Professionalization of Project Management

A Professional Identity Perspective

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Abstract

The professionalization of Project Management is still debated in academia. Researchers have mainly addressed this issue from the point of view of the employer organisations and professional institutions. Even though, practitioners are considered the ones able to drive the process and to determine the future direction of an emerging profession, their perspective has been neglected. According to the literature, Project Management is in the initial stages of professionalization. However, Project Management Institutions are pushing towards the professional status by imitating the traditional professionalization approach undertaken by other knowledge-based occupations such as medicine. Since professions are executed by professionals and, becoming a professional implies an impact on the individual's professional identity; it becomes central to understand what these individuals think, why they think about it as they do and why they do what they do.

Professional identity is part of the individuals' social identification. It is considered part of the individuals' identity constructed in social interactions and is concerned with the questions "Who am I?", "Who are we?" and "How should I act?" Thus, understanding professional identification provides insights into why individuals join particular occupations, why they decide against others and why they approach their jobs the way they do in order to understand if practitioners would identify with Project Management as a profession. For these reasons, this thesis addresses the individuals' subjective perceptions of Project Management professionalization from a professional identity perspective.

 The main purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of professionalization of Project Management and careers by applying a professional identity perspective on Project Management graduates. To address this objective, the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory perspective, the individual's professional identity in terms of professional identification, and the role of Project Management in their professional identity construction, were explored.

This study was carried out by analysing eight interviews with Project Management Master graduates under the influence of a social constructionist perspective where language serves as a medium that gives insights about the individuals' own realities. The findings of this thesis show that they do not perceive Project Management or their careers as a profession in terms of the traditional professionalization theory, but rather as a knowledge-based occupation, which can be exercised as a full-time occupation or applied as a tool-kit to other forms of management. Project Management is very important to them and plays a significant role, yet it is not part of their individual personal distinctiveness. They feel neutral towards the Project Management Institutions' aim to professionalise Project Management, because they do not consider that the practice of the occupation would change with professional status. However, a legal qualification requirement may present a threat to the individuals' professional identity. Thus, a possible transition from occupational workers to professionals may cause an identity conflict. Those findings suggest the need for further development of the professionalization theory and the advancement of the debate on professionalization towards a consensus about the core of professionalism. Thus, one of our suggestions for further research includes conducting a similar study under the perspectives of 'new' forms of professionalism towards Project Management.

List of Abbreviations

AIPM	Australian Institute of Project Management
APM	Association for Project Management
BOK	Body of Knowledge
HRM	Human Resource Management
IJPM	International Journal of Project Management
IPMA	International Project Management Association
MSPME	Master in Strategic Project Management
NPO	Not project-oriented
PM	Project Management
PMAJ	Project Management Association of Japan
PMBOK	Project Management Body of Knowledge (by PMI)
PMI	Project Management Institute
PMJ	Project Management Journal
PMO	Project Management Office
PMP	Project Management Professional
PPPM	Project-Programme-Portfolio Management
PO	Project-oriented
WBS	Work Breakdown Structure

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1. Introduction

The nature of Project Management (PM) is still debated (Kwak & Anbari, 2009). Especially, the debate regarding PM as a profession or as a mere occupation has often been addressed (Hodgson, 2007, p.232). It has been argued that PM is in the process of transition from occupation to profession (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.265). Under this perspective, the implications of the professionalization of PM for employing organisations, professional institutions and society have been addressed in contemporary literature (e.g. Hodgson, 2007; Muzio et al., 2011; Paton et al., 2013). However, the individuals' perspective in terms of practitioners or professionals, has been widely neglected (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36), even though, they are considered to be the ones able to drive the process and to determine the future direction of an emerging profession through their actions and choices (Gold et al., 2002, pp.52, 53). Therefore, it is central to comprehend how these individuals make sense of their environment, what they think about it, why they think about it that way, and why they do what they do (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.334). Because, professions are exerted by professionals, it is crucial to understand the way in which individuals identify with their careers. Especially, considering the possible progression and development of PM as a profession, it appears to be of great importance to consider the individuals' perceptions regarding how they conceive PM, how they identify with it and if they would accept to support the professionalization process.

The interest in Project Management has increased considerably (Ika, 2009, p.6). Not only companies, but society in general is increasingly turning to Project Management (Meredith et al., 2011, p.v). This is reflected in, for example, the foundation of professional institutions and the academic journals dedicated to the topic (e.g. Project Management Journal (PMJ), International Journal of Project Management (IJPM)). Likewise, the different Project Management certifications have been increasing and different university degrees, ranging from workshops, courses and specialisations to Bachelors, Masters and PhDs, have been introduced (Blomquist & Söderholm, 2002, p.34; Crawford et al., 2006a, p.723). Not to mention the several books, magazines, professional journals, softwares, blogs and forums exclusively dedicated to it. Moreover, Project Management is not only considered as an interesting topic, but also as an important and strategic subject in academia and organisations. For instance, it has been recognised by researchers and practitioners as a way to improve organisational performance (Patanakul et al., 2012, p.391) and as a means to respond, if not anticipate, to the opportunities and environments of the future (Webster, Jr & Knutson, 2011, p.10). Particularly, Project Management is considered to promote the creation of collaborative environments that encourages the achievement of goals in order to deliver projects on scope, on time and on budget (Seymour & Hussein, 2014, p.233) and as the link between the execution of projects and the organisational strategy and vision (Morris & Jamieson, 2005).

To better understand Project Management as it exists today, it is helpful to look through its changes over time (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176). Taking into consideration Turner and Müller's (2003, p.7) definition of a project as "a temporary organisation to which resources are assigned to undertake a unique, novel and transient endeavour managing the inherent uncertainty and need for integration in order to deliver beneficial objectives of change", humans have been dealing with projects since ancient history (Seymour & Hussein, 2014, p.233). However, it was much later, in the 20th century, that Project Management was acknowledged (Garel, 2013, p.665). Modern PM has its roots in

engineering and construction, thus, it emerged with the focus laid on planning and controlling (Bredillet, 2008; Pinto & Morris, 2011). However, it has been developing and reshaping due to the influence of other disciplines (Crawford et al., 2006b). Today, PM moved away from being purely tools and technique oriented and focuses more on strategic elements and soft skills (Bredillet, 2008, p.3; Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.239; Crawford et al., 2006a, p.182; Pinto & Morris, 2011, p.xii). In short, Project Management has come a long way from its origin as an "emerging profession" to a wide range of practice options (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176) that keeps becoming more dynamic as it becomes more mature (Bredillet, 2010a, p.4).

During this evolution, Project Management became highly institutionalised (Garel, 2013, p.665) as a consequence of events such as the foundation of professional institutions (Blomquist & Söderholm, 2002, p.30; Pinto & Morris, 2011, p.xii) like the Project Management Institute (PMI), Association for Project Management (APM), International Project Management Association (IPMA), Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) and Project Management Association of Japan (PMAJ), which provide members with a platform to share their knowledge, experiences and discuss issues (Garel, 2013, p.667). These institutions strongly promoted the dissemination and development of the PM model by creating their own codes of ethics and certification programmes, supporting dedicated journals in the field and publishing their own bodies of knowledge (BOKs) (Blomquist & Söderholm, 2002, p.36; Garel, 2013, p.668). In general, those BOKs vary in scope and definition, but share the same view on requirements of knowledge of techniques and management skills (Hodgson, 2002, p.809). The aim is to represent widely accepted practices of Project Management (Allen, 1995, p.77) and serve as a reference for the different Project Management certifications (Morris et al., 2006, p.711; Muzio et al., 2011, p.449). Furthermore, PM Institutions are functioning to promote and represent the Project Management community in society (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.283).

While PM as a field has developed, naturally, the role of the project managers has also changed; from a predominantly technical-manager to a reflective-manager that provides what is needed to deliver successful projects (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.722). Moreover, Project Management changed from being merely considered as an add-on to someone's career (Hodgson, 2002, p.816), to be identified as a career choice (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225). This means that PM is no longer perceived as a tool-kit that provides practitioners with special skills and techniques, but as "an evolving sequence of work activities, positions (…) and the associated attitudes, knowledge and skills that [someone] develops throughout its life" (El-Sabaa, 2001, p.2). To emphasise, even the Fortune magazine recognised Project Management to be "the career choice of the 90's and beyond" (Stewart, 1995). However, even if the demand of effective project managers has increased as organisations become more project-oriented, organisations demonstrate only limited support for the project managers' career development (Crawford, 2005, p.8; Crawford et al., 2013, p.1184). As a consequence, project managers may feel inadequately rewarded for their highly responsible and strategic work as well as a lack of recognition towards their efforts and the occupation as a whole (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.255; Crawford et al., 2013, p.1179; Hölzle, 2010, p.779); which sometimes leads project managers to leave organisations, sometimes even during project execution, to pursue new career opportunities and personal development (Parker & Skitmore, 2005, p.205). Even if project managers are typically inclined to take control over their own careers, voluntarily or as a consequence of the lack of organisational support, it has been recognised that a clear demonstration

of career development opportunities is likely to increase talent attraction and retention (Crawford et al., 2013, p.1184; Huemann et al., 2007, p.318). In response, Project Management Institutions have made a great deal of effort to assist organisations and project managers by developing PM career frameworks, which include clear job descriptions with their specific requirements and the corresponding certification level.

Not only professional institutions, but also educational institutions have become involved in this issue. Indeed, a nearly exponential growth in memberships of professional institutions during the last years (Hodgson, 2007, p.225) mirrors the number of employees willing to take on a role in Project Management and thus, reflects the general increasing importance and interest attributed to Project Management. But also, the emergence of dedicated training and formal postgraduate education programmes represent a continuous development towards a more reliable knowledge-base, enhanced skills and attitudes (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225) aimed to upgrade the working conditions and the status of the occupation (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p. 279; Hanlon, 1998, p.49). Because of this, Project Management has developed into a discrete, knowledge-based occupation with considerable influence in contemporary organisations. This has also left room for some people to even consider PM as a profession. For instance, the debate of whether PM is a formal practice or a profession is still open, even in the Management education community (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.175; Ika, 2009, p.6; Kwak & Anbari, 2009, p.435; Meredith et al., 2011, p.5).

Considering that, a profession is a vocation that comprises "an exclusive elite group" which enjoys high status, power and public prestige (Larson, 1977, p.20). Project Management Institutions like the IPMA, PMI, APM, AIPM and PMAJ have been constantly pushing towards the professionalization of PM. For instance, they clearly describe PM as a profession (AIPM, 2014; APM, 2014a; IPMA, 2014; PMAJ, 2014; PMI, 2014a) and the APM is even aiming to obtain professional chartered status (APM, 2014b). However, it has been recognised that occupations in order to be considered a profession, need to go through a professionalization process in order to develop specific traits (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Flexner, 2001; Greenwood, 1957; Wilensky, 1964), which has led to several perspectives about it. On one hand, some researchers like Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.266), Hodgson (2005, p.56, 2007, p.219) and Morris et al. (2006, p.711) have partially supported the PM Institutions by claiming that PM has the potential to become a profession, but is still in the early stages of development. On the other hand, doubts exist whether any occupation could achieve traditional professional status in the contemporary environment (Muzio et al., 2011, p.445; Paton et al., 2013, p.227). In turn, other discussions centre on whether PM could be justified a stand-alone profession (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.195) or would always be considered as an adjunct to other disciplines like engineering or architecture.

Nevertheless, PM Institutions are still pursuing the professional status by mimicking the traditional approach that was undertaken by other knowledge-based occupations such as medicine, law, engineering and nursing, to obtain the professional recognition (Hodgson, 2005, p.56; Zwerman et al., 2003). This traditional approach includes the development of an esoteric body of knowledge, achieving autonomy of practice, promoting norm of altruism, increasing authority over clients, and the creation and recognition of a distinctive occupational culture (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.266). However, PM Institutions have been particularly focused on the bodies of knowledge and stratified certifications (Ibid, p.225) since in the traditional view, this is what

distinguishes a profession from other occupations and increases their credibility and the legal recognition of the occupation (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.30). Moreover, these particular traits help to achieve monopolistic market closure, which increases the barriers of entry, and promote restrictive practices and self-regulation by practitioners (Evetts, 2013, p.780).

However, nowadays, certifications are still voluntary for practitioners (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.723). Nevertheless, since organisations are increasingly organising their work around projects (Meijers, 1998, p.191), some of them (including employers, sponsors and clients) already require certifications and use them as a guarantee of competence to project delivery (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.723). Thus, practitioners are encouraged to certify their knowledge because organisations may recognise certifications as an element to progress in the organisation (Paton et al., 2013, p.236; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.226). Even if, there is not sufficient evidence that certifications increase the likelihood of project success (Morris et al., 2006, p.713), professional institutions still promote an international, client-value orientation towards individual and corporate memberships (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225). Hence, it could be considered that even though Project Management has not (yet) achieved the majority of the traits which characterise a traditional profession, it is on the way and professional institutions are clearly trying to enforce and boost the process to further advance in the near future (Bredin, 2008, p.574).

Not only professional institutions, but also employing organisations, practitioners and society in general play a big role in supporting the process of professionalization. Hence, in recent years, researchers have been addressing the professionalization of PM, its consequences and implications. However, a very important part of professionalization, the practitioner's individual perspective and his/her sense of identity towards the occupation is often neglected or even completely ignored (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36). Given the importance of professionals, since no profession can exist without professionals, it is central to understand how individuals attach their own meanings to their work (Saunders et al., 2009, p.111) and how they make sense of their careers and their environment (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.334). In other words, in order to better understand the consequences and implications of the professionalization of PM, it is important to understand how individuals identify with their careers (i.e. professional identification) and the influence PM has in the individuals' self-concept of their careers (i.e. impact on individuals' professional identity).

Professional identity is defined as "one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences" (Slay & Smith, 2011, p.86). It encompasses cognitive (self-categorisation in terms of membership of occupational group), evaluative (self-esteem in terms of importance of group membership) and emotional (commitment in terms of involvement) elements (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.371; Tajfel, 1982, p.2). It can be studied from different perspectives (individual or collective) and levels (personal or social). However, regarding our interest in understanding how individuals identify with their careers, in this thesis, we will be dealing with identity from the individual perspective. Moreover, considering that individuals exercise their careers in a social environment and that identity is formed on an ongoing basis, shaped and reshaped in the interaction with others (Beech et al., 2008, p.959; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.89), we will be dealing with individual social identity. Understanding the individuals' values, goals, beliefs, stereotypic traits, knowledge and skills, and behaviours may provide

insights into why individuals join occupations and why they decide against others (Ashforth et al., 2008, pp.330, 331, 338). Especially during transition processes, such as becoming professionals, professional identities are re-negotiated or cognitively discarded to ensure a smooth transition into their new role (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.335). Hence, understanding individuals' professional identity in social interactions during these periods of transition, where identity development takes place (Ibarra, 1999, p.765), individuals reflect on the question "Who am I" (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.385).

In summary, PM Institutions are pushing towards the professional status of PM (Bredin, 2008, p.574; Hodgson, 2005, p.56). However, it is currently considered to be in the initial stages of professionalization, where the course of action can still be altered in order to become (or not become) a profession in the interest of all (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.152). Therefore, it is important to reflect on the consequences and implications that a future professionalization of Project Management may have for all the actors, including professional institutions, employing organisations, practitioners and society. Especially, considering that practitioners' perspectives have not been properly addressed in the professionalization literature (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36) and that becoming a professional implies an impact on the individual's professional identity that enables them to shift from occupational workers to professionals (Freidson, 1986, p.107), it becomes central to understand what these individuals think, why they think about it as they do and why they do what they do (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.334) to later understand if they would identify with PM as a profession that should be self-regulating and if they are willing to submit their practice for judgement or if they would rather identify with PM as an occupation that is subject to the whims of the market (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.178).

1.1. Research Question and Objective

With regards to the above problematisation, it is necessary to gain a better understanding about individuals' perceptions of Project Management, their careers and how they identify with them. Therefore, the **research question** addressed in this thesis is stated as follows:

How do Project Management graduates perceive Project Management and their career in terms of professionalization?

The **main objective** of this study is to contribute to the understanding of professionalization of Project Management and careers by applying a professional identity perspective on Project Management graduates.

In order to answer the research question and fulfil the main objective, our sub-objectives are exploring the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory perspective. In addition, we will explore the individual's professional identity in terms of professional identification, and the role of Project Management in their professional identity construction.

For this research, we have chosen to focus on PM graduates because formal education has been recognised to represent the development of PM towards a more reliable knowledge-based occupation (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225), aimed to upgrade the working conditions and the status of it (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.279; Hanlon, 1998, p.49). Moreover, formal education is considered an element of someone's career

(El-Sabaa, 2001, p.2) and therefore, an important element of the individual's professional identity (Evetts, 2013, p.780). In particular, the transition from work to school and from school to work has been recognised as periods where professional work takes place (Ibarra, 1999, p.765). Thus, we consider that PM postgraduates, which have been exposed to formal PM education and have gone through a transition period, have faced the process of re-negotiating or cognitively discarding their professional identity (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.335). Furthermore, we recognise in PM postgraduates a strong interest in PM, at least strong enough to have decided to invest one or two years of their lives to the subject and in many cases, a greater amount of money than for example, getting a PM certification. Not to mention that the effort of getting a degree cannot be compared to the effort of passing a multiple-choice test common in many non-academic certifications. In short, we believe that PM postgraduates' professional identities are more likely to be influenced by the PM discipline, thus, providing us with a more homogeneous group which shares a common basis and experiences, which is assumed to be an important element in both, the professional identification and the professionalization processes (Evetts, 2013, p. 780).

We are also aware that this choice excludes project managers that have experience in the field but do not hold a PM degree, PM certified practitioners, 'accidental' project managers (people who get involved in PM without intention), former people working in the PM field and others that may perceive PM as an important part of their careers, but did not pursue an educational degree in PM. However, we also consider that PM postgraduates can be considered the project managers of tomorrow because they usually belong to the younger generations and therefore, are the ones who would most probably drive and determine the process of professionalization of Project Management through their actions in the field. On the contrary, older generations working in Project Management may be considered not be too concerned about the topic since perhaps they would not even be able to take advantage of the benefits and face the challenges of the professionalization process. Therefore, this study must be interpreted considering these limitations and its findings should not be considered as the perceptions and opinions of all PM practitioners.

1.2. Key Concepts

The term 'professional' is widely used with different meanings and purposes. For example, it is very common to refer to the life at work as "professional life" or "professional experience". Further, we [as society] tend to refer to professional football players while we never refer to football as a profession. Moreover, when someone is very skilled in a particular thing it is common to say that he/she is becoming professional in that area. Even by looking in the dictionary for the definition of 'professional' we found a very broad, unclear meaning. For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines 'professional' as:

- Professional, adjective (Oxford University Press, 2014)
    - Relating to or belonging to a profession
    - Worthy of or appropriate to a professional person; competent, skilful, or assured
    - Engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as an amateur
- Professional, noun (Oxford University Press, 2014)
    - A person engaged or qualified in a profession

- o A person engaged in a specified activity, especially a sport, as a main paid occupation rather than as a pastime
- o A person competent or skilled in a particular activity

Due to this broad denotation, we decided to narrow the meaning for the purpose of this thesis, through the professionalization theory that will be presented later in the Theoretical Framework Chapter. In summary and for the purpose of this study, we conceive a profession as an occupation which enjoys high status, power and public prestige (Larson, 1977, p.20) that fulfils specific requirements (traits) developed throughout processes (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Flexner, 2001; Greenwood, 1957; Wilensky, 1964). In addition, another important aspect regarding professions is the way in which professionals (people who profess the profession) attach their own individual meanings to their work (Saunders et al., 2009, p.111). In Freidson (1986, p.230) terms 'professionalism', is concerned with the attitudes and commitments that professionals have towards their careers, representing the profession through who they are and what they do. Thus, in our perspective, an occupation can be considered a profession when it meets the traits and process that will be deeply explained in the Theoretical Chapter, and when its practitioners identify with and recognise it as such.

Regarding the previous statement about professionalism, we consider that some key words need particular focus to better understand the concept. These identified aspects are 'careers' and 'professional identity'. Career, as profession, is a term broadly used as if it was something commonly understood. However, even if it is normally used to describe a person's hierarchical progression in the working life (e.g. manager assistant to manager to director to Sr. Director), its perception by different individuals is not fixed and so very difficult to describe (Coupland, 2004, p.515,517). In order to avoid misunderstandings, we want to make clear that we conceive careers as something constituted by the actors in interaction with others through time and space (Cohen et al., 2004, p.409). For us, the term career represents a social phenomenon (Coupland, 2004, p.517), something constructed in the mind of the individuals influenced by the social interactions and not a conceptualised structure that an individual inhabits temporarily (Cohen et al., 2004, p.409). Thus, career refers to the social phenomenon (Coupland, 2004, p.517) shaped by the "evolving sequence of work activities and positions that individuals experience over time as well as the associated attitudes, knowledge and skills they develop throughout their life" (El-Sabaa, 2001, p.2).

Similarly, we perceive professional identity as the individual identification with his/her career, which is shaped and reshaped through social interaction (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, pp.357–359; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.86). In consequence, becoming a professional implies an impact on the individual's professional identity that enables them to shift from occupational workers to professionals (Freidson, 1986, p.107).

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theory on which this thesis was built on (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.521). The theory in this chapter represents our position based on previous research, related to our research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2009, p.98). Moreover, in this chapter the 'lens' through which our research will be studied is defined. First, Project Management as a field of increased interest will be introduced. More specifically, an overview of its history and evolution of Project Management to an established occupation is provided. It continues with the presentation of professionalization theory and its different streams, followed by a definition based on traits and processes. The subsequent section deals with professional identity towards an occupation and the process of identity construction. Finally, based on the aforementioned theory, the current status of Project Management in terms of professionalization and the related issues will be discussed and evaluated. The chapter concludes with a summary of the theoretical framework.

2.1. Project Management: A New and Important Part of Management

Project Management (PM) is one of the youngest, most vibrant, and dynamic fields among various management disciplines (Kwak & Anbari, 2009, p.443). Even though PM has still not been embedded in the corporate level of business as compared to finance, marketing, accounting and other management disciplines (Garel, 2013, p.663) it is considered to offer organisations a way to be effective and efficient in uncertain environments (Ika, 2009, p.6). Hence, companies are increasingly turning to Project Management (Eskerod & Riis, 2009, p.4) as a means to deliver business results (Mir & Pinnington, 2014, p.215; Patanakul et al., 2012, p.408) in today's chaotic and competitive global economy (Meredith et al., 2011, p.1). In fact, not only companies, but researchers also have recognised the strategic value of PM as a way to improve organisational performance (Patanakul et al., 2012, p.408).

Project Management is used by organisations to increase productivity (Mir & Pinnington, 2014, p.202), introduce change (Turner & Müller, 2003, p.7; Webster, Jr & Knutson, 2011, p.10) and implement strategy (Morris & Jamieson, 2005). In other words, the execution of projects is directly linked to the strategy and vision of the organisations (Morris & Jamieson, 2005). In consequence, the successful management of those projects is very important and thus, the organisation's PM understanding could be considered as part of its strategic assets (Jugdev & Müller, 2005, p.28). However, it is important to be aware that even if companies are increasingly becoming more project-oriented (Eskerod & Riis, 2009, p.4), this does not mean that they are automatically increasing their value. Actually, a bad or undeveloped PM capacity may lead to great losses in productivity, morale and profitability (Patanakul et al., 2012, p.391). This is why a constant development and improvement of the organisation's PM capacity is crucial (Andersen & Vaagaasar, 2009, p.19). Another important aspect to acknowledge is that PM is not a 'one standard fits all', but rather context-specific. Projects, in order to be successful, need to be managed according to the specific needs and circumstances of the organisation (Eskerod & Riis, 2009, p.4). As can be seen, the 'projectification' (Midler, 1995) of a firm, which refers to the change in the organisational structure for organising their work in projects instead of functions, is not easy. This is why, even though PM has proven to drive organisational success (PMI, 2010, p.2), academia and

practitioners are constantly looking for different and better ways to manage projects (Patanakul et al., 2012, p.391).

2.2. Project Management, its History and Evolution

Some of the PM Institutions define PM as the application of knowledge, skills, processes, methods, tools, techniques and experiences to project activities in order to achieve the project objectives and requirements (APM, 2014c; PMI, 2014b). However, even with this explicit definition, the nature of PM is still debated (Kwak & Anbari, 2009, p.435). The debate includes if PM is a practice (Garel, 2013, p.664), a discipline (Eskerod & Riis, 2009, p.4), a scientific specialisation (Ika, 2009, p.6) or a profession (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.175). Whatever the real nature is, at least we can consider it a relevant topic for research. Even if with this study, we will not be able to solve the debate, it is our belief that examining the history and evolution of PM through the events that helped shaping it and through the research reflected as trends in the literature, will contribute to a better and broader understanding of the field (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176).

It was not until the 1950's that PM evolved as a recognised field and was distinguished from other activities like construction or general management (Garel, 2013, pp.665, 667). It developed out of technological advances, mainly due to the large aeronautical and military projects of the Cold War (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176; Garel, 2013, pp.666–667).

In the 1960's methods, tools and techniques specifically developed for the application of Project Management, were introduced (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176; Garel, 2013, p.663). In the late 1960's, the establishment of professional institutions in the USA and Europe started to promote the dissemination of the PM model and the standardisation of the processes (Garel, 2013, p.667; Pinto & Morris, 2011, p.xii). The most relevant examples are: the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in Switzerland (IPMA, 2014); the Project Management Institute (PMI) in the USA (PMI, 2014a); the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK (APM, 2014a; Seymour & Hussein, 2014, p.236); and the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) (AIPM, 2014).

In the 1970's and 1980's the interest in project work expanded across several industries and other management sciences such as manufacturing and Information Technology (IT). Correspondingly, teamwork became a major and defining characteristic (Crawford et al., 2006b, p.176). During the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's, new PM methodologies evolved as a result of the influence from other management disciplines, making them more suitable for the new emerging environment (Garel, 2013, p.668). In the late 1980's, the establishment of three very important initiatives contributed to the institutionalisation of the PM standard model: the publication of bodies of knowledge, the creation of certifications and the development of codes of ethics (Garel, 2013, p.668).

In the 1990's the creation of a new PM environment (Carayannis et al., 2005, p.2) was supported by the promotion of different standards (Blomquist & Söderholm, 2002, p.34; Bredillet, 2008, p.2, 2009a, p.2). During this time, a shift from technical matters towards more strategic aspects of the organisation took place (Crawford et al., 2006b,

p.183). This shift is considered to be part of the response to the change from mass-marketing, standardisation of products, i.e. 'one size fits all', to the innovation-based competition (Aubry & Lenfle, 2012, p.687). In addition, new technologies enabled complex organisations to work on multiple interdependent projects simultaneously (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.239) and Midler's (1995) 'projectification' evolved into the 'programmification' of the firm (Maylor et al., 2006) where organisations arrange together their interrelated projects to form a programme. Those programmes are typically part of a portfolio (Pinto & Morris, 2011), which is defined as a set of projects and programmes that share and compete for the same resources (Archer & Ghasemzadeh, 2011, p.94). Today, projects are considered a means to implement strategy, which means that programmes and portfolios in turn align the projects with the corporate strategy (Patanakul & Shenhar 2012; Morris & Pinto 2010; Thomas & Mullaly 2007; Morris & Jamieson 2005; Jugdev & Müller 2005).

In order to illustrate the evolution of PM, we built a timeline (Figure 1) demonstrating the trends in the literature. We used the division of periods recognised by Bredillet (2009a, p.2,5). These periods were distinguished considering not only the historical events, but also, the number of peer-reviewed published papers' annual growth rate. On average, the annual growth rate amounted to 15% except during the 'rise of Project Management' (1988-1994) where it experienced only 8% annual growth rate. In recent years, the growth rate dropped slightly which, according to Bredillet, may represent a period of construction/deconstruction of the field of Project Management and a symbol of stability (Bredillet, 2009a, p.5). Other hypotheses the author holds are that, either PM is diluting as a part of general management and other scientific disciplines, or that traditional management will eventually merge into PM - the PM versatile model - (Bredillet, 2009b, p.5, 2010a, p.4). Finally, the trends identified by Bredillet (2010a), Kwak and Anbari (2009) and Crawford et al. (2006b) were positioned on the timeline, representing a comparative overview of the evolution of Project Management. Especially, Kwak and Anabari's (2009) paper was incorporated to include an 'external' perspective as it measured the percentage of published papers regarding PM inside management journals (i.e. excluding PM dedicated journals). In this way, we are simultaneously analysing what happened inside and outside the PM research field.

