



Handelshögskolan

Karlstad Business School

Magnus Olsen

Political Astuteness in Project Management

Could Street Smart Project Management be an
Additional Dimension?

Project Management

Master Thesis

Term: HT 2021
Supervisors: Henrik Bergman
Tomas Gustavsson

Karlstad Business School
Karlstad University SE-651 88 Karlstad
Phone: +46 54 700 10 00
E-mail: handels@kau.se kau.se/en/hhk

Abstract

The early years as a project manager are full of dangers and there is high risk of getting scars that follow you throughout your career and life. This thesis is a first step to study political astuteness in the project management context. Experienced project managers have been interviewed and shared their perceptions of political astuteness in their role as project manager. The results are presented in four main themes; "The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context", "The Dirty Tricks", "The Politically Astute Project Manager", "The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force-The Sensing". The first main finding is that the results of this study are aligned with previous research around political astuteness in public service manager context, and existing frameworks could be applied in future research. The second is that results show similarities with the phenomenon street smart and further research could make contributions when developing future individual baselines in professional project management organisations. The third is the findings around intuition and sensing which is not explored and can have great value for future development of project management if investigated further. The fourth is that diverse, complex, and multicultural context is perceived as the main source for development of political astuteness for project managers.

Keywords: Project Management, Political Astuteness, Political Skill, Street Smart

Sammandrag

De tidiga åren som projektledare är fulla av faror och det är stor risk att få ärr som följer dig genom hela din karriär och ditt liv. Detta examensarbete är ett första steg för att studera politisk skicklighet i projektledningssammanhang. Erfarna projektledare har intervjuats och delat med sig av sina uppfattningar om politisk skicklighet i rollen som projektledare. Resultaten presenteras i fyra huvudteman; "Karaktären av Politisk Skicklighet I Projektledningskontext", "De Fula Tricken", "Den Politiskt Skickliga Projektledaren", "Den Street Smarta Projektledaren: Använd kraften - Kännandet". Det första huvudsakliga fyndet är att resultaten av denna studie är i linje med tidigare forskning kring politisk skicklighet i offentlig förvaltningskontext, och befintliga ramverk skulle kunna tillämpas i framtida forskning. Den andra är att resultaten visar likheter med fenomenet street smart och ytterligare forskning kan ge bidrag när man utvecklar framtida individuella baslinjer i professionella projektledningsorganisationer. Det tredje är fyndet kring intuition och känsla som inte är utforskat och kan ha stort värde för framtida utveckling av projektledning om det undersöks

vidare. Den fjärde är att mångsidiga, komplexa och mångkulturella sammanhang uppfattas som den främsta källan till utveckling av politisk skicklighet för projektledare.

Nyckelord: Projektledning, Politisk skicklighet, Politiska färdigheter, Street smart

Svensk Sammanfattning

Denna studie tog sin utgångspunkt i mina egna erfarenheter av att som projektledare ofta hamna i situationer som var svårlästa och förrädiska. Jag uttryckte under min projektledningsutbildning att jag kände behov för att agera street smart. Begreppet fångades upp och var återkommande på våra träffar under utbildningen. Genom efterforskningar hittade jag tidigare forskning runt begreppet politisk skicklighet som jag uppfattade var det närmaste street smart jag kunde hitta och valde det som ämne för min uppsats.

Tidigare forskning har identifierat både svåra situationer och utmaningar i en projektledares karriär och man uttrycker också att det i många sammanhang är kopplat till politik i organisationer och projekt. Politik sägs finnas överallt och att det är en nödvändighet att kunna hantera de politiskt laddade situationerna. Här framträder en bild av att du som projektledare är aktiv i miljöer där du kan behöva förutse farliga situationer som svek, öppna personliga anklagelser och attacker, hemlig undergrävning av ditt projekt för att nämna några. Du kommer med största sannolikhet att balansera på en etisk knivsegg där du kan ha dubbla lojaliteter att ta hänsyn till när du väljer din position, strategi och fattar beslut. Det kommer säkert att finnas behov av att läsa mellan raderna, för att se och förstå det som inte visas.

Efter att ha undersökt tidigare forskning kring ämnet politisk skicklighet och färdigheter, är syftet med denna studie att undersöka och beskriva erfarna projektledares uppfattningar om politisk skicklighet i projektarenans kontext och deras roller som projektledare. Ett ytterligare syfte är också att undersöka hur fenomenet street smart kan kopplas till politisk skicklighet och om det eventuellt tillför en ny dimension.

Det finns två forskningsfrågor för studien: Hur beskriver och karakteriserar du som projektledare politisk skicklighet i projektledningssammanhang? Hur uppfattar och värderar du som projektledare kompetensen/förmågan politisk skicklighet?

Street smart är inte utforskat i projektledningssammanhang och inte begreppet politisk skicklighet heller. Däremot finns en del forskning runt politiska färdigheter i projektledningssammanhang men uteslutande har jag hittat kvantitativ forskning och det saknas

således kvalitativ forskning på politisk skicklighet i projektledningssammanhang. En av dessa studier visar också på att man inte kan överföra resultat från en kontext till en annan vilket ytterligare ger betydelse åt att undersöka politisk skicklighet i projektledningskontext.

Genom undersökningen av tidigare forskning har denna studie funnit att politisk skicklighet och street smart i projektledningssammanhang är utforskat men kan vara av stor relevans. I de beskrivna situationerna som projektledare ställs inför är det underförstått att det blir negativa konsekvenser och ofta allvarliga, om inte situationen förutses, förebyggs och/eller hanteras på ett bra sätt. Konsekvenser både för projektet, och känslomässigt för projektledaren personligen. Däremot finns en del forskning runt politiska färdigheter i projektledningssammanhang men uteslutande har jag hittat kvantitativ forskning och det saknas således kvalitativ forskning på politisk skicklighet i projektledningssammanhang. En av dessa studier visar också på att man inte kan överföra resultat från en kontext till en annan vilket ytterligare ger betydelse åt att undersöka politisk skicklighet i projektledningskontext. På grund av forskningsresultaten att ledning inom alla områden påverkas av kontextspecifika parametrar, kan forskning om politisk skicklighet i projektledningskontext ge ett viktigt bidrag till professionens utveckling på tre sätt. För det första kan det vara av stor relevans för projektledare i framtiden om kompetensen av politisk skicklighet genom studier identifieras, definieras ytterligare och förstås på ett djupare plan, vilket i sin tur påverkar utbildningen av projektledare positivt. För det andra kan det skapa kunskap för att stödja den framtida utvecklingen av yrkesorganisationens ramar. För det tredje kan det avslöja intressanta och viktiga områden för framtida forskning. Denna studie har haft som syfte att vara ett första bidrag till en sådan process.

Studien har varit kvalitativ med en induktiv ansats och använt sig av semistrukturerade intervjuer och tematisk analys som datainsamlingsmetod respektive analysmetod.

Det första huvud fynden är att resultatet, och mitt första huvudtema, pekar i riktning mot att politisk skicklighet i projektledningssammanhang har många likheter med tidigare studie gjord av Hartley et al. (2013) som undersöker politisk skicklighet i en offentlig förvaltningskontext. Projektledarnas uppfattning om politisk skicklighet visar att de är medvetna om och har erfarenheter av alla de fem dimensionerna inom ramen för ledarskap med politisk skicklighet (Hartley et al., 2013). Detta indikerar att ramverket kan vara mycket användbart i framtida forskning om politisk skicklighet även i projektledningssammanhang.

Ett andra huvudfynd är att den beskrivna kontexten har många drag av att vara vilseledande och farlig, huvudtema nummer två, och på sätt och vis kan jämföras med gatukontexten i beskrivningar av gatusmarthet i folklöre och teoribakgrunden (Smith, 2000; Urban Dictionary, nd-a; Urban Dictionary, nd-b) Beskrivningen i det andra huvudtemat stöder också tidigare forskning som har pekat ut dessa drag i sammanhanget (Cicmil et al., 2006; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Gällstedt, 2003; O'Leary & Williams, 2013; Paton et al., 2010) och tanken på att politik har en bra och en dålig sida (Hartley et al., 2019). Det bekräftar också bilden från Ferris et al. (2019) och Silvester & Wyatt (2018) att politik finns i varje organisation och på alla nivåer. Detta ger en tydlig indikation på att politisk skicklighet och den eventuella dimensionen av street smart har stor betydelse för projektledares misslyckande eller framgång i sina karriärer och bör vara en viktig del av all projektledningsutbildning.

Ett tredje huvudfynd är relaterat till det tredje huvudtemat och vikten av att arbeta i mångsidiga och mångkulturella sammanhang för att utveckla politisk skicklighet, vilket också indikerar att hög komplexitet skulle kunna påskynda uppbyggnaden av erfarenheter. Detta pekar i riktning mot och stödjer fynd i tidigare forskning av Hartley & Manzie (2020) där de drar slutsatsen att utvecklingen av politisk skicklighet främst består av erfarenhetsbaserat lärande, vilket också relaterar till att bli gatusmart vilket beskrivs som lärande i verkligheten (Urban Dictionary, nd-b). Resultaten stödjer också Hartley & Manzie's (2020) upptäckter att andra typer av möjligheter och initiativ för att utveckla politisk skicklighet, teoretiska och relaterade till book smart (Urban Dictionary, n.d.-a), i bästa fall är en bristvara.

Ett fjärde huvudfynd gäller det fjärde huvudtemat, Den Street Smarta Projektledaren: Använd kraften - Kännandet. Fantasi, intuition, lukt, känsla, känsla och att läsa av är alla uttryck för att leda och tänka inte bara med hjärnan som vi vet kan ha en tendens att fatta partiska beslut i pressade situationer (Kahneman, 2013), utan också leda och tänka med vår kropp och hjärta. Detta fynd relaterar också till dimensionen "Att läsa människor och situationer" från ramverket för politisk skicklighet (Hartley et al., 2013) som nämner det i; "Analysera eller intuitivt känna den dynamik som kan uppstå när intressenter och agendor möts". Det finns indikationer på att det finns beskrivna färdigheter, förmågor och fenomen som skulle kunna ge ytterligare en dimension till politisk skicklighet, och att de intuitiva och omedvetna delarna är nyckeln till att vara en gatusmart projektledare. Det finns också indikationer på att dimensionen av intuition och känslan relaterad till den, på grund av de tidsmässiga olikheterna mellan projekt och ordinarie verksamhet, skulle kunna ha större vikt i projektledningskontexten än den offentliga förvaltningskontexten.

Innehåll

Preface	7
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1. Purpose	9
1.2. Research Question	9
2. Problem Area and Previous Research.....	9
2.1. Concept of Street Smart	9
2.2. Research on Street Smart in Project Management Contexts.....	10
2.3. Research on Political Astuteness and Political Skill.....	11
2.4. Projectification and Immaturity.....	12
2.5. Challenges in a Project Managers Career	13
2.6. Professional Project Management Organizations	13
2.7. Starting Point and Relevance	14
3. Method.....	14
3.1. Research Strategy and Design	15
3.2. Data Collection Method	15
3.3. Participants	16
3.4. Loss of Participants	17
3.5. Implementation.....	17
3.6. Data Analysis.....	18
3.7. Reliability, Validity and Limitations.....	19
3.8. Ethical Considerations.....	20
4. Results.....	21
4.1. Overview Main Themes and Subthemes.....	21
4.2. The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context	21
4.3. The Dirty Tricks.....	33
4.4. The Politically Astute Project Manager.....	39
4.5. The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing.....	50
4.6. The Project Managers Valuation of Political Astuteness Going Forward	51
5. Discussion	52
6. References	62
Appendix I: Information Letter to Participants	67
Appendix II: Consent Form.....	68
Appendix III: Guide for Conducting Focus Group.....	69
Appendix IV: Guide for Conducting Semi Structured Interviews	70
Appendix V: Overview of Main Themes and Subthemes	71
Appendix VI: The Framework of Political Astuteness Skills.....	72
Appendix VII: Political Skill Index (PSI)	73
Appendix VIII: The Fine Balance of Ethics	74

Preface

In the course IEAD64 The leadership role in project environments (Autumn 2020) was given a task where we had to think about "What project managers need to be extra good at?". In the assignment and at an on-demand lecture with Karin Appelgren from the Swedish Transport Administration, I highlighted a perceived problem. As a project manager, I seem to find myself in particularly difficult situations characterized by power and conflicts of interest and a low degree of openness, where I experienced a need for acting street smart. The concept was captured by teachers and fellow students, and we returned to the concept in many of our discussions.

During the course, we also encountered a way of speaking within project management circles that further describes the relevance of exploring this area. The saying is something like: "You can measure a project manager's experience by the number of knives in the back!". This picture further motivated me to investigate and understand this area better, to be able to contribute to young project managers being able to develop their experience without getting as many knives in their backs.

1. Introduction

The experience of being betrayed as a project manager seems to be well documented in previous studies. Gällstedt (2003) describes several incidents that can affect projects, including situations where the project or project manager is betrayed. One strategy project managers use to handle such situations is stated to be to rely on their experience (Gällstedt, 2003).

Cicmil & Marshall (2005) and Paton et al. (2010) argue that project management is characterized by challenges in the form of ambiguity, uncertainty and power, and that contracts must be considered «social objects» with a background in interactions and power relations. Furthermore, Cicmil et al. (2006) argues for the need to develop the view of project management to also include skills for dealing with social and political situations and tensions.

Hartley et al. (2013) uses the term "Political astuteness" to describe the knowledge, skills and abilities to handle politics in leadership and organizations, a term that has become more established as the preferred term in later years (Ayres, 2019; Waring et al., 2018). This skillset is pointed out to be of increasing importance in our increasingly complex world (Crosby & Bryson, 2018).

O’Leary & Williams (2013) identify political tensions within an organizational change project and call it “political tactics”. They demonstrate that it is done consciously and covertly, and with the aim of undermining the project at the same time as support is given at all public meetings (O’Leary & Williams, 2013).

Hartley et al. (2019) argues that even though organization theory has had politics as a strand for a long time, it has for a long period been in the background of management theory influenced by Taylorism where politics has been seen as a negative and opposite to rational management. There are now a rediscovery of the importance of politics and political astuteness taking place, and it is pointed out to have a more constructive role for inter and intra organisational management (Hartley et al., 2019). It is also argued by Silvester & Wyatt (2018) that politics is present in all organisations and must be taken into account. Even further goes Ferris et al. (2019) when they state that politics in organizations are a fact of life.

Hartley et al. (2013) raises the awareness of two different perspectives regarding political astuteness. One perspective is that all politics has a “bad” side, and that it is negative and serves only individual egocentric purposes, the other one acknowledges political astuteness as a skill and ability that can be used to achieve goals for the common good, and thus has a “good” side, and in between there is also a “neutral” position which acknowledges the possibility to use it for both “good” and “ bad” (Alford et al., 2017; Silvester & Wyatt, 2018)

Here, a picture emerges that you as a project manager are active in environments where you may need to foresee dangerous situations like betrayal, open personal accusations and attacks, secret undermining of your project to name a few. You will most likely balance on an ethical edge where you might have double loyalties to consider when choosing your position, strategy and making decisions. There will certainly be a need for reading between the lines, to see and understand what is not shown.

Hartley et al. (2013) have researched political astuteness in a public service manager context and created a five dimension framework of skills connected to being politically astute. Since these skills and the ability to be politically astute is pointed out to be of increasing importance (Crosby & Bryson, 2018) and that a trend is identified where politics is being seen as an important part of organisations constructive efforts in management (Hartley et al., 2019), I argue that there is need for investigating political astuteness in a project management context as well. The above described roles and influence of politics and political astuteness is proven

to exist in every organisation (Ferris et al., 2019; Silvester & Wyatt, 2018) including project organisations (Cicmil et al., 2006; O’Leary & Williams, 2013). It is therefore important to study how experienced or maybe even street smart project managers navigate and handle the complex and sometimes dangerous context of projects.

1.1. Purpose

Following the investigation of previous research regarding the topic political astuteness, the purpose of this study is to investigate and describe experienced project manager’s perceptions of political astuteness in the context of the project arena and their roles as project managers. One further purpose is also to investigate how the phenomenon of street smart might be connected to political Astuteness and if it possibly adds a new dimension.

