Consultant Project Managers Coping With Liminality

An identity and sensemaking perspective

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This thesis means an end of two-year period in SMIO program. The journey until this point has incorporated challenges and hard work, but most of all it has been very memorable. While we are proud of our achievement, we have recognized that, like most things in life, this paper was not an individual effort. Therefore, we wish to express our gratitude for several people. Without these people, this thesis would have not come together as it did.

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Lastly, we are grateful to each other. Writing this paper encompassed ups and downs but it made us even closer friends and was an unforgettable journey together. We hope that you find this thesis as enjoyable to read, as we found it challenging and interesting to write.

Linköping, May 24th, 2019

Antti Chrons Jussi Kaivola
for Martti
ABSTRACT

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Background: Usage of temporaries in contemporary business is increasing due to demand for agile and efficient way of doing business. This trend has been rising especially when turning into 21st century. Growing group of temporary workers in different industries being mobile and under different circumstances than regular full-time workers. One professional group working with clients in temporal terms is consultants hired as project managers to lead customer projects in project-based organizations. These project managers switch context between businesses and try to adapt as soon as possible to new environments. The paper uses concept of liminality as a metaphor to describe these passages between projects which starts identity work and sensemaking process in individual.

Purpose of Thesis: The purpose of this thesis was to study how project managers cope with liminality using sensemaking and identity work as a point of view.

Methodology: This is a qualitative cross-sectional study conducted through semi-structured interviews in order to gather primary data for further analysis and findings. The empirical data was gathered from a Finnish professional service company and consisted ten interviews of consultant project managers.

Findings: The study presents a four-field matrix forming project manager archetypes as embodiments of variation how consultant project managers deal with liminality. Although, the group of people in the sample can be perceived homogeneous, it turned out that it contained heterogeneous characteristics regarding the research scope. The main differences found are illustrated through technical or social approach toward work, and whether sensemaking processes occurred in individual or collective manner. Therefore, the study was able to create four different form of archetypes: the realist, the connector, the performer and the moderator.

Keywords: Project manager, temporary worker, liminality, sensemaking, identity work, work-related identity.
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1 INTRODUCTION

It was one of those days again. Katarina was in a hurry on her way to work. She had taken her daughters Sandra and Jenny to kindergarten, even though it was not her turn. Since her husband August told her feeling sick after they woke up, nobody else could do it. Nevertheless, this was not in her mind right now. A new project was about to start for a new client that she had not met before. Last week she had been really busy with previous client finalizing the work. Few things were still left to do, and Katarina wondered where she would find suitable time to do them.

There were certainly feelings of uncertainty. Maybe even more than usual. Since the last week was extremely busy, she had no time to prepare for the upcoming project. Only during last night, she had quickly googled the company, looked for recent news and key figures about the company and the industry where it operates. Usually she wanted to make use of her professional network and find out if someone had worked with the client in the past. The salespeople of her own company had negotiated the assignment and she felt that they could have informed her better regarding project details. Sometimes she felt that the sales made promises that might not be completely doable just to close the deal. As she was stressing about where to find a parking spot, she wondered where the uncertainty was coming from. The client was totally new to her, operating in an industry which was only partly familiar to her from one prior assignment more than a year ago. She knew that this meant meeting a lot of new people during next few days, as well as absorbing tons of new information. The client and the project team would surely expect that she would start to organize work and provide direction immediately, since she was hired as a consultant project manager. That was going to be tricky as always.

But at the same time, she felt that these were also things that she liked in her job. She enjoyed the freedom the job enabled for her. She had learned to trust her capabilities in managing projects, capabilities she had built along her career as she had gained experience in different set ups. Katarina knew that she had come through these types of situations before and she trusted that her skills would be applicable also at this new domain. As she went through these thoughts, confidence started to rise. Things had their way of sorting out.