As a general conclusion, it can be said that PM emerged and has evolved as a response to the characteristics of contemporary society that demanded new methods of management (Meredith et al., 2011, p.1). Some of these characteristics include the development of competitive global markets, the growing demand for customised goods and services, and the exponential growth and availability of knowledge (Ibid). Because of this, PM today represents an articulated collection of best practices from several disciplines such as engineering, business administration, strategy, risk management and human resource management (Garel 2013, p.663; Bredillet 2008, p.3). In addition, PM in practice and as a field of research keeps evolving (Bredillet, 2008, p.3; Crawford et al., 2006b, p.175; Kwak & Anbari, 2009, p.442), becoming more mature and at the same time more dynamic (Bredillet, 2010b, p.4).
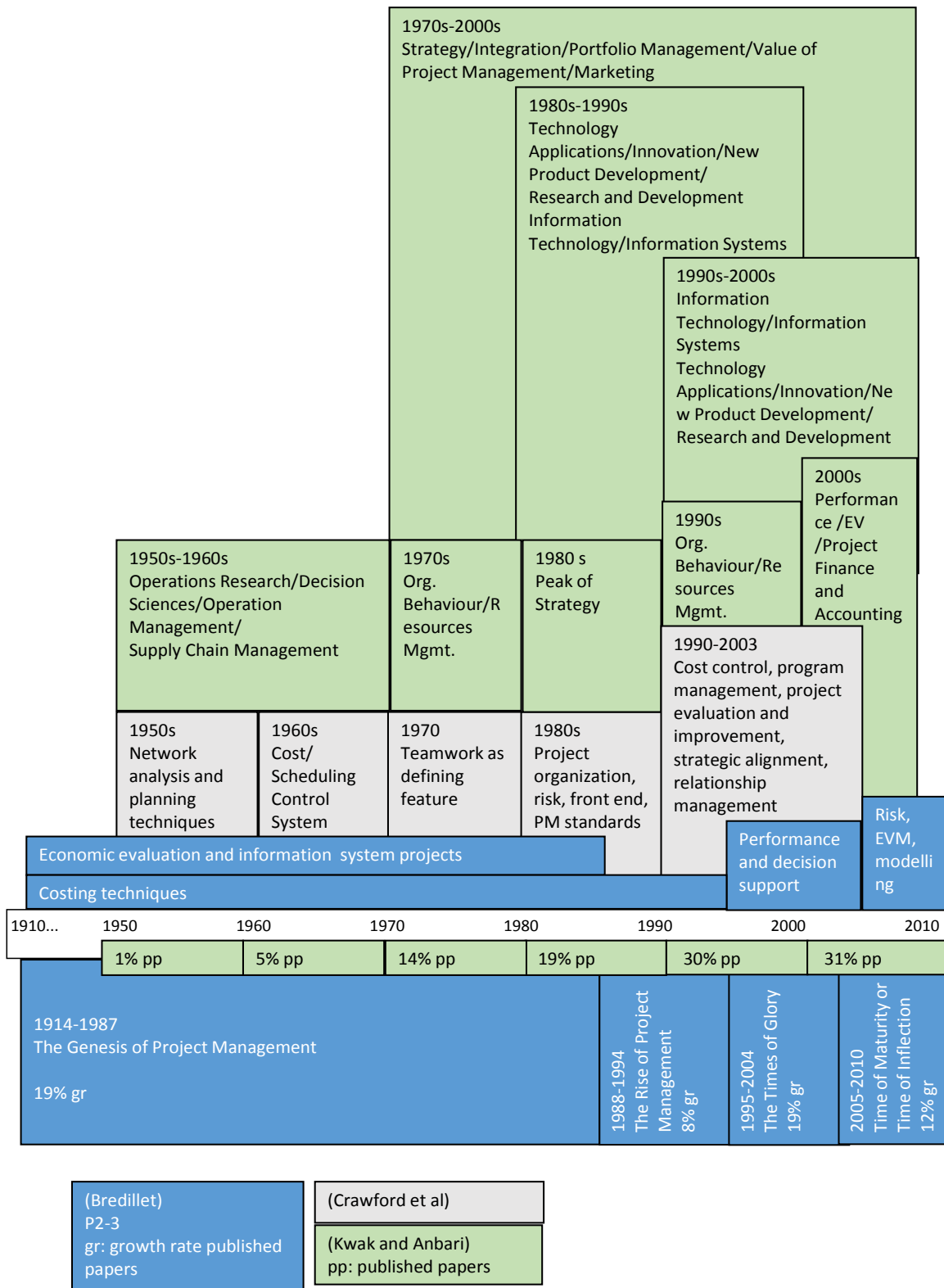
Figure 1. Trends of PM over the Years

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Bredillet 2010b; 2010a; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Kwak & Anbari 2009; Bredillet 2008; Crawford et al. 2006

2.3. Project Managers, the People behind Project Management

As shown in the previous section, PM evolved from a practice to plan, execute and control projects effectively to one of the main management disciplines that combine empirical research with solid academic theories and foundations (Kwak & Anbari, 2009, p.443). However, even if the PM literature increased considerably from the 1970's to the 1990's, there was a remarkable silence about the project manager's role during that time (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.890). Nevertheless, we can infer that the project manager role - the person in charge of applying PM practices, knowledge and methodologies to the management of projects - has evolved as well (Shenhar, 2004, p.569). During the early times of PM, the project manager's role was focused on meeting time and budget objectives in an efficient way, assuring operational performance (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.722; Shenhar, 2004, p.569). However, the traditional project manager has evolved into a project leader that deals with not only the operational, but also the strategic and human aspects of projects (Shenhar 2004, pp.569, 571). Thus, the importance of developing personal skills has overcome the one of technical skills regarding project performance (El-Sabaa, 2001, p.3).

As organisations are increasingly moving their activities to projects (Meijers, 1998, p.191), the demand in project managers has increased and so the interest in developing PM competence (Crawford, 2005, p.8). The days of following methodologies and only using tools and techniques are gone. The real role of project managers today is to learn, operate and adapt effectively to complex project environments (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.722). Project managers are no longer expected to only get the job done, but also to achieve business results (Shenhar, 2004, p.570). In consequence, they are requested to possess and develop not only technical, but also 'soft' - interpersonal - skills (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.239). Furthermore, not only the characteristics and skills of the role have changed, but also the scope and the challenges. The project manager is not only responsible for the execution of the project as he/she used to be. In these days, the project manager is responsible up to the delivery of the project to the operation team in the organisation. He/she needs to assure the integration to the organisation's processes and is accountable for the delivery of project benefits through the project's 'extended-life-cycle' - beyond project delivery. In addition, the project manager has to be able to manage the higher complexity due to the increasing interdependencies, stakeholder involvement, governance structures and the use of virtual teams (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.725).

Although the importance of the development of project managers has been recognised (Prabhakar, 2008, p.8), it is not uncommon that project managers leave the PM career to pursue one inside traditional leadership (Hölzle, 2010, p.779; Parker & Skitmore, 2005, p.212). Some of the reasons are that many project managers feel pressured by their roles and responsibilities (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.891) and that the division between executives and the project managers still prevails. Notably, although project managers are increasingly becoming a very important category of managers representing a major part of the organisation's leadership capabilities and are advancing towards higher levels of management (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.889), their career path still does not lead to the board positions (Hölzle, 2010, p.784; Meredith et al., 2011, p.112). The career pyramid (Figure 2), proposed by Hölzle (2010, p.784) illustrates it as an issue of a 'glass ceiling' prevailing in the PM career path.
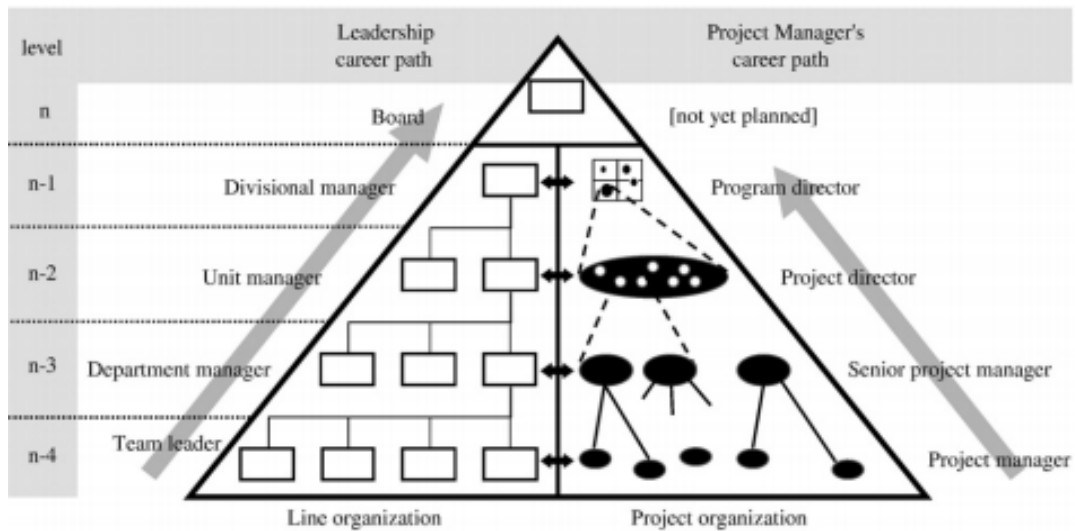
Figure 2. Matching Project Roles and Functional Leadership Positions

Source: Hölzle, 2010, p. 784

Moreover, not even project-oriented companies offer the certainty of 'climbing the ladder', but they also only provide few incentives and insufficient rewards to assume these positions (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.239; Huemann et al., 2007, p.318). In this way, PM is considered as a temporal role (Hölzle, 2010, p.779), a phase in one's career that precedes and follows another one (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.79) or as an extra activity in the job instead of a legitimate function that requires special skills (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.889; Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.239). To illustrate, the 'PMI's 2013 Salary Survey' reported that the country with the highest percentage of organisations with a formal project career path connected to upper management were the Netherlands with only 45%. The UK and even the USA, two of the most representative countries in Project Management, only reported 37% and 25%, respectively (PMI, 2013a, p.299).

In order to move away from Project Management as a temporary [managerial] role, some companies have started to introduce a formalised PM career path with the aim to create a common ground, make development opportunities for project managers transparent and attract PM competencies (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, pp.894, 897). Nevertheless, there is no universally applicable career path for project managers (Hölzle, 2010, p.783) due to the temporary nature of Project Management and lack of formal roles which meet the 'permanence' of employers wanting to bind employees to their organisations (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.899). In general, it was identified that the typical PM career models include three to four levels (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013; Hölzle, 2010, p.783). Usually those levels are based on the standards recommended by PM Institutions to legitimise their activities (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, pp.898, 900). Those career paths, or frameworks as some institutions called them, suggest different levels of project managers, each level with more responsibilities in terms of budget, complexity and size. The next suggested step is the promotion to become a programme manager where each programme is constituted of interrelated projects. At the top of the hierarchy is the portfolio manager who manages a portfolio composed of different programmes and projects in a certain region, Business Unit, strategy, budget, etc. (see for example PMI's career framework, APM's competence framework). To refine the different levels, various companies have implemented certification frameworks, corresponding to those of PM Institutions as an integral part of the career model (Bredin

& Söderlund, 2013, pp.899–900). Hence, certifications and competency are crucial for individual career advancement and for building a future career profile (Crawford et al., 2013, pp.1178, 1181).

Although the majority of the literature mainly refers to hierarchical progression and 'climbing the ladder' as career development, in reality is seems to take place differently. It appears that project managers rather prefer to participate in different projects and not necessarily intend to advance in the outlined hierarchy of the organisation. Therefore, they are inclined to move from project to project and/or across different organisations, to gain valuable experience and skills due to differences in the scope and complexity of the projects and thus, developing and advancing their career in this way. Furthermore, it could be that project managers move to the 'permanent' (i.e. functional) part of the company like for example, a line manager position in the same or a different company. This form of career development also confirms that project managers seem to be inclined towards a 'protean' or 'boundaryless' careers, which refers to people taking a pro-active initiative in terms of connections and know-how, thus, having self-direction over their career (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.901; Crawford et al., 2013, p.1184). However, there is not enough evidence to consider this as a characteristic of the role or as a consequence of the HRM neglecting career designs and possibilities to them (Hölzle, 2010, p.779). Yet, there is evidence that project managers prefer pursuing a specified path to better steer their careers (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.901). Furthermore, there is the need to believe "that PM is a true career booster" (Hölzle, 2010, p.785).

PM Institutions increasingly support organisations and project managers through their developed set of 'professional' standards reflected as certifications[1], assessment criteria, development programmes and career frameworks (Crawford 2005, p.8) which indicate the current tension within the occupation. In this way, PM Institutions provide organisations and project managers with a career path with clear job descriptions and the desired certification for each role. However, it is important to bear in mind that these PM Institutions are commercial ones and so, the frameworks come with a set of development programmes and certifications that have to be purchased from the respective institution. Nevertheless, they can also be considered as a guideline helping Human Resource Management (HRM) departments to design PM career paths.

Another issue regarding certification is that, even if today those are more a 'good to have' than a pre-requisite, they are perceived as a demonstration of a solid foundation of knowledge to competently manage projects (Crawford et al., 2006a, p.723). The assumption behind this is that, as standards define the requirements to be an effective project manager, people that meet the standards perform better. However, there is no evidence of a statistically significant relationship between performance and the proven knowledge of PM standards. Neither between the proven knowledge of standards and the senior mangers' perception of the project managers' effective performance (Crawford, 2005, pp.8, 15). Further, Fisher (2011, p.1000) identified that the most important skills a project manager needs to develop are not part of the standards and they are not reflected in the certifications. These skills are: understanding behaviours, leadership, influencing other, conflict management, cultural awareness, and the ability to understand others behaviours. Even if, PMI included interpersonal skills for the first

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[1] A list containing the majority of these resources is provided in Appendix 1.

time in its latest version of the PMBOK® [5th edition] (PMI, 2013b, p.17), these skills are difficult to assess during the certification process and cannot be learnt from a book.

The uncertainty of the careers of project managers do not only affect the project managers but also the organisations. The high turnover in these positions has a significant negative effect on the organisations' and the projects' performance (Parker & Skitmore, 2005, pp.205, 212) and represents a talent shortage due to brain drain (Crawford et al., 2013, p.1184). To avoid this, it is recommended that organisations give recognition to project managers through training programmes and clear career models including promotion criteria and opportunities to progress, using the institutions as support and guide (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.250; Hölzle, 2010, p.785; Parker & Skitmore, 2005, p.212; Shenhar & Dvir, 2007). This is assumed to ensure the motivation of project managers nurturing their desire to stay in the organisation, develop new capabilities and keep investing in their professional development (Crawford & Cabanis-Brewin, 2011, p.250). Also, organisations need to be aware that there is a direct correlation between effective talent management and project performance (Mir & Pinnington, 2014, p.215) and that project managers make the difference between project failure or project success (Prabhakar, 2008, p.8). In addition, project managers require to take personal control over their careers; embrace change, be versatile and active in shaping their own careers (El-Sabaa, 2001, p.8).

2.4. Professionalization

The term 'professional' can be found and read everywhere as it seems to have a positive underlying connotation to the public (Evetts, 2013, p.783). Therefore, the word is commonly used in society, but with different meanings. In particular, the understanding deviates greatly between an academic and layman. For example, it is common to use the word 'professional' to distinguish a hobby from a (paid) occupation while academia differentiates professions from other occupations as a granted status under specific criteria. In this thesis, we are interested in addressing professionalization from the academic perspective (i.e. professionalization theory).

2.4.1. The Trait Approach

Many attempts to impose a theoretical framework for the phenomena of professionalization have been made with varying success (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.278; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.28; Tobias, 2003, p.446). Professions were born with the purpose to protect society from fraudulent practitioners' exercise (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.35) by introducing standardised service quality. This assumes trustworthy professionals with the primary desire to serve the public interest, thus being self-regulative (Evetts, 2013, p.780). In the early 20th century, many researchers have extensively studied a functionalist approach whereby professions were considered to differentiate from an occupation by certain traits which represented the core of professional occupations (Terence, 1972, p.23) and were regarded to be readily obtainable by members of the profession through social construction (Freidson, 1986, p.107). According to the pioneers of the trait approach, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Greenwood (1957), the subsequent characteristics are identical across the typical traditional professions such as medicine, law and engineering: command and control of an esoteric body of knowledge, autonomy of practice, norm of altruism, authority over clients, distinctive occupational culture and legal recognition. Flexner (2001, p.156) summarised the identified traits by stating that "professions involve

essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation". These supposedly universal attributes allowed market closure and knowledge monopoly (Freidson, 1986, p.107). Consequently, professionals held influential positions, mainly of power and became prestigious and central participants within wider society (Evetts, 2013, p.780; Hanlon, 1998, p.49; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.29). The following table (Table 1) exemplifies the characteristics of the trait approach introduced above.

Traits of a Profession	Explanation of the Trait of Profession
Esoteric BOK	Members have a monopoly on understanding and applying BOK
Autonomy of practice	Members control the standards of society
Norm of altruism	Members act in best interest of client
Authority over clients	Professionals control the client/practitioner relationship
Distinctive occupational culture	Occupation is set apart by a distinctive set of norms, values and symbols
Legal Recognition	Usually legal requirement for specific training and preparation prior to practice

Table 1. Characteristics of the Trait Approach

Source: Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.266

2.4.2. The Process-Oriented Approach

However, the trait approach was heavily criticised for being too ideological and ignoring historical context of the respective profession (Saks, 2012, p.2). Hence, Wilensky (1964, pp.142–145) suggested viewing professionalization as a process where a typical sequence of events, ranging from the emergence of a full-time occupation over the establishment of training schools and professional associations, to political agitation to seek legal protection of the monopoly and the adoption of a formal ethical code and conduct, determines the degree of professionalism. In other words, due to the need of social structure, many workers have been involved in similar or the same work which results in the creation of a full-time occupation. Consequently, work knowledge and skills are required to perform the job. Therefore, training and educational programmes are established. In a next step, professional associations consolidate the professional community and control expert labour. Certifications and licenses are developed and introduced to differentiate the profession from occupations. During this stage, competitions of neighbouring professions over the scope of duties of the profession are likely to occur. Additionally, political actions such as lobbying for legal protection, restrictions and recognition for the title and work activities take place. In the last stage, an established code of ethics which serves as the foundation for internal and external relationships is adopted by the professional group (Curnow & McGonigle, 2006, p.288,289). This process was considered to facilitate and maintain social closure to the profession in order to maintain exclusiveness and power among practitioners (Abbott, 1988, p.35). This perspective could be understood as a rather structural form of occupational control which undergoes a constant iterative process of development as actions from one stage can have an effect on the previous one and subsequently may have an effect on the orientation of the profession as a whole (Evans, 2008, p.27).

Hence, the different stages may overlap to a certain extent and do not necessarily have to occur in the sequence outlined above.

Figure 3 illustrates the process-oriented approach in the 'typical' sequence while the arrows between the stages reflect the iterative processes between them.
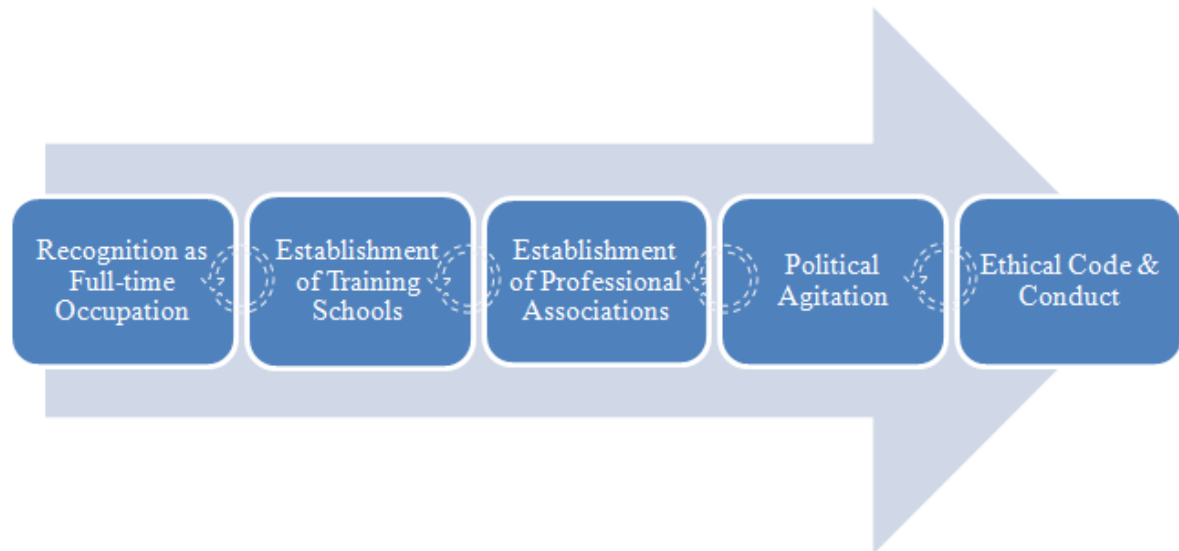
Figure 3. The Process-Oriented Approach to Profession

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Wilensky, 1964

Even though Wilensky's process-oriented approach could be considered as a valuable contribution to move beyond the rigid approach of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933), Greenwood (1957) and Flexner (2001) yet, it was still considered too functional and criticised for the lack of causal explanations (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.278), ignorance of power issues (Hodgson, 2002, p.805) and changes in historical conditions (Abbott, 1988, p.17; Terence, 1972, p.30). On the other hand, a rapid expansion of many professions during the 1960's confirmed Wilensky's process-oriented approach (Hodgson, 2007, p.217). However, in the 1970's professionalization theory came under review (cf. Johnson, 1972) and emphasised "the institutionalised form of the control of occupations" (Johnson, 1972, p.38). Due to changes in organisational structure, the rise of market orientation and globalisation (Evans, 2008, p.21), several emerging occupations (often referred to as knowledge-based or expert occupations) developed outside the traditional patterns of professionalization. In order to be successful, knowledge-based occupations have adopted a more innovative, entrepreneurial strategy which entails active engagement in the market. This led to a shift in focus from an explicit interest in professions (Abbott, 1988, p.63; Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.281) and professionalization, to a focus in professionalism which is concerned with macro [society], meso [community] and micro [individuals, work place] levels (Evetts, 2013, p.784). Therefore, the "golden age" (Freidson, 2001, p.182) was over and a "new" form of professionalism emerged where boundaries in all respects became relatively blurred instead of being clearly defined (Abbott, 1988, p.65; Evetts, 2013, p.781; Saks, 2012, p.6). Evetts (2013, pp.785–786) argued that this contemporary discourse lies between an optimistic and pessimistic view of professionalization. This means that elements of both, the classical view as well as new strategies and logics can be observed. This reflects that the traditional approaches are not (fully) rejected and continue to be relevant in contemporary analysis (Evetts, 2013, p.782; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.28).

This highlights the "importance of examining these journeys [professional developments] carefully and critically in the light of the history of the relevant occupations and their place in the labour market" (Tobias, 2003, p.449).

Gorman and Sandefur (2011, p.290) came to a similar conclusion. They argued that four central themes, namely expert knowledge, autonomy, normative orientation grounded in the community and rewards represent the continuity between classical and contemporary research, but in a modified form because of external changes. Nevertheless, societal and political developments and changes brought about ambivalent issues of power and market interest which challenge the process of professional formation (Saks, 2012, p.5).

2.4.3. New Professionalism

Expert knowledge and education was traditionally what distinguished professionals from 'normal' workers (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.30). It was considered to be of utmost importance in order to raise standards of competence and increase barriers to entry (Saks, 2012, p.1; Tobias, 2003, p.453). However, as an outcome of 'marketisation' (Evans, 2008, p.21; Freidson, 2001, p.15), the accessibility of knowledge by lay people has increased through information technology and general technological developments during the last years. In consequence, the legitimisation of expert knowledge has decreased (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.282; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.30), questioning its importance (Evetts, 2013, p.779) and threatening its exclusive jurisdiction (Wilensky, 1964, p.146). Furthermore, Evan (2008, p.21) pointed out a de-professionalization to occur, instead of a new form of professionalism. In an attempt to counteract a decrease in professional autonomy, high status and rewards, Wilensky (1964, p.149) argued for the importance of indeterminacy. Larson (1977, p.40) realised the importance of knowledge development and practitioners' training as a central issue for professionalization. Tobias (2003, pp.450–451) specified this, and called for a tactical shift in experts' knowledge to add value. He claimed that it is necessary to move from standardised, readily available technical knowledge to liberal functional knowledge which embraces lifelong learning and provides a sense of direction by creating value and beliefs. Ideally, the wider context, namely social, political and economic forces should be taken into account as well. This highlights the importance of tacit, experiential knowledge required (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.282). Contrary, expert knowledge has also been used to standardise and develop best practices which limit creativity and pursuit of excellence by practitioners (Tobias, 2003, p.452). Yet more crucial, it can lead to codification of work which implies a shift in control to external forces (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.282; Hanlon, 1998, p.43). Consequently, professionals have gradually lost control over their body of knowledge which is expected to weaken further in the future (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36).

Additionally, most professionals are part of large organisations with targets, quality models and cost control while facing rough competition. The resulting bureaucratised organisational structures led to alternative, but conflicting forms of professionalism (Hall, 1968, p.92), which in turn led to a redistribution of power and autonomy within the profession. Individual autonomy, control and the service ideal decreased meanwhile the profession as a whole has been able to maintain its power and dominant position (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.285). As a consequence, professional groups became heterogeneous and the power lies with the employers (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.284), thus facing organisational control. The change from occupational control where authority was based on professional discretionary decision-making, to organisational

control characterised by standardised work practices, external regulation and accountability; has transformed professionalism to promote and facilitate organisational professionalism and occupational change, hence commercialising professions (Evetts, 2013, p.787; Hanlon, 1998, p.51).

In essence, new emerging occupations have lost autonomy, service orientation and prestige which results in a struggle of power and trust towards professionals. Instead, attention shifted to power and interest outside the particular occupation, namely the state, capital and general public (Freidson, 2001, p.214; Hanlon, 1998, p.51). Therefore, monopolistic market closure and self-regulation are difficult to achieve, but perhaps those are not even desirable anymore (Hodgson & Muzio, 2010, p.107; Paton et al., 2013, p.227). Consequently, legislation, commerce and insurance will be in the centre of attention in the future (Hanlon, 1998, p.57; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.28).

As can be seen, researchers have not yet come to a consensus about professionalism (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.278). The core of professionalism is still debated due to implicit assumptions (Freidson, 1994, p.169) and being in the process of a potential paradigm shift to adapt to the contemporary environment (Evans, 2008, p.21). Thus, in order to avoid ambiguity and due to personal conviction, in this thesis, we consider professionalization from the traditional perspective comprising traits (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Flexner, 2001; Greenwood, 1957) as well as the process identified by Wilensky (1964) which, according to Evetts (2013, p.782) and Hughes and Hughes (2013, p.28), are still relevant and valid. In fact, in practice analogy is often drawn between traditional professions and emerging occupations (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.280).

As mentioned earlier, unique knowledge and skill sets of economic value, higher levels of prestige and autonomy, are what traditionally distinguished professionals from non-professionals (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.30). Therefore, professionals play a key role in professionalization because no profession can exist without professionals. Thus, it is crucial to understand how these professionals make sense of their environment, why they think about it as they do, why they do what they do (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.334) and where they place themselves within this environment (Walsh & Gordon, 2008, p.48). Hence, construction of professional identity in the sense of career identity creates a powerful link between what professionals know and what they really do (i.e. their role and corresponding behaviours) (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36). Professional identity, as a characteristic of the definition of a profession, is often neglected (Ibid). However, we consider this aspect to be of great importance because practitioners are the ones who drive and determine the process of professionalization (Gold et al., 2002, pp.52–53). Therefore, considering identity in the context of professionalization shifts the focus to individual subjective perceptions and reflects a more refined understanding.

2.5. Professional Identity

Identity is understood as a multidimensional and multifaceted concept which incorporates different loci and is broadly applicable to various phenomena (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.7). It can be studied from an individual or collective perspective. For the purpose of this thesis, the individual perspective will be considered. Further, individual identity, can be understood at an independent or interdependent, personal or social level. In this thesis, individual identity is studied from an interdependent social level as our interest lies in how individuals identify with careers and the interdependent influence

that social interactions have on it. The concept of identity offers a powerful way to grasp contemporary organisational settings, including relations of control and resistance (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.9). Therefore, its value lies in bridging the micro (self) and macro (social) levels (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.7; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001, p.61; Ybema et al., 2009, p.300).

For the purpose of this thesis, professional identity, often referred to as occupational or work identity, is of particular interest. It is relevant to point out that this thesis focuses on professional identity at the individual level, as our purpose is to study the individual perceptions. In a broader sense, Schein (1978) defined professional identity in clear terms as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (cited in Ibarra, 1999, pp.764–765). Therefore, the focus lays on the individual self and the identification with the career on a personal level, which is controllable by the individual (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.86).

Traditionally, professional identification was described as a rather passive or reactive process. The individual was "ascribed" into the profession through a fixed path consisting of different phases. Thus, the development of professional identities was a by-product of each career stage (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Weber & Ladkin, 2011) where individuals were inevitably part of the collective and individual professional identity did not play a role as it was a rather unconscious process (Meijers, 1998, p.191). Nowadays, as organisations became more turbulent and due to the current decrease of permanent working contracts and long-term company attachments, professional identity has become more individualised and (pro-) active in nature (Kirpal, 2004, p.218). As a result of the weaker organisational relationships, the individual's desire for identification is expected to increase (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.326) by actively seeking feedback and increased self-awareness. Hence, professional identity is regarded to be socially constructed.

Professional identity is part of organisational identification – identification with the employer – which in turn has its roots in social identification (Weber & Ladkin, 2011, p.169). Most frequently cited and originally formulated by Tajfel (1978, p.63), social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". The group (macro level) in turn, provides the individual with a framework within which to source aspects to construct social identity (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001, p.61). This suggests social identity to be a reciprocal approach where society has an influence on which occupations are accepted (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.88) and individuals shape the boundaries of an occupation by the extent to which those align their notion of self with collective identities (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.10).

In brief, professional identity is an overarching, almost negotiated concept that forms, shapes and reshapes individual selves through interaction with others (Beech et al., 2008, p.959; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.89). Thus, generally speaking, it is concerned with the question "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" and "How should I act?" (Alvesson, 2000, p.1105, 2004, p.189).

2.5.1. Components of Professional Identification

Since we are viewing professional identity as a social phenomenon, we draw on social identity theory for the determination of the components of professional identification. Social identification has been formulated in various ways, ranging from narrow to broad. The narrow end is concerned with three intertwined, but separate components (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.371) which represent the core characteristics of social identification, hence are central to identity construction (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.329). Those components were originally defined by Tajfel (1982, p.2) and include a cognitive and an evaluative element. An emotional element is usually associated with the former ones.

The *cognitive component* deals with one's awareness of membership in a social group. Thus, it is the "perception of oneness with, or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p.135) which occurs as a starting point for thinking and relating (Alvesson, 2004, p.191). Each social group provides a sense of identity to its members which can be chosen to be incorporated or excluded in their individual identities. Social groups that are perceived to enhance a member's self-image are more likely to be adopted (Alvesson, 2000, p.1106; Walsh & Gordon, 2008, p.48,50). This implies personal distinctiveness and the answer to the question "Who am I?". Ashforth et al. (2008, p.329) suggested that self-categorisation can happen either through "affinity" (oneself being similar to a role) or by emulating a desired role, meaning oneself has to adapt and reformulate his/her identity. The latter involves sensebreaking and sensegiving which requires a greater portion of information concerning the expectations of being a group member. In fact, the former is a smoother and less intense process, but it typically follows periods of emulation (Ibid, p. 346). Usually, individuals constantly compare themselves to others and in this way, they place themselves in particular groups and out of other groups (Walsh & Gordon, 2008, p.55). Additionally, self-categorisation is affected by relative group size (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.371). Usually individuals tend to acknowledge stronger in-group identification when the group is small. Isolating effects of group status, membership in smaller groups is more attractive and makes it more exclusive given its distinctiveness (Ibid, p. 374). Furthermore, given the effects of self-categorisation by affinity and emulation, individuals rather seek membership in smaller groups because the individual self is more similar to the collective self (role). Therefore, it is assumed to engage in a smoother process of identification and moreover the individual has the opportunity to maintain some sense of individuality (Ibid).