1.2. Research Question

There are two research questions for the study: How do you as a project manager describe and characterize political astuteness in the project management context? How do you as a project manager perceive and value the skill/ability of political astuteness?

2. Problem Area and Previous Research

To reach good orientation around the concept of street smart and its meaning, the study looks at street smartness in "folklore", to create an image of it and to be able to search for its existence, possible link to political astuteness and relevance in project management context. The investigation has revealed no previous research of street smart in the project management context.

Further, this study investigates previous research around the concept of political astuteness. Research on political astuteness is to be found in several fields such as organisation, different fields of management and psychology, but there are no studies of political astuteness directly linked to project management context and only a few (Cicmil et al., 2006; Dedong Wang & Yang Liu, 2021; Smith, 2000; Sunindijo & Maghrebi, 2020) on political skill in project management context.

2.1. Concept of Street Smart

The term "street smart" originates from the street, and most people probably relate it to the often threatening environments of big cities. In the Urban Dictionary a multifaceted picture emerges, and it is largely about situations where the individual is faced with an important and potentially

dangerous situation where the signals from the environment and how the situation is perceived for various reasons are unclear. But also about a preventive approach to avoid such situations, or develop a kind of readiness to deal with them with good strategies when they arise, which also relates to the ability to be resilient. (*Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-b)

Street smart is also put in contrast to book smart, where the latter is about learning and becoming intelligent by studying academically or theoretically, while street smarts is the intelligence, skills and abilities that you develop by actually being in the environment and learning through experience of real life. (*Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-a; *Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-b)

2.2. Research on Street Smart in Project Management Contexts

Street smart is a concept that is not researched in project management contexts. Wagner & Zaval (2009) have written a handbook within the framework of PMI / PMP, where street smart is used as a concept for the book series, but the book is a handbook with exercises and real scenarios for classic waterfall methodology and says nothing specific about the concept street smart. But we find it in Smith (2000) who uses it in the context of stakeholder analysis and equates it with political astuteness. Political astuteness can be understood as the deployment of political skill (Hartley et al., 2013). Political skill is defined as a set of skills, knowledge and judgement about stakeholder's interests, goals and how these are valued (Hartley et al., 2013). The study have examined political skills in the context of public sector leadership with a focus on the interaction with political governance, where it appears that political skill not only needs to be seen with a negative charge but also has positive dimensions (Hartley et al., 2013).

But is political skill the same as being street smart in the project management role?

If we go back to Smith, (2000) he believes that the size of the project affects the need to use political skill or street smartness and that in larger projects situations arise where you as a project manager need to risk analyse your own situation and evaluate the alternatives carefully. Situations such as being without the support of your sponsor, stakeholders or sponsors have a different agenda that you were not aware of, and they may not be interested in the project outcome or that the outcome should be successful (Smith, 2000). Here, political motives may play a role in the emergence of these situations (Smith, 2000. O'Leary & Williams, 2013. Hartley et al., 2013.). Smith (2000) points to the importance of understanding the internal and external environments of its actors and interfaces and the ability to develop supporting coalitions or to reduce the effects of opposition to the project. Doldor (2017) argues that

interpretation of diverse interests and the skill of aligning and creating coalitions to achieve goals are enabled by political astuteness.

2.3. Research on Political Astuteness and Political Skill

Hartley et al. (2013) developed a framework for political astuteness (Appendix VI) which consists of five dimensions; Strategic direction and scanning, Building alignment and alliances, Reading people and situations, Interpersonal skills and Personal skills. The framework covers from micro to macro skills which are interconnected and therefore political astuteness can be regarded to be a meta-competency. The framework has been frequently used in research and have been acknowledged and gained ground in recent years. Although it has not been used in research in Project Management context.

A slightly older model is the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) (Appendix VII) (Ferris et al., 1999, 2005, 2008) which consists of four dimensions; Social astuteness, Interpersonal influence, Networking ability, and Apparent sincerity. Several recent studies have used the PSI model as a means for data collection, but there are only quantitative studies (Dedong Wang & Yang Liu, 2021; Lvina et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019) to be found and so there seems to be a gap in qualitative studies of political astuteness in project management context. One of the recent studies have used the PSI to prove that political skill not only exists on the individual level but can be seen as a skill dispersed within a team (Lvina et al., 2018). The study also shows that team political skill strengthens team performance by enhancing team cohesiveness and eliminates barriers, although there were discrepancies in replication between different team settings, so context has relevance for the level of impact (Lvina et al., 2018).

Xu et al. (2019) have also used PSI and shown that political skill can be seen as a collective phenomenon, where the dispersed skills in the team can be added together and be seen as a whole. The study focused on shared leadership and diversity and found that team political skill can reduce negative effects that the team demography can have on shared leadership. The study also found that political skill extends beyond formal leadership and supports and facilitates leadership networks of informal nature (Xu et al., 2019).

A third study that has used the PSI is a study of Chinese construction projects that establishes a link between political skill and relationship quality. Politically skilled individuals choose more neutral conflict management styles and relationship quality is maintained to a higher degree after the conflict is resolved. (Dedong Wang & Yang Liu, 2021)

Sunindijo & Maghrebi (2020) have done a study in construction industry context, using the PSI and basing their study on existing theories that emotional intelligence is a precursor of political skill. But their results point in the opposite direction and puts political skill as a precursor to emotional intelligence. This confirms the importance of a contextual approach to management and the need for sector specific research. The authors also point out that construction projects, due to often complex and influential stakeholder situations tend to be politically charged.

Hartley et al. (2019) argues that political astuteness can serve as a conceptual link in order to understand leadership capability to create public value. Projects are very much about creating public value, hence we can see that this argument has relevance in a project management context.

In a study in the context of civil servants working closely with politicians, Hartley & Manzie (2020) connects political astuteness to three other important areas; technical skills, judgement and ethics and integrity. A model is presented (Appendix VIII) as a visualisation of the need for balance in the deployment of these skills and areas. However, they argue strongly that political astuteness is a requirement for civil servants (Hartley & Manzie, 2020). Once again, the parallel to project management is relevant.

In the same study, the way of training your political astuteness is investigated. The findings show that although political astuteness has gained recognition as a central competency, few public leaders and managers receive any formal training. The authors also investigate how political astuteness can be acquired and developed. There is much complexity but important factors affecting this is person/personality, context, time and variation (Hartley & Manzie, 2020)

2.4. Projectification and Immaturity

At a time when societal change is happening faster and faster, the demands on organizations' pace of change are increasing, this has contributed to the projectification described by Schoper & Ingason (2019) and (Wagner, 2021) among others. Projectification means that more and more organizations are choosing to carry out more and more tasks, including traditional line tasks, as projects (Wagner, 2021).

When it comes to the public sector, there is also a low level of experience of working in projects and the organization can then be described as immature (Blixt & Kirytopoulos, 2017). The combination of projectification and immaturity increases the occurrence of situations where

different centres of power in organizations are challenged, and that project managers are then faced with situations where it is not so easy to navigate between these different interests and need qualities of political astuteness or to act street smart. (Hartley et al., 2013; O’Leary & Williams, 2013)

2.5. Challenges in a Project Managers Career

There is also research on project managers' careers, which has been constantly changing and offers challenges. Lloyd-Walker et al. (2016) point to several of these challenges a project manager may encounter during their career. Time-limited contracts, personal responsibility for competence development, strategic career choices, flexibility and adaptation, difficulties in getting from the outside and into an organization, limited knowledge of power balances in the organization and protection of intellectual property are some of the challenges described (Lloyd-Walker et al., 2016).

The project manager role thus increasingly involves temporary employment and often this can also mean that you have two managers: project sponsor, who is often the line manager and superior in the project, and a manager linked to the organization's HR functions. These managers often have different formal roles and degrees of influence and influence on the project manager's situation. The quality of the relationship with each of these managers is essential for your performance and here there is a risk of situations that are difficult to handle, for example from the perspective of expectations of loyalty (Yousaf et al., 2011).

2.6. Professional Project Management Organizations

The change in the project manager role and society's projectification has led to a strong development of professional project management organizations and certifications, PMI, IPMA, Prince2, and others. One of the main documents for the IPMA concept is their ICB4 (Individual Competence Baseline) which describes 28 individual competencies that are considered essential for project managers to develop and work with (IPMA, 2015). Many of these characteristics can certainly be related as necessary to deal with the challenges described above, but do they capture the essence of political astuteness? And is there something more? What does being street smart mean in the project manager’s role?

IPMA also has an OCB (Organisational Competence Baseline) (IPMA, 2016b). This baseline among other things lists organisational competencies that should make culture, processes and structure in the organization aligned and have the same focus, but also development of staff

competencies. How does the perspectives above, around political astuteness and street smart affect all of this?

In addition to these two baselines, there is also a PEB (Project Excellence Baseline) (IPMA, 2016a) that outlines essential perspectives for achieving excellence with a project. The three perspectives; People and Purpose, Processes and Resources and Project results may all be negatively affected if a project environment requires the project manager to use the ability of political astuteness or to be street smart, or can the project manager's political astuteness and street smartness be an important skill that increases the probability of achieving excellence in projects?

2.7. Starting Point and Relevance

Through the investigation of previous research, this study has found that street smart in project management context is relatively unexplored but can be of great relevance.

In the described situations project managers are faced with, it is understood that there will be negative consequences and often serious ones, unless the situation is anticipated, prevented and/or handled in a good way. Consequences both for the project, but also emotionally for the project manager personally (Cicmil et al., 2006; Gällstedt, 2003).

Due to the research findings that management in all fields are affected by context specific parameters, research on political astuteness in project management context can give an important contribution to the development of the profession in three ways. First, it can be of great relevance to project managers in the future if the competency of political astuteness through studies is identified, further defined, and understood on a deeper level, which in turn positively affects the education and training of project managers. Second, it can create knowledge to support the future development of professional organisation's frameworks. Third, it can reveal interesting and important areas for future research.

This study aims to be a first contribution to such a process.

3. Method

This chapter accounts for the strategy and design chosen for this research, the method of collecting data, short description of the group of participants, the implementation of chosen method, how the data was analysed, a reflection over the quality of the study as a whole, and lastly which ethical considerations have been made.

3.1. Research Strategy and Design

The purpose and the goal of the study was to reach an increased understanding of a concept/skill. It was then important to hear people's stories and to examine perceptions and experiences. The choice then fell upon making a qualitative study because it provides space for detailed and nuanced stories where motivations and explanations provide further depth, and thus better conditions for reaching a deeper understanding (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018).

When describing and finding characteristics of a term or phenomenon in a relatively short study, it was important to do a good job to try to get the full picture. With a relatively small data sample there was a risk that the data would only give a fragmented picture. Because of this risk the codes, themes and subthemes was continuously examined with the process tools theoretical saturation and continuous comparison borrowed from the Grounded theory perspective (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). Grounded theory was therefore not used in full as method or as a theory generating perspective (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). When sorting the codes from the interviews and creating themes and subthemes there was a noticeable shift around the 5th and 6th interview when no more themes or subthemes were created for the remainder of the sorting of codes. Themes and subthemes formed where continuously compared in relation to new codes that at times caused an alteration of a theme or a subtheme (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018).

The demarcation between different approaches is described as a grey area by Bryman & Nilsson (2018). To begin with, the study took a starting point in my own empirical data, and then the study has focused on the participants' stories, experiences, and reflections, and these have formed the basis for the theoretical understanding that the study has developed. Thus my research approach was inductive (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018).

As for the results part the analysis has given me results in the form of concepts, categories and properties. Theory formation is outside the scope of this study and follow-up studies are needed to reach this point (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018).

3.2. Data Collection Method

The initial choice of data collection method for the study was to use focus groups. Early on I experienced difficulty to gather four to six experienced and very busy project managers to a synchronous online meeting. With the short timeframe of this study in mind, there was risk of having huge difficulties completing the study and getting enough data with this choice of method. A quick decision was made, and the data collection method was switched to semi-

structured interviews. This method is suitable to give the respondent the opportunity to tell freely, express opinions and describe feelings related to the topic (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). The guide for conducting focus groups (Appendix III) were then used as a basis for developing an interview guide (Appendix IV) to support the implementation of the interviews.

The interviews were recorded using Zoom and simultaneously Word on an iPhone were used to transcribe the interview into text. The argument for recording was to have the possibility to go back and correct the automatic transcription. This was important to make sure that the participants stories were captured in full and without misunderstandings which in turn was argued to secure validity and reliability.

3.3. Participants

Selection and Inclusion Criteria

To improve the chances of getting rich and relevant data it was important that the participants in the interviews had great experience of the project manager role. For this study, I chose to set only one criterion for participation; having at least ten years of experience of the project manager role. LinkedIn was used to reach out to the project management community. From the ones answering the reach out, the selection of participants was made subjectively, I made this choice since it seemed to be the best way to ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria. I also valued that it would be enriching for the data collection if the participants were spread in terms of industry, gender, age, geography, and other parameters, which further supports the choice of a subjective selection process.

Description of the Group of Participants

In total, seven project managers were interviewed and the participants age range was from the mid-thirties to the mid-sixties. The reason for conducting seven interviews was that signs of maturation were noticed around interview five and six and that after the seventh interview the total amount of data consisted of 113 pages of transcribed text, which was valued a good amount of data regarding the scope, level, and purpose of this study.

Geographically the participants were spread over three continents, Australia, Asia, and Europe, with 4/7 coming from Europe and 2/7 from Australia and 1/7 from Asia. The group was 4/7 female project managers and 3/7 male project managers. Their experience varied from ten years sharp and up to over 25 years of experience. All of them had experience from multiple sectors,

like IT, aviation, construction, video game industry, public sector, and finance. Four of them had multi-cultural experience working projects in different countries and on different continents, as a group their experience covered the continents of Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America.

3.4. Loss of Participants

To proactively mitigate any loss of participants a close and continuous communication were used. The participants were fully informed and were also given the possibility to ask questions before starting the interviews to have full transparency regarding the study and methods used.

After the initial change of data collection method from focus groups to semi-structured interviews, all participants accepted continuing to take part in the study. All four respondents invited to the initial focus group followed through and took part in an interview instead. During and after the interviews there were no problems or withdrawals. This means that the study was conducted without any loss of participants or participants data.

3.5. Implementation

The interviewees were asked to volunteer and was informed about the study through a general informative letter (Appendix I), where they could read about the organisation and methods used to conduct the interviews, the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, data handling and compliance with data regulations. Finally, the voluntary nature of the study and participants possibility to withdraw at any time during the study was also included in the letter. They then also gave consent to take part in the study by sending a consent form (Appendix II) to me from their personal e-mail addresses stating their consent to participate in the study.

The information to the participants about the switching of data collection method was done verbally and through e-mail communication. The initial interviews were conducted with the same project managers that had volunteered for the focus group, and all four of them agreed to doing an interview instead of taking part in a focus group and showed great understanding for the situation. The last three interviews were done with additional project managers which were asked about participating in an interview only.

The interviews were conducted with the support of an interview guide (Appendix IV) that was made with the focus group guide (Appendix III) as a base and adjusted to the new method and context. The guide had a sequence of questions that had been prepared but they were not applied

strictly, since the strength and purpose of using semi-structured interviews is to allow the interviewee to elaborate and the interviewer to follow up interesting leads with spontaneous questions. This is sometimes necessary to go in depth of the content and sometimes to steer the conversation back to the topic (Bryman & Nilsson, 2018). The interviews were recorded using Zoom and stored locally. Simultaneously I used Word on an iPhone that transcribed the interview into text, this was transferred and stored locally as well. The interview recordings were analysed to correct the automatic transcription. The interviews were between 75 to 110 minutes long.

The interview meetings all started with repetition of information about and the purpose and aim of the study, all participants were also given the chance to ask questions regarding the study. Furthermore, recording of the session was verbally agreed upon. The interviews all started with the introductory question and then the first main question. After that the interviews were unique in the sense that I used follow up questions about interesting things the participant had told. In all interviews both main questions were asked before the interview concluded. Introductory and main questions are found in the interview guide (Appendix IV). During the interview short notes were taken to secure that interesting leads were followed up before completion of the interview. As an interviewer I used active listening to motivate the participant to tell their story in full, and also gave the participant room to tell their story and elaborate without being interrupted, this strategy resulted in the interviews giving rich data.