Then she found a parking spot.
1.1 BACKGROUND

The hypothetical example of Katarina above portrays well real-life situations that occur often in contemporary business environments. Since modern organizations seek for flexibility, new solutions and efficiency in order to gain competitive advantage in the marketplace, the use of temporary workforce has increased popularity to manage this challenge (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Garsten, 1999). A Concept called liminality captures comprehensively the consequences of deploying human resources in more flexible and temporal manner. Liminality, based on anthropologist van Gennep’s (1960) work, has obtained popularity in business and management field in capturing contemporary elements of work arrangements (Söderlund & Borg, 2018). Liminality describes situations where individual is being betwixt-and-between (Turner, 1977) or putting it another way, “neither here nor there” (Borg & Söderlund, 2015, p. 262). Project-based organizations, project managers and the working environment such as the introduction portrays have been researched a lot. As the introduction example shows, Katarina is affected by feelings and forces of ambiguity along with sense of betweeness. Liminality literature acknowledge liminality having temporal and permanent elements (Söderlund & Borg, 2018; Ybema et al., 2011). For example, Katarina being in the middle of single transition from one working context to another, which presents processual liminality. However, Katarina’s work overall consists of working in such environment where she holds the liminal position in ongoing basis and therefore the temporary arrangements become permanent state for her.

However, the development behind liminality gaining attention in business and management field is worth of noticing. The early work of Penrose (2009) has already recognized resources as important source of success for an organization Her views can offer more stable viewpoint in developing organization’s ability to compete than just external positioning compared to competitors. Moreover, scholars like Barney (1991) and Wright et al. (1994) have further specified the circumstances where resources can be turned into competitive advantage. This applies also for human resources. The example shown in the introduction describes a highly advanced and demanding form of human resources, an external consultant who works as a project manager (Garsten, 1999).

---

1 First edition originally published in 1909
2 First edition originally published in 1959
A handful of studies have addressed issues that are closely related to conditions presented in Katarina’s example situation. For example, Paton and Hodgson (2016, p. 30) presented project manager as “twice-liminal” between different tensions. The authors noted that the project manager’s position is often a transitional phase from more technical previous tasks in the past into more general managerial tasks in the future. Another tension, explored by Paton and Hodgson (ibid.), was related to identity. The authors recognized different anchor points for developing work-related identities. The study reveals that some project managers were leaning more towards a local identity where it was believed that their skills and competences are highly context specific. Another type of identity found was cosmopolitan identity where project managers perceived that they could manage wide range of projects in different industries. However, none of the project managers identities were strictly attaching one or the other types, but rather it was seen as an on-going struggle within individuals (ibid.).

Borg and Söderlund (2014) studied technical consultant workers and were able to recognize liminality practices that consultants used in order to handle their temporary assignments. These practices revolved between active and passive attitude, task and social focus towards the job. For example, the recognized passive attitude consisted of elements, like waiting for others to act to get more information, or just simply waiting others to make decisions (ibid.).

Moreover, Borg and Söderlund (2015) suggested later specific liminality competences. The underlying idea behind these competences were individual’s own perception of the work. Based on the perception, the technical consultants could either make use of liminality as a learning platform or trying to diminish the effects of liminality. Making use of liminality required quick social networking at workplace and seeing opportunities on reaching additional responsibilities related to work. Central in making use of liminality was also the ability to see the whole organization beyond the temporal project organization. Still, diminishing the liminal experience was done by viewing the job as technical problem-solving and seeking for long assignments (ibid.).

Another study worth mentioning was carried out by Gacasan et al. (2016), where the scholars studied project managers in construction sites portraying complex environment. The goal in the study was to identify what kind of cues or signals project managers were able to draw from the working environment to make sense of situations, and how they were able to make use of them. Central notions from the study were that in low complexity environments project managers
were relying more on information that could be observed by project management systems and tools. However, in high complexity environments project managers emphasized more frequent interaction with others to spot signals from the environment. Furthermore, the study shows that experienced individuals in their profession were able to identify wider range of cues than newcomers (ibid.).