However, the process of classifying the social environment is influenced by personal values, cultures and images (Beech et al., 2008, p.963). Therefore, the *evaluative component* is concerned with value connotations. It reflects the importance an individual assigns to the respective group membership or role, thus self-esteem (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.373). As a result, identity claims made during self-categorisation can be acknowledged, discarded or ignored (Beech et al., 2008, p.963). This could also be argued to be connected to the status of the group. Several authors investigated that in-group identification is negatively influenced by lower status groups, whereas a higher group status typically leads to stronger identification (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.373). However, Ellemers et al. (1999, p.374) claimed the issue of group status to be paradoxical arguing that, precisely because of lower group status, its members are supposed to demonstrate in-group favouritism to enhance their social identity.

Yet, it is argued that identification "engages more than our cognitive self-categorisation and our brains, it engages our hearts" (Harquail, 1998, p.225). The *emotional component* of social identification addresses the individual's involvement with the group/role, thus, affective commitment (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.372). How one feels about his/her occupation depends on the organisational situation and vicissitudes of organisational life. Moreover, if knowing who you are and dedicating subjective importance to it, an individual is looking for sources of pride to be positively affected. Hence, the more positive an individual is influenced, the stronger he/she identifies with "I am... and it is important to me" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.329). That is, the more positively a group is assessed by an individual, the stronger would be the individual's affective commitment and vice versa (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.373). Consequently, the emotional component is considered to be the key determinant because it acts like an essential regulator to avoid identity threat and perhaps also identity conflicts (Ibid, p. 374). Furthermore, it is argued that affective commitment occurs depending on the nature of individual's inclusion in a particular group or role. Ellemers et al. (1999, p.375) distinguished between assigned versus self-selected (or achieved) group memberships. They claimed that active application of membership by an individual, e.g. a job application or a student applying for a Master's programme, show greater commitment in terms of solidarity and expected behaviour even when the group happens to be unsuccessful. Affective commitment is amplified when the individual has self-selected the group membership or when the group has a high status. This explains why individuals may be highly committed to a relatively lower status group. On the contrary, individuals tend to distance themselves from a group and show reluctant behaviours if assigned to a majority group size, which as suggested above, does not offer the opportunity for an individual to distinguish oneself within the group (Ibid, p. 385).

Ashforth et al. (2008, p.330) took it a step further by examining the content of identity in the organisational context which comprises values (What I care about…); goals (What I want…); beliefs (What I believe…); stereotypic traits (What I generally do…) and knowledge, skills and abilities (What I can do…). Those attributes are said to be fundamental and distinctive, hence portraying what it means to be, for example, a project manager, and reflect some kind of prototype. Therefore, the more content attributes one embodies and accepts as his/her own, the more akin one is to the prototype of the occupation and the stronger is the identity (Ibid, p. 330-331). However, contrary to the core attributes, these characteristics are more independent in the sense that sometimes an individual does not accept certain attributes of a role and therefore may simply be absent in the respective identity (Ibid, p. 331). Due to the fact that individuals may identify with multiple identities (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.351; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.371), a clash between the contents of those leads to an identity conflict which abandons identification with one or both loci. To solve the dilemma, identities have to be re-negotiated or cognitively discarded (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.335). For example, during career transitions, it can often be observed that individuals decouple prior role identities to ensure a smooth transition into their new role. On the other hand, a potential identity conflict arises if, for example, subsidiary managers consider their role identity distinctive rather than nested within the organisation's (collective) identity (Ibid, p. 358).

The broadest formulation of social identification is concerned with what people do, namely their behaviour (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.331). Though, this should rather be

understood as a probabilistic outcome than a necessary component of the concept of social identification.

Figure 4 illustrates the components of social identification as discussed above. The two-sided arrow between the core of identity and the content of identity as well as the dotted line around the core of identity indicate that social identity usually, but not necessarily contains each of the content attributes of identity. Sometimes it may occur that attributes are relatively unclear, tacit, emergent or not widely articulated, instead of being enacted (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.331). Then, the set of attributes of the core and the content of identity influence the behaviours of people.
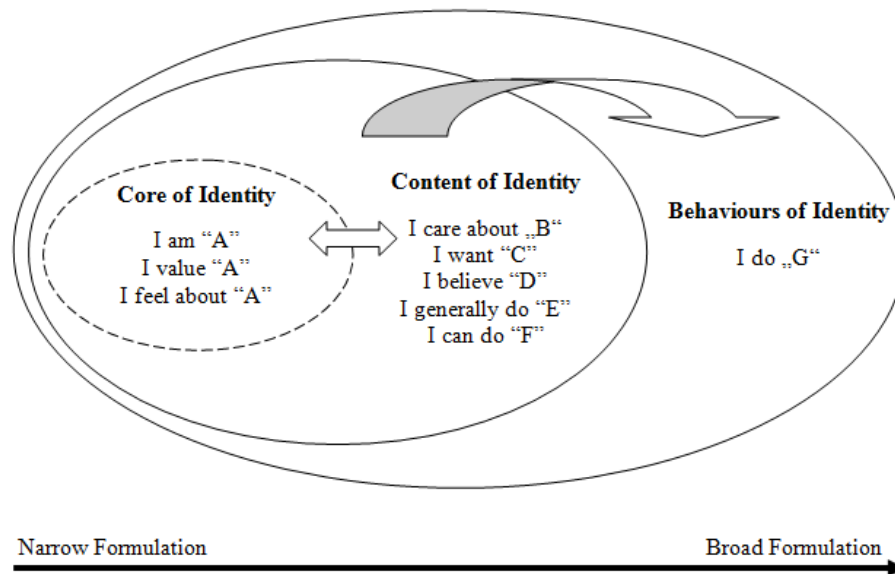
Figure 4. The Components of Social Identification

Source: Adapted from Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 330

In essence, the concept of professional identification provides insights into why individuals join particular occupations and why they decide against others, why they approach their jobs the way they do and why interaction with others takes place the way it does during their work (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.338).

2.5.2. Professional Identity Construction

While identity has been considered as a fixed construct, recent literature suggests adopting a more postmodernist view. Contemporary researchers (e.g. Belova, 2010, p.68) suggested identity construction to be a more dynamic, ongoing and discursive process. The focus is put on a transition from being (static) to becoming (fluid) (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.13; Ashforth et al., 2008, p.339; Beech et al., 2008, p.957; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1167). This implies that identities are rather open and achieved than closed and given (Belova, 2010, p.69). Ybema et al. (2009, p.301) proposed the following definition: "'identity formation' might be conceptualized as a complex, multifaceted process which produces a socially negotiated temporary outcome of the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self-presentation and labelling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance".

Lindgren and Wåhlin (2001, pp.357–359) argued that individuals who frequently transcend between organisations (e.g. project manager) have difficulties in developing a stable professional identity over time, because they only spend comparably little time in

an organisation. According to Smith (2011, p.681) those individuals engage in various forms of professional identity. As a consequence, individuals draw on networks across organisational boundaries as a social base. According to this perspective, Lindgren and Wåhlin (2001, p.358) suggested that individuals use repeated self-reflexion and conscious social interaction to develop their identity. This is an ongoing process which shapes identities while an individual moves through several organisational environments, i.e. different phases of one's working life.

Furthermore, individuals may engage in identity work which is defined as a continuous mental activity (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.15) of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). What may seem to appear an unproblematic process at first glance turns out to be different in reality. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p.1188) indicated identity work to be a struggle which deals with various discourses, roles and narratives which can either reinforce or constrain identity work while being in search for personal meaning, integration and comfort. Also educational background and professional rhetoric play a role in this process (Alvesson, 2004, p.219). By the interaction with others, identity work can be transformed into a more conscious process through self-openness or self-doubt (Beech et al., 2008, p.961). Particularly, Alvesson et al. (2008, p.15) suggested that this higher level of awareness about identity is mainly evoked by crisis, transitions in life or discontinuities. For example Ibarra (1999, p.765) noted that major shifts in career such as the transition between jobs or from school to work are main opportunities for identity development to take place.

Pratt et al. (2006, p.235) found that a mismatch between the interconnected identities (who people are) and their work (what people do) trigger identity construction. They claimed to resolve the problem through interrelated and various work learning cycles. Under those circumstances, more concentrated identity work takes place (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165) and individuals' self-reflexion increases (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.369). Individuals reflect outwardly as well as inwardly about past, present and future desires (Ibid). This requires a coherent narrative that is verified and regarded as credible (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p.141). A coherent narrative shows how an individual connects to the context and makes sense of it. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to both, inward and outward reflexion and identity work. Also Watson (2008, p.127) recognised the necessity to focus on both, the internal (self identity) and external (social identity) element of identity work. He understood that "identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives" (Ibid, p. 129).

Language and presentation in daily life serve as a medium for insights about reality (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.361; Ybema et al., 2009, p.301). Those relatively coherent (Watson, 2008, p.129) narratives give an insight about who people are and who they want to become by unfolding their life period by period (Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001, p.65). Thereby individuals are assumed to satisfy their needs for self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-continuity (Clarke et al., 2009, p.324). Belova (2010, p.68) saw identity as a polyphonic which consists of multiple discourses and the relationships between the different episodes that it comprises. Self-narratives can be considered as a discursive struggle since the fragile outcomes of social interaction can facilitate coherence and integration, but also fragmentation and conflicts (Sveningsson &

Alvesson, 2003, p.1163). Regardless of how it turns out, narratives can serve as a potential source for self-enhancement and self-consistency with regards to identity construction (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.334).

From the discussion above about the core components of professional identification, it becomes clear to us that all components are interdependent; though the affective component probably has the biggest impact on behaviours. However, it is important to note that the independent effects of the different core components and its associated group characteristics can reinforce each other when combined (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.385). In this way, professional identity is constructed through an iterative process of self-reflexion and conscious social interaction (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, pp.357–359) that shapes and reshapes the core, the content and the behaviours of the individual selves (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.330; Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.89). Moreover, professional identity is a continuous mental activity (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.15) that, even if it is shaped by shared experiences, backgrounds, formal education and/or membership of a professional association (Evetts, 2013, p.780), it is not attached to, or dependable on those (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.32). It is particularly important to us to clarify that professional identity is not exclusively addressing professions or being exclusively for people executing a profession. Even if the same word 'professional' is used, everybody can construct a professional identity. For example, as a student we can claim to have developed one, however, this does not make being a student a profession. Nonetheless, one of the characteristics of a profession is that its 'members' or 'practitioners' i.e. professionals, develop a professional identity towards that profession (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p.86).

2.6. Professionalization of Project Management

As stated earlier, continuous debates whether Project Management is an occupation which deserves professional status has been taken place during the last half century (Hodgson, 2007, p.232). It continuously works on its recognition as a profession and on the definition of the field (Bredillet, 2008, p.2). However, PM as a "theory" still competes against the status of "professional" Project Management (Garel, 2013, p.664). PM evolved as an accidental occupation where nobody planned to become a project manager (Pinto & Kharbanda, 1995, p.42) and it was merely considered a neutral toolkit being generic in nature (Hodgson, 2002, p.816).

At present, Project Management is more identified as a career choice (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225) which is reflected, for example, in the expansion of education programmes (Crawford et al., 2006a). However, as Hodgson (2002, p.804) pointed out, "the expansion of Project Management (...) relies heavily upon its promotion as a professional discipline". Indeed, PM professional associations have chosen professionalism as a medium to promote the occupation (Hodgson, 2005, p.57, 2007, p.230). The institutions claim Project Management to be a profession and they all use the words "Project Management Profession" to describe themselves (APM, 2014c; IPMA, 2014; PMAJ, 2014; PMI, 2014a). However, as noted by Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.266), Hodgson (2007, p.219), Morris et al. (2006, p.711) and Hodgson (2005, p.56), not everyone agrees with this view (yet) and claimed PM to be a semi-profession, emerging profession or para-profession. They also argued that Project Management definitely has the potential to become a true profession, but currently is only possessing or has developed some of the traits required to attain the professional status.

On the contrary, there are doubts whether, in the contemporary environment any occupation could achieve traditional professional status (Paton et al., 2013, p.227). Muzio et al. (2011, p.445) defined Project Management to aspire "corporate professionalism" which is more business-oriented and concerned with adding value to the client. Paton et al. (2013, p.228) agreed with this perspective, and argued that it is only achievable at a particular price. Styhre (2006, p.271) claimed that the professionalization of Project Management entails to rediscover understandings of conventional management while other researchers (e.g. Hodgson, 2002, p.819; Hodgson et al., 2011, p.380) still consider Project Management to merely be a professional discipline.

Much of what has been thrown in the 'melting pot' for discussion centres around the professional body, the duties and role of a project manager, and educational and academic development. Thus, in terms of professionalization of Project Management, opinions are divided about where it stands and in which direction it will develop. Therefore, looking at the development of professional institutions and the development of the field of Project Management can provide insights into the current status of PM as a profession. Recalling from section 2.4 on professionalization, researchers are still searching for the 'core' of professionalism. Hence, in this thesis a traditional view on professionalization will be adopted since it is not considered irrelevant or obsolete (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.290; Hodgson, 2007, p.232). Zwerman et al. (2004, p.151) even found that, opposite as one would expect, Project Management resembles traditional professions more closely than emerging professions. For instance, while moving into the 21st century, knowledge oriented occupations such as nursing and social work realised the similarity to traditional professions and engaged in the professionalization project in order to obtain the associated recognition and privileges. Likewise, Project Management embarked on a similar journey whereby professional associations intent to further the professionalization initiatives (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.265).

2.6.1. Project Management as a Profession

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we are now looking at PM in terms of professionalization, namely its current status. In section 2.4 on professionalization, different sociological perspectives, considering traditional professions were introduced. According to the trait perspective, certain characteristics must be present in order to consider an occupation a profession. Furthermore, there is a process involved in moving from an occupation to become a profession, which embraces various steps to emulate the traits of established professions (Hodgson, 2005, p.56) while political pressures involved in the process are dealt with. Due to the fact that, assessment of professionalization entails the evaluation of the traits (i.e. what a profession looks like) and the process (i.e. who does what and why) by which the traits are realised (Morris et al., 2006, p.711), the assessment of the current status of project management as a profession will be carried out along those perspectives. Moreover, the implications for practitioners, the challenges and possible concerns will be addressed.

2.6.2. Current Status of Project Management

To evaluate the current professional status of Project Management, we will draw on the work of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Greenwood (1957) (see Section 2.4.1 on professionalization) by applying the shared characteristics [traits] identified for traditional professions to Project Management.

Having exclusive control and command of an esoteric and systematic body of knowledge means to draw on a monopoly on applying the body of knowledge. Therefore, abstract concepts and formal education are necessary to form a monopoly of knowledge and skills (Freidson, 2001, pp.34–35). In the context of Project Management, the problem occurs on one hand because PM struggles to define and lay claim of an esoteric body of knowledge (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.156) and on the other hand, it appears that other professional groups (e.g. architects, engineers, IT specialists) have already laid claim to control the PM body of knowledge (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269). Furthermore, claims are made around the control of processes and not as usual, around the content (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.156). Even though PM bodies of knowledge so far have failed to convincingly argue that the knowledge improves the ability to deliver projects (Morris et al., 2006, p.713), it is considered a step in the right direction in terms of knowledge claims (Crawford, 2005, p.8,15; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269). Nonetheless, knowledge is still available to anyone who wishes to study Project Management (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.156), meaning that it is codified too easy.

In terms of autonomy of practice, incumbents control the standards of society, as only those individuals have the capability to understand and practice the field of work. Therefore, it is assumed that outside interference in terms of dictating professionals what or how to do their work (Freidson, 1986, p.170), would harm the professional work. Currently, not only PM, but also all established as well as emerging professions are struggling to achieve autonomy (Evans, 2008, p.24; Wilensky, 1964, p.156). This is caused by the fact that almost without exception, project managers work in big corporations nowadays where a claim for autonomy of practice is rarely recognised (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.284; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.157) because project managers have to comply with priorities, tactics and structures of the employer (Hodgson & Muzio, 2010, p.115). Instead, members make contributions to the standard of practice (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.268).

Members of traditional professions never acted out of self-interest, but rather in accordance with the service ideal for clients and the community (Evetts, 2013, p.780). Project Management, however, has always been defined in functional and economic terms and thus, it has never been considered to provide an altruistic service to society (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.268; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.157). It is also questionable if an occupation like Project Management can and has to act in an altruistic way. Since many different stakeholders are involved in the management of projects, it may be impossible to act solely in the interest of the client and neglect the interest of the organisation. Especially because organisations, which execute the project, largely use PM in a strategic way to facilitate and contribute to their own business success (Morris & Jamieson, 2005).

Usually, professionals control the relationship of client and practitioner. However, in the case of Project Management it is the other way around and clients have authority over project manager because those are employees of big organisations and typically not involved in the front-end of the project (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.268; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.157). However, since the front-end is a crucial part because it is where negotiations take place, the involvement of the project manager would provide him/her with the bigger picture of the respective project (Morris et al., 2006, p.718).

Through a distinctive set of norms, values and symbols, a professional occupation differs from others (Evans, 2008, p.24). However, in the field of Project Management there is no defined occupational culture. Nevertheless, certain aspects can be found such

as the 'language' of Project Management spoken during work and networking meetings. Despite, it is argued that Project Management still lacks a well-established community of practice which comes together on a regular basis (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.157).

The probably most important characteristic among all is the <u>governmental recognition</u> of the professional practice because it acknowledges that the occupation and its members deserve special status and privileges. In addition, it is recognised that specific training and preparation are required prior to practice. In the context of Project Management, the availability of several voluntary certifications is regarded as an initial step towards formal certifications and licensing. However to date, no jurisdiction legally recognised an exclusive PM practice and therefore professional status (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.268; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.157).

In order to give an overview of the current status of Project Management discussed above, Table 2 illustrates the comparison of the identified traits of a profession with the status of those traits in Project Management.

Traits of a Profession	Explanation of the Trait of Profession	Application of the Trait of Profession to PM
Esoteric BOK	Members have a monopoly on understanding and applying BOK	No – BOKs are beginning to be recognized but are still highly contested
Autonomy of practice	Members control the standards of society	No – members contribute to the standards of practice
Norm of altruism	Members act in best interest of client	Usually not – societal impact of failed projects not recognized
Authority over clients	Professionals control the client/practitioner relationship	Usually not – project manager tend to work within organizations
Distinctive occupational culture	Occupation is set apart by a distinctive set of norms, values and symbols	Possibly – certain aspects exist
Legal Recognition	Usually legal requirement for specific training and preparation prior to practice	Not yet – PM not legally recognized as a profession by any jurisdiction

Table 2. The Current Status of Project Management

Source: Combined based on Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.266,268

From the aforementioned analysis and Table 2 it gets clear that Project Management as an occupation has not (yet) achieved the majority of the traits which characterise a traditional profession. Therefore, it appears to be more beneficial to look at the process of professionalization of Project Management, where it is inevitable to take into account the historical, economic, social and political context (Morris et al., 2006, p.711).

2.6.3. Becoming a Profession

Several attempts have been made to define the process along which an occupation moves when trying to pursue professional status. As already pointed out in section 2.4.2, there has never been a single process identified (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.278). Even if identified steps were taken, they were not necessarily taken in the same

sequence (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.158). Therefore, the steps of the process may overlap and be entangled. Nonetheless, the process-oriented perspective on professionalization draws attention to the fact that professions do not arouse fully developed and therefore we consider this perspective to be helpful for any occupation seeking professional status. In the following we will adopt the work of Wilensky (1964), as introduced in section 2.4.2.

Full-time occupation

The first step towards professionalization usually entails Project Management to be recognised as a full-time occupation instead of a skill or tool-kit which is required and can be applied to many occupations (Hodgson, 2002, p.816). According to Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.268) Project Management seems to be recognised as an occupation. It has been argued that Project Management can be regarded as a part-time or a full-time occupation (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.158). Especially with the "projectification" and the transformation of many companies to project-oriented companies, employees usually spend their full working time on the projects (Eskerod & Riis, 2009, p.4; Meredith et al., 2011, p.112; Midler, 1995).

Training and education

To increase perceptions of society and the chances to upgrade to professional status, comprehensive higher-level educational programmes are indispensable (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.136). During the last decade, an increasing number of academic disciplines including Project Management as undergraduate and graduate degree programmes have emerged around the globe. This can be considered as a crucial step towards professionalization as eventually those students may consider themselves professional project managers (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.156). Furthermore, it acts as a link between research and education meanwhile advancing PM as an academic discipline. However, even though many educational programmes are in place and have been expanded (Hodgson, 2002, p.807), most of the training still happens in connection with professional associations (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.159).

Establishment of professional associations

In traditional professions, professional associations denote the centre of control. They are considered to act as mediators between practitioners and the outside world by representing, supporting and protecting practitioners' interests as well as enforcing practice standards (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.283). This, in turn, has an influence on the profession's power accruing. In the field of Project Management, several local and global professional associations arouse which on one hand compete against one another for recognition and authority (Hodgson, 2002, p.808), but on the other hand cooperate to increase the likelihood of Project Management to achieve professional status (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.270). On a global level, IPMA, which acts as the coordinator of international initiatives (Muzio et al., 2011, p.456) and the American PMI, have developed. On a local level, various associations can be found such as AIPM, APM and PMAJ. Additionally, global efforts have been proposed to combine and integrate a global approach to Project Management and, possibly laying the foundation for the formation for a global profession (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.271). Other researchers (cf. Allen, 1995, p.79; Muzio et al., 2011, p.456) had also recognised this need and its benefits; in particular due to the fact that projects often cross jurisdictional lines.

The creation of documents of a Project Management body of knowledge in the 1980's formed a significant stage and prerequisite in the process to professionalise (Allen, 1995, p.77; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.174). First efforts were concerned with establishing and publicising a coherent, distinctive and effective ontology, terminology and competence set in order to claim monopoly expertise and demarcate the field of Project Management (Hodgson, 2002, pp.804, 806, 2005, p.57; Morris et al., 2006, p.719). Since then, several updates to the standards of practice have been implemented in the bodies of knowledge (Morris et al., 2006, p.711) causing a shift from an "information-structure reference" to a "professionalism-authority reference" (Allen, 1995, p.77). Undoubtedly, this shift in direction will have significant effects on Project Management practitioners in terms of work and career (Allen, 1995, p.78). Evidently, the Project Management bodies of knowledge are important to practitioners since, such practice standards to a certain extend, determine best practices, training, development and views on competence by the industry (Morris et al., 2006, p.719).

Even if, the creation and maintenance of the different bodies of knowledge is present and could be assumed as a step into the right direction, it has been questioned if these professional associations have the potential to operate as professional bodies in the traditional sense (Morris et al., 2006, p.710; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269). This view arose in particular because there are large corporations that "bought into" the concept of – for example - PMI. Those corporations act as 'corporate council partners' which means that they have certain influence over the association as a whole (Hodgson, 2007, pp.229–230). Consequently, corporate interests prevail in the centre of the professional association instead of the practitioners' interests.

While Project Management emerged from an engineering context which entails the rather technical aspects of Project Management, much of the "softer" theories and frameworks come from management and social science. This and the ongoing competition among professional associations of promulgating discrepant bodies of knowledge (Hodgson, 2005, p.56) pose a great challenge to identify and agree on a generic and formal body of knowledge (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006, p.114; Morris et al., 2006, p.710; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.45). Furthermore, the bodies of knowledge are considered as widely context dependent, vague and fragmented, which make occupational closure rather unlikely (Morris et al., 2006, p.718). In this sense, Project Management has embarked on a complex process to professionalization without a general understanding of what the body of knowledge should be and who would be responsible to develop and maintain such standardised body of knowledge (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269).

Political agitation

Legal responsibility of professional associations is necessary to specify who is qualified to practice. This is a key aspect with regards to attain professional status and to be able to lay claim to its associated privileges and special status (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.271). In the context of Project Management, specific qualifications in terms of certifications for 'project management professionals (PMP)' were introduced in the 1980's. Even though these certifications are (still) voluntary, indicating that industry experience is more valuable (Muzio et al., 2011, p.452), they are of particular interest to practitioners who do not hold an academic qualification in Project Management (Morris et al., 2006, p.713) especially because it may serve as a transferable mark indicating professional status (Paton et al., 2013, p. 236). Especially since a global growth of PMP over the last decade started to control entry into the practice of Project Management as

organisations occasionally use it as an entry requirement when hiring a project manager (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272).

There are different certifications available ranging from knowledge-based to competency standards based on practice. However, usually, knowledge-based certifications which are based on the respective body of knowledge prevail (Morris et al., 2006, p.710; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.271). This kind of certifications earned serious critique in terms of validity and value. It is argued that sufficient knowledge to pass an exam does not reveal anything about one's ability to manage projects (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.273). In fact, it does not guarantee success nor does it eliminate poor performance (Morris et al., 2006, p.713). It merely serves as a screening mechanism and for potential occupational closure. In practice, professional judgement and discretion are what differentiates the professional from a lay person or specialist (Ibid, p. 714). Nevertheless, certifications are vital to maintain control over the body of knowledge and to sustain the position in the industry (Ibid, p. 715). However, the relative easiness of obtaining a knowledge-based certificate diminishes the value of the qualification and consequently, hampers credentialism. Because of this, and to avoid a single point of entry into professional associations, a hierarchy of accreditation was introduced (Muzio et al., 2011, p.451; Paton et al., 2013, p.235), distinguishing between lower level (e.g. team member and project manager) and higher level (e.g. programme or portfolio manager) qualifications (Hodgson, 2007, p.228) and specialised qualifications (Hodgson & Muzio, 2010, p.117). The underlying principle of this hierarchy reflects further attempts to professionalization because it shall serve as a structure for continuous professional development (career structures) and valuing practical know-how over abstract knowledge. Hence, while moving through the different levels of the hierarchy of qualifications, output-based measures become more valued than input-based measures, and additionally, different contexts are taken into account (Paton et al., 2013, p.236).

Agreeing the values of certifications poses a major challenge to the field of Project Management. On one hand, it boosts the general level of Project Management practice and screens out those with incompetence. On the other hand, entrance criteria are required to be set higher to avoid anyone being able to pass the exam with some time invested into studying (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.273). Therefore, certifications can be considered as an attempt to create barriers to entry, to promote practitioners' higher status and trustworthiness (Turner & Müller, 2003, p.7) and to facilitate recognition of those practitioners being eligible to be licensed. However, it is also impractical to exclude people from Project Management unless they are licensed (Morris et al., 2006, p.714). This is particularly true for "accidental" project manager.

Clearly, it can be concluded that certification by professional associations play a big role in driving the process of professionalization (Morris et al., 2006, p.715). However to date, there has not been much serious lobbying (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.159).

Monopoly use over the title

Even if Project Management could be said to be recognised as a full-time occupation, it has not clearly been defined what a project manager is (see Section 2.3). However, this must be captured and controlled in order to achieve professional status (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.268). Indeed, there are also other members belonging to the occupation of Project Management apart from project managers. Often people misperceive project manager to be the only members of the occupation which makes it

more difficult for the other members to find a suitable title for their work (Wang & Armstrong, 2004, p.379). Nevertheless, the term 'project manager' is not protected (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.158), meaning that everyone could claim him-/herself to be a project manager and thus being part of the Project Management occupation without evidence of qualification or training. However, it cannot be dealt with this problem until it has been identified a defensible definition of what exactly comprises a project and therefore the work of a project manager and other members of the occupation. Once this is clarified, it could be of use to protect the occupational title (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272). Moreover, to gain control over the title, the boundaries of the field of Project Management need to be defined. To date, the majority of the professional associations consider project management limited to the execution phase (e.g. PMBOK, 2013; APM BOK, 2012). However, Morris et al. (2006, p.717) recommended project managers to be involved in the management of the front-end. They argued that it is vital for how project delivery is executed. Furthermore, this would enable project managers to gain autonomy as they would engage in the negotiations with the clients. At the same time, it should be noted that due to differences in nature, not all projects require professional project management. This could be a possible explanation why hardly any serious efforts have been made to protect the name of the occupation (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.158). To approach this issue and to be able to differentiate between the competences of project managers, currently some organisations began to establish career ladders (see Section 2.3) that require different qualifications as the hierarchical rank and project complexity increases (Meredith et al., 2011, p.112; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, pp.268–269). This can be considered as the initiation of an ongoing, messy process to attain control over the work. Over time, the boundaries of work will be further negotiated and defined. First indications can already be noted in terms of role expansion of project managers. Nowadays, the work of a project manager comprises a lot more than originally required. The focus of Project Management is considered to have shifted from trained technicians who apply knowledge and techniques to reflective practitioners who reflectively manage what is required for a successful project (Crawford et al., 2006a). In summary, the vague agreement about the scope of work in Project Management (Hodgson, 2002, p.809) constitutes a major challenge to move from occupational to professional status.

Ethical code and conduct

In combination with the different bodies of knowledge, each of the professional associations created a code of ethics that members are supposed to adhere to. However, these codes cannot be enforced as long as memberships to professional associations are not obligatory and practitioners do not have to subscribe to the code (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.156,159).

2.6.4. Implications for Practitioners

Regardless of the potential of Project Management to pursue professional status, an acceptance by organisations and important jurisdictions of formal written standards would have significant implications in practice (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, pp.272–273). To date, project managers cannot be held accountable for the outcome of projects, but some assume that it is only a matter of time.

Considering the bureaucratisation of practice in Project Management work, projects are highly influenced by management tools, market pressures and demands for organisational learning (Styhre, 2006, p.276). Especially, the bodies of knowledge can

be perceived as acting as a yardstick to assess and compare the work of project managers (Hodgson, 2002, p.813). Therefore, professionals must adhere to the established practice guideline and demonstrate that this was followed. On the other hand, justification for non-adherence to the guideline is required. However, this might be considered as excessively time consuming and unnecessary because many project managers operate in fast-paced environments (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272). Another reason would account to the fact that there is no clear evidence that practice guidelines provide better results (Morris et al., 2006, p.713). As a result, project managers face trade-offs between delivering the project on time and following the guidelines. Consequently, projects may be delayed even more or be over-budget due to making obligatory justifications. Therefore, a clear definition is needed stating when and where the practice guideline inevitably has to be applied and followed and when project managers are allowed to short-cut those (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.273).