3.6. Data Analysis

The choice of method for analysis and processing data was thematic analysis, as it is a method that provided the opportunity for a broad and flexible approach in the analysis. This was suitable and advantageous when analysing the rich and data-dense material collected through the semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was conducted by following the six step methodology described by Braun & Clarke (2006). I familiarised myself with collected data, did initial coding and then created themes. The themes were reviewed and then defined. Finally, they were compiled and reported.

The familiarisation was done by both looking at the recordings repeatedly and correcting the transcriptions and then a read through of the entire material as a whole. The interviews were transcribed continuously and therefore the familiarisation also were a continuous process that allowed me to use this knowledge to improve my interviews and be more sensitive to interesting

things mentioned by the respondents. After the read through some notes regarding the overall content was jotted down. The initial coding was done by reading the text in word and putting the codes in Excel with the sentence number as identification, to make it easier to go back and re-read interesting parts regarding the same codes. The codes were then transferred to the digital tool Miro that provided a flexibility in handling codes and creating themes. During the iterative process, this tool allowed me to quickly visualise new connections and insights while sorting codes and creating themes. The themes were reviewed by going back to the text to increase the understanding of the origin of the codes that comprised the theme. The themes were then defined and connected to the participants comments, stories, and experiences. The themes were also compiled and can be found in Appendix V.

3.7. Reliability, Validity and Limitations

By describing and arguing for the choice of method and selection principles, the study's transparency increases and gives the reader a good opportunity for review. In this way, I argue that the study secures reliability, and the results are given an increased credibility. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) a criticism directed at qualitative studies is that the researcher's subjectivity and own experiences can influence the analysis. In this study, based on the purpose, choice of method and the quality of collected data, this has not been valued as being an obstacle or that it has affected validity and reliability to such an extent that it has damaged the study's relevance. Further, in the study I have seen myself as an interpretative tool using my knowledge and experience as a backdrop processing the participants comments, stories, and reflections. I have actively been aware of and to the best of my ability avoided to mix my own experiences and biases with the participants data.

Considering the spread of age, project management experience, geography, gender, sectors and cultural experience among the respondents, the data is valued as being valid and reliable in regard to being able to shed light on the research question and giving a good base for discussion and reliable and valid conclusions.

Limitations and threats to validity and reliability has been countered by supervision of teachers, colleagues, and fellow researchers, not only the ones connected directly to the course, but I have also asked for and received supervision and academic advice from highly experienced peers and professors outside the course.

One limitation of the study is that the relatively small number of participants and amount of collected data could make it difficult to draw generalising conclusions. However, the borrowing of tools from the Grounded theory perspective gave me as a researcher a support in the process of analysing and valuing the collected data because of the discovery of a certain degree of theoretical saturation. Furthermore, the purpose of the study has been to describe existing perceptions here and now as a first step to possible future studies, therefore the relatively small data sample is not valued to have affected the quality of this study negatively.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

To honour ethical considerations this study is based on The Swedish Research Council's ethical considerations for research. There are four main requirements that need to be considered, these are; the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the benefit requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018).

The information requirement has been taken into consideration through sending out necessary information (Appendix I) about the study to the participants in advance as well as repeating the information verbally at the start of each interview. Furthermore, they were asked to formulate themselves in such a way that their stories and the information they provide cannot harm individuals or organizations. In the cases where such information was expressed, it has been my ethical duty to ensure that it is not disseminated or used in the study in such a way that harm occurs, this has been done by erasing any company or individuals' names already in the transcription phase and by me treating the information as confidential.

By having all participants sign a consent form (Appendix II) after being well informed about the study, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any given point in time, the consent requirement is properly addressed.

During the data analysis, all data had already been anonymised in the correction of the transcript. It was not considered of any importance to connect data to any individual participant. All recordings were erased when the data analysis was completed. In this way the confidentiality requirement is considered as properly taken care of.

The benefits requirement is taken into consideration by informing participants about, and me as a researcher abiding to, that the collected data and information is only to be used for the stated purpose of the study and will be destroyed when the study is completed, approved and the grade has been registered in Karlstad University's study register.

I also believe that the risk of stigmatisation of groups or discrimination is low and that anonymisation in the analysis further reduces these risks (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018).

4. Results

In the following section the research results will be presented. All descriptions, reflections and things mentioned are from the analysis of the data collected in the interviews and represent the interviewees collective perceptions and experiences, seen through the lens of thematic analysis.

4.1. Overview Main Themes and Subthemes

The results after thematic analysis are four main themes and 13 subthemes. The four main themes are; The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context, The Dirty Tricks, The Politically Astute Project Manager, The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing.

The first main theme, The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context, was constructed out of four subthemes; The Context, Challenges and Conflicts, Decisions, and Culture.

The second main theme, The Dirty Tricks, was built up by three subthemes; The Hidden, Overt Resistance, and On your Own

The third main theme, The Politically Astute Project Manager, is forged by six subthemes; Awareness, Experience, Strategy, Network, Personal Development and Mistakes

The fourth main theme, The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing, has no subthemes but is exciting enough to stand for itself.

4.2. The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context

The description by the respondents give a picture of political astuteness as a phenomenon that has many facets. It is by all respondents characterised as something multidimensional, complex, dynamic and with a great degree of uncertainty. It is characterised as a sort of an ecosystem with a multitude of stakeholders and many dependencies and interdependencies, by one respondent described as incomprehensible.

...it has to do with many different opinions, it has to do with many different stakeholders, but all these things are a sort of an ecosystem which is working together...so there are lots of moving parts...you cannot leave something out or include many things at the same time...

Supplementing the characterisation as an ecosystem, it is also described as a rule of life, something that cannot be avoided and that it is not related to size of organisation or project, it is everywhere and the need for a holistic approach is suggested by another respondent. However, some respondents state that the size and nature of projects do affect the character of political astuteness.

All respondents express that you as a project manager has a lot of hats, manager, problem solver, counsellor and many more, and that you will see many things and situations throughout your career. The complexity is once again pointed out in that everyone has their view of reality. The multitude of stakeholders, and stakeholders at different levels, are highlighted and that you must be prepared to be approached by many stakeholders in different ways, not all of them being pleasant experiences.

Another situation that is reflected upon by most respondents is that you can end up sitting on two or more chairs, meaning that you end up in situations where your loyalty may be challenged and then the need to be politically astute increases. The need for trying to avoid this and trying to use technical solutions to solve those situations is pointed out.

...it was only a few times that I was the coordinator and then the project manager at the same time because then you have like two hats because you're the coordinator of the over project, you're the project manager for your own organisation...we were splitting this so we had the scientific coordinator...and then us as company joining as a more administrative coordinator role so then we could split so the coordinator, the official one, was more involved in the content side and could really be part of all the discussions without having to worry about the, over moderating everything, because I was doing that and I was neutral at that point so I didn't have a stake in the project as such...and that separation worked actually quite well.

Most respondents have a view of political astuteness where it is obvious that nothing is black or white, and that it has both a good and a bad side or can be used for all kinds of purposes. Some of the respondents see political astuteness as the same as diplomacy which have both an internal and an external dimension. This is sharply contrasted by one of the respondents who clearly takes a stand against anything political, which is seen as an abomination.

...so potentially you're talking to absolutely the wrong person here because my view is and has always been don't play those games at all...you know, I have no care or regard for hierarchy or ego or any of those things and I quite often actually go into projects and tell people you know, upfront...

This one-sidedness of politics is further enhanced by describing project and organisations as sometimes infected by politics and the suggestion to excuse yourself as fast as possible from situations where you risk being drawn into political games, “...*don't even try to to play political games with me because it's...it's pointless...it's of no interest and actually it's just a waste of energy*”. The respondents view has a serious conviction and also points out that being a-political and having no other agenda than delivering the project as best as possible will create trust with the team and stakeholders.

Related to being a-political are reflections from several respondents regarding the need for balancing between delivering and being diplomatic or politically astute.

If you deliver great quality and you deliver it on time and on budget, but you dropped the political astuteness you risk failure...because just people won't remember some of these other things if the whole thing was a conflict and a big mess you know, and people criticising the outcome.

...and so you can have all the political astuteness in the world but if you can't deliver on it you know, there's so many projects that always get delayed and delayed and delayed or they have to get re-scoped and that the client has to go along with it, but that does not make them happy.

Another perspective of the difficulty with balancing is related to the individual level and the level of caring for the individual team member or stakeholder.

...tend to be overly caring and and it attracts away from projects and delivery and outcomes because they're too, their too sensitive that you know...there has to be a line where you said no, no, I'm sensitive to your position but we've still got to achieve outcomes, we can't just you know, it's not all about how you feel...so how do you do that?

An interesting characteristic pointed out by some respondents is the relationship between political astuteness on the individual level and organisational level. Company agendas sometime overrun relationships you have built with individuals and that it is important to have clarity around what is company agenda and personal agenda and how these interact. It is also pointed out that these two levels need to be judged differently.

I just want to reiterate I think that the difference between individual an organisational communications and politics and that they, they have to be judged differently...you know in an ideal world you could get you could do away with the fabrication of the organisation and deal with just the individuals but that's not always possible so sometimes you have to have to adjust for the the organisational agenda regardless of your relationship with the individual

you know. You could have a fantastic open honest relationship with a specific individual that you're working with from another company, but their company's agenda may not align with your company's agenda...

Most respondents are aligned around political astuteness being a political way of handling things to be as beneficial as possible for all stakeholders. However, several respondents also add the dimension of speaking up to authority, and here we see two different perspectives of this. One perspective that is stated by some respondents is that speaking up to authority is not politically astute. The other perspective that some respondents give is that it is politically astute to sometimes speak up to authority, but it needs to be done in an understandable way explaining the arguments.

One dimension that is mentioned by most of the respondents is that there are differences between individuals, to be successful when trying to be politically astute you need to choose strategy depending on your personality, age, and other individual characteristics. To be young is seen as a disadvantage.

...of course I was much more naïve, I was extremely young also. But at the time, but I had really nice mentors with what really helped me to navigate in this ocean of different guys. It's also related with personal like development...human...as personality as I was young I was still learning many things just about regular...regular life.

In addition to this the respondents mentioned that they also see generational differences where the older generation is stated to be "more secret". We will also see that this is related to the respondents reflections regarding the experience dimension of political astuteness.

From here we slide into the first of the subthemes The Context.

The Context

A suitable bridge is the respondents reflections that there are great differences between projects, and they mention high profile projects and use terms like prestigious projects or hot topic projects. These are for example projects started with a clear political background, projects around sensitive issues regarding states or regions and projects related to topics with political controversy. One clear result is that most respondents reflect on the importance of having support from the projects power centre and that the balancing of perspectives and opinions from stakeholders is an obvious part of the context or characteristic of political astuteness. The respondents also make a clear distinction between senior stakeholders and other stakeholders,

where the senior stakeholders are more important to be aware of and address properly, so the valuing of the stakeholder's importance and possible impact on the project is seen as part of being politically astute. In addition, they all mention that the complexity in the stakeholder situation also enhances the complexity of the political astuteness needed. Examples of what the respondents meant affected this complexity is numbers of stakeholders, stakeholders on different levels, stakeholder's personalities and motivations and organisational structures. One respondent also mentions that the title and background of the director affects the context in a certain political direction.

...if the PMO is governed under the chief information officer it suits technology, and if it's governed by the chief operating officer it moves to the operation field, if it's governed through the chief strategy oversight go to the strategy right...

The respondents also characterise the context from a language perspective, where translation between stakeholders from different disciplines is a major obstacle. An example given is that Information Technology people and finance people don't use the same terminology and have a hard time understanding each other. Several respondents point out that it is crucial to make everyone understand each other and each stakeholder's perspective.

There are also reflections related to the two sides of political astuteness, where it is pointed out that there are also "*...people in the shadows who can impact something...*". The people in the shadows are not necessarily a sign of the bad side trying to manipulate and deceive, but the respondents are clear on the existence of people in the shadows on both sides. It is however also pointed out the need for having awareness of function biases, certain stakeholders have functions in the organisation which makes them prone to or needed to act in a certain way to fulfil their function, to do their job. This should not be mistaken for being on the bad side of politics.

Coming back to stakeholder's personalities, that were also mentioned when describing the context, and the need for having the skill to handle the different personalities. The respondents describe that there are both collaborators and creators of obstacles, and that the creators of obstacles often are focused on the technical aspects of processes and projects.

I believe that people who if there are two persons who are similar, have similar approach in collaboration, communication how open transparent and professional enough so will always like each other and always will try to do as much as possible for each other and that's my observation so and there are some people who for some reason just don't want to...to deliver

the results and they are more interested in processes or in actually creating obstacles rather than making results so with these people is a bit more difficult to find a common language.

Furthermore, the respondents also point out that even though the stakeholders are your customers, they are not always right, sometimes stakeholders hold on to very detailed solutions and in those situations it is important to dare to suggest different solutions that in your view will work for the better, of course there is need to consider the ethical aspect and be aware of the decision making authority while doing this.

Another comment regarding stakeholders and context was that stakeholders more often than you would think is forgotten. This is linked to the high-pressured project context where you as a project manager need to juggle everything seemingly at once, trying to get the team to work optimally, and then nearing the end of the project there's suddenly an awareness appearing, that you need to link what you are doing to the stakeholders needs and wishes.

The general description of the context of projects and political astuteness given from the respondents are that context is highly important and that no project is like the other. It can be similar, but never the same. It is lined with uncertainty that causes the context to change. Practical examples given are difficulties regarding language, participation, time zones, problems with time constraints that limit your options which in turn affect your possibility to choose strategy when trying to be politically astute. We also revisit the reflection regarding different realities, the context surrounding a project are perceived in different ways by different stakeholders and the importance of communication to share and bring these perceptions together to a mutual picture is mentioned by all respondents. Inexperience and the feeling of meeting an authority can inhibit this communication as reflected upon by one respondent, *"because I was new it was Oh my God it's the European Commission, it's like they're the gods in a certain way, but I mean having my experience now it's like you know...you can have a talk with them"*.

This high pressured, uncertain, and constantly changing juggling act also causes other effects. One of the effects mentioned is that it causes people to get stuck in their tracks, doing things like they've always done it. It also causes people to give resistance, resistance to change and creative solutions

...a lot of that might come about because people are either either in the situation where they got so many pressures in the day today they can't see beyond that, or and then again I say you have to then in terms of the practical skills, you have to realise that you've either got to

create time or space or something to get people out of that situation, to have the time to do the thinking...

The respondents are clear in their opinions about the growing importance of purpose. In one perspective it is seen as more and more important for projects to have engaged people and stakeholders, that believe in the project, to succeed. In another perspective in the sense that if you cannot communicate the feeling of purpose there is a higher risk of resistance in the project or that people accept the status quo.

Organisational structures are also pointed out as sometimes being an obstacle to handle, where you risk ending up powerless in dead ends if you cannot navigate smoothly between the power centres who has the mandate of decision making. One respondent was very clear around the need for frameworks and ground rules to help mitigate such obstacles and to support the project manager, the examples given was governance and change frameworks, and also frameworks to guide people to what needs to be done and how to follow rules and regulations. In essence the message here was to reduce complexity to reduce the difficulty around political astuteness. *“What I’ve seen it works better is to have such kind of structures to minimise the political influence under the board of directors.”*

One last contextual awareness that respondents talk about is that it is generally harder to affect externally, for example when different consultancies are collaborating or in large projects with a complex external stakeholder situation. Here the contract is pointed out to be a possible tool for leverage, that should be handled thoroughly and cautiously with great political astuteness since it is never enough, but needs to be supplemented with handling the situation in other ways and with other tools and skills. Here there is risk for negative effects not necessarily in the ongoing project, but that you damage relationships and possibilities of future collaborations.

There were a couple of companies that were part of the project that it was clear, to them that it was just business it was just work you know, and and just another job and that was incredibly disheartening and frustrating. But you know you can only push people so far under the guise of a contract and look they, they were not my team they were other contractors on my level so I had no control over them.

