and reflected upon the transcript, you may add, delete, or change portions of the transcript as you deem appropriate. The conversations are an important element in my research. Please take notice that all of the data for this research project including your name are not confidential. Additionally, I may use your name in my dissertation and subsequent publications.

I appreciate your contribution to this research and look forward to speaking with you.

Best regards,

Waleed Afndy
Research Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Organization and Leadership Program
wafndy@gmail.com
650-703-5982