On an individual level, the benefits of professionalization comprise an increased status and recognition as well as the provision of a guideline of practice (Evetts, 2013, p.780; Hanlon, 1998, p.49; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.29). However, there are doubts among project manager about the value of professionalism (Paton et al., 2013, p.234). Indeed, professionalization of Project Management brings some costs with it. Project manager are required to be pro-active (Evans, 2008, p.23) and constantly be up-to-date in terms of knowledge and skills (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.901; Wang & Armstrong, 2004, p.378). It would not be enough to simply be able to master and apply the knowledge presented in the bodies of knowledge. Furthermore, certifications would be obligatory and membership costs would increase (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.274). Additionally, professionalization creates accountability assumed by practitioners. A personal liability insurance is demanded and those costs are usually very high (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.274; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.151).

2.6.5. Challenges and Concerns

To date, Project Management has neither gained support nor recognition by local governments (Hodgson, 2002, p.807; Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272). Indeed, although professional associations have established standards of practice and continuously try to further advance the field of Project Management, doubts exist as to whether it is understood and noticed that there is a developed occupation of Project Management. Furthermore, it is questionable if private corporations are willing to protect the autonomy and rights of project managers due to the fact that usually interests are only short-term (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272; Zwerman et al., 2004, p.177).

The biggest struggle for Project Management, however, can be identified with the definition of the scope of work and an esoteric body of knowledge. Those are particularly paramount because the bodies of knowledge followed the occupation of Project Management when people realised that they are carrying out similar work and made efforts to define those activities (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.45). Therefore, the greatest challenge in the process of professionalization of Project Management lies in gaining recognition and acceptance for the changes required to move towards a profession. Firstly, professional associations are required to shift their focus towards representing the value of Project Management. Then, and more important for our research, practitioners are required to decide whether they can identify themselves with Project Management as a self-regulating profession or whether it should continue as an occupation being subject to market changes or considered a tool applied to various occupations. Either way, differences in scope are considerable and are accompanied by

implications on the development of the occupation or the profession (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272).

After this evaluation about the current status of Project Management in terms of professionalization and the current undertakings by PM Institutions, it can be concluded that Project Management cannot be called a profession. However, as the assessment of the process-oriented approach reflects, PM can be considered to have started the journey towards becoming a profession and is making serious efforts to successfully pursue professional status.

2.7. Individual Professionalization in Project Management

As it can be extracted from the assessment of the previous sections, professional associations expend great efforts to attain professional status for Project Management. To date, PM accomplished some of the identified traits that characterise a profession and several undertakings reflect the willingness and efforts to become a profession. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go to fully develop the characteristics and recognition of a (traditional) profession. However, this process also requires efforts from the members of the occupation of Project Management. Recognition of the costs and benefits of professionalization is regarded to shape practitioners' personal commitment and professional identity necessary for professionalism (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, pp.274–275). Professional associations contribute by providing a sense of identity to its members. However, as pointed out in section 2.5.1 on professional identification, professional identities are constructed in a social, personal and provisional way. Therefore, professional associations can have a major influence on the construction of professional identities, but it requires a more personal and subtle process (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.32). The repetition of Project Management terminology is crucial to embody professional identity. One shall not simply acquire and accept tacit skills, but is required to reproduce those (Hodgson, 2005, p.58). Thus, it could be said that the construction of identity creates a powerful link between what professionals know and what they really do (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36).

While the majority of the research about professionalization of Project Management focuses more on the aspects enforced and pushed top-down by professional associations, usually an individual's sense of identity with the occupation and the process are excluded as a characteristic defining a profession (Ibid, p. 36). In this way, a very important part of professionalization is disregarded because professionals are the ones being able to drive the process and determine the future of an emerging profession in terms of achievement of professional status. In line with Hughes and Hughes (2013, p.33) and Hodgson (2005, p.64). 64), Gold et al. (2002, pp.52–53) agreed on the importance of reflexive professional self-regulation and proposed that professionals are responsible for the quality of the assigned values, their commitment and adherence of ethical values and truthfulness. Furthermore, professionals' willingness to take responsibility for their work, passion and the way they deal with problems and challenges make a difference in how Project Management is perceived, understood and practiced (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.275). Then, society will judge on professionals accordingly. Hence, it is considered that the debate on professionalization of Project Management could be advanced by understanding the socially constructed professional identities of individuals working in projects. An early awareness and comprehension has the advantage to know in which direction professionalization of Project Management should be pushed. However, because Project Management is currently situated in the

early stages of professionalization, directions can still be altered to become a profession in the interest of all (Zwerman et al., 2004, p.152).

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses our underlying assumptions with the aim to provide the reader with the understanding of our logic and foundations so they can better follow and interpret our study. In addition, we are striving to cover and explain all the decisions made throughout the study and analyse its consequences. The chapter starts with a description of our preconceptions and motivations that led us to our research topic. Afterwards, we will give an overview of the research perspective by addressing our research philosophy, method, strategy and approach. In addition, we will explain the research process, from the literature review up to the analysis of the empirical material. Finally, we will address the trustworthiness of the research and present the ethical considerations of the study.

3.1. Preconceptions

Researchers operate inside their own paradigmatic assumptions (Shepherd & Challenger, 2013, p.227). Moreover, researchers are part of the research and so the research becomes biased by their worldviews, culture, experiences and values (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119). These preconceptions influence not only what, but also how researchers see things, which in turn influences the choice of the research area, the formulation of the research question, the choices about methodology, the way in which data is analysed and interpreted and the way conclusions are derived (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.27). We therefore recognise that research is not value-free and that it should be interpreted considering those preconceptions. Thus, it is important that researchers reflect about the role these factors play in their research, inform the reader about them, and exhibit reflexivity about how these may have influenced the research (Ibid). Because of this, in this and the next sections, we will attempt to let our readers know the factors that led us to do this research and the way in which we pursued it.

We are about to conclude our Master Programme in Strategic Project Management (MSPME). By saying this, we want to express that we both share a common interest in Project Management, strong enough to have decided to spend a year and a half as full-time students. In addition, we also pursue this degree in order to increase our competences to later make use of them to further develop our careers. In other words, we are facing a career transition and so, we are in the process of shaping and readapting our professional identities (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005, p.569). Hence, our interest in the career of project managers came naturally to us. In summary, our driver was that we know what we have to offer to the business world, but what we do not have very clear is what the business world has to offer to us.

In addition, based on personal work experiences and those shared by our fellow students, we were able to spot a gap between what happens in the real business world and what PM Institutions and academics consider that should be happening. For instance, as referred to in section 2.3, there are plenty of publications suggesting that the career path of project managers should follow the PPPM system (Project-Programme-Portfolio Management see section 2.3 in the Theoretical Framework Chapter), however, by the experiences mentioned above; we got the sense that this is not the structure organisations hold. Another important thing to mention is that neither one of us holds a PM certification from any PM Institution. With this, we want to stress that we both see PM more as an academic discipline than as a set of tools, techniques and methodologies precisely developed for the management of projects. We see the value of PM to be more

concerned with the strategy than with technical aspects of the management of projects. Further, we conceive the PM Institutions as bodies that promote the standardisation and institutionalisation of PM, but we have no preference towards a specific one. We also consider certifications as a way to develop and get to know things, but not as a requisite (i.e. indispensable) in order to work in the field. Moreover, certifications in our perspective, demonstrate a good knowledge of a particular methodology (e.g. PMI's, PRINCE2, IPMA). Hence, providing a limited perspective that does not consider any alternative methods, perspectives, advantages and disadvantages compared to other possible methods used outside the grantor institution's scope. Particularly, we perceive certifications as a good technical preparation for developing Project Management skills but not for developing strategic skills.

Based on the aforementioned, we address this study with the underlying assumption that Project Management is a Management discipline like Marketing, Business Administration or Finance. Particularly, we conceive PM as a career and a role in an organisation that even if it requires special skills and knowledge, it cannot be termed a proper profession. For us, PM represents more a specialisation that allows people to develop new skills and broaden their abilities with knowledge from different fields. For instance, we see ourselves respectively as an engineer and a tourist business administrator with the "plus" of a PM degree. This is comparable to the people holding an MBA degree where, even if that gives them a certain status and recognition, it does not mean that they become MBA professionals. In this way, we agree with Zwerman et al's (2004, p.79) position that PM is a phase in one's career that in most cases precedes and follows another one. In contrast with, for example, nursing where once you become a nurse, most remain nurses. Moreover, our underlying view of this phenomenon is that PM Institutions are pushing for the professionalization of PM; however, organisations are more inclined to see PM as a role or function. We do not have a clear knowledge of how project managers feel about this issue, but we do believe that they are key players and very powerful actors regarding the future of PM. However, we are open to new ideas and to change our minds and we believe that knowing this will help us to pay attention to the way in which we conduct interviews in order to avoid as far as possible to bias the respondents. In the end, being aware of one's own assumptions is important in order to look beyond them and evade only seeing what we want to see (Hopper & Powell, 1985, p.429)

3.2. Choice of the Topic

As stated in the previous section, our interest in the careers of people in Project Management came naturally to us. However, as stated in section 1.2 (Key Concepts), careers in general is a broad topic and can be studied from different approaches (Coupland, 2004, p.517). Thus, in order to narrow our research, we conducted a preliminary investigation focusing mainly on primary sources such as PM blogs, Linkedin groups and talking to our fellow students and professors. From this preliminary research and our knowledge in Project Management, we were able to identify a discrepancy between what academia and practitioners consider to be the career path of project managers. After searching for academic papers regarding career paths in Project Management, using 'career paths Project Management' and 'careers in Project Management' as keywords in the Umeå library database, we were able to confirm that researchers have addressed this problem and concluded that there is an organisational lack of support to the project manager position. However, key researchers in the field such as Crawford (2005; 2006a, 2013) and Hölzle (2010) also

recognised that project managers tend to be inclined towards self-directed careers. Thus, we returned to the primary sources to explore what practitioners say about it and we identified that one of the main discussions regarded whether the project manager position is a profession or an organisational role. We also identified that the different perspectives were held depending on how individuals got involved in PM. Two main clusters were identified in this sense, people working in PM "accidentally" who mainly supported the organisational role perspective, and people who consciously prepared themselves pursuing a career in PM who tended to support the project manager professional perspective.

In addition, the research in the dedicated blogs such as MPUG blog (Giammalvo, 2011) and Max's blog (Musing, 2012) led us into focusing on the different meanings and perceptions people have about professions. In order to get more insights, we started our own discussion on Linkedin (inside a group dedicated to PM) with the question: Is Project Management a profession or a role? (de la Campa, 2014). The different comments confirmed our previous assumption that the word 'profession' means different things to different people and that both perspectives, PM as a role and as a profession, have supporters. Because of this, we decided to establish a common meaning for professions through the professionalization theory and use it as the lens through which we will conduct our research. Even if we found that there has been some research dealing with the professionalization of PM, it mainly addressed the perspective of the organisations and PM Institutions. Thus, we want to focus on the subjective experiences and opinions of the individuals acting in the field of Project Management, which so far, according to our best knowledge, have not properly been addressed in the available literature. Not to mention that, in our perspective, the investigation of the individuals in the field is crucial for the future development of PM.

3.3. Research Philosophy

The research philosophy, usually expressed in terms of ontology and epistemology, contains important assumptions about the way in which we conceive the world (Saunders et al., 2009, p.108). It is the intellectual process of how we know (epistemology) (Heimtun & Morgan, 2012, p.288) and how we interpret 'reality' (ontology) (Morgan, 2007, p.57) that underpin the research strategy, and the methods used according to that strategy (Saunders et al., 2009, p.108). Further, the research philosophy adopted is influenced by the nature of the phenomenon studied (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p.491; Saunders et al., 2009, p.108). Thus, one researcher may hold different philosophies when the study is concerned with facts, such as the resources needed in a manufacturing process, and when it is concerned with the opinions and experiences of the workers (Saunders et al., 2009, p.108).

Considering that this study is concerned with social entities – individuals – rather than natural entities, it is important to reflect on how we conceive (ontology) and how we know (epistemology) the social world. In general, we do not think that social phenomena can exist outside the social actors, but rather it is a product of the actor's consciousness (Hopper & Powell, 1985, p.431; Saunders et al., 2009, p.110). In this way, we would argue that professions and careers do not exist prior to the cognition of any individual (Patanakul et al., 2012, p.431). Particularly, taking into consideration the meanings provided in section 1.2 (Key Concepts), our ontology regarding professions, careers and professional identity would be closer to constructionism or constructivism.

More specific, we perceive it not only as an individual's cognitive process, but as a process of construction through social actions (Young & Collin, 2004, p.373). Furthermore, this process may be – and it usually is – influenced by the reproduction of social structures or patterns, which at the same time, may be reinforced or transformed through this cognitive process (Cohen et al., 2004, pp.409, 417). Because of this, we would claim that our philosophy is closer to the Social Constructionism stated by Brunes (1990) and Vygotsky (1978), who recognised that individual sense-making is preceded by and a result of social interactions. In consequence, our study will be held under the social constructionist perspective.

Now that our social worldview has been defined, it is important to also address how we get to know that social world. Under the social constructionist perspective, we consider that humans make sense of the world around them by interpreting the social world and adjusting their own meanings (Saunders et al., 2009, p.115). Therefore, social phenomena like the one we are researching, do not have an existence that is independent from the social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.19). Because of this, the way in which the phenomenon can be understood is by acquiring the knowledge from the subjects rather than by the observation of external facts (Hopper & Powell, 1985, p.431). Hence, we as researchers are interested in exploring and understanding the subjective realities that exist 'in there', in the thoughts and experiences of the actors, rather than the objective reality that exists 'out there' (McKenna et al., 2011, p.150). Based on our ontological stance, and because of our human condition, the way in which we will be able to make sense and understand those subjective realities is through the interpretation of them. Thus, we will make use of our subjectivity to reach an understanding of the actors and their social world (Romani et al., 2011, p.443) through an examination of the respondents' interpretation of that world (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.280). In terms of epistemology, our perspective would be close to Interpretivism where "researchers are concerned with understanding the actors' views and meanings" (Romani et al., 2011, p.443) by "adopting an empathetic stance" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.116).

We are aware that under this philosophy, we as researchers do not play the role of data collectors, but we become part of what is being researched (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119) because we will determine the way to reproduce the voices of the respondents and act (unavoidably) as a 'filter' between the individuals and the research setting (Antaki, 2008, p.433; Schensul, 2011, pp.86–87). In this sense, the interpretative stage of the research will be impacted by our ontological and epistemological assumptions in terms of how and what knowledge get constructed from them (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p.337). In addition, our interpretations may be biased by our worldviews, experiences and beliefs (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119). However, by being aware of it, we will be able to reflect constantly on how these aspects may be influencing our research (Schensul, 2011, p.87). This is why we have intended to give the reader explicit access to our preconceptions and choices. Nonetheless, we are also aware that the way in which the reader will understand our research will be by means of his/her own interpretations.

3.4. Research Method and Strategy

Another important consequence of the research philosophy is the impact on the research method choice because the research method naturally flows from the ontological and epistemological assumptions (Long et al., 2000, p.191). We agree with Long et al.

(2000, p.195), that both qualitative and quantitative methods yield valid results. However, there is a difference in the way data is collected and analysed (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.25). The quantitative methods employ measures (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.25) capturing a view on the world as a concrete structure (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, p.498) and so, they are usually rooted in objectivist and positivistic assumptions (Saunders et al., 2009, p.114). On the other hand, the qualitative methods deal with data that is not meant to be quantified (Saunders et al., 2009, p.480) involving studies that investigate phenomena in their natural settings by interpreting the meanings that people attach to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.5; Saunders et al., 2009, p.484). Thus, they are usually rooted in constructionist and interpretivist assumptions (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.25). We also agree with Saunders et al. (2009, p.115) that the social world is too complex to theorise in the same way as in natural sciences and that the methods used to conduct this kind of research are essentially different. Thus, considering that our research takes place in the 'social world', our research philosophy and our interest in the subjective experiences of the individuals, we consider that a qualitative method is the best way to approach this study.

There are several strategies to gather information associated with qualitative research. Some of them are ethnography, participant observation, interviewing, focus groups and analysis of documents (Bryman & Bell, 2003, pp.281–282). The selection of one or another should be based on the research question, the purpose of the research, the population and the access to the participants (Ibid, p.281). Considering that the fulfilment of the sub-objectives lead to meet the main objective and consequently answer the research question, our focus lies on choosing the best way to gather information by exploring the individuals' perceptions and professional identities. Thus, we will dedicate the rest of this section to the selection of the appropriate method to gather this kind of information.

Narrative shows how an individual connects to the context and makes sense of it giving insights about who they are and who they want to become (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p.141; Kärreman & Alvesson, 2001, p.65; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.369). Particularly when addressing identity, asking questions is the most popular approach in research (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.20). Moreover, language serves as a medium or conduit that actors use and which gives insights about their own realities (Coupland, 2004; Ybema et al., 2009). As stated by Vygotsky (1978, p.126), language is a means of reflection and elaboration of experiences that is highly personal and at the same time a profoundly social process. Thus, "language use can be taken as a root metaphor for all human action, and conversation, dialogue, as the root model for the analysis of all mental processes" (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997, p.162). Hence, under our social constructionist philosophy, language constitutes a precondition for thought and a form of social action by which meaning is constructed (Young & Collin, 2004, p.377,382). For these reasons, we decided to use interviews as our strategy; not only to collect data, but also as a way to uncover the private and sometimes incommunicable experiences of the respondents, and to gain insights into alternative assumptions and interpretations (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p.335; Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.255). As stated by Paton et al. (2013, p.232), interviews do not attempt to extract information from the respondents but rather to stimulate narrative production. Thus, interviews are the site where the information is co-constructed, where identities are forged through discourse, and where sense-making takes place (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p.335).

Even if there are several types of interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.341), we will take a 'localist' perspective (Alvesson, 2003) through the use of semi-structured interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.239). Thus, we as interviewers see ourselves as people who are involved in the production of sense-making through interpersonal interaction with the respondents, who are constantly producing situated accounts that must be understood in their own social context (Alvesson, 2003, p.15). In other words, this approach recognises the subjectivity of both, the researcher and the respondents, and the socially constructed nature of the interviews where actors produce questions and answers through a discourse (Qu & Dumay, 2011, pp.247, 255). Even if other forms of interviews are also suitable to fulfil this purpose, we decided to use a semi-structured method because we want respondents to be able to build and reflect on their answers; but at the same time we want to assure that the aspects relevant for this thesis are covered (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.246; Saunders et al., 2009, p.324). Moreover, we consider that a structured interview would decrease the opportunity for respondents to express themselves in the way they would normally do (King, 2004, p.88), while an unstructured interview may limit our aim to have similar information from all the respondents (Schensul, 2011, p.90), leading us more into collecting different information from every respondents. In summary, in this thesis we will use semi-structured interviews to gather information in order to fulfil our objective and answer our research question.

3.5. Research Approach

As stated before, in this research, we aim to call for a focus on a key actor that has been neglected in the theory regarding professionalization of Project Management (Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.36). In this way, we pursue to develop knowledge, intending to contribute to and broaden the scope of that theory.

Regarding research approaches, deductive or inductive, we agree with Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p.25) that those approaches are not the extremes of a continuum but part of a cycle and mirrors of one another. Deductive research leads from general premises to a more specific conclusion following a logical coherent normative (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010, p.209), and it is considered a good approach to test theory (Saunders et al., 2009, p.129) by submitting a hypothesis (or hypotheses) to empirical scrutiny (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.10). Inductive research runs from particular to more general conclusions amplifying the knowledge more than restating the premises (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010, p.209), and it is considered a good approach to develop theory as a result of the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2009, p.129). With this in mind, we would consider that our thesis is closer to the inductive approach since, we are attempting to build meaning from the collected empirical information of a particular population (Schensul, 2011, p.12). Considering that our objective is "to contribute to the understanding of professionalization of Project Management and careers", rather than to test a particular aspect of the theory, we would argue that an inductive approach suits better in our research. Moreover, because the available research regarding professionalization of Project Management is scarce and there do not seem to be literature addressing the social actors' perspectives, it was almost impossible to formulate a precise hypothesis to confirm or reject through empirical information. Thus, an inductive approach is considered to be appropriate when the research topic is relatively new and there is little literature available (Saunders et al., 2009, p.127). In particular, we set our approach as that of an inductive theory-driven because our study

is framed under theory [professionalization] within a context [Project Management] (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p.26) in order to build meaning from the perspectives and opinions of [key] social actors (Schensul, 2011, p.12).

3.6. Literature Search Method and Source Criticism

The research of relevant literature was conducted through the accessible research engines from Umeå University and Heriot-Watt University (discovery tool) which mainly use EbscoHost, ScienceDirect, Elsevier, British Library Integrated catalogue and Emerald databases. Additionally, google scholar was used as research engine and to identify key articles based on the number of citations. To increase credibility and significance of the theoretical framework, our research criterion was to select academic (peer-reviewed) journals from the last seven years in English language. The reason for this is our preference towards relevant, up-to-date information written by experts in the respective field (Saunders et al., 2009, p.67) in order to capture recent understandings and perspectives.

We decided to divide the theoretical framework in three main sections: the first addressing Project Management, the second addressing professionalization and the third combining the former two into the professionalization of Project Management. In the first section, keywords such as 'history of Project Management', 'evolution of Project Management', 'importance of Project Management', 'value of project management', 'career of project managers', 'project managers career path', 'careers in Project Management' and 'project managers in organis/zations' were used. For the second and third part the main keywords used were 'professionalis/zation', 'process of professionalis/zation', 'profession', 'professionalism', 'professional Project Management', 'professionalis/zation of Project Management', 'professionalis/zation and careers'. It should be noted that those keywords were also used in different combinations, e.g. 'history of Project Management' or 'Project Management history' to make sure that we did not miss important references and that we obtained a satisfactory resource base. In this research, the main journals appeared to be *Project Management Journal, International Journal of Project Management, Academy of management Journal, Journal of Vocational Behavior, The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Career Development International, Organization, Current Sociology and Human Relations journals*. Due to the nature of our research and the relevance Project Management Institutions have in this research, it is necessary to state that those institutions support the two most important journals in the Project Management field. The *International Journal of Project Management* is published in collaboration with the APM and the IPMA while the *Project Management Journal* is the academic journal of the PMI. However, as mentioned earlier, it is also important to say that they are both peer-reviewed journals, meaning that those are written and reviewed by recognised experts in the field (Saunders et al., 2009, p.67).

To narrow down the list of articles resulting from the key word search and to filter out only those being relevant to our research topic, a preliminary working list of articles was selected based on our research criterion and on the review and analysis of the abstract of the articles. The next step comprised reading the discussion and conclusion section and determining how the articles may relate to our research and the rest of the papers (i.e. support, contradict, challenge). The chosen articles were carefully read looking for the main ideas and concepts. Simultaneously, a reference snowball literature

search was made to ensure completeness of key resources and main ideas. This allowed the identification of topic-related articles cited in our chosen articles and the identification of key authors in the field of interest. In this stage, even though we had preference towards recent articles, the year of publication did not represent a limitation. Moreover, secondary references were avoided as far as possible in order to ensure the quality of our research. Instead, we accessed the original sources to avoid misrepresenting its original meaning, which can happen easily due to different understandings and interpretations of each author. Books were not totally excluded, but used for introductory purposes (Saunders et al., 2009, p.69) to topics in which we did not have previous experience (e.g. professionalization theory) and when addressing 'classic theories' (e.g. trait and process approach to professionalization). Furthermore, edited sections from relevant books were used.

As our literature research advanced and we got acquaintance with the broad theories, further literature search was done using key terms such as 'professionalis/zation and professional identity', 'corporate professionalis/zation', 'professional/ organis/zational/ individual socialis/zation/ career/ occupational/ vocational identity/identification' and 'professional development'. The resultant articles found were assessed according to the same process mentioned above. Thus, the literature search and review was more an iterative process than a single activity (Saunders et al., 2009, p.60).

3.7. Respondent Selection

Addressing the whole population is very difficult in any research, but especially in qualitative research. Hence, sampling is a central practice in this study, and qualitative research in general (Robinson, 2014, p.25). As stated in the Research Approach (Section 3.5), we follow an inductive, theory-driven approach, intending to contribute to, and broaden the scope of the theory rather than developing a new one. Hence, our respondents should be selected for their 'representativeness' and 'informativeness' of the population in terms of how they are capable to contribute, rather than how they are capable of producing a generalisable theory (Lucas, 2014, p.406; Mabry, 2008, p.223).

In order to answer our research question and fulfil our main objective, we need to ensure that the respondents meet specific criteria (Saunders et al., 2009, p.239). In this case, all respondents must hold a postgraduate degree in Project Management from an educational institution. Considering this, we found the purposive sampling technique most appropriate for our research because of the advantages compared with other sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was chosen taking into consideration that this sampling method is favourable for working with small samples while ensuring that particular categories, which in our judgement will be best for answering the research question, are represented in the study (Robinson, 2014, p.32; Saunders et al., 2009, p.237). In contrast to convenience or snowball sampling, the subjective way in which the purposive sample is selected is based on the researchers' a-priori theoretical understanding of the topic being studied and their own experiences (Guarte & Barrios, 2006, p.277; Robinson, 2014, p.32). Particularly, since it is crucial to adopt an empathetic stance in interpretative research (Saunders et al., 2009, p.116), we needed respondents that we understand good enough in order to increase the likelihood of interpreting their world from their point of view. In consequence and considering that "convenience sampling is inevitably a factor in any sampling strategy" (Mabry, 2008, p.216), we selected graduates from our Master programme (MSPME) to be our

respondents. We did not only find them convenient due to an assumed easier access through our programme directors, but we also felt that having this experience (MSPME) as common ground would enable us to enter the social world of the respondents from an empathetic position. In this way, we intend to increase the likelihood of understanding their world from their point of view and counteract, to some extent, our lack of experience in this kind of research. Moreover, because of our experiences and studies of PM, we [researchers and respondents] share the "PM language", which represents an advantage by increasing the likelihood of interpreting things in the same way our respondents intended to express it. Nevertheless, this could also represent a disadvantage because respondents may not feel the necessity to go deep in their answers and instead use expressions such as "you know", "and so on", and "you understand". However, acknowledging this in advance would allow us to be cautious about it and avoid this issue by asking them to further explain their answers using questions such as "what do you mean by this?".

In summary, our potential respondents could be considered homogeneous (Saunders et al., 2009, p.240) in the sense that they all share the common characteristic of holding a postgraduate degree in PM. This characteristic is advantageous to provide in depth information about the issue of study (Saunders et al., 2009, p.240). Furthermore, there is also room for heterogeneity (Ibid, p.239) as respondents differ, to a greater or lesser extent, in age, nationality year of graduation from MSPME, previous academic background and work experiences. This heterogeneity helps to provide evidence that the findings are not particular to a certain group, time or place (Robinson, 2014, p.27) and help looking at the phenomenon from different angles, thus gaining more insights. We are also aware that purposive samples are prone to researchers bias due to the subjective component of the judgement (Guarte & Barrios, 2006, p.278). To overcome this, we intended to use clear, theoretically guided criteria for the respondent's eligibility (Robinson, 2014, p.32; Saunders et al., 2009, p.239) while providing the reader with a description of the sampling method and selection criteria.

3.8. Accessing the Respondents

The way in which we got access to our potential respondents was through online advertisements inside the social network groups (Linkedin and Facebook) of the MSPME programme. These groups are exclusively for MSPME graduates and managed by the programme coordinators of the different schools. We posted an advertisement saying that we were looking for respondents for our thesis work with the purpose of exploring MSPME graduates' perceptions on PM and their careers. We were cautious about mentioning anything about professions or professionalization theory following Waddington's (2004, p.155) recommendation to provide a truthful but imprecise summary of the research purpose in order to reduce the risk of eliciting self-conscious responses that may bias our study.

Once the advertisement was published, we used a 'self-selection' strategy attributable to the low control we have over the potential respondents (Saunders et al., 2009, p.236). Therefore, the respondents were selected based on their willingness to cooperate and interest in the topic. We are conscious that voluntary participation may lead to self-selection bias where people who choose to participate in the interviews may be different to those who don't (Robinson, 2014, p.29). However, we feel that this bias is contained because the advertisement was posted in groups where all participants fulfilled our

sampling criteria (MSPME graduates). In this stage, we had twelve people that replied to be interested in our research; however, we were only able to interview eight. The main reason of this appeared to be related to time constraints, especially, because December is considered a busy month at work and other social activities.

After receiving the respondents' acceptance to participate in the study, based on Rowley's (2012, p.264) recommendations, we made (personal) contact with them by email. These emails aimed to explain a little further who we are (programme and university), what the research is about (as stated before, avoiding to mention professions and professionalization), our desire to conduct Skype interviews in the last week of November and the first week of December (open to every schedule since we are addressing people from different time zones), and the interview duration (between one and one hour and a half). Finally, we rendered thanks for their interest and offered to share our work with them if they are interested. Furthermore, these emails intended to establish a proper rapport with the respondents prior to the interviews. The aim of this was to overcome the loss of rapport and interaction recognised in online interviews as compared to face-to-face interviews (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014, p.601; Rowley, 2012, p.265).

3.9. Presenting the Respondents

Eight respondents from seven different countries were interviewed. Among those eight respondents, there were six men and two women. All respondents are postgraduate students of the MSPME programme. However, they graduated in different years. Some respondents were from the first edition (01/2008) and others recently graduated (01/2014). A couple of others graduated between the first and the latest edition. Moreover, some of the respondents worked before joining the programme while some others started the programme right after obtaining their previous degree; however, by the time of the interviews, all respondents had already gained working experience. In general, all respondents have previous degrees (Bachelor and Master) from different fields with no relation with PM, except Tom, who was already dealing with projects in his Bachelor degree. Table 3 gives an overview of the respondents' general characteristics.