At the same time the respondents are clear that also within organisations there are struggles, for example projects competing for resources which will be our bridge into our next subtheme, Challenges and Conflicts.

Challenges and Conflicts

The general description of challenges and conflicts given by the respondents reach from unclear division of responsibility that creates tension and opinions that need clarification, requests to add things out of scope and all the way up to where your company are in a bind without monetary reserves and are forced to push on through in a project that you would rather terminate for different reasons. These conflicts all have in common that they grow if not attended to and the attending to conflicts is by most respondents seen as part of political astuteness, and that frameworks around conflict management could reduce complexity in handling the conflicts and supporting political astuteness. When it comes to challenges the respondents describe both challenges that are seen in a negative sense, like a sort of obstacle, but they also give a picture of challenges in a positive sense, challenging you as a project manager, an individual or a team to make them grow. One respondent mentions a situation where the project team was in place and the respondent came in as a project manager and deliberately challenged the existing situation.

...and part of the team was already formed and I went into that...what's the phrase? Like a bull in a China shop...because the brief stated very very clearly you know that this this centre had to be an exemplar and everything had to be of the highest quality etcetera, and and I went in and I looked at some of the stuff that was being done and affectively upset a huge number of people who had invested their time into this thing already, by saying it's not good enough...I think I think we can do better.

We have to get past the concept of you know people being precious about their, their ideas or their suggestions in pursuit of excellence, I guess in pursuit of delivering the single best outcome...so yeah. You know, I certainly broke a few egg shells but I managed to repair those relationships and bring people along.

One perspective given is that it is the individual's feeling of control and safety that is challenged and that indicates that the respondents see most conflicts and challenges as based in our human side, and not so much really being about the technical or factual side of things. Another perspective given is that challenges and conflicts can arise as the result of hearsay and rumours, which is very much related to the informal side of politics and political astuteness.

The challenges and conflicts often surface as a result when the status quo is challenged. They encompass both individuals and organisations and the respondents mention that sometimes it is politically astute to actually agree that there is a disagreement. They are also clear that the strategy used to resolve or handle a conflict is part of political astuteness, where many conflicts

should be solved one to one, and that it is important not to expose individuals before having a thorough understanding of the situation.

A project manager should not expose all their employees or his peers before understanding what the situation is because a lot of misunderstandings might come up, maybe the parties that are in conflict they don't know the whole picture.

The respondents describe some characteristic situations regarding challenges and conflicts with individuals. Sometimes individuals with formal power wants to exert and demonstrate it, this is mentioned to be one of the most challenging situations to resolve according to some respondents and are also commented on as being part of power games and sometimes creating obstacles because of different interests. Related to this it is also mentioned that sometimes these people are tolerated in the organisation because they bring other advantages, a form of organisational political astuteness. Another type of challenge is about the individual's development and career, where several respondents tell about experiences where they have been performing well or have been applying for a job but then being denied because of political reasons or that they have been disliked by board people, which obviously falls in under the "dark side" of politics and political astuteness.

The respondents describe several types of conflict on team or department level, where one of the most mentioned are conflicts between project managers and line managers related to the earlier mentioned challenging of the status quo. There is also a clear experience of conflicts between departments where projects affect one positively and the other one negatively, here it is also described how departments can be attacking each other and centralised project management functions like for example Project Management Offices (PMO). The background for these attacks is not only because of challenging the status quo but also the fact that different sections and departments have different plans and priorities even though they are in the same organisation. Also, here it is pointed out that a form of departmental function bias exists and that some conflicts arise when a specific department actually do their job in a proper way.

...for instance, just one right example is I think it's constant kind of conflict of interest, were sales guy tries to sell whatever they could sell despite any risk associated with that, because they're not responsible for its core for for instance...any regulatory risks it may bring, and other risks.

Furthermore, the respondents also mention the conflicts that are a result of the competition between project teams, competition for resources, competition to be rewarded to run a project

and the competition for attention. These conflicts can also appear on an intra project level where the team gets divided into camps with different opinions or interests. One respondent connects this to organisational structures that create complexities and gives the example of an organisations Key Performance Indexes (KPI) on individual level, if they are not carefully thought through and aligned, they can create conflicting interests between individuals that threaten to divide teams into camps.

...and things that people prioritise for themselves with their functions are very much open dependent on obviously on this personal KPI's versus strategic KPI's and if you don't have proper KPI's then obviously people select the ones that will impact their annual performance at the end of the day that's quite logical.

Another perspective mentioned by one respondent has to do with a change that has been noticed in the project management world and picked up by the respondent, and it is regarding that operations and projects seem to trade places, where we now see that operation more and more often are working in shorter perspectives trying to deliver and keep things afloat, and that projects are more and more used for long term thinking and strategy in the organisation. The respondent poses an interesting question regarding this.

There was an article only the other day published suggesting that it used to be the case that the operations were permanent, and the projects and change were temporary now it's the other way round...it was this flipping around that the operations just keep you afloat in the sort of the short term and the projects are all about delivering the strategic change and changes the permanent thing. So, I suppose whether that's going to change what we think about politics and diplomacy I don't know?

The respondents also talk about several experiences where the challenge or conflict comes from the top-level management, for example sudden changes in strategy because of business related changes like mergers or sale of company. The suddenness of these decisions and the lack of involvement are mentioned to cause the feeling of losing control and safety that was mentioned earlier, and that feeling often shows as resistance or frustration that causes challenges and potentially conflicts. And when we now have moved into the realm of decision making we have already taken the step over into the next subtheme.

Decisions

Some of the respondents clearly state that decisions are politics and that decision making processes require you to deploy political skill, to be politically astute. In the project context it is mainly steering committees that are mentioned as being the decision making entities where there are obvious power struggles and negotiations, *“...and at the very end the steering committee agreed but it was very sharp committee lots of conflict and arguments...”*.

The respondents are clear about that decision making processes triggers behaviors in individuals, teams and organizations and that it is often the cause of conflict, both short term conflicts but also in a long term perspective where it can cause individuals to feel neglected, abandoned or not listened to if the decision making process is poorly run. Here they clearly mention links to political astuteness in the way that you handle stakeholders in the decision making process and that decisions is the natural epicenter for power struggles and the art of lobbying.

...keyword here's power and decisions at least to my understanding, because politics in projects are important when it goes to decision to my mind and that's why it's very closely tied again to steering committees, because steering committees are bodies where decisions are taken.

Also, the outcome of the decision making process can cause challenges and conflicts, according to the respondents, even if the process is being done in a very politically astute way. An example given is decisions to stop projects or decisions to pull out of projects causing severe dilemmas and problems for other stakeholders. Respondents also mention that these types of decisions can give the project manager scars that are tough psychologically and follow you through your life and career.

...it was out of the blue terminated... ...so such kind of scars in the project management world are famous and I would, one scar is when they decided in project that was working to stop the whole PMO right, it was a shame taking into account that there were a lot of stakeholders working with me were satisfied were bringing their results, but some of the board people didn't like it because they didn't understand the value of such kind of things, that they wanted to build something better for their benefit...

Respondents also mention the complexity reducing role of decision making frameworks that organizations can use to mitigate poor decision making processes. Decision making has a larger

role in the results as we will see in the theme The Hidden where the respondents reflect upon the “dark side” of politics and how it affects decision making processes.

This brings us to the final subtheme of The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context, and that is the subtheme of Culture.

Culture

The respondents give a picture of culture at several levels, region and country level, organisation and company level and team and department level. The general picture is that culture bring about implications and challenges you need to be aware of, as one respondent put it,

...balancing projects in a political view, it is heavily affected by the culture of the company because somethings that are allowed in one country are not allowed in another country on another continent so it's not one size fits all.

The cultural implications between countries and regions are also about that they have different political scenes which highly affect how you as a project manager can deploy your political skills to be politically astute.

It was the first time I had ever had to deal with the cultural implications of [region] business and I, I kind of went into it as I always am blunt and honest... ..but culturally, and I didn't realise, culturally there is an expectation to always negotiate and always haggle, and because I had my my kind of opening discussion was the fact, yeah the actual facts, I had nowhere to go with my baseline.

In another example the cultural implication brings the project manager to the edge of law and ethics, where a high-level public servant was holding out a decision and waiting for a bribe. *“I totally suspected he was he was wanting that because because that's endemic in that culture right. So it, that was, that was blatant because it's a very cultural thing to do...”*

Most respondents reflect around the cultural differences between companies, but also cultural differences within companies, where departments or even project can develop their own culture. Once again frameworks are mentioned as a complexity reducing possibility where companies make efforts to regulate cultures, often in the form of values. The respondents descriptions point out two distinctly different cultures; collaborative culture, where trust is the base and, the fear culture, where control and force is the base. The effects pointed out here is that the collaborative

culture generally gives better performance, while the fear or forcing culture makes people afraid to make mistakes and people tend to stop helping each other bypass problems.

Another perspective given around culture is that some cultures fit your personality and communication style better, which makes your interaction more natural and less need to spend effort on being politically astute.

There is a really big difference in my experience between East Coast and West Coast U.S. business and East Coast fitted my kind of communication style perfectly you know it's just blunt and you say it like it is and if you don't like it you have an argument about it and then you resolve it and go have a drink... West coast was lots of fence sitting and skirting around issues and not really saying...you know...getting to the point...

Some of the respondents also reflect upon culture that it is something you sometimes challenge, which is related to what has been mentioned earlier in the main theme as challenging the status quo. This challenging of the culture is also mentioned to create tensions, challenges, and conflicts. One respondent also reflects upon a situation where the challenging of a culture did not play out, but instead the respondent decided to resign because of the political environment and culture in the company.

I resigned from my previous job exactly because of that reason, and I understood that I can't just work with, I don't want, I can work, but I don't want to work in this environment, what happened to be...no so because of this political environment and some decisions I was just, felt very, I thought that it's really against how, it's against the truth which I believe in.....company just works in such way that I don't want I don't want to work here.

So, this concludes the first main theme The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context and we now move into the second main theme which is The Dirty Tricks.

4.3. The Dirty Tricks

The general descriptions from the respondents that led to this main theme revolves around pushing of opinions, stalling, going behind backs, getting others to do the dirty work, misleading and betraying and actual sabotage of projects. It is not a pretty picture, and it is of course related to the first themes descriptions of context, challenges and conflicts, decisions, and culture.

In the previous main theme respondents gave a description of political astuteness as to having a good and a bad side. This main theme is mostly about the bad side, but the respondents also reflect upon confidentiality and that not everything can be open and transparent, but there's

often some people that have insights behind the scenes. In this sense the reflections show that political astuteness sometimes is about balancing on a fine line.

There is a clear statement from all respondents that these methods and this way of deploying your political skill is not by any means right to do, but that what is deemed right also differs between cultures and contexts.

Many comments from the respondents are about lying in one way or the other. It is clear that this is something that every project manager sooner or later will need to face and handling it is to the respondents clearly part of political astuteness. One respondent expresses an experience regarding people that lie about technical things in the projects and states that *“they are likely to lie about other things as well”*. Different reasons for lying are also described, and several respondents mention that people lie to keep up appearances or because they want things to look good to get a promotion. People also lie, leave out information or manipulate data in decision making processes to increase the chances of getting a favourable decision. Another form of lying that is described is when people make future promises misleading stakeholders.

So they were angling for promotion, and they conveniently left out you know... not issues with the project but we were doing feasibility studies and they were making all sorts of promises to the executive that there was no way that we could keep, and they knew that, and the thing is not nobody, nobody was saying anything.

In one way or another these above-mentioned situations are about individuals having own agendas, or managers running the department agenda for own glory and benefit, often against or at least not completely aligned to the company agenda.

Another thing that many respondents has mentioned is situations when you get used by others, the reflections are all from the respondents early career when they were young and inexperienced project managers. One way you get used is when you are working in a multi project setting or PMO and you are being told or forced to “pet” projects, give them a free pass through gateways or decision making processes, treat them better than other projects to make them look better, giving them more attention and doing things with higher quality than in your other projects.

In other examples project managers have been used to do the dirty work for others.

...as you’ve got the the backing and the goodwill of the client and they know and they fully understand that your interests are for the best of the project you can kind of unleash a bit, and

actually on on that project I, I actually think the client and project director got me involved in things that were not really my remit specifically because they knew how...not aggressive, that's not the right word, but how blunt I am...and you know I think maybe I was vocalising their frustrations to these other teams as well.

The respondents describe a mix of reactions to this, where some are surprised to meet open and evident lies while some are looking at it in a different perspective where peoples personalities, ego and self-esteem and the reality of coalitions between stakeholders are taken into consideration. In the latter cases there is less surprise, and an understanding that people sometimes want to hide things, this weighing in of different factors is mentioned by the respondents as being part of your political astuteness.

Respondents also talk about situations where someone goes behind the back, this could for example be when decisions are already taken but not informed so that you keep people in the dark. It could also be more aggressive actually trying to stop and sabotage a project.

We were not entirely unaware of it and this part of these your connexions and your political astuteness.....we started getting you know people commenting saying: oh I think something's going on... yeah this consultants over here is doing this documentation...oh why they doing that documentation because that's not related to their project it's related to our project why would they be doing that?...we probably didn't have more than a couple of weeks notice that somebody wanted to cancel the project entirely.

The quote above moves us into the first subtheme, The Hidden.

The Hidden

A reflection regarding the hidden came from a respondent that commented on early signals, *"...typically it's when something is not happening or happening much slower or with much less qualitative output as it was expected or planned"*. This stalling of things in the project can have many facets and the respondents mention; slow and very formal written conversation, not speaking your opinion, holding back your thoughts, doing the minimal to avoid needing to ask for resources. The consequences are of course the stalling, but also that you make it difficult for the project manager to read the situation causing frustration.

...it didn't matter how many times we said this or how many different ways we highlighted it this guy would not would not budge but at the same time he would not commit to detailing his his vision for things so he was only ever reacting to stuff that we would put in front of him...Uhm... and you know it's the worst possible thing where someone just says yeah that's that's not what I was thinking and then leaves it there.

The above quote is an example of having a hidden agenda and is mentioned by most respondents, where one experience is regarding managers keeping up appearances in meetings but backstabbing each other behind the scenes, another is where pieces of the puzzle slowly comes together, *“and you started putting together a pattern of behaviour that I realised that there was a deliberate ploy here to to undermine a particular person”*. These hidden agendas or as some respondents call it “unsaid motivations”, are often discovered by chance when parts of information come together from different sources over time and forms the picture. When these “unsaid motivations” occur with people that actually has impact over outcomes it is by some mentioned to be the hardest situations to deal with, just because of the reason that they are hidden and even when you become aware you need to handle this with one of your key stakeholders, which puts you under a lot of pressure to handle things politically astute.

The lack of transparency is by the respondents explained with people having personal interests and prioritising personal success and glory instead of company benefits.

...sometimes they'll say things and make it clear and other times they won't, there's other motivations that they're trying to do something whether it be money promotions looking good to somebody else you know or undermining somebody trying to get rid of someone...
...it's it's you know it's all the personal power plays, that people do inside projects or or even outside projects they do it in any organisation.

But another explanation is also mentioned from one respondent, that sometimes people are too embarrassed to tell and be open. So, the hidden doesn't always mean that things are done deliberately and with meaning to harm.

Other perspectives on hidden is when managers hide the real situation and publicly announces fake information or information not based on experience or involvement.

...some of the things I've heard recently about top management, I forgot what the modern expression for it is...“ghosting” the, the real opinions of staff and students. Now whether that is a function of those informal conversations not happening so we're just seeing written messages from people quite high up that's sort of saying stuff like “morale is very high”.

To run things behind the scenes has been mentioned by some respondents and this also have some different facets. Going vertical behind the scenes is an expression for not following rules and regulations, bypassing levels, or processes and earlier we heard from the respondents that resistance sometimes are organised hidden, behind the scenes to try to keep the status quo. The last expression of the hidden takes us back to decision making processes where many of the

respondents mention that decision in many cases is brought in behind the scenes and decided informally, and the decision making process becomes an empty formality. One specific such case that also relates to confidentiality is mentioned by a respondent where the organisation had an enterprise level project to merge with another firm and it totally overshadowed projects on tactical level that were left without attention or information and the situation was then perceived as stalling or that there were hidden agendas somewhere.