Name	Age	Nationality	MSPME Graduation Year	Previous Degrees (to MSPME)	Interview Duration (min)	Industry Sector (latest job)	Project orientation (latest job)
Adriana	25	Romanian	01/2014	Bachelor in Accounting & Management Information Systems Master in Accounting	80:23	Tyres & Track	PO
*Tom	24	German	01/2014	Bachelor in International Project Engineering and Management	44:04	Transportation	PO

				Bachelor and Master in Applied Mathematics & Physics	44:18	Project Management (research)	NPO
*Marcel	31	NA	NA				
Tiago	33	Brazilian	01/2008	Bachelor in Business Administration	40:05	Food	NPO
*Ian	33	Mexican	01/2008	Bachelor in Systems Management (systems engineering & IT)	37:53	Strategy & Innovation (research)	NPO
*John	39	Vietnamese	01/2008	Bachelor in Education Bachelor in Accounting & Auditing	52:41	NGO	NPO
Inna	29	Ukrainian	01/2009	Bachelor in Economics & Administration	52:54	Pharma	PO
Jaime	31	Mexican	01/2012	Bachelor in Industrial Engineering	37:29	Aerospace	PO

*Fictional name   PO= project-oriented; NPO= not project-oriented

Table 3. Information about the Respondents

Source: Created by the authors, based on the gathered empirical data

3.10. Preparing for the Interviews

Semi-structured interviews require a great deal of planning not only before, but also during and after the interviews regarding how questions should be asked, how questions flow and how to interpret the responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.247). As stated by Saunders et al. (2009, p.328) "prior planning prevents poor performance". Thus, our interview planning started by gathering information about how to design and conduct this kind of interviews.

We considered Hannabuss's (1996, pp.26–27) and Saunders et al.'s (2009, pp.327–343) guidance and recommendations very useful, thus, we used them as guidance for planning and conducting the interviews. These could be summarised into four aspects. First, establishing rapport with the respondents is essential. Second, keep the conversation ongoing. Avoid questions that dampen the discourse such as yes or no questions, be clear on the questions, avoid questions that puzzle the respondents and avoid asking several questions at the same time. Third, researchers need to be careful with when it is appropriate to interrupt the respondent. It is important to keep the focus and pace of the interview and be able to clarify terms and questions the respondent might not understand, and ask the respondents to exemplify or go 'deeper' when necessary. Last, it is crucial to adopt a non-judgmental attitude and be patient so that even moments of silence work on the behalf of the interview. Nonverbal language, such as indication of shock, surprise, nodding and approving the answers should be avoided.

3.11. Developing the Interview Guide

Based on the aforementioned recommendations, we then developed an interview guide (after several drafts) including main and possible further questions (see Appendix 3). For developing these questions, we first developed a set of 'target areas' considering specific features we wanted to know in order to answer our research question and fulfil our objectives (see Appendix 2). In this stage, we identified six main targets:

- Demographic information.
- Explore the professional identity of MSPME graduates and to what extent it is influenced by their academic and work experience in the PM.
- Determine to what extent MSPME graduates pursue/d a career in the PM.
- Increase our understanding about how MSPME graduates conceive PM (e.g. as a profession, a role, a practice, a methodology).
- MSPME graduates' opinion about how PM Institutions aim that PM becomes a recognised profession (advantages and disadvantages).
- Explore the respondent's opinion about the professionalization process (advantages and disadvantages they perceive in general, for the field and personally, for themselves)

These targets were then linked back to specific aspects of the theory presented in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2) in order to be able to operationalise the concepts by formulating questions addressing our targets while maintaining alignment with the theory presented (see Appendix 2 Columns 1 and 4). Thus, different main and possible further questions were developed for each one of these targets. Moreover, different questions were developed depending on if the respondent's latest position was project-oriented or not. Once the questions were developed, we formulated a 'rationale' (see Appendix 2 Column 5) in order to evaluate and state the operationalisation of the concepts by explaining how the questions relate to the specific target and the theory, thus, how the responses, evoked from the questions may inform us in relation to our 'target areas'. Further, we checked that all the questions met the recommendations presented in the previous section (Section 3.10). This check included making sure that we did not use yes or no, puzzling, leading (introduce bias) or complex questions. We then presented the interview guide to our supervisor and asked for her advice. We did some modifications based on our supervisor's feedback and then we started conducting the interviews. The interviews on average took 48 minutes, from a range between 37 and 80 minutes.

3.12. Conducting the Interviews

Skype, and other online video and audio call services, are a good way to conduct interviews from a geographically dispersed sample without major costs and logistical issues (Robinson, 2014, p.36). Since our respondents are in different locations, we found this means as the most appropriate for our research. We agree with Deakin and Wakefield (2014, p.604) that online interviews are a viable option rather than a secondary option when face-to-face interviews cannot be achieved, and that they produce as reliable and in-depth responses as the ones generated in face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, this kind of interviews may exclude some participants that for example, do not have technological competences, means to obtain the software or maintain internet connections for the duration of the interview (Deakin & Wakefield,

2014, p.605). However, because we are using a free software and this kind of technology is common to all MSPME students, we think that this limitation does not have a big impact on the selection of our potential respondents.

The interviews were scheduled based on the respondents' time availability and time zones. However, since Skype is now available on different devices like computers, tablets and phones and Wi-Fi is accessible for free even in public places, the respondent may have chosen to be in rather disruptive environments (e.g. work or home) where respondents could be easily distracted. These circumstances may interfere with the flow of the conversation interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014, p.605). Therefore, we let our respondents know that we were accessible when it was best for them and encouraged them to choose a time and place with minimum distractions so they can be as focused as possible in the interview. Moreover, technical problems such as delay in the transmission, loss of connectivity or 'frozen images' represent another type of disruptions. Regardless, we did not face any of these issues, except in one interview where the issue was solved by calling again immediately.

Both of us (researchers) were present in the interviews, however, only one of us conducted the interview while the other was more focused on taking notes, paying extra attention to the non-verbal language because the video was not recorded. This also helped us to avoid interrupting each other or the respondent. The microphone of the researcher taking notes was muted during the interviews to avoid background noise that may have decreased the quality of the recording. Moreover, we (researchers) kept contact via text-chat during the interview. We are aware that sometimes this may have distracted us. However, it was very useful because we were able to share a 'listener' perspective, suggest follow-up questions, ask to further explore a certain topic and indicate missing questions that the interviewer may have forgotten due to the ongoing conversation. We switched positions in every interview because we felt that having the opportunity to play both roles would help us to improve our researcher skills. Even if, having different people conducting the interviews affects the way in which the interview is conducted, we do not feel that it represents a negative issue. In our perception and in coherence with our philosophical stand, each interview was different in essence due to the uniqueness of the rapport built with each respondent and so the uniqueness of each interview atmosphere. Moreover, the nature of the semi-structured interviews assisted by the interview guide helped us to conduct similar interviews.

All the interviews began with a small presentation of us, which in all cases led into a small talk about our experiences in the MSPME programme and the life in the different countries. As stated before, since all of the respondents studied the same programme, it was easy to establish rapport by talking about common experiences. We also found that the rapport was positively enhanced by this, and by the respondents' desire to share their 'thesis writing experiences'. We then moved to explain once more that the topic of our research is concerned with exploring their perceptions' on Project Management and their careers. We then asked them if we could use their names, age and nationality in the research. All of them accepted to reveal their age, but some of them preferred to remain anonymous. Because of this, we decided to present the information using the respondents' names of those who consented to it, and giving a fictional name to those who asked to remain anonymous. All the audios of the interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission for further analysis, which enabled us to generate accurate transcripts. This issue is very important because of the ease to upload the records and make them available to the public (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014, p.640). Even if this risk

is also present when recording face-to-face interviews, the fear is more related with this kind of interviews. Therefore, in order to overcome this fear and build trust, we intended to establish a good rapport with the respondents. Furthermore, we let them know that these records would not be shared in any case without their consent, that they would only be used for this academic purpose and that our written report will be available in the Umeå University database. Moreover, we offered to share the transcripts with them as soon as possible, so they would have access to the information we would be using.

The interviews continued by gathering general information such as MSPME graduation year, bachelor degree, etc. (see Appendix 3). We then asked them to walk us through their careers, without giving them any definition of the concept, to encourage them to talk about it and their experiences. We then intended to let the conversation flow using the interview guide as a reminder to us, but in coherence with our methodology, not as a structured guideline meant to be mutinously followed. Depending on the conversation, we used some of the further questions in the guideline and in other cases; we asked to expand on their responses or to exemplify those to get more insights.

Finally, it is important to stress that all interviews were conducted in English, which did not represent the mother tongue of any of the respondents, nor the researchers. However, we knew that all respondents have very good command of the English language as the MSPME programme is taught in English and requires a language certificate to be accepted to the programme. Nevertheless, we are aware that people may express themselves in different ways when talking in their mother tongue. Moreover, interpretations may also be affected at all levels (questions, responses, presentation of the information and analysis) as we (researchers and respondents) may go back to our native language during the mental process of interpretation to then translate it while speaking or writing. Even if we perceived that none of the respondents felt uncomfortable during the interviews, it is important to us, and in coherence with our philosophy, to bear in mind and consider the impact it may have on the respondent, and consequently on the production of information.

3.13. Processing, Presenting and Analysing the Empirical Material

The empirical material derived from the interviews results in a large corpus of unstructured textual material, which cannot be analysed straight forward (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.424). Moreover, there are no standardised procedures or clear-cut rules about how qualitative data should be analysed (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.424; Saunders et al., 2009, p.489). However, once data is collected, researchers are obliged to analyse it (Rowley, 2012, p.263). Thus, in this section, we will describe how the empirical material was processed to further explain how it would be presented and analysed.

Analysing is not a static process, but an iterative process of data collection and data analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.425; Saunders et al., 2009, p.488). This iterative process allows the researchers to recognise important themes, make relationships and identify patterns as the information is collected and processed (Saunders et al., 2009, p.488). Thus, it is important to listen to the interviews as soon as possible and take time to think about what has been said and identify details that might affect subsequent interviews (Rowley, 2012, p.267). In line with this, after each interview, each of us (the researchers) listened to the records to later talk about them and plan how the next interview should be conducted considering changes such as clearer questions, putting

emphasis on relevant topics, and testing possible patterns. In addition, the records were fully transcribed, as soon as we could, and sent back to the respondents (those who agreed to) for the final checking.

Once all the transcripts were available and following Rowley's (2012, p.268) suggestions, we moved into organising the empirical material, getting acquainted with it, and classifying it. First, the empirical material was organised into different files for each respondent. A second version of the files was created rearranging the chunks of text so that all the text relating to a specific question was in one place and in the same order as the interview guide. We then moved into carefully reading these second versions of the transcripts while making annotations about key themes and other interesting observation. In this stage, we started to consider the way in which the empirical material could be presented in the final report. Due to the large amount of 'raw' empirical material produced and the space limitations of the study, we decided to condense, group and restructure the material in order to present it in a narrow but meaningful way (Saunders et al., 2009, p.482). Nevertheless, we acknowledge that information processing is a result of the researchers' interpretations (Rowley, 2012, p.269) and that undertaking this stage of the analytical process means engaging in a selective process guided by the objectives of the research (Saunders et al., 2009, p.493), which are inevitably influenced (or biased) by the researchers' preconceptions and worldviews. In consequence, it was important to us to go through this process by reflecting on our own assumptions, the potential bias they might introduce (Ibid) and our responsibility as researchers with openness and honesty (Davey & Liefooghe, 2004, p.181). As stated before, being aware of one's own assumptions allows to look beyond them and evade only seeing (and selecting) what we wanted to see (Hopper & Powell, 1985, p.429).

The first process we carried out was categorising. We started by using the 'target areas' (what we wanted to know) of the interview guide (see Appendix 2 Column 1) as categories because, as suggested by Saunders et al. (2009, p.492), these categories were guided by the purpose of the research as expressed through the research question and objectives. Moreover, since this research is theory-driven, these categories were also guided by the theory presented in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2). We then 'unitised' the empirical material by attaching relevant 'chunks of text' or 'units' to the appropriate category (Ibid, p.493). However, since analysing is an iterative process and in correspondence with our inductive theory-driven approach, we were able to re-categorise the material based on the relationships, key themes and patterns founded in order to represent all that has been found in the empirical material (Ibid, p.495). After the re-categorisation process, we decided to present the material using seven categories (see Empirical Chapter 4). We are aware that pre-establishing the categories is not in line with inductive research. However, as stated before, we are inductive theory-driven because the lens used in this study is the one of the traditional professionalization theory. For our first sub-objective of exploring the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory perspective, the categories from theory (characteristics of a traditional profession) are crucial because they determine the way in which the empirical material should be analysed. Thus, is very important to be sure that the specific aspects such as the trait and processes are addressed. However, the second sub-objective has a more inductive nature and so; we only include in this first categorisation a broad perspective that will be shaped according to the empirical material gathered.

The second process was concerned with summarising and structuring the empirical material intending to condense it without losing the sense of what has been said or observed (Ibid, p.491). In addition, in order to demonstrate the existence of the discourse (Dick, 2004, p.206) and to guide the reader through our interpretations, we also present the respondents' quotes (marked as " ") that lead us into that summary. Moreover, considering our social constructionist stand where meaning is built by social interaction, we are not only focused on understanding the respondents' use of the language, but also on "reading between the lines" (Dick, 2004, p.203; Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.251). Thus, paying attention to the hidden messages and ambivalence, and being sensitive to the non-literal meaning forces became very important (Antaki, 2008, p.432; Qu & Dumay, 2011, p.251). In addition, parts of the information that were cut out because it was considered repetitive or irrelevant were marked in the text as '[…]'. On the other hand, when it was necessary to insert words to complete sentences or give context, we marked it in the text as '[ ]'.

The analysis continued with the interpretation of the information by comparing and relating the key themes, relationships and patterns found on the empirical material to the theoretical propositions (Saunders et al., 2009, p.500) presented in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2). The synthesis of this process will be presented in the Analysis Chapter (Chapter 5).

3.14. Quality Criteria

Just claiming a well-carried out research does not lead into good conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.277). The quality of the research needs to be assessed in terms of reliability and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.33; Morse et al., 2002, p.13; Saunders et al., 2009, p.156). However, the research criteria for assessing qualitative research has been subject to extensive debate (Hammersley, 2008, p.42; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.277). Nonetheless, one of the most accepted criteria was developed by Guba and Lincoln (1985) where reliability and validity were substituted with concepts of "trustworthiness" (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.35; Morse et al., 2002, p.14). However, Morse et al. (2002, p.13) claimed that the rejection of reliability and validity in qualitative research shifted the focus for "ensuring rigour" from the researchers' actions to the readers. Moreover, they argued that, "researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies integral and self-correcting during the conduct of inquiry itself". Therefore, in this section we will assess the quality of this study from the researchers' action perspective (verification) while providing the reader with enough information for the final evaluation of it (trustworthiness).

3.14.1. Verification

Throughout the whole study, we (researchers) focused on the process of verification suggested by Morse et al. (2002, p.14) in order to reduce the risk of "missing serious threats to validity and reliability until it is too late to correct". The authors suggested five strategies to properly address the verification process. The first strategy, *methodological coherence,* aims to ensure congruence between the research question and the components of the method. The second strategy regards if the *sample is appropriate* for answering the research question. The third strategy is concerned with *collecting and analysing concurrently* forms a mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know. The fourth strategy is to *keep theoretically,* which

means that ideas emerging from the data are reconfirmed with new data; this gives rise to new ideas that, in turn, must be verified with data already collected. The last strategy is *theory development* [in our study] through a template for comparison and further development of the theory.

Following these strategies helped us identify when we needed to make changes to the research process. As the majority of good qualitative researches, this was not a linear process, but a constant movement (back and forth) between design and implementation (Ibid, p.17) aiming to ensure coherence among the formulation of the question, the literature review, the collection and analysis of the empirical material. We also intended to provide explicit evidence of it throughout the different sections of this chapter. The purpose of this was to make the evidence accessible to the reader and to avoid relegating rigour to only one section of 'post hoc' reflections (Ibid, p.19). Moreover, according to Morse et al. (2002, p.17), following these strategies ensures rigour and that "reliability and validity are actively attained rather than [only] proclaimed by external reviewers on the completion of the project".

3.14.2. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is assessed through the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.35; Morse et al., 2002, p.14).

Credibility refers to how believable the findings are (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.35) and to the researchers' ability to correctly understand the social world (Ibid, p.288). Considering that, matching findings with theory discounts possible threats to the validity of the conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009, p.500), we believe that the conclusions of the study can be considered credible. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2003, p.288) suggest to submit the study for respondent validation to confirm the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon. In this case, we shared the transcripts with the respondents for a final checking. However, we did not share our interpretations with them. Even if we are aware that this may represent a weakness in terms of credibility, we decided not to do it because of the sensitiveness of the topic (especially considering individual identity) and because this study is guided by the professionalization theory, which may represent something with which our respondents are not acquainted. Thus, respondents may not agree with our theoretically guided interpretations and findings.

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings are applicable to other contexts and at other times (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.35) and to the extent to which findings can be generalised (Saunders et al., 2009, p.102). Regarding transferability, we agree with Gobo (2008, p.197) that it is not an inferential process performed by the researcher but it is rather a decision made by the reader. Thus, we as researchers have intended to provide the reader with a solid argumentative logic and an extensive description of the research in order to let him/her decide to transfer this knowledge to other situations or not (Ibid). As stated before, we believe in the uniqueness of the context and that knowledge is obtained through the individual process of sense-making in which individuals construct their own meanings through their interpretations. Thus, we believe that each reader would understand this research in a uniquely personal way and that transferability should be assessed under that unique and personal understanding. In our opinion, the research decisions presented in this chapter suggest that the study is applicable beyond our eight respondents, and MSPME graduates in general. Moreover,

we consider that, due to the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the respondents, this study can be transferred to PM graduates from different educational institutions, different nationalities and age, which are no members of any PM Institution. However, generalisability is impossible since the phenomenon is neither time nor context-free (Gobo, 2008, p.197); especially considering that this thesis deals with professional identity, which is continuously shaped and reshaped through social interactions and that it can be constantly renegotiated as a consequence of personal experiences. Moreover, considering the influence that PM Institutions have in the education of PM, we believe that the practitioners' perceptions of PM are likely to change along with the process of professionalization. However, as stated before, it is not our aim to produce generalised results, but rather contributing to theory by exploring the perceptions of the social actors.

Dependability is considered the parallel of reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.35) and is concerned with the extent to which the data collection and analysis techniques yield consistent findings (Saunders et al., 2009, p.157). The lack of standardisation in semi-structured interviews leads to concerns about dependability (Ibid, p.326). However, since this kind of studies are meant to reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation that may [and most probably will] be subject to change, methods are not exactly intended to be repeatable (Saunders et al., 2009, p.328). Nonetheless, Bryman and Bell (2003, p.288) suggest that keeping an 'auditing' approach may help to overcome dependability issues. Thus, following Saunders et al.'s (2009, p.328) and Bryman and Bell's (2003, p.288) recommendations, we intended to be explicit and highly descriptive about the processes used and the findings, while making clear why we considered that our decisions best suited to the study. Moreover, the complete records of all the phases of the research are kept and are available under request.

Confirmability aims to show that researchers acted in good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.289). For this purpose, we have intended to provide the reader with a detailed description of our preconceptions, motives for choosing this research, philosophy, research perspectives and research process. Moreover, according to Saunders et al. (2009, pp.326, 327), semi-structured interviews are biased by both, the respondents and interviewers. The interviewer bias occurs in cases where the interviewer impose his/her own beliefs and frames of reference through comments, tone or the non-verbal behaviours which influences the responses of the respondents and the interviewer's interpretation of those responses. The respondent bias is caused by the respondents' perceptions of the interviewer and the sensitivity of the topic. In this sense, respondents may only provide a partial picture of the situation or be inclined to respond in a way that casts him-/herself in a socially desirable role. To overcome these issues, and as explained throughout the Methodology Chapter (Sections 3.6 to 3.13), we carefully planned the interview process while adjusting it after each one of the interviews. We also provided the respondents with enough information about our research so they would know in advance, which questions they might expect. We also encouraged the respondent to choose a good location for taking the interview and we (researchers) intended to keep an appropriate appearance. As stated before, our common MSPME background represented a good 'opening' for the interviews increasing the confidence and trust levels. We also assured them anonymity and that the records would only be used for our academic purposes. In addition, we intended to phrase the questions clearly and tried to formulate the follow-up questions using the respondents' own words provided in previous responses. Moreover, to make sure that we had understood the response in the same way as the respondents, we provided a summary before moving to

another main question, thus, giving the respondents the opportunity to evaluate the adequacy of the interpretation and correct if it was necessary. However, it is important to be aware that, even if all the respondents have a good knowledge of the English language, it did not represent the mother tongue in any of the cases, which may have led to misinterpretations and bias. Moreover, there may also be bias caused by cultural differences between the respondents and the interviewers. Especially, considering that these interviews were concerned with individual identity, which may represent a sensitive topic, we may expect that some of the respondents have kept some relevant information uncovered or decided to express only what he/she considered appropriate. In addition, it should be considered that the respondents' ex-professors and tutors will have access to this study so they (the respondents) may have tried to express things according to what they believed is expected from them and maybe, holding back information they would consider inappropriate for this audience.

3.15. Ethical Considerations

Even if we considered that several ethical issues have already been addressed throughout the study, it is important to have a section dedicated to the appropriateness of our behaviour in relation to the study. First, we would like to be explicit that we adhere to the deontological view, thus, we believe that the "ends served by the research can never justify the use of research which is unethical" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.184).

Important aspects to consider when addressing ethical issues in business research are the potential harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception (Bryman & Bell, 2003, p.535). We considered to have addressed all of these issues in different stages of the research. Particularly, we do not consider to have been involved in any situation representing a conflict of interest. Moreover, confidentiality and anonymity were explicitly promised to all respondents, and our word was kept by only providing the information that the respondents consented to share. We also considered to have obtained informed consent from all the respondents. By this, we mean that all respondents gave their consent freely and based on full information about the use of the information and privacy rights (Fisher & Anushko, 2008, p.99; Saunders et al., 2009, p.190). Further, we adhered to the objectivity principle by fully collecting, analysing and presenting all empirical material instead of exercising a convenient subjective selection of the material (i.e. hiding or manipulate information) during any stage of the process (Saunders et al., 2009, p.194). Even if our decision to provide respondents with enough, but imprecise information about the interview may be considered as a deceit over the real purpose of the study, we do not consider to have fallen into deception. In line with Fisher and Anushko (2008, p.101) who considered that "not providing participants with specific hypotheses regarding the relationship among experimental variables does not in itself constitute deception", we believe that no provision of information about the lens used in the study did not transgress the deception principle. Moreover, we believe that providing respondents details about the discrepancies around the meanings of 'professions' and 'careers' may have introduced respondent bias to our research.

4. Empirical Results

This chapter will give an overview of the empirical material gathered during the semi-structured interviews. The purpose is to make the reader familiar with the findings, which have been summarised and categorised according to the targets used for the development of the Interview Guide (Appendix 2 Column 1). As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter (Section 3.13), some new categories were added during the categorisation process as needed. The material is presented in seven categories named Work history and careers of the respondents, Knowledge employed in Project Management, MSPME graduates' self-presentation, Respondents' relations with the Project Management Institutions, Respondents' perception of Project Management, Respondents' perceptions of the traits of traditional professions, and Respondents' opinion about the professionalization of PM initiated by PM Institutions.

<u>Work history and careers of the respondents</u>

Adriana	Tom	Marcel	Tiago
- 2008: Internship in Auditing in PWC (3 months) - 1 year Erasmus Exchange in France - 2009-2012: Credit Management in Hewlett-Packard - 09/2012-01/2014: MSPME - 01/2014: Research in PM - 07/2014: PMO Support in Camoplast Solideal*	- Internship in the airspace sector (6 months) - General Management (textile industry) - Other internships in Production, Mechanical Engineering - 09/2012-01/2014: MSPME - Trainee in Bombardier Transportation*	- Master in Applied Mathematics & Physics - Internal Consulting or Analysis (4 years, pharmaceutical company) - 2006-2008: MSPME - Consulting - 2012-2016: Research in PM*	- 09/2006-01/2008: MSPME - Marketing Trainee in Nestlé - Innovation (development of new products) in Nestlé - Trade Marketing in Nestlé (1 year) - Trade Marketing Project Supervisor in Nestlé - Consultant in Nestlé - Key Account Manager in Nestlé - Job transition*
Ian	**John**	**Inna**	**Jaime**
- 02/2003-09/2003: IT Auditing Consultant in KPMG - 09/2003-03/2006: Consultant in Everis - 03/2006-09/2006: Manager of the PMO in the ministry - 09/2006-01/2008: MSPME 05/2008-07/2008: Teaching at university (course in Consulting) - 07/2008-2012: Senior Manager for strategic projects in the ministry of finance - Vice President of	- Teaching at university (7 years) - Part-time Accountant, regional Finance Coordinator in NGO - 09/2006-01/2008: MSPME - Operations Director (control, finance, HR, consultancy) in NGO - Deputy Country Director & CFO in NGO - Promotion to regional office - Advisor in NGO*	- 09/2007-01/2009: MSPME - 05/2009: Internship in Strategic Planning (assistant to the management) in Novartis - Market Research in Novartis - Operational Marketing in Novartis -Strategic Planning Manager in Novartis*	- Bachelor in Industrial Engineering - Minor in aerospace in Montreal - Pratt & Whitney (aerospace industry) - Business Analyst in Company X - Logistics in Company X - 09/2010-01/2012 MSPME - Business Consultant in Colombia - Project Engineer in Company X*

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Table 4. Respondents' Work History

The work history of the respondents (Table 4) indicates that commonly Project Management is accessed from another more specific occupation or studies, but usually from related fields such as business administration and accounting. The respondents attested that PM was brought to their attention through a sequence of events that happened during their careers and finally took them where they are today. To explain the respondents' career transitions into PM, different reasons or important events were pointed out. For example, Adriana realised that her previous field does not match with what she wants: "The reason why I made the change, well, there were a couple of reasons, but one of them was that I realised that maybe finance and especially accounting might not be really what I want to do. I wanted a bit more of human contact". However, respondents often drew on the reasons that led them into PM rather by chance. On one hand, Inna and Marcel highlighted that networking and the contact with other people influenced career decisions enormously: "I see a lot of influence from contacts or people around me on my decisions regarding my career" (Marcel). Inna also pointed out the importance and value of learning about other people's careers: "I think it's more a kind of process of networking and knowing people from industries is very important. It means a lot to get to know people and learn about their experiences" (Inna). On the other hand, involvement in projects in previous, non-project based job positions increased the interest in the field of PM: "The one that took me to projects was when I was in logistics. [...] And I inherited this position, I think that was mainly by chance because the previous industrial engineer left the company for another assignment and that was it. That was pretty much when they hit me, when I said I want to do projects. Really that one is really what made me pursue this line of career because otherwise I would have stayed in logistics and maybe grow in logistics" (Jaime). For Adriana the project experience was a trigger that made her feel to have a lack of knowledge: "So, there you were having couple of interesting projects. Some of them were really touching upon how do we manage a project, who does what, how to we share responsibility. [...] But I felt that I lacked some PM knowledge".

As a consequence, respondents moved into PM and took the Master in Project Management (MSPME) in order to add managerial skills and knowledge: "[...] the change from IT related, trying to make it more management. Even if I was in projects to have a Master that says 'Management' that sells you in that field much better like an MBA or Master in Management" (Ian). Jaime was even speculating on a specific job position he wanted to pursue after MSPME: "Well, one was because it was PM. I was specifically looking for a PM Masters. I think the opportunity of going out and looking at the Masters also happened when I looked for this, there was this aero structure project engineer position [his current position]" (Jaime).

Adriana wanted to broaden her knowledge and saw PM as a chance to move away from the 'specific': "I wanted to have more of a bird eye's view of more than I was doing, back then I was in finance. And PM seems to me that it gives me this helicopter view so I said why not". Tiago also realised this issue and pointed out the value of PM: "So they

[projects] are different, this allows you not so early in your career to become so focused in one theme because you can use PM with a lot of things, it's like business. If you study something so specific maybe you get stuck to one industry. And PM is why it opens to".

Others named less specific purposes for having joined MSPME: "At that time I was looking for a Master degree because I realised that just Bachelor doesn't work and it will just not work in the long-run. It was just a spontaneous decision and I liked this programme better than others" (Inna). Indeed, most of the respondents got attracted by the design of the programme, in particular by the perceived benefits. For example, Ian, Tiago and Tom considered international experience and mobility a valuable characteristic of the programme because it shows ability to adapt, tolerance and team work which is important in today's multinational companies: "[...] the fact that you live in three different countries because this differentiates you from other people as well. It shows the companies that you are a person that you know how to adapt to different situations, that you know how to adapt to different cultures and also you get around, you know how to take care of yourself" (Tiago). Furthermore, studying in three different countries and with people from around the world was recognised as a good opportunity to establish an international network (Ian). With the aid of having three different diplomas from prestigious universities (Tiago) it was considered to boost professional opportunities afterwards: "I thought they [three diplomas] will enable me to have these wider options for my professional career which actually did happen" (Ian).

All respondents considered the Master degree in Project Management as an asset which gives credibility and acts as a career booster: "I think it was a 100% contribution of MSPME of having this role" (Adriana). "Without that Master degree I could not be what I'm doing now. So the Master degree is a very valuable degree, for my career as well as promotion opportunity" (John). Furthermore, it was recognised as a facilitator to get into the job position: "I think it definitely helped me in my career, getting good feedback now from my first job now here. That definitely made it a lot easier for me to get into the role of PM" (Tom). Additionally, with an understanding of what a project really is, it was acknowledged as a complement to previous knowledge, degrees or expertise which consequently opened the doors for other potential job positions: "And also because this type of Master where you have to manage of course, and when I use it with the background I had I was able to jump from a more operative role to a more managerial role" (Ian). Drawing on the complement of previous knowledge, Tiago argued: "Only with the Project Management knowledge I would not have been able to do my job. I needed the expertise in those fields or else I wouldn´t even be able to select which projects were best". This indicated that PM as a broader field needs to be complemented by more precise, hands-on or tangible either studies or work experience: "You need to start with something specific before you get general and not the other way round. So if you do not have the understanding of any of the sub-topic then it is hard to work at this broad level" (Adriana). As Tiago noticed: "PM is a position for someone with a very solid and technical knowhow in another field which becomes a project manager later in his career". Therefore, the position of a project manager is not perceived as an entry position and according to Tiago, it "would usually start out as an analyst or specialist then a coordinator, then a supervisor and then project manager".

Even though a couple of respondents did not really know what to do with their studies afterwards (Adriana, Inna), after graduation, all respondents pursued a job in the field of PM or related fields where they would work with projects. Respondents stated that they had actively applied for their jobs and were looking for something more or less in line

with what they were doing before the Master programme. Those that did not have professional experience looked for internships, traineeships or 'assisting jobs' to get a foot into the business world: "After graduation I realised I need an internship because I need to somehow enter and put my foot into the business world and for that PM or the title manager would not be possible. I don't know, there are different people on the programme of course, different background, different ages and some people have a lot of experience and of course after graduation they might go and apply for much higher position but for me it was basically part of my studies, so I haven't worked before really in a company" (Inna).

During the development of their careers, all respondents have been involved in projects or project work, some more extensively than others: "I was involved in PM activity throughout my career ever since I joined Nestlé" (Tiago). Those that are currently predominantly involved in projects and project work claimed their role to be purely PM (Adriana) or the whole industry or organisation as very project-oriented (Jaime, Inna, Tom). In general, it can be observed that respondents went back or tried to go back to the same organisation they used to work for before the Master in order to further develop there: "And I did that after graduation, I went back to my country, I went back to the same organisation as I was committed" (John). However, respondents took on different roles, usually those were more managerial and with higher responsibility. In general, during their careers a lot of the respondents moved across different departments and positions, but within the same company.

In the future, the majority of respondents (Adriana, Marcel, Ian, John, Jaime, Tom, Tiago) intend to stay in the same field of work or division as they are currently, which in most of the cases is in the field of PM, related or close fields. Some have a clear goal or desired future position they would like to pursue: "I definitely see my career in PM and definitely in the so called front office. My goal is to become a project manager for these big projects that we do in the division and just to develop in that area, to start with smaller projects obviously or not as strategically important, moving all the way to what we call critical A projects" (Tom). While others were less concrete and hardly able to mention the industry sector they would like to work in: "I mean in general, I think, if it is some sort of purposeful area or industry with a good purpose then I will stay there" (Inna). Although Inna is "really proud to be in that area of PM field [...]", she indicates flexibility or openness to change: "But to me it's like a lot about explorations and be open to opportunities [...]. I saw a lot of absolutely amazing, outstanding, successful people in the industry and they, they've been through so many functions and through so many projects and finally, they develop that pretty holistic view and they can do something meaningful and can get decision-making roles. But they needed this multi-faceted knowledge from different areas of business. So that's why I just took it as a lesson to myself and not focus on a specific area" (Inna).

However, the respondents with a more specific idea about their future position realised that in the short-term more experience or acquirement of knowledge is necessary before pursuing their desired position: "I do see the need that I cover some gaps that I have in project and programme management. So I do want to be a bit more operational in order to think strategically because now it is about strategy, as I said it's extremely exciting but I feel that I'm lacking some operational aspects in order to understand the strategic ones" (Adriana). "I hope I will be playing this role [advisor in strategic and business planning] for a while, maybe for the next 1-2 years to really learn more about the implementation of the strategic and business plan. I may go after; I mean a higher position covering this area. Now I'm more or less an advisor so maybe I will end to hold

a manager role position, for example manager of strategic plan or maybe director of the strategic and business plan" (John).

The general expression or desire to work in the field of PM or closely related fields is reflected in the respondents' overall satisfaction in working with projects: "I learnt that it's very thrilling to be in that field" (Inna). Although respondents perceived PM as challenging, they also described it as an interesting and awarding and/or rewarding: "For me, projects are always exciting, it means we get to do something new, to implement a new tool, to enter a new market or to launch a new product. These objectives are very important for an organisation's future, so usually if you are part of a project you will get to leave your mark. There will be a change because of your participation, and for me the best is once you have the results of the new project. That is very rewarding to see something working that was not there before" (Tiago).

Knowledge employed in Project Management

Although MSPME was collectively recognised as an asset, respondents asserted that they only make very little use of the PM tools and techniques in a formal way (Tiago, Inna, Marcel, Jaime). "I think there are a lot of things in the MSPME, in terms of techniques or know-how that you don't use here [...]" (Jaime). "So for instance, some of the things that were useful for me they were not actually related to PM itself" (Marcel). The few concepts that were considered practical in business life are the Project Management Life Cycle (John) and the Work-Breakdown-Structure (WBS): "But the WBS is something that I used and was something well seen by people as people could understand it, high level breakdown and you can see the test they accomplish the specific goal depending on how you structure. Gantt chart and those things I used for my own control but that was nothing that was well established in the organisations" (Tiago). Instead, respondents indicated the value and importance of soft skills and more general management skills (e.g. change management, management accounting, leadership, negotiation) over technical skills: "I mean it's difficult to name exactly things I'm using in business life; but definitely, I mean it's also like a lot of soft skills, that team work" (Inna).

These insights correspond to what respondents perceived as the characteristics needed to successfully manage a project. According to the respondents and their experiences, soft skills were reported to be of great importance and the key to success: "Well, I think whatever project we take, it's all about people, people will be involved, people skills, managing people is crucial. This is probably the most. I mean the projects that fail actually; they fail either, because of lack of communication or lack of motivation or lack of power, leadership, and clear direction" (Inna). "I must say balance between art and science in terms of, of course we need the technical skills, we need technical knowledge. However, to apply those to complexity of working environment, then we need also balance of the human's science [...] we need to think about human factors and also the impact on the organisation and on the staff" (John). Additionally, quick intellectual grasp (Marcel), openness to change (Ian) and ability to deal with uncertainty were considered as essential in working with projects: "I think being able to deal with uncertainty, things that you can't really grasp. So in other areas you might have things that are more issues that are more problems in the day-to-day business. But in PM, I think a good project manager is somebody that can deal with uncertainty" (Tom).

However, it was recognised that the level of technical knowledge and soft skills depends on the level in the project system: "On project level you do need some knowledge more

of a specific knowledge of the project you are managing. The more you are going to programme management, the harder it is to have an understanding, technical and specific understanding of the projects underneath because it is broader and broader. So specific is actually not that useful. When you get to portfolio management it is really less and less about technical knowledge and more about the human side" (Adriana).

Despite optimism towards their role in PM, respondents indicated difficulties in enacting the role in particular organisational settings. It was pointed out that organisations are not yet ready for PM, meaning that the organisational transformation has not yet taken place or has not fully been implemented (Adriana, Tiago, Tom): "And it was a new discipline and PM still is a new discipline like I'm telling you that they are implementing things like 3, 4 years ago in the company that were PM tools. And to this day, I left the company; I know that it's still not so well used" (Tiago).

MSPME graduates' self-presentation

When asking the respondents how they would present themselves to a head-hunter (without applying for a specific job), generally, respondents strongly emphasised on their PM skills and/or knowledge. But, more importantly, they drew on their experience in project-oriented organisations or industries and in the field of PM to indicate their ease to grasp any new industry or work. Only Adriana and Tom mentioned their previous academic and/or professional background explicitly. The others either made indications or did not mention it at all. "I would tell them that I am a PM enthusiast with good international background, having gotten a lot of good positive feedback from various internships in different fields of industries, mainly focusing mechanical engineering parts" (Tom). Ian and Inna affirmed their current/last position and pointed out their professional experience: "I'm a researcher in strategy and innovation and I have nine years experience as a business management consultant and as a senior project management in sectors such as telecom, banking and in government" (Ian). In line with the strong emphasis on professional experience which most of the respondents followed, Inna mentioned her professional experience above her education because she feels that it is more valuable to companies: "I think I would say I'm a marketer with a PM background" (Inna). Tiago even picked a specific position with a project title to underline his PM experience: "In my CV I highlighted a lot that I have the formal PM Masters [...]. And I highlighted in my CV, in the trade marketing department my position was trade marketing project supervisor that was a project title because that what I did there". Surprisingly, also the Master degree in PM was mentioned only very few times.

Furthermore, perceived important capabilities (usually human skills) were mentioned (Jaime, Tom): "I would say that I am very capable or able to work with different groups, that I'm able to work with specialists, you know, to coordinate them, to grab, being a generalist, but to align and harmonise the needs to different stakeholders and deliver. [...] But at the end I think those projects abilities are transferable everywhere" (Jaime).

Respondents' relations with the Project Management Institutions

None of the respondents has a certification from any of the PM Institutions, but nearly all of them have thought about it either during or after the Master degree: "I've been thinking about it but have not decided it yet, maybe next year" (Jaime). While some respondents indicated that getting certified in PM is not their priority (Tiago, Ian), Inna clearly stated her disinterest. Furthermore, she indicated that it may only be useful in academia in order to share knowledge, but in the field not really (Inna). Only two

respondents (Adriana, Tom) have more concrete plans of intending to get certified in PM in the near future: "I will get one in February. Hopefully I will get it. It is part of PRINCE 2, but it is for portfolio management" (Adriana). "No, but I am planning to. That is definitely one of my new year's resolutions or for the year after that to start joining the associations first of all and then also to get certified. I might even go for both, for the two big ones which is the IMPA and the PMI" (Tom).

On the contrary, the remaining respondents were not very convinced. This was expressed through the various reasons and excuses mentioned. Time constraints were the reason to defer the certification: "So I think because I was full of work so I was letting pass, changing from one certification to the other" (Ian). "But then I didn't have time to do it or I didn't want to take time for it from my studies" (Marcel). Additionally, it was indicated that there are too many certifications available and that it is hard to choose the right one, especially because those are valued differently around the world: "And then actually there are many types of certifications. Let's take for example, the PMI offers different options [...]. But not in all the countries they are asking for the same certifications or not the same value they give to them" (Ian).

However, the main reason why respondents are not certified was the perceived barrier set by the PM Institutions in terms of professional hours required: "The first time I was considering to get PMP but at that time I took the requirements of that I had to be project manager for two years. Later, I realised that people have it without having it. It's just how they write about it. But by that time I took it as a barrier" (Marcel). While Adriana wants to get certified in the near future because of personal and business needs and feelings of pressure in front of her peer workers, Marcel did not see the necessity anymore due to advanced professional experience gathered during the past years. He would only get one for purposes other than acquiring PM skills and knowledge: "But I also need to know what is the status of practices in profession in order to know what kind of knowledge they need to know as well, what do they need from the research" (Marcel). Thus, what was perceived as a barrier previously transformed into a state where field experience was perceived to be more valuable, making certificates unnecessary (Ian, Tiago, Inna): "But actually to be honest, later, [...] it was not a difference because I already had years of experience and then if you go to the interviews and then the way you answer I think they realise somehow that you are trustable" (Ian). "It's a lot about experience and if people have experience or if they studied somewhere and then they improved their knowledge in the field that makes the person an expert comparing to having like tons of papers from different institutions proofing a lot of things" (Inna). Furthermore, the already acquired Master degree in PM was mentioned as a reason not to get certified: "I think having my Master is enough. I usually like to tell people that the MSPME course is equivalent to a PMBOK certification" (Tiago).

Although none of the respondents has a certification in PM, they perceived it as beneficial and valuable to have. It was considered to reduce the complexity and increase the understanding in the job: "Because I hope I will be able to see clearer the connection how all projects contribute overall to the programme, how all programmes contribute to the portfolio and how you report differently, how you report at the different level" (Adriana). In this sense, it was also seen as a contribution to lifelong learning: "The other thing is also just generally personal development. I think it's important that you don't just stop with the Masters degree and think "good now I'm done". I think you should always learn" (Tom). As a consequence, it was mentioned that "you have a very good overview of what are the parts and what can be the issues and then you [...] choose what applies in this specific situation" (Marcel).

In first place, certifications give reliability to the practitioner and/or the department by demonstrating the practitioner's capability according to certain standards (Ian, John, Adriana): "[...] When I was starting before having experience as project manager they made a difference because they enable you to have people to somehow trust you because this entity says that you are good in Project Management according to certain standards. [...] maybe if you have short experience as a project manager it is a way to ensure companies that you are able or capable to do the job" (Ian). On the other hand, certifications were also assumed to be no guarantee of competence (Adriana, Ian, Marcel, Tom): "Other than that, also having a certification doesn't mean that you are actually capable of the job or different projects or different types of industries. That is the only thing I see misleading" (Ian). "I mean you can debate long about what they [certifications] say about somebody if, how you can judge somebody according to certificates" (Tom).

Furthermore, certifications were identified as an element to set oneself apart and as an enabler for employment opportunities (John, Jaime, Tom). In this context, often the Master degree in PM was recognised to be outweighed by certifications: "I think that more and more companies are recognising but also requesting these certifications. So even though I have a degree in PM it might not be enough because companies might say that these degrees haven't been around for so long and they don't know how good they are, whereas they know the associations have been around for like 60 years or something like that, they have a certain value, they have other people in the company that have already gotten these certifications" (Tom). Therefore, "the license of certification allows him or her to have more opportunity of employment" (John).

Although certifications are not required in PM, "[...] they always say that certifications, like PMI, it's a plus [...]" (Jaime). In particular, for more process-oriented projects where all steps are more or less clear and where "[...] it's just a question in which consequence you will put them and you know in advance that finally you will build it. I mean if you build a warehouse, then you will find to build it. If you want to find a new drug, then no guarantee" (Marcel).

However, most of the respondents expressed disagreement towards a hypothetical obligation of holding a certification in order to work in Project Management. Only John argued that "[...] the certification from the PMI should be already legal [...] [but not obligatory]". Adriana and Jaime acknowledged that in some professions, such as accounting and auditing it is necessary to raise the barrier of entry through legal certifications because those people have a lot of responsibility and legal implications may occur: "So having a certification is like a shield that yes, we have this resource, this person that is certified, so we are good to go because there might be legal implications" (Adriana). However, for Project Management it was considered as not necessary: "I would say that is nonsense. To me it's nonsense, it's another piece of paper [...], [...] just another bureaucratic thing. If you have some prestigious certificate or you don't it doesn't really matter and I think it should not be" (Inna). In this context Marcel pointed out that often people do not require the full knowledge and usage of the PMBOK which in his opinion would lead to over qualification if certifications were obligatory: "So in that sense, and as I said, in some companies they are labelled project managers although their tasks are not actually related to PM, don't require usage of all PMBOK". Jaime saw it in a bit more extreme way: "But for PM, would be for me as [...] you ask a designer to qualify in marketing".

Despite general disagreement, a few respondents (Adriana, Marcel, Tiago) considered it to perhaps be acceptable for more project-oriented companies, pure PM roles such as the PMO or for types of projects that are similar and where knowledge is available about how those projects look like. Examples mentioned were IT, construction or engineering: "If you don't have these tools, if you don't have this well figured out, then you are going to lose yourself in the project. It's too big, too complex, too many people involved, too many suppliers, too many of everything, too much money" (Tiago).

Nevertheless, the usefulness of mandatory certificates in some markets is downplayed by the argument of Inna, Tiago and Ian that experience, expertise and acknowledgements from previous jobs outweigh a certificate: "It's a lot about experience and if people have experience or if they studied somewhere and then they improved their knowledge in the field that makes the person an expert comparing to having like tons of papers from different institutions proofing a lot of things" (Inna).

In general, respondents were more concerned with potential disadvantages or risks than possible advantages mandatory certifications to work in the field of PM could have. On one hand, Adriana worried about the expulsion of important functional managers (without certification) which bring a lot of expertise, capabilities and value to the projects and without which PM couldn't exist: "[...] making PM restrictive to those that have certification I think it is quite a bad idea because often project manager of PM, in order to manage the project you need the functional knowledge as well, so you would have the people of the functions to come to the projects as well." On the other hand, it was recognised to be problematic in two ways since projects are considered unique and different from each other: "Other than that, also having a certification doesn't mean that you are actually capable of the job or different projects or different types of industries. But each one has different capacities so you cannot expect that you have the same result" (Ian). Marcel complemented this view by claiming that "They [BOKs] just have a general framework which is supposed to fit both, smaller projects and larger projects". Therefore, the tools and approaches "[...] would not fit the requirements of particular type of projects" (Marcel).

Although Tom did not see a downside, he couldn't imagine that this would happen: "I think it [PM] will regulate itself. I can't imagine in this day and age that such a thing like PM could be institutionalised by two big organisations like PMI, IPMA". This is in line with Inna, who argued that if certifications were mandatory in PM, then pursuing qualifications shouldn't be restricted to a few professional organisations: "[...] my issue is if there is a requirement to be project managers, as an employee or applicant I should have a choice where to get the certification". Similar to Tom, Jaime did not see a reason for this to happen: "I don't see why would they [the government], you know, put resources in managing that?".

However, even though "[...] it would be shocking [...]" (Inna) and Jaime thought that people will not pursue the qualification, when worst comes to worst, respondents would probably go and get a certificate, but only under the condition if they are not able to find a job elsewhere and if it was formally recognised: "If I want to have a job and the job is not available because of this certification, I will probably go and get it" (Inna).

Respondents' perception of Project Management

PM is considered to be triggered by increased competition and complexity companies are facing. As Adriana noticed: "There is competition everywhere, there is competition in all fields, there is less and less space for creativity and invention". In addition, PM is

understood to become more important as a means to manage and structure work and as "a way to implement strategy" (Ian) in order to align the different projects and programmes: "All this programmes at some point might cannibalise their resources that a company has. Yes, you need to align it and how you align it; you need PM to align it" (Adriana). Jaime acknowledged it as "a way of putting small pieces together, small pieces are different and they have to match to the other".

This "relatively new discipline" (Tiago) is considered "a really growing field" (Adriana) which offers new roles and job opportunities. While "it's getting more and more serious" (Adriana) it was even recognised as growing into a profession: "I see it as a more and more well-defined profession" (Adriana). However, other respondents perceived Project Management rather as a more generic, specific type of management: "PM for me is a different way of looking at management. [...] it's a lot more goal-oriented. For me PM is definitely an opportunity to do management in a better way" (Tom) due to more flexibility, but also uncertainty. In this context, Tiago and John perceived Project Management as a useful set of tools and concepts to manage and control projects, allocate resources and facilitate decision-making. Thus, as noted by Marcel, there are different perspectives on Project Management.

Ian specified it further and considered PM as a process and an outcome. On one hand, it was conceded as a systematic approach or process to manage people to achieve a specific objective or task within a specific period of time. Inna emphasised the importance of the time limit of a project: "Yes, of course it has budget, yes of course it has people and yes of course it has the clear goal but I think it is the most important that the project has a time limit". On the other hand, it could be understood as a potential asset to the organisation as people may transfer their PM expertise: "So even though they [people participating in projects] have left or they are not participating anymore in the process, they still have this skills which is called PM capability and therefore it's also like an outcome as a skill, for example people that will help in a way to their own organisation" (Ian). In this way, it is considered to develop into a specific type of knowledge which may be applicable to different fields of work: "I think that the skills and knowledge of PM are more and more recognised as a specific knowledge although [...] it's a knowledge which concerns many fields [...]" (Adriana). Linked to this, it was claimed that "PM can be everything" (Adriana, Inna), not only what is called PM: "So I think we can call it a job of PM; but in essence there are so many other jobs that are totally doing the same thing" (Inna).

In line with Marcel who realised that the perception and representation of Project Management is likely to depend on the type of project work, Tom recognised that it cannot be seen as a universal approach which benefits all organisations: "I don't think that it's for every company. I don't think every company should do PM".

By drawing on the growing awareness of PM and picking up the aspect of Adriana that PM is more and more seen as a profession, we realised that all respondents had difficulties in defining what a profession is which was expressed in long pauses, clarifying questions and expressions such as "that is a tough one", "good question", "that is hard", "I guess", "I'm not sure, but", "Is a sort of". Finally, the respondents came up with definitions which reflect different understandings of a profession. It was realised that "maybe a profession was differently defined 100 years ago" (Adriana). In this context, it was argued that at present there is no difference between an occupation and a profession: "With saying that it's a profession, for me it's like anything; if you are a housekeeper or if you are a general manager, if you are working in a bakery or as a

retailer, as a researcher, whatever, for me those are all professions" (Tom). However, it was realised that a profession is a matter of perception (Inna). Tiago specified this and stated: "I think every time that you know a set of skills that other people don't, you can classify this as a profession, something that is correlated, something that works".

Collectively the following characteristics of a profession were identified by the respondents. It was considered to be a group of people with a similar type of job or working in the same field (Adriana, Jaime, Tom): "[...] within that profession you can do many different jobs" (Jaime). The people in that group or subject area were reported to have a certain role or responsibility in a community: "A profession I think is maybe defined that you have a certain role within a community i.e. a company or an NGO or any kind of other organisation that contributes to the success of that organisation or the sustenance of the organisation, it doesn't even have to be the success but at least it survives" (Tom). Furthermore, a profession is regulated and comprises a professional body, certifications and documentation which attest the existence of the profession (Adriana, John): "Maybe I am bit biased because actually with the research I'm describing what a profession is. So a profession is supposed to be an activity that is regulated and that you need a license to operate" (Ian). On the other hand, also recognition by society was identified as an aspect of a profession: "Profession would be to broadly recognise overall by common public, recognised activity which will require some formal education, some practices and some behaviour standards" (Marcel).

According to the respondents' definition of a profession, the majority (Adriana, Jaime, John, Tom, Tiago) considered PM to be a profession or at least to be on the way to become a profession. Adriana pointed out the geographical differences in the perceptions of PM being or becoming a profession: "In the States it is 200% a profession because of PMI. I think in Europe [...] it's less of a profession; it's less seen as a profession as it is in the States. [...] so why in the States it is more of a profession because it has history". However, it was recognised that it is not a profession like doctors or lawyers: "I mean you have to be careful because these have a kind of social standing, even connected to certain degrees like a doctor or whatever it's called for law" (Tom). Furthermore, limitations were pointed out: "Yes, I think especially if you take this part, the part of PM which is kind of PMI based etc., that's probably a profession. But quite often project managers are referred to someone who doesn't have this formal elements at all. But anyway they are called project managers in their companies and this part I would say is not a profession; it's more a craft or something or just the label, but not more than the label" (Marcel).

On the other hand, a couple of respondents recognised PM not to be a profession because PM does not require a certification to practice in this field: "In the sense for example consultants or now where I am studying, actually they are not considered to be a profession because you don't need a license to be a consultant instead of for example to be a doctor, a lawyer or accountant which are like the activities that are considered profession because you have this license" (Ian). Instead, no matter how it is called, "but if it consists of projects, it's a PM position" (Inna). Therefore, Project Management was considered rather as a toolbox (Tiago) or a know-how (Inna): "So I think PM is more kind of an attitude or content, the content of a job. It's more like how you do things." (Inna).

<u>Respondents' perceptions of the traits of traditional professions</u>

Taking into account the role and importance of the bodies of knowledge in PM, respondents found them professionally and personally very useful (John). In particular, the resulting standardisation was recognised as beneficial: "It has to do with not reinventing the wheel. It means you don't have to start from zero" (Jaime). Furthermore, it serves as the basis which provides a common language, gives tools and enables interchange of practices (Marcel, Jaime): "[...] they provide certain framework we may not remember if we do not refer to them, like step by step to ensure that we have the right information, the right resources and for the decision making" (John). In other words, the BOKs were perceived to set the guidelines (Tiago) by introducing best practices which assist in managing projects successfully: "They were also very important in the beginning when all those tools, they were all loose. And there are a lot of tools in PM, they were grabbed from IT projects and there are tools that were grabbed from other things. And the guy grouped them all together and said those are good tools to do projects, the best actually. If you use them it's going to help you; to manage, to define, to organise, to control and to get better results" (Tiago). Besides the usefulness, it was realised that standardisation of knowledge and best practices prevent PM from making tailor-made solutions (Marcel).Although the respondents evaluated the bodies of knowledge as useful, there was a common agreement that it is possible to manage a project without knowing or following the BOK, usually by simply using common sense (Adriana, Tiago): "So I think that the tools are very important and they will help you to be successful. I don't think they will hurt you in any way. But I also think that, I have also seen that it is possible to be successful without it but I think your chances improve if you have it" (Tiago). Marcel recognised that it depends on the type of the project by arguing that it would not make sense for projects that are highly analytical and involve a lot of tacit knowledge to follow the BOK, e.g. R&D projects, when starting projects from scratch and when similar projects have not been done before or prototypes. Respondents identified that on one hand, challenges may be faced if not following the BOK: "I would say yes, he or she can successfully manage a project but I bet he/she would be facing different challenges or certain challenges. If they refer to that BOK they may avoid those challenges because the BOK may provide certain information or certain knowledge for the readers [...]" (John). On the other hand, it was observed to be not helpful following the BOK step-by-step: "I think if you use the BOK step by step you wouldn't get a lot. I mean I don't think that this is a good thing" (Jaime).

In terms of recognition, respondents agreed that PM is worth it because projects are everywhere nowadays and they are gaining more importance in organisations: "I think it's important because projects are now many and they become quite omnipresent so in this sense if people will just think in that direction what it takes to manage such activities etc., it will already bring some value" (Marcel). According to Tom, adopting a project-oriented structure in organisations can already be termed as recognition in PM: "In the end I think yes, like anything else deserves recognition. If companies decide to do PM then they should also structure themselves in that way. So that is also kind of recognition, so that somebody who is or a company who is working in PM recognises that they do so and structure themselves accordingly" (Tom).Nevertheless, respondents did not recognise PM as a field that deserves special recognition. However, as a consequence of the ubiquity of projects, respondents experienced that their PM knowledge and skills are more recognised as special and complementary by peers and colleagues (Adriana, John, Tiago): "I started to change my point of view little by little

because I do see that people are coming to me as to someone who knows about methodology, about PM etc. etc. So it would complement their specific knowledge" (Adriana). Tiago reported: "[...] it had helped me to impress people and then they look at you and "Wooooooooow" this guy knows something we don't know". Furthermore, it was reported that some of the respondents were more recognised by colleagues because of their presence: "In my organisation I think it is. Well, I wouldn't say elite. But we are recognised because we are more visible. I mean because of the kind of work, I don't know..." (Jaime). However, "in terms of respect or status in the company, I don't think they deserve the better, the nicer status, higher status in the company but they should be definitely considered as very skilful people because their brain adjust so much the different function, they learn so many things from many different areas, and not solely what they specialised in" (Inna).

Respondents acknowledged that project managers do not have much autonomy in their work (John, Inna) because project managers are not their own bosses: "It really depends on the organisation" (Inna, Jaime). Taking into account "higher visibility projects; I've got a lot of attention in terms of details, what's here, what's there, let's discuss this before we do, let's have a meeting before the next step and stuff like that. So it depends [...] how big the project is, like budget wise" (Inna).

Nevertheless, they are usually empowered to take certain decisions within the scope of the project: "[...] the project manager should be empowered to make certain decision, I mean within the available/allowable framework of authority. But again not 100% because by the end of the day the project manager is accountable not only to the higher authority but also to his or her team. So again I would say collaborative efforts rather than too much independent" (John). A reason to restrain from authority is the involvement of the functions into the projects: "We do support budgeting but we don't do it ourselves. So still the functional leaders have a lot of strength and I guess it's because also, I mean it's a very technical environment, so the functional leader, the functional chief has to have this power I guess" (Jaime). Another problem is that project managers are only labelled as such, but actually they are not managing anything: "I would say when I worked for this PMO of what people were calling project managers were not project managers because actually people didn't manage anything. They were mainly analysts preparing solutions but they were labelled project managers in their companies or organisations. All the decisions were taken by someone else [...]" (Marcel).

Corresponding to only having limited autonomy, project managers were perceived to have no formal authority over their clients: "[...] we often are part of a natural team but the people that work for our projects are employees. So they have a functional boss and we just work with them in a matrix form. So, you have to have authority over them, but it's not formal authority. I mean the client sets expectations but rules, I think it's the project manger together with the functional chiefs" (Jaime). Furthermore, Jaime pointed out that credibility increases authority: "I mean we are the ones that are reachable, we are the ones that talk to them [clients], we are the ones they believe and as long as we manage to deliver the trusted increased and they come to us".

In order to run PM smoothly, the culture of PM is considered to be an important element in PM: "Yes, they are very important, in fact, really important and the project manager should be aware of those kinds of things to ensure this working environment and in which he or she gains the full support from the teams. Especially the team is comprised of the members from different cultures, different nationalities or

personalities" (John). However, in general, respondents expressed their doubts that a distinctive culture exists in PM. It was recognised that more PM culture can be found in project-oriented companies (Tiago), but depending on the scale of the organisation or division (Inna). Doubts arose because of the involvement of organisational functions in the project (Adriana): "IT companies are like this, but it gets mixed up together with IT culture. So the company culture ends up to be bigger than your professional culture" (Tiago). Furthermore, the development of a culture was identified to possibly differ in different locations, times etc. (Tom).

Instead of considering it as a culture of PM, it was realised as either an atmosphere (Adriana) or certain attitude (Tom): "Maybe a culture is too much said. It might be an atmosphere; it might be a way, a way to manage this project. The culture I think is more applicable to organisational level, department, industry, country whatever. Since a project is a temporary organisation I'm not sure if it is sufficient to actually what you might call a culture" (Adriana). Additionally, ability and personality were rather considered to constitute culture in PM: "But I don't know if this is culture really. I would say it's more ability and personality. I guess it eventually creates a culture of how to be, but not now" (Jaime).

Respondents' opinions about the professionalization of PM initiated by PM Institutions

Respondents identified the PM professional associations to have different functions and roles which serve and fulfil different purposes. They are considered as professional bodies that ensure capability of performance: "Well, they are there to ensure that those who are part of them are actually capable enough to perform their profession" (Adriana). This in turn gives credibility in front of society which was perceived as the most important function of the professional associations (Adriana): "So yes, that is the third party to hold a professional accountable through the ethics or technical skills and knowledge" (John). For the members those institutions serve as a place where networking and knowledge sharing takes place which consequently improves the whole field of PM (Adriana, Ian, Inna): "[...] it's just a good way for people, to stay progress, to move, to develop the whole field and exchange and be on top of things and maybe finding jobs, maybe just stay connected if you want to develop as a project manager" (Inna).

Apart from giving its members a community, they were realised to enhance and grow the BOK and therefore, further develop the PM discipline by maintaining, developing and passing on knowledge in a compressed way (Adriana, Ian, Jaime, Tiago): "[...] they [professional associations] organise conferences, events, so they do not only train people in practicing in public or private companies but they also do research" (Ian). "Then, to maintain the knowledge and store it and compress it forward, for example, as something new is invented in PM and this should be incorporated in by the professions, by the professional associations and encouraged" (Adriana). As an outcome, guidelines and standards are established which are reflected in best practices (Jaime, Tiago): "They establish the guidelines, they tell you the minimum necessary of knowledge, they present to you, they organise the profession [...]" (Tiago).