But everything is not hidden, and now we move into the subtheme Overt resistance

Overt Resistance

An experience some of the respondents mention is that pushing too hard creates resistance. It is also something that most respondents mention that they plan for.

I'm very cynical about it and I plan for it and I will put arguments and you know do as much work as I can up front too to make our case and to ease that resistance as much as possible.

The overt resistance is further described as being very time consuming, partly because of ignorance and that handling it requires a lot of communication in a situation where the feelings are high. One example that shows the feelings involved were a situation where a reorganisation was interpreted as a hostile takeover of departments.

The respondents also comment that a lot of resistance arise because people feel that they have not been taken seriously or been listened to.

People on the technical side are often very good at overstating the benefits or not understanding the amount of behavioural change that might be needed to deliver some of those benefits, as just seeing something from a purely technical view might lead to scepticism or lack of support from people.

Another situation like this is mentioned, where the project is coming from a top-down perspective, and the respondent could feel the hostility and suspicion coming out to the departments that had not been involved.

And related to feeling is a reflection by one respondent regarding the level and difficulty handling the resistance depending on the context.

...but when you're dealing with creative things as opposed to factual things you know, it's it's subjective and its opinion based and and people, people hold on to their opinions around

creative ideas far longer than they do around hard and factual you know, technical solutions for example, so yeah, got lots of resistance.

Also, a part of this theme are situations described by some respondents which involves stakeholders or managers trying to force their way, either it's about forcing their way of working, forcing their own views, forcing their own agenda and decisions, they are all related to the earlier mentioned power games that were said to cause tensions, challenges, and conflicts.

On your Own

Even though you as a project manager always work around people and in teams and other constellations, it is obvious that you are also sometimes alone and on your own. The respondents give a picture of how this is related to success and failure, and that you as a project manager should take measures to protect yourself.

Even in success you can be lonely or even pushed off, and the picture given is that the project management context is highly competitive both on company, team, and individual level.

...in many companies as well there are people that when they see such kind of ideas moving forward, doing things that is beneficial for the company, they don't want you...because maybe they don't get the glory. If you succeed everybody's happy and want to take part of it if you fail nobody knows you and they want to take the whole part of the successful outcome.

In times of failure, or when you as a project manager need to speak the truth even if it hurts, you are on your own. You risk your current job, you risk your reputation and with that your career is in jeopardy. The respondents have experienced "blaming sessions" as arranged meetings specifically set up to find the responsible person, and also being falsely accused of not doing their job properly and being attacked and accused of having their own hidden agenda. There are also experiences of losing the job because of following their inner beliefs and moral compass.

I basically had to tell the truth there were some a some very untoward things happening in a project, well it's sort of outside related to the project and I had to go to somebody's boss and tell them what was going on, I was asked to move on...I just had to speak the truth and my head rolled because of it.

These situations are according to the respondents clearly connected to your ability to be politically astute and some of them are very clear about that it is wise to always secure evidence and documentation of your actions and communication to have your back cleared in times of

failure and when difficult matters arise. Because at the end of the day, in those situations you are on your own.

So how does the project manager need to be equipped to handle all of this? We now move into the third main theme, The Politically Astute Project Manager.

4.4. The Politically Astute Project Manager

This main theme will first give a general picture of the project manager with a good ability to act politically astute, and the skillset needed. We will then go through some subthemes to deepen the picture given from the respondents.

The general description given is that the project manager should be calm, positive, humble, controlled and being able to juggle a lot of things at the same time while moving things back on track when needed. To be ethical is also mentioned by some respondents, to never accept to do illegal things or be pushed to do unethical actions, you are better off moving to a new environment rather than staying. The respondents mention the importance of following your inner beliefs and fight for what you really believe in. One respondent also points out the support from ethical guidelines in different certification bodies and professional project management organisations.

Respondents are also clear about the uniqueness of every project and that you cannot tell exactly which skillset you need, you must be ready to face uncertainty and improvise, adjust to reality. Respondent's views on skills are also that some skills are natural, and you have them from birth or gain them in your upbringing and that other skills can be learned. Furthermore, the respondents mention the importance of asking for and taking advice, although it is also mentioned by some respondents that this generally is something that project managers are not really good at.

...and this is one of the problems, most of the PM's don't do, they don't ask for help okay. They ask help not from last situation but they ask help for resources, financial people, you name it...but not for serious issues.

To be a project manager you need to be passionate about it and have will power, passion for creating good solutions, improving things, or being passionate about taking things to the extreme, doing the impossible that has never been done, depending on the level and context you are working in. By one respondent this project manager is described as being the hub, and that you are a hub not only for communication and flow of information but also a hub for the people

in the project. The respondents point out the importance of communication skills, being able to translate between disciplines to help people understand each other and to adjust the language to the receiver. To be able to do this your ability of listening is crucial and that you have the skills to facilitate and coach individuals and groups.

...and realised that my my skill I guess was kind of sitting at the centre of these desperate and different discipline teams... ..and they all talk very different languages and they all have very different expectations and requirements for for what the product is going to end up being, and I found that my my skill was sitting in the centre of these and translating effectively.

The respondents also relate this to the ability to empathise with people.

Another part of the communication is the informal communication and the ability to initiate conversations and relations to stakeholders. This is pointed out to be a critical skill related to creating awareness, preparing for decision making processes and mapping the project management environment.

A big part of being politically astute as a project manager is your ability to negotiate, solve conflicts and also to convince people. This is related to your communication skills but the respondents also point out facilitating and coaching as important skills.

But none of this will happen if you cannot instil trust in the team and the stakeholders, and creating trust is done by being open, honest, and transparent. This is pointed out to be one of the most important abilities to become a politically astute project manager.

One of the people a few years ago said to me: [Name], you're not just the Project Manager...you're the project councillor...does that make sense? You're the person, even though I was the project manager, you're the person in the project that everybody feels that they can come to if there's a situation, problem or a conflict or something...that they can come and talk to, and something will be done about it...

As a project manager you are in the midst of things, and you are expected to make things happen and handle situations while also caring for the project team and meet their needs and expectations. One respondent described this as a need to "cater for people", to make them feel good and have a good environment around them, both physically and psychologically. Another respondent used the term "project intelligence" to describe this.

...is the project intelligence, but it's I don't know what would you you could call it, and you know, what's the heartbeat of the health of the project? The health of the project is not just

whether you're delivering on time, on budget, it's about how the teams working...are things getting done...are people working together, are they cooperative, collaborative...do they enjoy being there...you know, and if you're talking with people and connecting with them and listening...

We use this “project intelligence” to move into our first subtheme, Awareness.

Awareness

This is one of the aspects that is reflected upon the most by the respondents. Everyone talks about the importance of being aware, and the need for being aware of a wide range of things in a multitude of areas. It is described with words like knowing or having knowledge about, have understanding of or awareness of.

One strand is about knowing and that knowing or having knowledge is power, in a good sense. It is important to be curious and do research not only to get an understanding of the project topic, but also to have a broad knowledge that goes into many fields. This knowledge gives you credibility and a sort of basic legitimacy that you need to start the process of being trusted. It is also mentioned that this knowledge is important to be able to communicate with different disciplines in the project with confidence, and that it also affects your ability to take action and the quality of it.

...there are some people who just follow, tend to follow job description, which I never did and whatever I hear which is not clear for me I try to listen more and then to Google and to ask someone else just understand everything, any topic. That's why I understand risk management, understand a bit payments, I understand this is that and it helps me to react much faster and to make more correct decisions without any additional extra information, just constant learning.

This knowledge is mostly related to technical or factual stuff like difficulties, internal and external threats and opportunities, problems, requirements, standard law, resources, and it's limitations to have an understanding of what is possible.

Respondents also point out that you need enough knowledge to be able to know when you are being lied to or misled, which relates back to our previous main theme The Dirty Tricks. This knowledge also consists of knowledge about who you are dealing with, which helps you with anticipating and choosing the best strategy.

...politically astute is probably a good description... they read the, what's the phrase? And you probably would have heard it, they read the tea leaves...they understand how things are and they respond in the correct way to get the best project outcomes.

To gain this knowledge the respondents are very clear about the importance of asking questions, and this is mentioned by most respondents. The asking of questions is described as somewhat of an art and they point out the importance to not be afraid to ask questions, to ask about the right things, to ask the right people and to ask at the right time. There is a clear view that this is a big part of being politically astute, in the sense that you map the environment, the team, the stakeholders and any other thing that you need to understand.

We then move over to the awareness described as an understanding or actual awareness. It is almost described as all-encompassing with a need to look beyond your own field or box. One respondent describes it like this.

...they're quite focused and narrow and in what they are doing. So in that way I can, I can bring in different topics and also quite often I could connect things you know, also from like previous stuff or something I have read or I was involved with you know, and and relate it or can, can maybe point out a partner or a reference. Sometimes I feel like I'm like a walking book or dictionary in a certain way, and, and that of course helps to think of possible development of risk that the others are not aware of because they are only looking at their own field of expertise, whereas I have more like a 360 degree view or angle, and then yeah that's how I would explain that, how that works.

But there is also clear reflection on the fact that you also need to accept that there will be things you are not aware of, that will be uncertainties that will come as unforeseen things during the project.

One of the areas that are mentioned the most is people, personalities and what one respondent calls psychological make up. Most respondents point out that awareness around the people is a necessity, and strongly related to being politically astute. On an individual level you need to be aware of the individual's perspectives and viewpoints, their needs and how you can help them, their position and what matters to them, reasons for decisions, their motivations, and drivers, who has influence and power to impact the project.

...growing the mycelium which is all about finding the few people within... ...who really know what's going on, who and other that critical sort of linchpins in the whole project...
...actually looking at the small levers you can pull... ...the small levers and the small changes you can make that have a big effect.

Another respondent uses the term “interest versus power grid” to describe the need to become aware of the people that really have an impact.

On a team or organisational level, the awareness needed is about organisational context, coalitions, the dynamics, and power structure in the organisation. On an enterprise or inter organisational level there is awareness about the landscape, the environment or ecosystem and trends. Related to this is also the awareness about the purpose and the bigger picture meaning that you need to have an awareness over all levels.

Almost all respondents are clear about that it is important for you to have as great extent of your awareness as possible to give you the best chance of succeeding to be politically astute. The one exception brings in another perspective and that you need to balance and also keep a focus in your seeking of awareness.

I don't know how useful it is? It, it might just be a huge waste of time. I suppose it depends whether it's relevant to what we want to do at the time...just picking up an awareness of what's happening in lots of different places isn't necessarily helpful unless you are seeking to influence or take action in that area is it? It might just be a bit of a distraction actually.

Related to this balancing of awareness is the mentioning of the timing of awareness, where the reflection indicates that if you have great timing of your awareness, it will create opportunities. To become aware of the right things at the right time, and also to some extent be aware of what others are not aware of, awareness as a competitive edge. Here one of the respondents also point out that in today's society we have many more opportunities and options and that probably means increased need for greater political awareness in order to spend resources in a responsible and effective way.

Some respondents also bring up the awareness of your own position or person in relation to others, and the importance of being aware of the limits of your authority in order not to exceed it and create tensions and potential conflict. This self-awareness bridges over to our next subtheme, Experience.

Experience

The respondents see experience as something that develops over time and that it takes many years to build experience, and that it is something highly valuable that cannot be bought. Both failure and success are seen as equally important to gain experience on how to handle situations. Some respondents express that failures gives you scars, but that you develop from that as well

since you are challenged to find new ways and also to change your own behaviour. The respondents give a clear reflection that as you develop experience you develop your agility and resilience and also your soft skills and that you cannot expect the same from a young project manager as from an experienced one.

...at first and foremost it is something I've always done...actually that's probably not entirely true I would have said that probably in my teens and 20's I didn't do this, it, it is a skill that I have, that I think was always with me, but as I've got older I've got better, I've learned more to be able to read people better, to connect with people better.

They express the need for a balanced leadership, where you balance between technical skills and soft skills, both are needed and to have project management certifications can be helpful and that project management education makes you better at handling situations to benefit the projects and stakeholders, but education and certifications don't make you a project manager. To be a project manager you need to be able to handle the people, which connects to being politically astute, and this is mainly developed by gaining experience. A specific part of leadership is mentioned as a result of gaining experience, and that is courage. Courage to stand up for your opinions, stand up for people and to dare to use the increased influence that often come with experience.

There are also reflections made that the more complex projects and environments you are in, the faster you develop your experience. Diverse projects and settings and working in multicultural environments are tough and can give you scars, but it helps you develop your experience faster. Experience is also said to increase your ability to anticipate future events and scenarios, for example dirty tricks and hidden agendas. In addition, experience also develops your "smell".

From experience we now move over to the next subtheme, Strategy.

Strategy

The respondents mention a multitude of strategies and one overarching reflection is about level of diplomacy. The respondent problematises that too much or too little diplomacy will not get the job done, but that it is the balance that is important. Too much diplomacy is argued to slow your progress, because you are listening to everybody and trying to please everyone. Too little diplomacy will get you into trouble with stakeholders, create tensions and possible conflicts.

...but I suppose you have to have a certain amount of lack of diplomacy perhaps to actually think that you're sort of going to be able to make stuff happen. So I suppose from my point of view getting that balance right, how much do I try and change, how much do I not try and change, is maybe one of the challenges in this area with sort of politics. And we all sort of know yes-people that just sort of agree to everything and actually then you can end up in a sort of a bit of a bind because you're you're not actually moving forward.

One strategy that some respondents mention is about steering from the background to avoid raising resistance, and one way of doing it that is mentioned is using your connections on all levels, using your network and your networks network. Another way reflected upon is having the informal talks and checks with people, getting project intelligence without stirring up the dust.

...and the other one that we used to induce to find, and I still find extent even within academia, is you have to try and find ways to steer from behind because if people...people will often resist things because it's not their idea.

...this management board members member has good relationship with for instance my management board member who I report to...so they having coffee each Tuesday, I would ask to discuss this during this coffee break this Tuesday.

I was also in the background because I always wanted to know how we are doing in the projects you know I was also taking care of the finances and checking whether we do that so I was involved in a certain way but not deeply.

In contrast to this the respondents bring up formal escalation as a strategy. This is something that most respondents say they use to a low extent, one respondent said once or twice per year while working in a multi project environment. Situations mentioned is related to critical situations, situation where they themselves have been put pressure on and conflict situations. It is imperative that formal escalation goes to the right level or department otherwise it will only make things worse and so it is important to be aware of the projects place in the organisation.

Related to this is the evaluation of the situation and one important aspect highlighted by some respondents is to know who you are dealing with. This is something that affects the choice of strategy to a great extent, what power and influence does the person have, what background does the person have and also what is his psychological make up, in the meaning how does the person function and react to different strategies and situations. *"...so I had to use his psychology to get our best outcome, so I don't know if you would class that as political astuteness, in some ways it is cause you are reading the person."*

When talking of assessing the situation and the people almost all respondents mention “choosing your battles”. Maybe this is not a strategy in itself, but according to the respondents it is a vital part of being politically astute. When having experience of the dirty tricks and the hidden agendas and other foul play, most respondents stop for a second, assess the level of impact it has on the project and then choose their action. In most cases it is less important if it is right or wrong in their eyes, what is important is the level of impact on the project. Sometimes it is about letting someone win some battles along the way, the less important ones, to create a better negotiation leverage when the important issues are discussed. It can also be about assessing how much change that is possible to achieve or using it to create a win-win.

...we agreed on specific amounts of allocation where I have specific tradeoffs agreed who then else comes to the business project to help the project... ..because what I could do, I could then use again some some force and some power, but it was not so critical, that was not the battle to choose this time...so it's fine to stop it the way we have at the end of the day agreed...because long term is much more helpful than to argue on the specific topics.

...I did something we get on some tradeoffs. I got some extra things I could get... as many extra things I could get, it will help the project so this project will not be heavily impacted, we agreed or no worse switchback will happen...so I think at the end we reached kind of model is win win solution in this case...

Another situation the respondent describes is when you end up in a situation where you have no good options. This is also an important awareness to have, when to pull out instead of pushing on, cutting the losses instead of keeping on spending resources on something that is unlikely to get the outcome wanted by the stakeholders.

I was hoping that my voice would have some weight, but it didn't, and of course you're then frustrated and and the, and then I was only concerned of getting all the money basically you know. And then I thought OK if they want to do it this way OK let them have it like that, I mean it would have also meant that we would have to put more resources into it which we wouldn't have, because we spent also some of the resources already, and then I thought OK let's get this finished and just try to get the money.

A strategy that is mentioned by most stakeholders to affect a situation or decision towards a positive outcome, is lobbying. It is characterised by having a lot of informal talks, scanning the situation, trying to influence in a certain direction. It also consists of pre-meetings to discuss strategy before negotiations and decision making processes or to actually form coalitions in

advance of negotiations or decision making processes. But it is also to do research and analysis to find data to support your cause and, in some cases, dig even deeper.

...sometimes it's not so much what I hear in a presentation, I then I actually go to the people and ask them more direct question because you get usually the, the pink side, in the presentation and you don't really hear about the stuff that can go wrong.

Another strategy most respondents talked about is to involve people, both in the teams and stakeholders in a wider sense. A big part of it revolves around involving the team, being inclusive and value everyone's opinions and asking for them actively. It is seen as important to give people the chance to be heard and also to softly push and inspire silent individuals to express themselves, which is a great strategy to break the dominance of individuals.

I can encourage people who might be more silent or at the beginning of their career. I could push them in a certain way or give them task to become more visible or present something, involve them somehow.

To act on people's ideas is seen as a great foundation to build off of and if you cannot do that, then manipulate the process so they feel that it's their idea, because when people feel an idea being imposed on them the reaction is most often resistance.

The strategy of involving people also relates back to communication, where the respondents give many examples of strategies. They mention one on one conversations, motivating coaching talks, having open communication, communicating possibilities and being positive in communication, tailoring messages to the target audience, clarify language to get rid of complexity, making communication meaningful and as one respondent expressed "some of it is just spending time too". One specific thing mentioned by most respondents was the role of being the translator in communication. This is seen as equal parts listening and expressing. This translating between disciplines, teams, departments, or individual is given great importance for the progress in developing a sense of common strive towards a goal in the project.

Other strategies highlighted as related to political astuteness by the respondents include doing proper stakeholder analysis that we from earlier reflections know often is forgotten. Also doing a proper risk analysis is mentioned as is using worst case scenario planning. To plan ahead is highlighted as important but it is also mentioned that planning only takes you so far, sooner or later the unexpected will occur and therefore it is important to be proactive and use strategies to anticipate and forecast. Forecasting is also something that is mentioned to have limitations when reality hits you and you cannot anticipate everything, so it is vital to have a flexibility

both in the planning and the team that allows for adjustments to the reality and the needs of the team. Another strategy mentioned is to never wait with doing things, always start as early as possible in order to have room for adjustments without falling behind.

I supposed to summarise the point was to counter the unforeseen's you need to be proactive... you need to not just say: ahh, I will deliver it in this time frame. And every three months put the project back by another two months, you need to drive the project, you need a plan. So you did plan the project first, then you have to drive it and you have to have your avenues to keep things going if something comes up. So what happens if an unforeseen comes up? What are you going to do about it? And you can't really forecast it, but you can you can have a team that is flexible to change track and say: Well we're going to keep going on that, yes that's going to have to stay back, but we're going to do this, this and this, so that we don't lose time.

In all of this it is also an important strategy to always consider the strategic perspectives, the long-term effects in comparison to the short gains.

One last strategy reflection is regarding the start of a project and the forming of a team. The respondents are clear about the inherent difficulties of coming in late or inheriting an already existing team. Then you come to a situation where you have many blind spots you need to investigate to build up your awareness before choosing strategies. In cases where you can pick your own team and set it up from the beginning you reduce a lot of complexity and also reduce the complexity in the political astuteness perspective.

When setting up a team you obviously at least to some parts want to rely on your network, so now it is time to go into the next subtheme, Network.

Network

We start this subtheme by connecting back to the previous one and the building of teams. The respondents are all clear about the general importance of building and maintaining your network, through the relationships with your network you build a trust capital that you can use both in an ongoing project or when looking for people to a team.

I mean to require resources and to make people to work on the project just using some let's say forcing methods which is not something that typically works as you know so it comes again to the politics or I would call it networking so how much you can establish relationship with a functional leaders how much you can establish in relationship with the persons working on the projects themselves.

Not everything around networks is about getting results, most respondents highlight the importance of getting to know people away from work, having a good time together and sometimes you develop personal friendships and close trust with people in your network. Another perspective is to actively give back to your network by being there for people when they need support, trying to nurture them in their development. Some respondents mean that your career in a way depends on your network and how good relationships you are able to build. It affects not only the opportunities for jobs and projects, but the network is also a catalyst for professional learning keeping up with the development of the trade and it is also a catalyst for your own personal development, which is our next subtheme.

Personal Development

Earlier in this main theme we mentioned that it was important to be passionate about being a project manager, and when it comes to personal development some of the respondents say that they have stopped separating their personal me from the professional me. To them the separation of these two stopped them from developing and it created frustration and dissatisfaction. They mention that authenticity and being yourself is vital to find your way in the complex project management context and to find the strategies that work for you.

Some of the respondents say that their start into the profession was haphazard and rather tough, there are feelings of being naïve in the beginning of the career and as one respondent put it, “basically I was thrown in the cold water”. Despite this there’s a view on themselves as being undervalued and that it is important to know your value and seek the opportunities and challenges to develop. Some mention doing career moves of strategic importance for their development and also the importance of mentors through their career.

Most of the respondents mention that their personal development has come through willingness to learn, curiosity, observation, exchanging with peers and experts and to have resilience to keep going when the challenges arise. Only one respondent mentions active reflection and evaluation as a means for self-development and the same respondent also expresses that dealing with politics and political astuteness to her is a positive and very developing challenge.

We now move into the last subtheme and look at, Mistakes.

Mistakes

The respondents have now and then made comments about common mistakes and pitfalls that you as a project manager should try to avoid.

The top mistake not to make according to the respondents is not making an initial stakeholder analysis. This is seen to be the basis for your ability to be politically astute. If you don't know or are aware of your stakeholders, how will you then be able to deploy your political skills towards them.

Quite often the stakeholders are kind of forgotten at least the external ones you know because they're never really doing a thorough stakeholder analysis.

Second on the list of things not to do is trying to please everyone. As seen in earlier themes the respondents have mentioned the importance of knowing the prioritisation of the stakeholders and that if you listen too much you will lose momentum. *"I suppose the downside of then maybe too diplomatic is you don't you don't make enough progress."*

Other mistakes mentioned by the respondents are over information and that it is politically wrong to always voice an opinion for everything in the project management field since you cannot possibly know everything yourself.

And with that it is time to move into our last main theme, The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing.

4.5. The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing

Throughout the interviews the respondents have been using words like, smelling, sensing, feeling, or reading in the context of revealing things. It has been difficult for them to really describe what that consist of but in this last main theme we will try to get a good look at these abilities.

We start with one respondents highlighting of the ability to imagine and the importance of imagination in order to be able to foresee future scenarios and to empathise with other people. Empathising is described as being able to put yourself in others perspective, an ability to care and relate to their different situations. When you have experience and have been in many situations you develop an understanding of the situations, and this is described as being able to smell these situations. One respondent tells that after experiencing a personal trauma this ability was developed and more sensitive than before the trauma, the ability to empathise was increased.

I had some health issues for the last one half years and I have the feeling I have become even more sensitive in a certain way when it comes to empathy you know. And when I look at

people and and I just pick up something... . I don't know I mean it seems like I'm I'm even more aware now.

The smelling is also described as being able to feel or sense things. The respondents have split views on this and some of them do not believe there is any extrasensory perception, and they explain the feeling and sensing by perceiving cycles and patterns, overhearing things that adds to information you already have which makes you sense something, some kind of reading between the lines. While some of the respondents mention that they base their decisions on facts but that they still have some kind of intuition or gut feeling, and that it is important to be able to access several parts of your brain when working. An example is to be able to tell when someone is false. *"I'm not sure if it's intuition or it's just false intuition based on experience."*

That's actually a really good question because some of this starts to come down too intuitive things that people do as opposed to any a... what it means it's what's the thing it's a it's an inbuilt thing as opposed to a learned thing.

The sensing is also by some described as reading, and mainly about reading body language. Observing behaviour, interaction and communication is mentioned as parts of this ability, but also to be able to see what is not there, what is missing.

And then of course you form yourself a picture, and then you see how the project is managed how you know, you see the emails, how are things communicated also with the project manager. Then the action that they don't that they didn't take etcetera, and and that's kind of forming then a picture yeah. But I mean yeah, that's that's how it happens.

One respondent reflects that this is connected to emotional intelligence, *"Of course it also very related to emotional intelligence that you can...you can feel the other person you can feel his or her motivation or fears."*

4.6. The Project Managers Valuation of Political Astuteness Going Forward

Part of one of my research questions were how the project managers valued political astuteness as a skillset or competency going forward. This has not been described in or part of any of the themes, instead I present this result on it's own before going into the discussion.

All of the project managers say that the skill is valuable and their stories give proof to that, even for the one who do not like politics and try to avoid it. There are some who are uncertain about whether it will be more or less important in the future.

I think it will remain the same it will remain in same level of importance nothing will change...I don't...there is many things in life they remain unchanged...it's also because people of peoples nature we are built in such ways that you have always been negotiating with about something and trying to make some deals yeah I think so...

Some of the respondents refer to the world getting more and more complex, and that political astuteness will be more and more important as a skill for project managers. This is motivated by some respondents with their experience of projects also becoming more and more complex. Another motivation from one respondent is that nowadays everyone forms their own perspectives and truths because we have access to more information, and that it is harder to manage things like motivation and give people the feeling of purpose.

5. Discussion

In this section I address the main findings and results of the study and relate back to previous research and theory. Furthermore, there will be reflections on the success of the study in relation to answering the research question and reflections on validity and reliability. I will also reflect on ethical aspects, relevance and make some suggestions for future research.

Main Themes

This study resulted in four main themes. First, we have The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context which gives us a rich picture of the world in which a project manager needs to learn how to navigate. Second, we have The Dirty Tricks which described how the bad or dark side of politics on different levels affect the context and puts pressure on the project manager to be politically astute to manage themselves and their projects. The Politically Astute Project Manager was the third main theme which gives us a picture of what is regarded as the core of the politically astute manager, with focus on our conscious and cognitive abilities and actions. The fourth main theme, The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing, described that there is also automated unconscious sensing abilities that we use without actually being in control of them, but our actions and decision making is affected by them.

Main Findings

The first main finding is that the result, and my first main theme, points in the direction of political astuteness in project management context having many similarities to previous study done by Hartley et al., (2013) which investigates political astuteness in a public management

context. The project managers perceptions of political astuteness show that they are aware of and have experiences of all of the five dimensions in the framework of leadership with political astuteness (Hartley et al., 2013). This indicates that the framework could be highly usable in future research of political astuteness also in project management context.

A second main finding is that the context described have many traits of being deceiving and dangerous, main theme number two, and can in a sense be compared to the street context in descriptions of street smartness in folklore and the theory background (Smith, 2000; *Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-a; *Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-b) The description in the second main theme also supports earlier research that has pointed out these traits of the context (Cicmil et al., 2006; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Gällstedt, 2003; O’Leary & Williams, 2013; Paton et al., 2010) and the idea of politics having a good and a bad side (Hartley et al., 2019). It also confirms the picture from Ferris et al. (2019) and Silvester & Wyatt (2018) that politics exists in every organisation and at every level. This gives a clear indication that political astuteness and the eventual dimension of street smart have a great importance to project managers failure or success in their careers and should be a vital part of any project management education.

A third main finding is related to the third main theme and the importance of working in diverse and multicultural context for developing political astuteness, which also indicates that high complexity could speed up the building up of experience. This points in the direction of and support findings in previous research by Hartley & Manzie (2020) where they conclude that the development of political astuteness mainly consists of experiential learning, which also relates to becoming street smart which is described as learning in real life (*Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-b). The results also support Hartley & Manzie’s (2020) findings that other types of possibilities and initiatives to develop political astuteness, theoretical and related to book smart (*Urban Dictionary*, n.d.-a), are at best a scarce commodity.

A fourth main finding is regarding the fourth main theme, The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing. Imagination, intuition, smelling, sensing, feeling and reading are all expressions of leading and thinking not only with the brain which we know can have a tendency to make biased decisions in pressured situations (Kahneman, 2013), but also to lead and think with our body and heart. This finding also relates to the dimension “Reading people and situations” from the Framework of political astuteness skills (Hartley et al., 2013) which mentions it in; *Analysing or intuiting the dynamics which can or might occur when stakeholders and agendas come together*. There are indications that there are skills, abilities and phenomena

described that could add a dimension to political astuteness, and that the intuitive and unconscious parts are the key to being a street smart project manager. There are also indications that the dimension of intuition and the sensing related to it, due to the temporal difference between projects and operations, could have more weight in the project management context than the public management context.

Success of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe experienced project manager's perceptions of political astuteness in the context of the project arena and their roles as project managers. The research questions for the study were: How do you as a project manager perceive and value the skill/ability of political astuteness in a project management context? How would you describe and characterize it?

The study has succeeded in fulfilling the purpose, in the sense that the results give a very rich picture of the respondents perception of political astuteness. They describe and characterise it in depth and also give a detailed view of the context and situations they have experienced as project managers.

Possible objections to this could revolve around the study having a relatively small data sample which would be deemed not representative and therefore only giving us a partial picture. This study has been planned to be a first step in mapping political astuteness in the project arena and project manager context, examining experienced project managers perceptions. The result is descriptive in its character and has been relevant in regard to earlier research, supporting many earlier descriptions and conclusions. Therefore, I argue that the result of this study still gives a good understanding for further needs and research related to political astuteness and also the dimension of the street smart project manager, and thus have answered both research question fully.

Developing Political Astuteness and Street Smartness

In section 2.2 Research on street smart in project management context, the following question was asked: But is political skill the same as being street smart in the project management role? One way of looking at it is from the perspective on how you develop these skills or smarts, by real life experience or by academic or theoretical study. In this study the respondents were clear on the importance of experience, which supports findings from previous studies identifying experiential learning as the main source for developing political astuteness (Hartley & Manzie,

2020). But it is not the only way of developing political astuteness and Hartley & Manzie(2020) argues for looking further into how theoretical and practical experience could be combined in reflective learning activities. In my own experience such a combination exists in situations where you use simulations or role playing to replicate a real life experience followed by reflection on the experience or result which is also indicated by Jansson & Ljung (2016). Theoretical simulations and role playing has been used by the teachers in the Master's Program in Project Management at Karlstad Business School, of which this thesis is the final part. These simulations are of course possible to do human to human but also in online format or digital models with different advantages and disadvantages. (Economou et al., 2014; Maratou et al., 2016; Rich et al., 2018; Schmitz, 2018). In my opinion this is a very important development needed to give the next generation project managers the necessary tools to rise to the challenges of the future and succeed. The second way of looking at this question is to focus on the behaviour, the deployment of political skill compared to acting street smart. In the results we have seen that there are great similarities between acting street smart and the political skills that are deployed when being politically astute according to the framework by Hartley et al. (2013). But it seems like there are also some differences between the two phenomena. One difference could be that street smart contains more of intuition and sensing and using all of your senses when navigating the environment and hazards around you, something that could be important due to the temporal dimension, meaning that in a public management organisation the organisation itself is more or less constant and the power centres are relatively fixed. In contrast you have the project management context where the organisation itself is temporary and often changing during the project (Jansson & Ljung, 2004). This perspective is highly interesting since project management is exercised in a high pressured highly complex context where it is imperative to be able to quickly assess short- and long-term effects, make judgements and make correct decisions. So how do we maximise project managers ability to sense instead of needing complex and administrative heavy decision making processes to make correct decisions? In my opinion, Emotional intelligence (Anthony C. Mersino, 2013; Fareed et al., 2021; Goleman, 2020; Zhu et al., 2021) and cognitive readiness (Ivano Di Filippo et al., 2019) are two phenomena that are highly interesting to look at regarding the intuitive and sensing aspects of the ability to deploy political skill and exercise political astuteness. Especially since the respondents showed great difficulty in expressing themselves around this topic and also reflected upon the fact that they throughout their career have very few instances of self-reflection on these matters. One out of seven respondents have deliberately used self-reflection for personal and professional development. It seems that project managers are so caught up in

delivering their projects that they do not have time to reflect over their own development, which then becomes haphazard. Here I believe there is great development potential in the future.