Although the role of professional associations in PM is recognised to be important, it was indicated that they are more important in research than in the field. In this sense companies were only considered as a resource of information and thus, as an input for the professional associations: "So I think their role is important. I think it's important that they set standards. Of course you can debate how much standard is worth in PM. I

think they have some worth, but I think that these associations are especially important for research. How much they help the companies I cannot judge right now" (Tom). However, it was assumed that they could benefit each other in a reciprocal approach where "the company gives information or access to their resources in terms of information and the organisations in turn sell their competences in PM" (Tom).

Overall, the majority of the respondents agreed with what PM Institutions are aiming for and with their claim of PM being a profession: "I think it's a profession. I wouldn't disagree with them in these terms [...]" (Tiago). However, some were more convinced than others: "But yes, eventually somehow it's going towards that direction" (Ian). And they expressed indifference because they do not see the implications of it if PM would be a profession: "Weeeeell, of course it can be, we can call it whatever, we can call it profession. I don't know if this changes too much. It's like...what does it change? Does it change the status of a person in a company? Does it change the CV? I don't know what's the objective. It doesn't really matter" (Inna). Drawing on this, "like I said, PM is just like any other management so I don't think it would really be much different to what it is today. I mean in the end it's just a title. What I think is more important is the culture and everything that develops around it that makes it more of a recognised profession [...]. So I think it's just matter of development; it goes very slowly I think" (Tom).

As Ian recognised, there is a positive and a negative side about the professionalization of PM. Due to the perception that PM is "growing and people see it more and more growing" (Adriana), naturally there are some benefits. On one hand, it gives more awareness and recognition to the field of PM: "So if it becomes more regulated and we have clearer frameworks of what PM is and that is part of developing of being a profession, then as an individual you also earn more credibility and actually people understand what you are doing" (Adriana). Due to more awareness and recognition, work is done more frequently through projects, which in turn creates new job opportunities (Adriana). Furthermore, the professionalization of PM would also benefit the employer and employees: "I mean I agree that somehow they are helping project managers to be more marketable in the sense of finding a job because they provide these certifications" (Ian). In turn, companies will pay for the courses and certifications because they also benefit from it: "And it's good because you increase the quality of the people. Somehow you standardise the skills of people" (Ian).

On the other hand, respondents considered it as disadvantageous and had doubts regarding the viability of the professionalization of PM: "If you want to be a project manager, but what I'm saying is like maybe you act as a project manager but you don't want to continue that path, it's like now there are even certifications for being a part of a project team which didn't exist before. For example, I don't think that you need these in order to participate in a project. Or also now that certifications that go beyond projects and PM" (Ian). Therefore, it was perceived to be purely commercial: "I think sometimes it could be also a business like if you see the requirements the way you have to maintain this license with credits. I mean there should be a line" (Ian). Furthermore, for practitioners it was realised to be a potential burden: "[...] it can also be seen a bit as a burden, as a bureaucratic thing, as a "must do" just because it is required by whomever" (Adriana).

However, despite the recognised importance of the professional associations and perceived advantages as well as disadvantages of the professionalization of PM, respondents expressed doubts regarding the regulative power of those institutions. They were considered not to have the potential to influence the industry: "I mean, I don't

think it can have a power of having the standards to influence industry so much, for example, if a certificate will prove that you are a super project manager, it's just a certificate" (Inna). The reasons for the perceived limited influence were that PM is not considered to deal with legal requirements such as doctors or lawyers: "So I think that even if we have a certain code of ethics, I can't imagine that it can be so strictly regulated as like a doctor or a lawyer who really has life in their hands. I don't really see the big consequences; I don't really see the big effects of that" (Tom). "No, I don't see why because it's not really, I mean in the end it doesn't have to do with safety or legal requirements or taxes, you know it's management only" (Jaime).

5. Analysis

As stated in the Methodology Chapter (Section 3.13), the interpretation of the empirical material will be carried out by relating to the findings presented in the Empirical Chapter (Chapter 4) with the theoretical propositions introduced in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2). The analysis will be focused and constantly related to the objectives of the study as we intend to answer our research question through the fulfilment of those objectives.

5.1. Project Management under the Traditional Professionalization Perspective

The various responses regarding the respondents' perception of what Project Management is, reflect the ongoing debate about the nature of Project Management as suggested by Kwak and Anbari (2009, p.435). The responses support Garel's (2013, p.664) and Eskerod and Riis's (2009, p.4) positions of Project Management as a practice and as a discipline respectively. The responses included PM to be a specific type of management, a set of tools and concepts, a process and a method, and they all emphasised the requirement of specific knowledge. The different perspectives on PM could also be attributed to the lack of clearly defined boundaries of the field of PM as outline in the theoretical framework. Therefore, individuals make up their own definition of what PM is, how they use it and what comprises the scope of the work of project managers.

Considering that one of our sub-objectives is to explore the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory perspective, we wanted to identify first how they conceive professions in general. The first thing we noticed was that all respondents had difficulties with this question and took more time to answer it than any other question. In addition, expressions such as "that is a tough one", "good question", "that is hard" and introductory phrases such as "I would say", "maybe", "I guess", "I'm not sure, but" and "Is a sort of" were used. Respondents' hesitation and insecurity in this question shows that the term 'profession' is something that is usually taken for granted, something that is usually used as if it was something commonly understood (Coupland, 2004, p.515). Moreover, the different responses suggest that our preconception about the term 'profession' meaning different things to different people is valid.

Excluding Ian, who has been exposed to the professionalization theory in previous studies, the rest of the respondents tend to perceive professions as an occupation or job and a way of recognising a group of people with similar types of work and specific skills. In line with Evetts (2013, p.783), respondents referred to professions with a positive underlying connotation. However, some of them mentioned certifications or licenses and documents as part of the elements that distinguish a profession from other occupations, which is in line with the work on professionalization by Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Greenwood (1957). Nonetheless, respondents tended to refer to them more as an evidence of the existence of a profession instead of a trait or characteristic through which social closure of the occupation may eventually be achieved. Additionally, Marcel identified recognition, formal education and standardised behaviours as distinctive elements of a profession, which is in line with Wilensky's (1964) process-oriented perspective on professionalization. It should be noted that respondents did not identify all characteristics of a profession under the traditional professionalization perspective. Although certifications and licenses are an important

step towards professionalization it should be kept in mind that becoming a profession means more than that.

Based on the respondents' definition of a profession, we asked them if they would consider PM as a profession. Most of the respondents affirmed PM to be a profession or at least to be on the way to become one. The majority of the respondents used the existence of PM certifications, PM Institutions and BOKs as evidence of why PM is a profession. Marcel also included the higher level education programmes, the PM standardised language and tools. One of the two respondents that does not perceive it as a profession was Inna who explained her position by defining PM more as a "know-how" or an "attitude" towards how to manage things. In this sense, she claimed that PM is more a way in which someone exercises his/her job. Ian, the other respondent that did not consider PM as a profession, as explained above, was already familiar with the professionalization theory through previous studies. He put a lot of emphasis on the lack of legal recognition by means of legal qualification for the exercise of the occupation. In this sense, we could interpret that Ian does not perceive that PM is a profession under the traditional professionalization perspective. In addition, an important claim was made by Tom when saying that PM is definitely a profession, but not in the sense like doctors or lawyers because those have a "kind of social standing". Considering that lawyers and doctors are classified as traditional professions, embedded in the trait and process perspective of professionalization, we interpret that Tom does not conceive PM as a profession in the same terms (i.e. under the trait and process perspective). Therefore, it could be said that Project Management is widely seen and accepted as a profession, but under a different definition of the term 'profession' (i.e. not the traditional perspective) where some traits or characteristics either seem to be unimportant or are not perceived as applicable to PM. Moreover, considering that individuals place themselves in and out of particular groups after comparing themselves to the members (Walsh & Gordon, 2008, p.55), we can consider that respondents decided to exclude themselves from the traditional professions group by claiming that they do not see themselves in the same group as doctors, lawyers or accountants.

In order to fully understand what the respondents meant when claiming that PM is or is not a profession, we also addressed their perceptions on each one of the characteristics of the trait and process perspective of professionalization.

<u>Full-time occupation</u>

In general, we could interpret that the respondents agree with Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.268) and Eskerod and Riis (2009, p.4) that PM seems to be recognised as an occupation where people spend their full working time on projects. Nonetheless, considering Inna's perception of PM as an "attitude" or "know-how" to address any job, we suggest that she also perceives PM a set of skills or tool-kit which can be applied to many occupations (Hodgson, 2002, p.816).

<u>Training and education</u>

All respondents conceive their degree in PM as a complement of their previous education and perceive that this degree gives credibility to their knowledge and skills. Some of them even consider this degree as an equivalent to having a certification. Especially, Marcel perceived that the existence of Master programmes in PM is evidence that supports the professional status of the occupation. Other than that, we feel not to have enough empirical evidence suggesting that PM educational programmes support and enhance the professional status of the occupation. In particular because

respondents, as opposed to what was proposed by Zwerman et al. (2004, p.156), did not seem to consider themselves as professional project managers. This entails that the formal educational institutions do not convey sufficient professional values. On the contrary, the respondents identified this degree as a good basis that gives a broad picture of the field, rather than generating expert knowledge. At large, the MSPME programme is considered to have provided the respondents with a better understanding of PM and an introduction to what is there in the world of PM, so they can choose later if they want to specialise in a particular role, methodology or aspect. For example, Adriana who is now involved in the PMO (Project Management Office), stated that she got an idea of what a PMO is during the MSPME programme, but certainly not everything she needs to know for the exercise of this position. Thus, she is planning to get certified as PMO under the PRINCE2 methodology. Also, Tom emphasised that in PM you are never done with learning, but it is actually a lifelong learning cycle. In general, they perceive that the MSPME programme introduced them to PM specific methodologies, but also 'soft-skills' and other management techniques needed to manage projects were taught. These skills and techniques, according to the respondents and Fisher (2011, p.1000), are more useful in practice and important for project performance than specific PM methodologies and technical skills. On one hand, this may be attributed to the diversity and uniqueness of projects indicated by the respondents and therefore, an inability to apply a generalised set of technical skills or methods to all types of projects. On the other hand, it could be that organisations are not ready yet. Although the 'projectification' (Midler, 1995) of organisations has been discussed in the PM literature for a couple of decades now, it seems that it has not really been happening in reality or only very loosely. This means that organisations may carry out their work through projects, but by the means of other skills and methods such as general management instead of specific PM tool and techniques.

Establishment of professional associations

The majority of the respondents conceives PM Institutions as bodies that give PM credibility in front of society and a place for networking and sharing practices. Some even talked about the importance of these bodies in the research and consultancy field. Indeed, professional bodies were perceived as more useful in academia than in the field. However, we do not feel that the respondents perceive these institutions as a centre of control as suggested by Gorman and Sandefur (2011, p.283). Instead, they perceive them as bodies that enhance the development and formalisation of PM rather than regulative bodies. This reflects respondents' scepticism towards the professional institutions. As a consequence, without regulative power of the institutions, PM would be subject to changes in the market instead of possibly developing into a self-regulating profession (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.272).

Esoteric Body of Knowledge

In line with Morris et al. (2006, pp.718–719), respondents see the BOKs as a compilation of best practices and standards which provides a common language and terminology, but they do not feel that these bodies include all the knowledge, contexts, or answers to all issues related to the practice of PM. The respondents also claimed that those BOKs provide a good basis and a general framework. In line with Zwerman et al. (2004, p.156), they feel that the BOKs are accessible for anyone being interested in the topic, rather than exclusive or closed to the PM community. Moreover, in line with Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.269), the respondents believe that the various BOKs available in the market give the feeling that there is not a single 'best way', but rather

that PM is flexible and context specific. In addition, they agree with Morris et al. (2006, p.713) that following the BOKs does not improve the ability to deliver projects successfully, but they do perceive them as a good 'know-how' in order to avoid or solve some common problems and challenges. Even though the establishment of BOKs could be considered an important step in the process of professionalization (Crawford, 2005, p.8,15), they do not seem to provide a common ground in PM, at least not in the form as they occur to date, because mainly technical skills are presented. Considering the traditional professionalization perspective, it seems that the BOKs are not able to serve as a characteristic to distinguish PM as a profession because it cannot be considered as a guarantee of competence.

Political agitation

None of the respondents hold a certification from any of the PM Institutions. Even though some of them expressed their desire to get one, we interpret that they do not consider it a priority and that they do not perceive enough value in it for their personal and/or career development, to actually get certified. We also infer that, as suggested by Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.268) and Zwerman et al. (2004, p.157), respondents do not perceive that there is a single and exclusive certification. Moreover, they feel that the extensive catalogue of available certifications from the different institutions decreases the credibility towards an exclusive and single certification (i.e. best certification in PM) and increases the doubt of which certification to obtain or which certification is best for them. This suggests that the attempt by the institutions to assist career prospects with a certification framework causes more confusion than recognition among practitioners. Thus, respondents realise that the competition among PM Institutions for recognition and authority (Hodgson, 2002, p.808) decreases the achievement of a general understanding on how the BOKs and certifications should look like and who should be responsible for their development and maintenance (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.269). This in turn indicates a rather commercial approach undertaken by the professional institutions instead of providing support to the practitioners of PM.

Furthermore, respondents perceive working experience to be more important than certifications. They see certifications as being good for acquiring a knowledge base that needs to be proven in practice in order to acquire 'real' expertise. In addition, respondents share Morris et al.'s (2006, p.713) and Crawford's (2005, p.8) points of view that certifications do not guarantee competency and that certified people are not more capable of managing projects effectively and successfully than others without certifications in PM. However, they do perceive that certifications reduce the Project Management complexity, mainly because the acquired knowledge of the different methodologies increases their options to choose from, in order to address a specific situation. Moreover, respondents also seem to agree with Fisher (2011, p.1000) that the most important skills needed when dealing with projects are interpersonal or 'soft skills' and that these skills are not properly addressed in the BOKs, nor reflected in the certifications. Thus, certifications are perceived as recognition of technical knowledge and methodologies which mainly emerged from the early engineering background PM has. But it was also affirmed that people can successfully manage projects without formal PM training and certifications. Therefore, certifications could be understood as being redundant in practice. As a consequence doubts may arise if PM certifications can enable social closure because it seems that it does not comprise exclusive knowledge which is abstract enough that it can only be understood by its practitioners. Instead, anybody might be able to manage a project by simply using common sense. When

comparing this with the profession of a doctor, for example, the issue gets quite clear. By simply using their brains, laymen are not able to make a diagnosis. Hence, although respondents seemed to be aligned with Turner and Müller (2003, p.7) by considering that certifications create barriers to entry, PM may need to think about something different in order to raise their barriers to entry.

On the other hand, respondents also agree with Morris et al. (2006, p.714) that it seems to be impractical to increase the barriers to entry in PM because that would exclude very capable and important people from the field. This implies that 'accidental' project managers, who usually come from functions, still prevail in Project Management. Therefore, the isolation of those may jeopardise the practice, development and success of PM as a whole due to the absence of special knowledge and expertise that people without PM knowledge bring to the projects in different stages. Finally, this would mean that even the existence of projects could be at risk because on one hand, as identified by the respondents, PM depends on the functions in order to complement the project manager's capabilities with specific knowledge relevant to the respective project. On the other hand, new thinking and techniques brought to the project have the potential to enrich and innovate PM, thus developing it.

Respondents also acknowledged the value of certifications in the sense that it increases the likelihood of obtaining a job. In line with Crawford (2006, p.723), they perceive that companies use them as [the last] criteria for hiring one person over another, but respondents still consider that experience is of utmost importance and what companies are looking for when hiring people. Therefore, it could be said that certifications serve as an asset to professionals with little working experience in the field of PM. However, considering that some certifications require X amount of hours of professional experience as a project manager, it seems rather contradictory because when having gathered the required work experience, practitioners feel that a certification is not necessary anymore. A potential problem and harm to the professionalization process of PM could be traced to the problem pointed out by Marcel that often project managers only have the label, but their work is not related to PM. Consequently, those people (if having enough professional hours) could obtain a PM certification because of their title. Furthermore, this would imply that even though trying to raise the barriers to entry for PM it would not be exclusively for project managers as intended because still people who are not 'really' working in PM would be able to enter the profession.

Moving away from the professionalization process and in line with our objective, one of the categories included to understand the graduates' opinion on how PM Institutions aim that PM becomes a recognised profession. The empirical material gathered regarding this issue shows that respondents do not see a real difference between PM as a profession or not. The majority felt inclined to a neutral position where the 'title' does not really matter, nor make a difference in the practice of the occupation. However, some of the benefits perceived were that project managers may become more "marketable" and that the benefits that the employing organisations offer to them may increase. In contrast, Ian pointed out that this may be encouraged by the institutions' ambition of making a "business" (i.e. profit) out of it. If this holds true PM would be promoted in a rather commercial way and therefore, the traits and characteristics of the traditional professionalization perspective would not be considered applicable.

When addressing the possible benefits or implications the professionalization of PM entails, the respondents' perceptions included an increased status, credibility and recognition (Evetts, 2013, p.780; Hanlon, 1998, p.49; Hughes & Hughes, 2013, p.29).

But doubts arose (Paton et al., 2013, p.234) as respondents also considered it part of the bureaucratisation of practice in Project Management (Styhre, 2006, p.276). In addition, they consider that this may bring trade-offs between delivering the project on time and following the guidelines (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.273). In Jaime's words, "if you use the BOK step by step you wouldn't get a lot [done]". When introducing the legal recognition trait (legal qualification or certification needed for the exercise of the profession), respondents strongly disagreed with the need of being legally certified and presented more disadvantages than advantages and again insisted on the argument that experience is more important than certifications. In this sense, most of the respondents agreed to become legally certified if their jobs depend on it, but not because they are personally convinced of the value of those.

Legal recognition

Respondents feel that legal recognition makes no sense in Project Management. For example, Adriana acknowledged that it makes sense for professionals such as auditors and accountants because they have a lot of responsibility and legal implications may occur, but for PM it is not perceived as necessary. This could be further interpreted with a lack of demand from society for the services of PM as a profession. Moreover, respondents do not feel that this occupation deserves a 'special status' or 'priviliges' in comparison to other related occupations such as functional managers. Tom suggested that the recognition of PM is given when companies decide to move towards more project-oriented structures, but that people involved in projects are no more important than any other employee in the organisation. Moreover, the majority of the respondents understood recognition more at a knowledge level than in terms of status, rewards and privileges. The former would suggest that respondents do recognise PM as a knowledge-based occupation (Thomas & Zwerman, 2010, p.225) which is embedded in specialised knowledge, but that certifications are dispensable for the practice of PM.

Autonomy of practice

The respondents agree with Gorman and Sandefur (2011, p.284), Hodgson and Muzio (2010, p.9) and Zwerman et al. (2004, p.157) that the claim of autonomy of practice is rarely recognised because meeting the structure, tactics and strategies of the employer organisation has priority. Furthermore, they recognised that the involvement of subject experts or functional staff often restrains project managers' autonomy of practice, which in turn may harm the project work due to struggle of power and trust because of external influence and command of work instructions. This suggests organisational control (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.285). In this sense, a project may not be seen as a temporary organisation independent from the 'permanent' organisation, but rather as something similar to a department of the organisation where (cross-) functional manager are constantly involved. However, respondents also suggested that the level of autonomy depends on the type of organisation and the hierarchical position someone has inside the organisation. Moreover, the respondents recognised empowerment as something more beneficial for the role, than actual autonomy. In line, they expressed the value of the "multi-functionality" in terms of the different perspectives individuals bring to the projects. Thus, they see more value in "team work recognition" than in autonomy of practice per se. This implies that respondents see the whole project team to be responsible and accountable for the project delivery instead of only the project manager.

<u>Authority over clients</u>

The respondents seem to agree with Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.268) and Zwerman et al. (2004, p.154) that there is a lack of authority over the client. However, they argued that this lack of authority in reality is a "lack of formal authority" and that "informal authority" may still be developed through credibility and trust. In this way it is true that the clients set the expectations and that project managers have to respond to the employer organisation. However, the more credibility someone has in the eyes of the client and the organisation, the more authority someone gets to make decisions.

<u>Distinctive occupational culture and conduct</u>

Respondents agree with the importance of a common language inside the PM field, but claimed that there does not seem to be a specific culture in PM. It was recognised that a culture in PM is rather defined by the departmental or organisational culture. Considering that a defined culture differentiates professions from other occupations (Evans, 2008, p.24), we would argue that the respondents seem to agree with Zwerman et al. (2004, p.157) that Project Management still lacks a well-established distinctive culture. A possible reason could be that, as pointed out by the respondents, organisations are not yet ready for project work or better said to fully work in a project-oriented structure and way, including PM specific methods, tools and procedures.

5.2. Professional Identity and the Role of Project Management

In line with Kärreman and Alvesson (2001, p.65) who recognised that talking about someone's career period-by-period gives insights about who they are and who they want to become, and Ybema et al. (2009, p.301) and Lindgren and Wåhlin (2001, p.361) who recognised language and presentation as a medium for insights about reality; we decided to let the respondents talk freely about their careers. First, we would like to highlight that all respondents addressed not only their working life over time, but also included formal education and in some cases other types of training. In addition, the respondents also expressed to consider networking, and learning from other people as important factors that have influenced their careers. Thus, we could interpret that respondents share our perspective of careers as a social phenomenon (Coupland, 2004, p.517) shaped by the "evolving sequence of work activities and positions that individuals experience over time as well as the associated attitudes, knowledge and skills they develop throughout their life" (El-Sabaa, 2001, p.2). Furthermore, respondents seem to have more boundaryless and/or protean career orientations in terms of connections and know-how, hence being more pro-active and self-directive over their careers (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013, p.901; Crawford et al., 2013, p.1184). Therefore, corporate careers in the sense of traditional hierarchical principles of climbing the career ladder are not important to them and also not followed, even though PM literature and professional associations suggest this to be the career path and development in PM (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013; Hölzle, 2010a, p.783). Apart from Tom, the respondents do not have clear plans for their careers. Instead of clear goals, they rather have in mind a possible list of positions or career advancement they could imagine for themselves. Being more concentrated on the next few years than being engaged with long-term career planning reflects that it is not important to quickly advance in the company (i.e. hierarchical progression). They care more about own values as well as personal and professional development, instead of a title. In other words, they work in PM in order to satisfy their values and not because they want to advance rapidly in the organisational hierarchy.

Therefore, respondents are rather looking for project work which is interesting and exciting, but challenging and at the same time rewarding or awarding for them in order to gain satisfaction. As long as the respondents' career expectations can be matched, they are able to enact their careers and simultaneously can perform according to the needs of the organisation. This means that their professional identity is independent of the employer. However, even though they show physical and psychological mobility and transferability of skills is acknowledged, their careers are bounded to their networks and where working opportunities can be found. The majority of the respondents ended up where they are today rather by coincidence. Accordingly, they seem to move where the opportunities are. This is also in line with the work history of the respondents which reflects that in general, respondents are not planning to settle down in an organisation, but is willing to proceed if something better comes up or even to change the direction of their careers. Therefore, experimenting and trying out new things gives dimension to them.

Considering our last sub-objective of exploring the individual's professional identity in terms of professional identification, and the role of Project Management in their professional identity construction; we began by looking at their motives and expectations regarding their postgraduate degree in PM. The empirical material shows that, in general, respondents joined the MSPME programme to complement previous studies in order to add managerial and other skills and knowledge to their careers. This could be interpreted in Hodgson's (2002, p.816) terms as respondents perceiving PM as an add-on, which may enable them to switch careers and/or pursue different job positions with higher responsibility. However, their perceptions of the degree as a career booster and an asset would also align with Thomas and Zwerman's (2010, p.225) perspective of PM as a career choice. Considering that, the majority of the respondents intend to stay in the PM field in the future, we would consider that the respondents see PM as a career choice but at the same time, as an add-on or tool kit that enhances their careers. In Ian's words, it is something similar, "like an MBA or Master in Management". Thus, in line with Zwerman et al. (2004, p.74), respondents tend to perceive PM as a phase in one's career that precedes and may follow another one. Therefore, it could be seen as a temporal role (Hölzle, 2010b, p.779) even though respondents underwent dedicated, formal training and education which would assume greater identification with PM as a career choice.

When asking the respondents how they would present themselves to a head-hunter (without applying for a specific job) the majority of the respondents did not answer by saying "I am…", which according to Alvesson et al. (2000, p.1105) would imply personal distinctiveness. Only Inna and Ian referred to themselves as "to be" their current or last working position (marketer and researcher), which, according to Ashford et al. (2008, p.303) could be interpreted as constituting the respondents' identity core. In line, we do not recognise PM as part of the identity core in the rest of the respondents, except maybe Tom, who referred to himself as "to be" a PM enthusiast. Nevertheless, in general, respondents put great emphasis on their PM skills and knowledge and their experience in project-oriented organisations or industries. Therefore, how they see themselves is determined by what they do, their knowledge and capabilities. Thus, considering Ashford et al.'s (2008, p.303) components of social identity, we could consider that PM is strongly present at the content level of identity, which is concerned with values, beliefs, goals, stereotypic traits and knowledge, skills and abilities. Hence, PM is an important part of the individuals' professional identity and in consequence, PM has influence on the respondents' behaviours.

Failure to identify with PM at the core of identity could be attributed to respondents' movements from more established occupations such as accounting, engineering and auditing to Project Management (see Table 3 and Table 4). A recognised absence of a distinctive culture in PM could be another (complementing) reason. As a consequence, practitioners often face a strong departmental culture which they get 'indoctrinated' and under which they have to enact their careers in the end. In addition, the respondents' perspective of PM as an add-on or toolkit, which may serve as a career booster, may also contribute to the issue. Since, they do not relate PM with a specific and clear role (i.e. prototype), respondents have difficulties to self-categorise themselves in terms of affinity or emulation; which according to Ashford et al. (2008, p.330), strengthen the identification with the occupation. Nevertheless, respondents demonstrate to give significant importance to PM. By considering PM as a set of specialised skills, respondents highly stress their employability because of the recognised transferability of skills and consequently its applicability to many fields and adaptability to different contexts. Moreover, respondents acknowledged that networking with other people opens possibilities because eventually something comes up, which in turn drives them to where the opportunities are. Therefore, PM as an add-on is an important part because they are able to adapt and reinvent themselves in new and different contexts; which also helps to reflect on themselves and on what they know. Furthermore, the recognition of the respondents' PM knowledge and skills received from peer-workers increases the role of PM in the individuals' professional identity construction, because identity construction is concerned with the relationship of how individuals see themselves and how they are identified by others. In this sense, PM seems to enhance the individuals' self-image, which, according to Alvesson (2000, p.1106) and Walsh and Gordon (2008, pp.48, 50) increases the likelihood of identifying with the group.

Considering that individuals may identify with multiple identities (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.351; Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.371), sometimes the attributes of identity may be relatively unclear or not widely articulated (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.331). In Project Management this may especially hold true due to its diversity and the wide application of PM to different fields such as for instance accounting, construction and transportation. However, it seems that joining the MSPME programme did not lead respondents to an identity conflict in terms of a clash of the content of the different (old and new) identities. Instead, respondents were able to incorporate PM into their professional identity by letting go some values; meanwhile the values of PM became stronger and they started to consider PM as part of what they do. By enriching their professional identities, they underwent transformation and the perceived definition of themselves expanded by adopting more values during adaptation to different works or projects in different industries. Therefore, after some time has elapsed, they relinquish some PM values due to not making use of many PM tools and the realisation that general management tools and soft skills are more valuable. During each change in position or job or even projects they undergo this process of reflection where, to some extent, professional identities are reconstructed (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.15). Hence, due to less use of PM tools, respondents identified less with PM at the core because other values enriched their identities. Therefore, with increased experience individuals reflect upon their priorities and consequently, career choices are guided by their values.

In line with Ashford et al. (2008, p.335), it could be understood that the respondents who did not answer with a straight "I am" were able to renegotiate their professional identity as a result of the identification with PM instead of cognitively discarding or abandoning their previous identities during this process. Thus, even if in Alvesson et

al.'s (2000, p.1105) terms, we could consider that these respondents do not perceive something concrete as their professional distinctiveness (which is concerned with the question "who am I?"), in line with Ashforth et al. (2008, p.329) they demonstrated to give subjective importance to specific events in their careers, which in turn increased the awareness about identity (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.15). Therefore, considering the meaning and priority that respondents give to PM when talking about their careers, we would argue, in accordance with Ellemers et al. (1999, p.373) that the respondents have a strong affective commitment towards PM. Furthermore, considering that all respondents expressed to have joined the Master programme because of personal conviction and desires, the strong commitment towards PM could also be attributed to the self-selected inclusion to the group recognised by Ellemers et al. (1999, p.375).

Considering that, under the traditional professionalization approach, the establishment of professional associations as centres of control is essential, it is important to assess how respondents relate to these institutions in order to understand if they would identify with PM as a self-regulating profession. The first thing that caught our attention was that none of the respondents are members of any PM Institution. Thus, according to Ashforth and Mael (1989, p.135) and Alvesson (2004, p.191), respondents decided to exclude these institutions from their professional identities because they do not identify with the group. In Ellemers et al.'s (1999, p.373) terms, this reflects that individuals do not give enough importance to become members. In particular, it could be argued that respondents did not demonstrate to be sufficiently positively influenced by the BOKs or certifications to develop a strong identification with the grantors' institutions (Ibid, p.375). Hence, if certifications were to become obligatory to work in the field of PM, this could have serious implications for the practice of it since it could be considered that practitioners would understand it as an assigned membership to the PM Institutions. As a consequence, commitment in PM in terms of solidarity and behaviours is likely to decrease (Ellemers et al., 1999, p.375). Taking into account that respondents excluded themselves from the group of PM Institutions by not obtaining membership, the role of those professional associations may be questioned. They are perceived to set guidelines and being helpful in advancing the field of PM, hence, they are also considered to significantly drive the professionalization of PM. However, it seems that PM Institutions see and understand something different in PM than practitioners do. Respondents tend to indicate that a professionalization by mimicking the traditional professionalization process is not wanted and also not necessary.

However, the empirical material also shows that respondents perceive certifications as a 'plus' because they set people apart and improve employment opportunities. Thus, according to Walsh and Gordon (2008, pp.48, 50) and Alvesson (2000, p.1106), respondents are likely to identify with them easily because they perceive that these memberships enhance their self-image. Thus, in Ellemers et al.'s (1999, pp.373, 375) terms, the little involvement of the respondents in the PM Institutions could be interpreted as respondents having a low emotional identity component towards these institutions, and their decision of not becoming members of these institutions could be reasoned with a low cognitive component. However, the recognition of certifications as self-image enhancers suggests that these institutions may have a positive impact on the evaluative component of identity.

Networks act as a social base and provide new opportunities when undergoing job transition (Lindgren & Wåhlin, 2001, p.358). Although respondents see certifications as not necessary and would only get them if their job really requires it, they perceive the professional associations as beneficial platforms for knowledge sharing, self-promotion

and connecting with other members. Therefore, PM Institutions could be considered a crucial part of their careers. However, ironically, they do not seem to give importance to relate to other project managers in those associations or to be interested in participating in that platform. Thus, considering that identity construction takes place by differentiation and identification with a group, it could be argued that respondents cognitively self-excluded from the group (Tajfel, 1978, p.63). In particular, they tend to feel more interested in networking with different people from different functions and areas other than specialised people within the field of PM, which is conform to the respondents' perception of PM as an add-on applicable to various industries. Thus, identification with other project managers is not as important, mainly because they do not even see themselves as specialised project managers or project team members. Therefore, they are not constructing their professional identity exclusively in the field of PM, but also take on and incorporate different aspects and values gathered during networking, mainly at the organisational level. To distinguish themselves from other specialised project managers or people working in the field of PM they bring in their professional experience which is also closely related to the development of skills and knowledge. Thus, they prefer to broaden their networks and look for labels suitable for the perceived in-group such as experienced individual working in the field of PM. Furthermore, the respondents' experience could be understood as an individual reputation which may facilitate to get interesting offers because it demonstrates credibility, adaptability and ability to handle complex situations. However, it seems a bit paradoxical that the respondents point out the ease to adapt to various fields and work by seeing PM as an add-on, but not really belonging anywhere. As a consequence, some may be confused about what they want, who they are and what their career really is, but most of the respondents considered it in a positive way in the sense of being flexible and being able to take on different, exciting and challenging projects by not being focused in a specific area.

6. Conclusions

The main objective of this thesis was to contribute to the understanding of professionalization of Project Management and careers by applying a professional identity perspective on Project Management graduates. To fulfil this objective the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory, their professional identity in terms of professional identification, and the role Project Management has in their professional identity construction were explored. In this chapter, we will discuss the key findings of the study, and so contribute to the understanding of it by drawing attention to the research objectives and research question. It continues with a presentation of the practical and theoretical implications of the study. The last section outlines the study limitations and recommendations for further research.

As argued before in this thesis, the implications of the professionalization of PM for employing organisations, professional institutions and society have been addressed in previous studies, however, the individuals' perspective of practitioners has not properly been addressed. Thus, the professional identity perspective applied in this study is an important contribution to the understanding of the professionalization of Project Management and careers, especially, because practitioners are considered to be the ones able to drive the professionalization process (Gold et al., 2002, pp.52, 53). This perspective contributes to the understanding of the professionalization of PM by giving insights into the practitioners' perspectives of PM and their careers, as well as the role that PM plays in their professional identity construction and how they identify with it. Moreover, the aforementioned contributions help to understand and speculate about if they would be able to identify with PM as a profession and the impact this may have on the individuals' professional identity.

The exploration of the Project Management graduates' perceptions of Project Management under the traditional professionalization theory perspective provides insights into the different perceptions of PM, reflecting the debate about the nature of Project Management as suggested by Kwak and Anbari (2009, p.435). In general, PM is perceived as a Management discipline that comprises specific knowledge articulated in tools, methods and concepts. In practice, PM is considered to take place as a profession (outside the traditional professionalization theory). However, the findings also demonstrated that the term 'profession' means different things to different people and that its meaning is usually taken for granted. Nonetheless, the term 'profession' is usually utilised with a positive connotation to tell apart or distinguish a group of people with specific skills. Considering that these findings reflect the debates about professionalization and about the nature of PM, it could be argued that a further advancement and closure of those debates would be beneficial for a better understanding of professionalization and PM theory respectively. It could be claimed that the lack of clearly defined boundaries of the field of PM has a negative impact on the identification with PM and professions because individuals struggle to identify with something that is not clearly defined.

The traditional professionalization perspective applied in this study defines a profession as an occupation which enjoys high status, power and public prestige (Larson, 1977, p.20) that fulfils specific characteristics (traits) developed through processes (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933; Flexner, 2001; Greenwood, 1957; Wilensky, 1964). Under this perspective, PM is not perceived as a profession, but as a knowledge-based occupation, which can be exercised as a full-time occupation or applied as a tool-kit or

technique to other forms of management. The findings supporting this include the lack of recognition of an esoteric BOK in PM, the claim of 'team work recognition' and 'multifunctionality' rather than a claim for autonomy of practice, the perception of the absence of a distinctive culture, the graduates' opposition towards a legal recognition and their lack of support towards a distinctive status or privileges. Not to mention, the consideration of formal training as a way to introduce a broad perspective of PM rather than a means to upgrade the status of the occupation, the perception of the PM Institutions as bodies in charge of enhancing the development and formalisation of PM instead of centres of control, the lack of recognition of a positive relation between certifications and project performance and the higher importance given to soft-skills and working experience over the technical knowledge which is considered to be the focus of certifications. Consequently, it could be observed that, even though professional institutions are pushing for the professionalization of PM, it does not come through in individuals. In this sense, they may be holding back the process while PM Institutions struggle to conform to the traditional professionalization model.

The exploration of the Project Management graduates' professional identity in terms of professional identification, and the role Project Management has in their professional identity construction, revealed that PM is part of the individuals' professional identity. However, PM does not act as the individuals' personal distinctiveness, but is rather present at the content level of their professional identities. Thus, these findings support that PM is part of what individuals care about, want, believe, generally do and can do, rather than who they are, what they value and how they feel about something. Therefore, the core of the identity of PM practitioners is rather built on their identification with different career stages or previous experiences, which supports Zwerman et al.'s (2004, p.74) argument that PM seems to be a phase in one's career that precedes and follows another one. In addition, it was noted that formal education in PM is not perceived as a means to gain professional recognition, but rather as a complement to previous studies in order to add managerial and other skills and knowledge to advance their careers. In consequence, they do not consider themselves "to be" professionals of PM.

The professional identity perspective adopted in this study contributes to the understanding of careers in the PM field. The exploration of the individuals' careers revealed that they do not perceive their careers as a hierarchical progression, but rather hold a social constructionist perspective towards their careers and feel inclined to manage those independently and take direction accordingly. For example, they may prefer moving to different types of projects for developing new skills instead of moving into a higher hierarchical level. Thus, it could be argued that the PPPM system suggested by the PM Institutions and widely addressed in the contemporary PM literature, does not reflect the perception of the practitioners and therefore reality. In consequence, it could be claimed that a protean and/or boundaryless orientation would be more accurate for the research of careers in the PM field. Moreover, the findings of this study contribute to theory by uncovering that the inclination for a protean and/or boundaryless career is a consequence of the individuals' choices rather than an outcome of the neglection of career designs and development plans by organisations.

In terms of professional identity construction, the importance given to PM while talking about the individuals' careers supports that PM is a strong evaluative component of the individuals' professional identities. In line, this appreciation of importance and the self-selected inclusion to the PM group were recognised to positively affect the individuals, thus, being an emotional component of their professional identities. However, since PM

was not found to positively affect what individuals are but rather what they do, it could be argued that PM is not an emotional component as strong as it is an evaluative component. Moreover, the individuals do not demonstrate a strong awareness of membership to an exclusive PM group, but rather show themselves to be more inclined towards bigger groups, like for example groups inside their organisations. In addition, the acknowledgement of specific platforms for networking and sharing experiences and their cognitive exclusion from them define PM as a low cognitive component of the individuals' professional identity. The aforementioned could also be attributed to the lack of "affinity" to a specific role, which at the same time could be ascribed to the inexistence of a PM prototype due to the unidentified defensible definition of the work of the project managers and team members. In essence, it could be argued that the debate on the nature of PM and the lack of a clear definition of the role of project managers or work in projects affect the individuals' professional identity. It could be said that the aforementioned negatively affect the cognitive component, which in turn, affects the strength of the individuals' identification with PM. Thus, a further advancement of the PM debate and a clear definition of the work in PM would promote a stronger identification with PM.

Considering that PM Institutions pursue the PM professionalization by mimicking the traditional professionalization process (Hodgson, 2005, p.56; Zwerman et al., 2003), this study also contributes to the future advancement of this process by displaying the individuals' opinions about it. For instance, this study reveals that individuals feel neutral towards the PM Institutions' aim to professionalize PM, because they do not consider that the practice of the occupation would change with professional status. However, when introducing the legal qualification requirement for the exercise of the occupation (which is required according to the traditional professionalization perspective), they strongly disagree with it. Assuming the professionalization process to advance in this direction, a legal qualification requirement may present a threat to the individuals' professional identity (Ellemers et al. 1999, p.375) in terms of professional disruption. This may result in a poor affective commitment to PM, and possibly leads to the abandonment of the career. In consequence, individuals would not be able to identify with PM as a profession and the transition from occupational workers to professionals may cause an identity conflict.

In summary, the findings of this study disclose that PM graduates do not perceive PM or their careers as a profession in terms of professionalization, but rather as an interdisciplinary occupation. This means that PM knowledge could be applied in the management of projects and various other types of management. The professional identity perspective undertaken in this study contributes to the understanding of careers in the PM field by showing how individuals feel to be voluntarily inclined towards taking control of their careers. In addition, by showing that they do not conceive careers as a hierarchical progression, as commonly referred to in PM literature, they rather feel eager to advance their careers in terms of development of new skills by embarking on interesting, exciting and challenging (project) work. Moreover, this study also contributes to the understanding of professionalization by showing that individuals seem to agree with Freidson (2001, p.182) that the "golden age" of professionalization is over and with Abbott (1988, p.65), Evetts (2013, p.781) and Saks (2012, p.6) that a 'new' form of professionalism with relatively blurred instead of clear boundaries has emerged. In addition, this study contributes to the PM theory by showing how the lack of clearly defined boundaries of the field of PM and the team members' roles have a negative impact on the individuals' professional identity which restrain them to fully

identify with PM as their personal distinctiveness. Thus, this study also contributes by calling for advancement in theory regarding the nature of PM and a clear description of the role, scope and responsibilities of the project manager and project team members. Finally, this study contributes to the understanding of the professionalization of PM by revealing that PM is still perceived as an add-on that can be applied to various occupations. Thus, in response to Thomas and Zwerman (2010, p.272), we would argue that PM is perceived to be more useful if it continues as an occupation that is subject to market changes than as a self-regulated profession. Considering that, PM Institutions are pushing towards the professionalization by undertaking a traditional approach, which is still in the early stages where directions may still be altered, it could be argued that the process should either be stopped or taken a different course and move the professionalization into a different direction. Especially, the focus on the bodies of knowledge and stratified certifications as the main drivers seem to be misaligned with the individuals' perspectives of PM and the reason why they do not identify with PM as a profession under the traditional professionalization approach. However, it is important to note that individuals perceive PM as a profession, but in their own terms. Thus, it could be argued that PM, alike other new knowledge-based occupations, may develop into a profession outside the traditional patterns and under a more innovative and entrepreneurial strategy (Evans, 2008, p.21). An example is the "corporate professionalism" suggested by Muzio et al. (2011, p.445).

6.1. Practical and Theoretical Implications

As argued before, professional institutions and other knowledge providers, employing organisations and practitioners play a big role in the process of professionalization of PM. Thus, in this section, we will address the implications of the study, for each one of them.

The findings of this research contribute to the understanding of the professionalization of PM and to career theory through the lens of professionalization which, to our best knowledge, has not been introduced. By discussing the challenges of the process of professionalization within the field of PM, this thesis makes theoretical contributions as already indicated in the section above. For **academics**, it is beneficial to understand that individuals do not perceive their careers as 'climbing the ladder' as widely suggested in the contemporary PM literature, but they rather hold a social constructionist perspective towards their careers and feel inclined to manage those independently and take directions accordingly. For example, they may prefer moving to different types of projects for developing new skills instead of moving into a higher hierarchical level. Therefore, we would recommend to address PM careers from a boundaryless or protean career perspective which can be found in contemporary career literature. Moreover, we hope that understanding the impact on the individuals' identity the theoretical debates have, enhance the advancement of theory towards a consensus regarding professionalization and the nature of PM. Especially, the findings of this study indicate that professions are still distinguished from other occupations, but that the way in which they are distinguished are not the same as they used to be 40 years ago when the traditional professionalization theory was developping. Rather, the findings support the advancement of theory towards 'new' forms of professionalism, addressing the specific context and circumstances of the contemporary world. In addition, we hope that this study raises the academics' interest in the practitioners' perspective of the professionalization process and that this perspective will be addressed in future studies.

For **PM Institutions**, it is valuable to understand the practitioners' perspectives and opinions about the professionalization process and the way in which individuals interpret the existence of several institutions. Moreover, we believe it is beneficial to them to grasp the individuals' perceptions of their certifications and BOKs, in particular with regards to project performance. Another highlight PM Institutions may perceive as fruitful is the importance given to the soft-skills. In this way, PM Institutions may consider to include them more extensively in their training frameworks. Considering the professionalization process, PM Institutions may find it advantageous to be aware of the individuals' opinions about the requirement of a legal qualification for the exercise of the occupation, and that this may be perceived as a decreasing value due to the exclusion of non-certified people. Comprehending the professional identity of individuals, PM Institutions may re-evaluate the pursuit of professional status by mimicking the process of other knowledge-based traditional professions and redirect the process in the interest of all. In general, institutions benefit from this study by understanding the individuals' construction of professional identity, what and how it is affected. Acknowledging this may help institutions to better understand their future members and so, take actions to positively affect individuals and in consequence, strengthen the individuals' identification with these institutions and PM as a career. Regarding the more independent and self-directive career orientation that individuals in PM have, PM Institutions could get valuable insights and apply these to their currently recommended career frameworks for PM (e.g. hierarchical career progression as PPPM system). We believe that a different perspective on the career frameworks, taking into consideration boundaryless and protean career models could benefit the whole field of PM because individuals may rather be willing to pursue a long-term career in PM as the career offered would match the individuals' career expectations.

For **educational institutions**, it is useful to know how individuals perceive PM and the importance given to the development of soft-skills over technical skills. In addition, we believe that it is important for them to acknowledge how individuals intend to gain a broader understanding of PM by means of the PM programmes and the value they assign to it, instead of becoming experts of a certain methodology or techniques. Therefore, educational institutions would be able to adapt their PM programmes accordingly. Considering that individuals do not see themselves as professional project managers, it may be valuable if educational institutions were to work towards conveying more professional values and therefore making a step towards increased professional identification. On the contrary, by knowing that individuals do not see themselves as professional project managers, educational institutions could also think about distancing themselves a little from the PM Institutions when further developing their educational programmes and rather take into account what individuals perceive as useful and valuable for the practice in the field of PM. Hence, soft skills and general management tools and techniques should be addressed. Furthermore, they should keep putting across the broader perspective of PM.

Understanding the professional identity of individuals and the perceptions of their careers is helpful to **employer organisations** because they would be able to better understand the individuals they employ. In addition, they would be able to match their employees' values and develop specialised Human Resource practices in order to attract and retain the talent by making specific development plans accordingly, and in consequence, encourage organisational identification. Understanding this and taking suitable actions, might contribute to decrease the negative effect of turnover in the PM

field, recognised by Parker and Skitmore (2005, p.212) and the brain drain recognised by Crawford (2013, p. 1184).

For **individuals** wanting to study a PM degree, the findings of this study may assist them in understanding what to expect and where PM may develop in the future. In addition, the professional identity view taken in this study may be of interest to future PM students, leading them to reflect on their own professional identity and on what it takes, in terms of identity, to become a professional and identify with the career. This reflection may assist them in making an informed decision about whether or not to study a degree in PM. In a broader sense, this study may also assist them in understanding careers beyond the widely suggested hierarchical progression and lead them to consider taking direction of their own careers and be open the idea of careers as not only a vertical climbing but as an all-direction journey without boundaries.

This study is beneficial to **practitioners** in the PM field by making them aware of the existence of the process of the professionalization in PM and its potential implications. This awareness would enable practitioners to decide whether to support or oppose the process and may encourage them to spread their opinions in their organisations and inside their networking platforms. Moreover, we believe that this may lead practitioners to reflect on their own professional identity, how they identify with PM and evaluate if they would be able to accept the necessary changes and identify with PM in a different way.

In general, this study is beneficial to all of the above mentioned stakeholders as a source of acknowledgement of the professionalization process of PM. In consequence, they may raise their voices by either supporting or opposing the process. In addition, we believe that this acknowledgement would be beneficial as a whole by encouraging practitioners, academics, organisations and PM Institutions, to work together for the benefit of all and jointly shape the future of the professionalization of PM.

6.2. Limitations and Further Research

This study comprises several limitations that have to be acknowledged. For instance, the qualitative method to research used in this thesis may have led to authors' bias despite its awareness and means employed to avoid them; in particular in the presentation of the empirical material and the choice of the respondents' citations as well as in the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

This study explores the PM graduates' perceptions because it has been recognised that formal education aims to upgrade the working conditions and the status of PM (Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p.279; Hanlon, 1998, p.49). However, PM graduates do not represent the whole population of practitioners of PM, thus, we suggest that future research could take into consideration project managers with more or less field experience, PM-certified practitioners as well as people 'accidentally' working with projects. We believe that comparing the findings of this study with findings from accidental project managers and certified members would increase the understanding of the process of professionalization by addressing a wider perspective of the practitioners' population. We believe it would be particularly fruitful to confront certified and not certified practitioners as certifications resulted to be an important evaluative component of the individuals' professional identity. Moreover, being certified implies to become a member of the PM Institutions and of a selective group of certified people, which according to Ellemers et al. (1999, p.371) would have a positive impact in the cognitive

component of identity. Thus, the role of PM in the professional identity of practitioners may be different with certified and not-certified practitioners.

Furthermore, this study may be limited by its relatively small and narrow (MSPME graduates), but at the same time also quite broad sample in terms of nationalities, background, ages and experiences. Even though this combination of heterogeneity and homogeneity could also be considered an advantage, we believe that it would be fruitful to focus more on the differences in different countries. In particular, it would be interesting to see if there are changes in the professional identification with PM in countries like Australia and South Africa, where the process of professionalization of PM seems to be more advanced because the governments are involved and support PM practices. This would increase the understanding of how PM identification takes place and what aspects are involved and may be favourable for further professionalization of PM in general.

Limitations of the research strategy can also be identified. Although interviews are considered as an appropriate way to study social phenomena (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.20), we would encourage further studies to undertake an ethnographic research strategy. Even though, the interviews give valuable insights into the issue, it is subject to what the interviewees say and divulge of themselves. Therefore, we believe that observing part of the population would complement the findings of this study and generate a better understanding of the identity processes by additionally gaining insights into 'real' behaviours.

Another limitation of the study regards the little focus on the respondents' context. We are aware that context plays a very important role in inductive research. Moreover, context gives important information about the identity of the individuals. However, the professionalization theory used as lens of the study suggests that a profession is context free. Hence, one of the characteristics of a profession is the common understanding of the occupation. In addition, considering that we only were able to conduct one interview with each respondent and in coherence with our philosophical stand and identity theory, we let the respondents express themselves freely and give the input that they are considering important. Thus, the information provided about their professional context expresses what respondents care about and what is important to them. However, the findings suggest that context may influence the respondents' perceptions. Thus, we suggest that further studies focus also on the context to identify the relationship between context and perceptions of PM.

Furthermore, considering that professional identity is part of organisational identification (Weber & Ladkin, 2011, p.169), further studies may also address more directly the difference between practitioners in project-oriented and function-oriented companies, and different industry sectors. In other words, assess how the relationship between those two different kinds of structures and different industry sectors affect the way in which individuals identify with PM.

Under the application of the traditional professionalization perspective, the findings of the study suggest that a 'new' form of professionalism should be considered. Thus, we believe that with a similar approach as in this study, PM practitioners' perceptions and identities could be explored under a different lens like for example, Muzio et al.'s (2011, p.445) "corporate professionalism". Moreover, we believe that the findings of the study support the need for further development of the professionalization theory and the advancement of the debate on professionalization, towards a consensus about the

core of professionalism. Therefore, we would encourage exploring how these 'new' forms of professionalism fit with PM and what aspects and strategies it comprises.

Finally, because of the time specificity of the phenomenon and the influence PM Institutions have in the field of PM and especially in the education of PM, we suggest to evaluate if the findings of this study hold in time. Thus, keep track of the individuals' professional identity during the professionalization process of PM to increase the likelihood to move in the right direction.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Project Management Most Recognised Certificates

Institution	Certification
IPMA	IPMA Level D Certified Project Management Associate
	IPMA Level C Certified Project Manager
	IPMA Level B Certified Senior Project Manager
	IPMA Level A Certified Projects Director
PMI	CAPM ®Certified Associate in Project Management
	PMP® Project Management Professional
	PgPM® Program Management Professional
	PfMP® Portfolio Management Professional
	PMI-RMP^{SM} Risk Management Professional
	PMI-PBA^{SM} Professional in Business Analysis
	PMI-SP^{SM} Scheduling Professional
	PMI-ACP® Agile Certified Practitioner
OGC/APM Group	Prince2 Foundation
	Prince2 Practitioner
	Prince2 Professional
	MSP - Foundation Managing Successful Projects
	MSP - Practitioner Managing Successful Projects
	MSP - Advanced Managing Successful Projects
Australian National Vocational Qualifications	Certificate IV Project Management (Recognition of Prior Learning)
	Diploma of Project Management (Recognition of Prior Learning)
	Advanced Diploma of Project Management (Recognition of Prior Learning)
	Certificate IV Project Management (Training)
	Diploma of Project Management (Training)
	Advanced Diploma of Project Management (Training)
AIPM	CPPP Certified Practicing Project Practitioner
	CPPM Certified Practicing Project Manager
	CPPD Certified Practicing Project Director
	CPPE Certified Practicing Portfolio Executive
South African Vocational Qualifications	National Diploma: Project Management
University Level Qualifications	Postgraduate: Certificate of Project Management
	Postgraduate: Diploma of Project Management
	Masters of Project Management

Source: AIPM, 2014; GAPPS, 2012; PMI, 2014

Appendix 2: Interview Guidelines

What we want to know (target)	Main Questions	Further Questions	Theory	Rationale
Name, gender, nationality, age, actual or latest job, industry sector, Bachelor, year of graduation from MSPME				Demographics
Explore the professional identity of MSPME graduates and to what extent it is influenced by their academic and work experience in the PM field.	How would you present yourself to a recruiter/ headhunter without applying to a specific job?		Professional Identity is concerned with "Who am I?"	Understand who the respondents are and their background (do they mention their careers? PM?) I am a PM, I am an engineer, I am a student… This would give us idea to which aspect of their careers has a stronger influence on their professional identity.
Determine to what extent MSPME graduates pursue a career in the PM field.	Can you walk us through your career? (with dates) Can you tell us a little bit more about your current/last work? Any particular events you feel were important during your career? Talking about career, how and where do you see yourself in	Career history, types of employment and industries, additional degrees, values and goals. How did you end up there, influence of past experiences? **NPO:** Why are you not working in projects (personal conviction, situation, etc).	Careers are something constructed in the mind of the individuals influenced by the social interactions and not a conceptualised structure that an individual temporarily inhabits. Career is a strong element of the individual's professional identity.	Understand their careers and background. Explore if they joined as a career choice or looking to add skills to their careers (PM as a career choice or add-on). Were they looking to upgrade their working status? Project success is linked to which type of skills (knowledge, technical, soft,

			Project Management changed from being merely considered as an add-on to a career choice. Formal education represents a development towards a more reliable knowledge-base…aimed to upgrade the working status of the occupation. Soft skills are considered more important for project success.	experience). This will help us understand the value they see in the PM education.
	the future? Why did you join the MSPME programme?	Motivations, expectations (and fulfilment), impact in their working life. Considerations about how to be a successful project manager. **PO**: perceptions of the work in the field, their roles and fulfilled expectations.		
Increase our understanding on how MSPME graduates conceive PM (e.g. as a profession, a role, a practice, a methodology).	How would you describe Project Management? What do you think about PM certifications? How would you describe a profession? According to your description, would you define PM as a profession? Why?	Are you certified (which), why or why not? Value perception. Explore the respondents' opinions of the traits of professionalization.	Profession is a vocation that comprises "an exclusive elite group" which enjoys high status, power and public prestige. Occupations in order to be considered a profession, need to go through a professionalization process in order to develop specific traits.	Profession means different things for different people. Understand if they perceive a profession in terms of the professionalization theory. Understand if they see PM as a profession or a knowledge-based occupation by exploring their opinions about the different traits of professionalization in the context of PM.
MSPME graduates' opinion about how PM Institutions aim	For you, what is the role of the PM Institutions (e.g. PMI,	Are you a member of any Institution? What value do you perceive in	Professional associations push towards the professionaliz	Find out to what extent they agree or disagree with what the PM Institutions aim.

that PM becomes a recognised profession (advantages and disadvantages)	IPMA, APM, etc) What do you think about PM Institutions defining PM as a profession? What benefits/problems do you see in the professionalization of Project Management?	them? Would professionalization have an impact on your current or future careers? **PO**: contribution to the professionalization process	ation of PM putting extra emphasise on the BOKs and certifications. Professionalization has an impact on the individual professional identity.	Understand their perception of the institutions as regulative bodies or more as practitioners associations. Would they support or be against the professionalization process. Would they identify with PM as a profession?
Explore the respondent's opinion about the professionalization process	If a legal qualification for the management of project was become a 'must' to work in the field: How would you see that in general? ...and personally?	Advantages, disadvantages, implications, risks, issues (for practitioners, organisations and society). **PO**: what would they do (move or get the qualification)	Practitioners are key players in the professionalization process. Implication for practitioners, organisations and society.	Would they renegotiate their identity in order to become professionals? Would they move with the process due to personal conviction (identity) or because they are pressured to do so. Understand their perceptions of the impact the professionalization may have on the different stakeholders.

PO - Project-oriented; NPO - not project-oriented

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

➢ *Presentation to the respondents.*
➢ *Aim of the interview: Explore how they perceive Project Management and their careers.*
➢ *Ask if we can use their names, age and nationality.*
➢ *Ask if it is OK to record the conversation for future analysis.*
➢ *Tell them that the interview is meant for academic purposes only and that the thesis will be published in the University database.*

1. **Demographic Information**
   a. Name
   b. Gender
   c. Nationality
   d. Age
   e. What was your Bachelor's degree in?
   f. Year of graduation for MSPME
2. **What is your current/latest job position? What do you do there?**
   a. Job title
   b. Industry sector
   c. Are you involved in project activity? How?
3. **How would you present yourself to a recruiter/headhunter without applying for a specific job?**
4. **Can you walk us through your career?**
   a. Career history, types of employment
   b. Do you hold any other degrees? (e.g. other Master, PhD)
   c. How do you see your career? (values, goals etc.)
5. **Can you tell us a little bit more about your current/last work?**
   a. How did you end up on your present position?
   b. How have your previous job/academic experiences influenced your actual job/situation?
   c. <u>For Not Project-oriented jobs</u>: How does your Project Management academic background relate to your current position?
      1. Why are you <u>not</u> working in the field of Project Management (change in position/field)?
      2. Have you tried to pursue a project-oriented work after your MSPME graduation? What happened?
6. **Any particular events you feel were important during your career?**
7. **Talking about career, how and where do you see yourself in the future?**
8. **Why did you join the MSPME programme?**
   a. What drove you to do a Master in Project Management? What were your interests/expectations?
   b. How do you think the Master in Project Management has affected your career (specifically your current position)?
   c. How useful have be to you your MSPME degree?
   d. What does it take to be successful in Project Management? (e.g. certification; keep up with knowledge, leadership etc.)
   e. For Project-oriented jobs: What is it like to work in the field of Project Management? What does it mean to you to be a *project manager/ work in projects*?

f. <u>For Project-oriented jobs:</u> How would you describe your role as a *project manager/ project member*?

g. <u>For Project-oriented jobs:</u> How have your expectations been fulfilled for the work in Project Management? How do you feel now?

9. How do you see Project Management?

10. What do you think about PM certifications?

a. Do you hold one? Which one? Why? Why not?

b. Why did you choose to do a certification?

c. If more than one: Which one has the most value for you?

d. What value does a certification have for you?

11. How would you describe a profession?

12. According to your description, would you define PM as a profession? Why?

a. Esoteric BOK: For you, what is the role of the BOKs? The standards? Good to have skills? Must??

b. Autonomy of practice: How much autonomy does a project manager have? In what way?

c. Norm of altruism: Do you think altruism would be in the interest of PM? Why?

d. Authority over clients: How do you see a project manager's control over the client?

e. Distinctive occupational culture: How would you describe the culture in PM? , what are the norms and values of PM? What is missing in order to achieve a distinctive culture?

f. Recognition: How do you perceive people working in projects vs those working in functional areas? Do you see PM as a field worth of special recognition? Why?

13. For you, what is the role of the PM Institutions (e.g. PMI, IPMA, APM, etc)

a. Are/Were you a member of any Project Management Institution? (e.g. PMI, APM) Why? Why not? Do you see value in being/becoming one?

b. Would you consider them as regulative bodies, a networking platform, standardisation, practitioners associations?

14. What do you think about PM Institutions defining PM as a profession?

a. If Project Management were formally recognised as a profession, how would it make a difference in your practice of Project Management?

15. What benefits/problems do you see in PM becoming a profession? (e.g. increased competence, status, recognition)

a. <u>For project-oriented jobs</u>: How do you think you can contribute to the development of a Project Management profession?

16. If a legal qualification for the management of project become a 'must' to work on the fields: How would you see that in general? and personally?

a. Advantages/disadvantages/risks/issues

b. For Project Oriented jobs: what would you do?

c. For not Project-oriented jobs: What implications, advantages, disadvantages and risks do you perceive for practitioners and organisations?