Difficult Situations and Career Challenges

A project managers life is full of difficult situations and career challenges and the results of the study confirm the previous findings regarding these situations (Beverley Lloyd-Walker et al., 2016; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Gällstedt, 2003; Paton et al., 2010; Yousaf et al., 2011). The participants stories covered everything from the gnawing stress that wear you down over a long period of time and the intense stress of meeting deadlines and handling unforeseen problems instantaneously, all the way to being pushed to do illegal things, handling bribing attempts and sometimes even make decisions that as a consequence make your own head roll. Cicmil & Marshall (2005) and Paton et al. (2010) reflects upon the contract as a regulating tool in these situations and point out that the contract can never fully mitigate these difficulties. This is supported by the results of this study where the respondents described situations where the contract supported the collaboration to a certain degree, but that you on top of that needed to handle the situation with political astuteness, handling the relationships to the people. This also supports the conclusion by Cicmil & Marshall (2005) that contract are social objects affected by interactions and power relations.

The results also supports O'Leary & Williams (2013) in that the resistance and difficulties arise covertly and consciously, behind your back, which maybe is the main reason for the need of your intuition and sensing, the street smart dimension in project management. The results also give a deep picture of how important experience is to handle all of these situations which also supports Gällstedt's (2003) findings that one of the main strategies project managers use is to rely on their experience. At the same time Gällstedt (2003) points out other coping strategies like sharing with peers and education and development of the individual and organisation. To share with peers brings us to the reflection part which we saw in the results were a weak spot with the project managers. This brings us back to what has been highlighted by Hartley & Manzie (2020) as a need in the future, a more broad approach to development of political astuteness with a mix of methods and they specifically point out reflection as a key element.

Reflection on IPMA Baselines in the Light of the Results

Regarding the IPMA baselines (IPMA, 2015, 2016b, 2016a) this study have not had the goal to make any comparisons with other frameworks or relate the results to them in a comparing

manner. However, there are a couple of things that I believe is of value to reflect upon. The first is that respondents clearly indicates that when you have the luxury of picking your own team it results in less complexity in getting the team aligned, which relates directly to the alignment of the organisation in the Organisational Competence Baseline (IPMA, 2016b). Seeing this in the light of Lvina et al.(2018) and Xu et al.(2019) that shows that political skill is not only an individual but also a collective phenomenon enhances the importance of the process of forming the team. It also stresses the importance of the project managers awareness around skills and personalities of individuals and how these affect each other positively or negatively. One further reflection is that the Project Excellence Baseline (IPMA, 2016a) has the People & Purpose as the foundation of excellence, giving even more weight to the importance of the project managers ability to handle people which is a big part of the political astuteness framework (Hartley et al., 2013). A possible street smart dimension with more weight on intuition and sensing could then be important to increase the chances of reaching project excellence.

The Perspective of Ethics

Hartley & Manzie (2020) presents a model for the fine balance of ethics (Appendix VIII), where they argue that to be an effective public manager you need to balance between being too technical and not politically astute enough and being too politically astute and not technical enough. Technical should in this context be interpreted as understanding the processes and tools needed in the public servant context, in a sense it is about knowing and being able to handle the system you are working in. They also argue that there is a balance between the public servant protecting the formal boundaries towards the politician and being too compliant with the politician. If we change the word politician in the model and substitute it with project sponsor, I would argue that it is a relevant model to use in project context as well. The results indicate several situations where the project managers have needed to do a balancing act between the loyalty to the project sponsor or other high-level stakeholders and the formal governance of the project. In some cases, this balancing act results in the need to speak up to the authority in the project. The project managers were divided regarding if speaking up to authority was regarded as being politically astute or not, but when put in the context of this model and balancing act, in my opinion, speaking up to authority is very much about being politically astute. There are also indications in the result that you as a project manager needs to balance between your technical skills and your political astuteness or people skills. It was expressed as a balance between delivering (technical) and taking care of people's feelings (political astuteness). This can be exemplified with the reasoning around contracts

(technical) and that the contract only regulates part of the context and that there is need for also handling the relations in the situation (political astuteness) (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Paton et al., 2010). Several of the respondents pointed out that the very best project managers are the ones that can do this balancing act without losing either of the perspectives. A reflection here is that in project management education and certifications, there is an overload towards the technical skills. Here it seems to be a big discrepancy between what experienced project managers say is the most important to develop and become an excellent project manager and what education and certifications actually sets out to accomplish.

The Street Smart Dimension

Is there something like Street Smart Project Management? The results in the light of previous research indicates the possible existence of a street smart dimension to political astuteness. Possibly street smart project management could be a type of project management that is characterised by an intense juggling of many issues, using intuition and sensing to make quick decisions on how to handle people and factual issues, but at the same time considering the collective intelligence around you. The street smart project manager also seems to have a great sense of self preservation, has a conscious development with the changes and challenges in the environment, and knows when to act, and when not to.

The difference between the politically astute project manager and the street smart project manager can maybe be described by looking back to the introduction on page six, where we can read "...to see and understand what is not shown.". This is what the politically astute project manager is good at, while the description of a street smart project manager would go like this "...to sense and feel what is not shown."

Reflections on Validity and Reliability

The study has collected data from a group of participants that are very representative for experienced project managers and all interviews were done without interruptions or problems. All interviewees had a lot to say which points to them understanding the questions and purpose of the interview and their English has been very good so there were no cases of unclear data or risk for misunderstandings. Transcriptions and handling of data has been without complications and the results give answer to the research question. With this in mind I argue that the study has a high degree of reliability and validity.

Reflections on Ethical Considerations

During the work there has been no implications regarding ethical considerations. All planned measures have been taken and fulfilled.

Reflection on Limitations

One possible weakness in the study was the prolonging of the period for data collection, which was spread out over 11 weeks. This was unfortunate, but looking at and assessing the data and the result after analysis, I argue that it has not affected the study negatively.

Another possible weakness is regarding the relatively small participant group, seven interviewed project managers, in total 113 pages of transcribed material. But since the aim has been to capture the perception of a phenomenon and describe it, and the collection of data showed signs of maturation this has no negative consequences for the study or the validity and reliability.

Relevance of the Results

The result of this study has relevance for the development of professional project management by contributing to the knowledge around individual competencies that have been proved important in project management context. The knowledge from this study can contribute value to future education and training of project managers, development of new individual baselines in professional project management organisations, find new ways and methods of training project managers, to speed up the building of experience and reduce the risk of project managers getting scars from unnecessary rough and tough experiences. It also lays an important foundation for future research around political astuteness and street smart dimension in project management context.

Suggestions for Future Research

The importance of future research on political astuteness in project management context is supported by the findings by Sunindijo & Maghrebi (2020) who's results indicate that research findings is not automatically transferrable from one context to another but needs to be confirmed by studying the phenomena in the actual context of interest.

Another perspective mentioned by one of the respondents that I would like to relate back to here is the possible transition we are seeing in our organisations today. The respondent indicated that permanent operations and projects are trading places, and permanent operations tend to do

more of the short-term keeping things afloat, and projects tend to be the deliverers of long-term strategies. Does this change the way we see politics and political astuteness? If so, in what way?

The research done by Hartley and colleagues could be seen as ground breaking and highly relevant in society going forward, with increased pressure on leadership, collaboration and need of solutions for sustainability in all dimensions. Project management has a central role in this and therefore I make a suggestion for future research to replicate previous research around political astuteness but in the project management arena and project management context. The value lies both in getting valuable affirmation or disaffirmation of earlier findings, and to map the project management context and perceptions in a similar manner as has been done with public managers which would give a deeper knowledge on political astuteness in project manager context.

In this study there were findings which pointed out that political astuteness is a relevant concept in project management context, but also findings that point in the direction of a possible additional street smart dimension, that could also be relevant. This could be further researched with the specific purpose to compare the phenomena political astuteness and street smart with each other and in relationship to existing individual baselines. The value lies in possible future contributions to the development of the individual baselines, but in the light of Lvina et al. (2018) and Xu et al. (2019) it could also contribute to deepening our understanding of political astuteness on team level and organisational baselines.

It is also conceivable to follow up the results that come out of this study with a quantitative study, but then in order to prove the frequency and occurrence of political astuteness and to further affirm or disaffirm possible existence of the dimensions of street smart and thus be able to further value their relevance in project management context.

Final Words

I have enjoyed doing this study and really been inspired by this important topic and the privilege of meeting the fantastic, experienced project managers. I noticed during the interviews that there was a strong dedication and that these project managers have a passion for what they do! I hope that this study and this discussion is an inspiration to others and that we will see more research done on this topic in the near future. I will end this study with an important quote from one of the respondents.

“Try to enjoy what you do, see project management not as a profession but as your passion, something like a hobby, something like you enjoys to do, and step by step good things will come for those who try!”

6. References

- Alford, J., Hartley, J., Yates, S., & Hughes, O. (2017). Into the Purple Zone: Deconstructing the Politics/Administration Distinction. *American Review of Public Administration*, 47(7), 752–763.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074016638481>
- Anthony C. Mersino. (2013). *Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers: The People Skills You Need to Achieve Outstanding Results Ed. 2 [Elektronisk resurs]*. Amacom.
- Ayres, S. (2019). *How can network leaders promote public value through soft metagovernance?* 97(2), 279–295.
<https://login.bibproxy.kau.se:8443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbl&AN=vdc.100084362633.0x000001&site=eds-live>
- Beverley Lloyd-Walker, Erica French, & Lynn Crawford. (2016). Rethinking researching project management: Understanding the reality of project management careers. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 9(4), 903–930. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-04-2016-0033>
- Blixt, C., & Kirytopoulos, K. (2017). Challenges and competencies for project management in the Australian public service. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 30(3), 286–300.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-08-2016-0132>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006, January 1). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bryman, A., & Nilsson, B. (2018). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder* (hbib11d Dd 2018:11; Upplaga 3). Liber.
<https://login.bibproxy.kau.se:8443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat01070a&AN=karl.b1675454&lang=sv&site=eds-live>
- Cicmil, S., & Marshall, D. (2005). Insights into collaboration at project level: Complexity, social interaction and procurement mechanisms. *Building Research and Information*, 33(6), 523–535.
- Cicmil, S., Williams, T., Thomas, J., & Hodgson, D. (2006). Rethinking Project Management: Researching the actuality of projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 24(8), 675–686.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2006.08.006>
- Crosby, B. C., & Bryson, J. M. (2018). *Why leadership of public leadership research matters: And what to do about it*. 20(9), 1265–1286.
<https://login.bibproxy.kau.se:8443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbl&AN=vdc.100064481883.0x000001&site=eds-live>

- Dedong Wang & Yang Liu. (2021). The Effect of Political Skill on Relationship Quality in Construction Projects: The Mediating Effect of Cooperative Conflict Management Styles. *Project Management Journal*, 52(6), 563–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728211037503>
- Doldor, E. (2017). From Politically Naïve to Politically Mature: Conceptualizing Leaders' Political Maturation Journey: From Politically Naïve to Politically Mature. *British Journal of Management*, 28(4), 666–686. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12219>
- Economou, D., Doumanis, I., Bouki, V., Pedersen, F., Kathrani, P., Mentzelopoulos, M., & Georgalas, N. (2014). A dynamic role-playing platform for simulations in legal and political education. 2014 *International Conference on Interactive Mobile Communication Technologies and Learning (IMCL2014)*, *Interactive Mobile Communication Technologies and Learning (IMCL)*, 2014 *International Conference On*, 232–236. <https://doi.org/10.1109/IMCTL.2014.7011138>
- Fareed, M. Z., Su, Q., & Awan, A. A. (2021). The effect of emotional intelligence, intellectual intelligence and transformational leadership on project success; an empirical study of public projects of Pakistan. *Project Leadership and Society*, 2, 100036. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.plas.2021.100036>
- Ferris, G. R., Berkson, H. M., Kaplan, D. M., Gilmore, D. C., Buckley, M. R., & Hochwarter, W. A. (1999). *Development and initial validation of the Political Skill Inventory*. The annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Chicago.
- Ferris, G. R., Blickle, G., Schneider, P. B., Kramer, J., Zettler, I., Solga, J., Noethen, D., & Meurs, J. A. (2008, January 1). Political skill construct and criterion-related validation: A two-study investigation. *JOURNAL OF MANAGERIAL PSYCHOLOGY*, 23(7), 744–771.
- Ferris, G. R., Ellen, B. P., III, McAllister, C. P., & Maher, L. P. (2019). Reorganizing Organizational Politics Research: A Review of the Literature and Identification of Future Research Directions. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 6, 299. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015221>
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Kolodinsky, R. W., Hochwarter, W. A., Kacmar, C. J., Douglas, C., & Frink, D. D. (2005, January 1). Development and Validation of the Political Skill Inventory. *JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT -LUBBOCK THEN COLLEGE STATION TEXAS THEN STAMFORD CONNECTICUT-*, 31(1), 126–152.

- Gällstedt, M. (2003). Working conditions in projects: Perceptions of stress and motivation among project team members and project managers. *International Journal of Project Management*, 21(6), 449–455.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863\(02\)00098-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863(02)00098-4)
- Goleman, D. (2020). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2013). *Leading with political astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom*. ANZSOG and CMI.
- Hartley, J., & Manzie, S. (2020). 'It's every breath we take here': Political astuteness and ethics in civil service leadership development. 40(8), 569–578.
<https://login.bibproxy.kau.se:8443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbl&AN=vdc.100111216005.0x000001&lang=sv&site=eds-live>
- Hartley, J., Sancino, A., Bennister, M., & Resodihardjo, S. L. (2019). Leadership for public value: Political astuteness as a conceptual link. *Public Administration*, 97(2), 239–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12597>
- IPMA. (2015). *Standard—ICB4*. <https://www.ipma.world/individuals/standard/>
- IPMA. (2016a). *Standard—IPMA PEB*. <https://www.ipma.world/projects/standard/>
- IPMA. (2016b). *Standard—OCB*. <https://www.ipma.world/organisations/standard/>
- Ivano Di Filippo, Daniele Di Filippo, & Carl Belack. (2019). *Cognitive Readiness in Project Teams: Reducing Project Complexity and Increasing Success in Project Management [Elektronisk resurs]*. Productivity Press.
- Jansson, T., & Ljung, L. (2004). *Projektledningsmetodik*. Studentlitteratur.
- Jansson, T., & Ljung, L. (2016). *Området Projektledning vid Handelshögskolan i Karlstad: En pedagogisk modell i praktiken*. <https://docplayer.se/41782596-Omradet-projektledning-vid-handelshogskolan-i-karlstad-en-pedagogisk-modell-i-praktiken.html>
- Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, fast and slow* (hbibl1d Doe 2020:1; 1st pbk. ed.). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
<https://login.bibproxy.kau.se:8443/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=c0101070a&AN=karl.b1692646&lang=sv&site=eds-live>
- Lvina, E., Johns, G., & Vandenberghe, C. (2018). Team Political Skill Composition as a Determinant of Team Cohesiveness and Performance. *JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT*, 44(3), 1001–1028.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315598371>

- Maratou, V., Chatzidaki, E., & Xenos, M. (2016). Enhance Learning on Software Project Management through a Role-Play Game in a Virtual World. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 24(4), 897–915.
- O’Leary, T., & Williams, T. (2013). Managing the Social Trajectory: A Practice Perspective on Project Management. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, Engineering Management, IEEE Transactions on, IEEE Trans. Eng. Manage.*, 60(3), 566–580.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2012.2228206>
- Paton, S., Hodgson, D., & Cicmil, S. (2010). Who am I and what am I doing here? : Becoming and being a project manager. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(2), 157–166.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/026217111011019297>
- Rich, B. m., Kretschmer, D., Goldmann, C., Hettling, L., Brandt, A., & Woll, R. (2018). Praxis-Oriented Teaching of Project Management Skills for STEM Students in Higher Education. *2018 IEEE International Conference on Teaching, Assessment, and Learning for Engineering (TALE), Teaching, Assessment, and Learning for Engineering (TALE), 2018 IEEE International Conference On*, 829–834.
<https://doi.org/10.1109/TALE.2018.8615345>
- Schmitz, K. (2018). A Three Cohort Study of Role-Play Instruction for Agile Project Management. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 29(2), 93–103.
- Silvester, J., & Wyatt, M. (2018). Political effectiveness at work. In *The SAGE Handbook of Industrial, Work and Organizational Psychology: Personnel Psychology and Employee Performance*. (p. Pp. 228-45). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Smith, L. W. (2000). *Stakeholder analysis: A pivotal practice of successful projects*. Project Management Institute Annual Seminars & Symposium, Houston, TX., Newtown Square, PA.
<https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/stakeholder-analysis-pivotal-practice-projects-8905>
- Sunindijo, R., & Maghrebi, M. (2020). *Political Skill Improves the Effectiveness of Emotional Intelligence: Bayesian Network Analysis in the Construction Industry*. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)AE.1943-5568.0000417](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)AE.1943-5568.0000417)
- Urban Dictionary: Book smarts*. (n.d.-a). Urban Dictionary. Retrieved 12 February 2022, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=book%20smart>
- Urban Dictionary: Street smarts*. (n.d.-b). Urban Dictionary. Retrieved 12 February 2022, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=street%20smarts>
- Vetenskapsrådet. (2018). *Good research practice [Elektronisk resurs]*.

- Wagner, R. (2021). Projectification and its impact on societal development in Germany. *PM World Journal*, X(I).
- Wagner, T., & Zaval, L. K. (2009). *Project Manager Street Smarts: A Real World Guide to PMP Skills*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Waring, J. (1), Bishop, S. (1), Clarke, J. (1), Exworthy, M. (2), Fulop, N. j. (3), Ramsay, A. i. g. (3), & Hartley, J. (4). (2018). Healthcare leadership with political astuteness (HeLPA): A qualitative study of how service leaders understand and mediate the informal 'power and politics' of major health system change. *BMC Health Services Research*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3728-z>
- Xu, N., Chiu, C.-Y. (Chad), & Treadway, D. C. (2019). Tensions Between Diversity and Shared Leadership: The Role of Team Political Skill. *Small Group Research*, 50(4), 507–538. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496419840432>
- Yousaf, A. (1), Sanders, K. (2), Torka, N. (2), & Ardts, J. (3). (2011). Having two bosses: Considering the relationships between LMX, satisfaction with HR practices, and organizational commitment. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(15), 3109–3126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.606124>
- Yvonne Schoper & Helgi Thor Ingason. (2019). Projectification and the impact on societies. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 12(3), 517–521. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-09-2019-288>
- Zhu, F., Wang, X., Wang, L., & Yu, M. (2021). Project manager's emotional intelligence and project performance: The mediating role of project commitment. *International Journal of Project Management*, 39(7), 788–798. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2021.08.002>

Appendix I: Information Letter to Participants

Dear Participant/Respondent,

My name is Magnus Olsen and I am currently studying the Master's Programme in Project Management at Karlstad Business School, Karlstad University in Sweden.

I am now working on my master's thesis and looking for respondents who want to participate in a focus group regarding my research question. The focus group is planned to consist of 4-6 PM's and the planned duration is 1,5-2 hours. I am using Zoom and the focus group meeting will be recorded. You are expected to have video on to create better flow in communication. The recording will be transcribed and used for my research purposes only.

The purpose of my study is to examine experienced project managers' perception of "Political astuteness" (also known as political – savvy, awareness, acumen, acuity, 'nous', skills, antennae, or socio-political intelligence).

In order to participate in the study, you need to have had at least 10 total years of experience as a Project Manager within organizations, companies, or authorities. Your experience can be both from private and public sector.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any given time without giving a reason, which does not affect the processing that took place before your withdrawal. Your personal data will be processed according to your consent, and all information in the thesis will be anonymized, including organizations/workplaces.

All data that is available to us is processed in such a way that no unauthorized person can access it. The data will be retained until the thesis work has been approved and the grade has been registered in Karlstad University's study register and then destroyed. The thesis will be published and publicly accessible.

Karlstad University is the data controller. According to the Personal Data Act (Data Protection Regulation as of 25 May 2018), you have the right to access all data about you that is handled free of charge and, if necessary, to have any errors corrected. You also have the right to request deletion, restriction, or object to the processing of personal data, and it is possible to lodge a complaint with the Swedish Data Protection Authority. Contact details of the Data Protection Officer at Karlstad University are dpo@kau.se.

If you have any further questions regarding participation, please don't hesitate to contact me! Thank you for your time, I hope to meet you as a participant in my focus group!

Kind Regards,
Magnus Olsen

magnus@societor.se
+46 (0)733 33 83 93

Contact details of supervisors:
Henrik Bergman (Programme Director)
henrik.bergman@kau.se

Appendix II: Consent Form

Consent to participate in the Project Management master's thesis study:
"Political Astuteness in Project Management"

I have been informed, in writing, about the study and agree to participate. I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can cancel my participation in the study without giving any reasons. My signature below or confirming participation through personal/organization e-mail, means that I choose to participate in the study and agree that Karlstad University will process my personal data in accordance with current data and protection legislation and information provided.

I, _____, hereby confirm that I agree to participate in the above-mentioned study.

Place: _____

Date: date of responding e-mail

Please copy the above text, fill in your name and place, and send back to me.

Kind regards
Magnus Olsen

magnus@societor.se
+46 (0)733 33 83 93

Contact details of supervisors:
Henrik Bergman (Programme Director)
henrik.bergman@kau.se

Appendix III: Guide for Conducting Focus Group

This Guide has been created based on recommendations in the literature (Bryman, 2018).

Information collected before the focus group:

(These data will be anonymized, used for analysing purposes and then destroyed when study is completed)

What is your:

- a) Number of years as practicing project manager
- b) Type of organization (Private/Public/Authority, please specify sector if possible) and numbers of years practicing in each if more than one.
- c) Type of Education/Educational background (PM-by accident or PM-by education/choice).

Information given at start of focus group:

Reminder to me: Have neutral body language at all times, make as few interventions as possible, interventions should be made to either direct focus to the actual topic (in case the group loses connection to the topic), or to follow up and deepen the discussion around something interesting brought up by the group.

- Start by thanking participants for their participation!
- Short introduction by everyone.
- Introduction to the topic and purpose of the study.
- Reason for recording and handling of data and recording.
- Duration of focus group.
- General rules for the discussion.
 - a) All participants in the focus group must handle the information given and received as confidential.
 - b) When talking about personal experiences, try to avoid using information that can be sensitive or information that can identify individuals or organizations.
 - c) Do not talk at the same time as someone else, please raise hand electronically or physically, or speak when there is silence 😊
 - d) Make sure that you also listen to others.

Main topic/question:

The main topic of the focus group is Political astuteness, and I would like to start by asking you,
1, How would you describe and characterize Political astuteness?

2, How do you as a PM perceive and value the skill/ability of political astuteness?

Follow-up questions:

If necessary, follow-up questions will be asked in order to clarify or deepen an answer such as for example:

Can you or do you wish to elaborate on this question?

Could you tell us about an experience of your own?

If I understood correctly, you meant that...?

Possible specific questions in case of silence or low degree of conversation in focus group:

Do you feel the need to use your political astuteness/act street smart in your role?

What relevance do you attribute to political astuteness/street smartness as a skill in the project manager role?

What characterizes the situations where you feel the need to use your political astuteness/act street smart?

What in your actions do you consider to be or show signs of political astuteness/street smartness?

Increasing or decreasing importance in the future? Why?

Importance for project success? Elaborate/arguments?

Negative aspects of political astuteness/Street smartness? Elaborate/arguments?

Appendix IV: Guide for Conducting Semi Structured Interviews

This Guide has been created based on the initially prepared Guide for conducting Focus Groups and recommendations in the literature (Bryman, 2018).

Introductory question:

Can you tell me about your Project manager experience; how many years' experience, what types of organisations you have worked in and if you became a Project Manager "by accident" or if you chose to educate yourself into the profession?

Information given at start of Interview:

- Start by thanking participant for volunteering!
- Short introduction.
- Introduction to the topic and purpose of the study.
- Reason for recording and handling of data and recording.
- Duration of interview.
- When talking about personal experiences, try to avoid using information that can be sensitive or information that can identify individuals or organizations.

Reminder to me: Have neutral body language at all times, make as few interventions as possible, interventions should be made to either direct focus to the actual topic in case the interviewee loses connection to the topic, or to follow up and deepen the interview around something interesting.

Main topic/question:

The main topic of the interview is Political astuteness, and I would like to start by asking you to describe and characterize Political astuteness in a PM context?

How do you as a PM perceive and value the skill/ability of political astuteness?

Follow-up questions:

If necessary, follow-up questions will be asked in order to clarify or deepen an answer such as for example:

Can you or do you wish to elaborate on this question?

Could you tell us about an experience of your own?

If I understood correctly, you meant that...?

Possible specific questions in case of silence or low degree of conversation:

Do you feel the need to use your political astuteness in your role?

What relevance do you attribute to political astuteness as a skill in the project manager role?

What characterizes the situations where you feel the need to use your political astuteness?

What in your actions do you consider to be or show signs of political astuteness?

Increasing or decreasing importance in the future? Why?

Importance for project success? Elaborate/arguments?

Negative aspects of political astuteness? Elaborate/arguments?

Appendix V: Overview of Main Themes and Subthemes

Main Theme	Subthemes
<p style="text-align: center;">The Character of Political Astuteness in Project Management Context</p>	The Context
	Challenges and Conflicts
	Decisions
	Culture
<p style="text-align: center;">The Dirty Tricks</p>	The Hidden
	Overt Resistance
	On your Own
<p style="text-align: center;">The Politically Astute Project Manager</p>	Awareness
	Experience
	Strategy
	Network
	Personal Development
	Mistakes
<p style="text-align: center;">The Street Smart Project Manager: Use the Force – The Sensing</p>	No Subthemes

Table 1: Overview of Themes and Subthemes from data analysis

Appendix VI: The Framework of Political Astuteness Skills

The framework of political astuteness skills.

Dimension	Description
Strategic direction and scanning	Strategic thinking and action in relation to organizational purpose. Thinking long-term and having a road map of the journey. Not diverted by short-term pressures. Scanning: thinking about longer-term issues in the environment which may potentially have an impact on the organization. Attention to what is over the horizon. Analytical capacity to think through scenarios of possible futures. Noticing small changes which may herald bigger shifts in society. Analysing and managing uncertainty. Keeping options open rather than reaching for a decision prematurely.
Building alignment and alliances	Detailed appreciation of context, players and objectives of stakeholders in relation to the alignment goal. Recognizing difference and plurality and forge them into collaborative action even where there are substantial differences in outlook or emphasis. Works with difference and conflicts of interest not just finding consensus and commonality. Actively seeking out alliances and partnerships rather than relying on those already in existence. Ability to bring difficult issues into the open and deal with differences between stakeholders. Knowing when to exclude particular interests. Creating useful and realistic consensus not common denominator.
Reading people and situations	Analysing or intuiting the dynamics which can or might occur when stakeholders and agendas come together. Recognition of different interests and agendas of both people and their organizations. Discerning the underlying not just the espoused agendas. Thinking through the likely standpoints of various interest groups in advance. Using knowledge of institutions, processes and social systems to understand what is or what might happen. Recognizing when you may be seen as a threat to others. Understanding power relations.
Interpersonal skills	'Soft' skills: ability to influence the thinking and behavior of others. Getting buy-in from those over whom the person has no direct authority. Making people feel valued. 'Tough' skills: ability to negotiate, able to stand up to pressures from other people, able to handle conflict in order to achieve constructive outcomes. Coaching and mentoring individuals to develop their own political skills.
Personal skills	Self-awareness of one's own motives and behaviors. Ability to exercise self-control, being open to the views of others, ability to listen to others and reflect on and be curious about their views. Having a proactive disposition (initiating rather than passively waiting for things to happen).

Source: Hartley et al. 2013

Appendix VII: Political Skill Index (PSI)

Instructions: Using the following 7-point scale, please place the number on the blank before each item that best describes how much you agree with each statement about yourself.

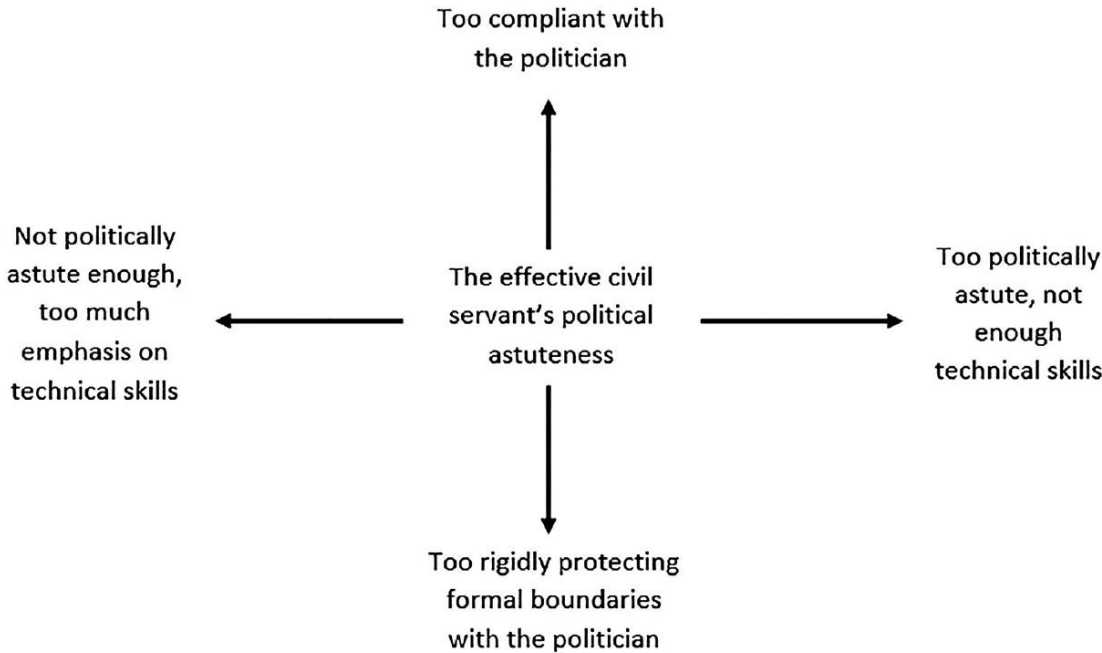
1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree

1. ____ I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others. (NA)
2. ____ I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me. (II)
3. ____ I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others. (II)
4. ____ It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. (II)
5. ____ I understand people very well. (SA)
6. ____ I am good at building relationships with influential people at work. (NA)
7. ____ I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others. (SA)
8. ____ When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do. (AS)
9. ____ I have developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work whom I can call on for support when I really need to get things done. (NA)
10. ____ At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected. (NA)
11. ____ I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others. (NA)
12. ____ I am good at getting people to like me. (II)
13. ____ It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do. (AS)
14. ____ I try to show a genuine interest in other people. (AS)
15. ____ I am good at using my connections and network to make things happen at work. (NA)
16. ____ I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others. (SA)
17. ____ I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others. (SA)
18. ____ I pay close attention to people's facial expressions. (SA)

(NA = networking ability; II = interpersonal influence; SA = social astuteness; AS = apparent sincerity.)

Source: Ferris et al., 2005

Appendix VIII: The Fine Balance of Ethics



Source: Hartley & Manzie, 2020.