Last study presented here in the background, is Maitlis’ (2005) research about collective sensemaking in the context of symphony orchestras. She studied how sensemaking happens in groups by investigating how leader’s and other stakeholders’ efforts effect on each other producing different outcomes. The central notion of her study was that depending on whether the sensegiving activities done by leader or other stakeholders are high or low, the outcomes of the sensemaking process vary. According to Maitlis (ibid.), the outcomes vary in terms of how broad or narrow set of alternatives were considered, and how coherent action the sensemaking process was able to produce.

1.2 INTRODUCING RESEARCH PROBLEM AND SCOPE

This thesis has been partially inspired by scholars mentioned in the previous background chapter (1.1) and partially because of personal interest towards the profession of project manager. Working in liminal environments relates essentially to individual’s identity (Beech, 2011). Due to external disruptions, such as context switches at work, identity work is triggered (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). This identity work is tightly connected to sensemaking activities where individual makes efforts to understand and adapt to the changing environment (Weick, 1995). This is the reason that this study seeks answer to the research question and tries to shed light on the life of project manager mainly through identity and sensemaking literature. Therefore, compared to mentioned studies in prior chapter (1.1) this study presents in some extent different approach, where the field lacks empirical validity, by combining aspects of identity and sensemaking to the work of consultant project manager proposing a research question:

**How do consultant project managers cope with liminality?**

Moreover, the thesis seeks answer to sub-question:
What creates the feeling of being integrated to the new working context?

However, as stated in the depicted previous studies conducted, them being close to this study’s research question, the central concepts of these studies cannot be excluded by no means. Rather they offer valuable starting points and can now be seen in a new context as well, since the authors of this study presume that some similarities might be found. Therefore, these studies should be seen as complementing elements of this study and vice versa.

There are several reasons why the authors of this study find the research problem particularly interesting and worth studying. Firstly, understanding the challenges relating to the job of a project manager is highly relevant, since the position has validated in business and presents the most common managerial job. Still, many people decide to leave the profession to do something else (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Secondly, while the work of Borg and Söderlund (2014) has increased understanding of working in liminal conditions, their study presented findings from project employee point of view. This study presumes that, based on the sensemaking literature, consultant project managers cannot take such passive approach toward the job that was found in Borg and Söderlund (ibid.) study. Finally, it certainly seems challenging that project manager is expected to organize work of a project team and take decisions while he or she is in the middle of integrating process to the project stakeholders.

1.2.1 Literature search

The reviewed literature is searched from Linköping University library databases and assisted by Google Scholar application. The search started from the topic of liminality with related keywords. From liminality, once the authors understood relevant dimensions of the phenomenon, the search expanded to identity, identity work and sensemaking where numerous keywords and combinations of them were used. The search contained books, e-books, academic journals and articles. This was done for ensuring the reliability of the sources used. Each interesting search result was cross-checked with Google Scholar to see the number of citations. Then articles and books were peer-reviewed between researchers and mutually decided for relevance regarding research question. The search contained only English written literature. This search process resulted in finding some base articles which allowed also the authors to identify more relevant sources. These articles were Söderlund and Borg’s (2018) extensive
review of liminality and Maitlis and Christianson’s (2014) comprehensive work about sensemaking. Overall, the literature used in building literature review for this study contains literature between 1959 and 2018. Full reference list is provided at the end of this thesis.

1.3 THESIS OUTLINE

Thesis outline provides topic level overview and each of them include more detailed descriptions regarding the main content of the topic. The outline helps to organize the thesis structure and facilitates connections between chapters.

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<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>The first chapter introduces the thesis subject presenting a small storytelling prelude followed by prior relevant studies conducted close to the thesis subject as a background. In addition, chapter presents the research question, the literature search and argues for the significance of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature review</td>
<td>After the introduction of the background and scope of the work, it is suitable to create engagement with literature review. The chapter starts by representing top-down approach from the catalysts which have an effect causing liminality or matters which generate liminality to professional environments. The study will narrow the theoretical scope into the level which is essential to be able to answer the research question. The literature review encompasses three main themes: liminality, identity and identity work and sensemaking. Themes are concluded in two visualizations referring to introduced concepts and to grasp essential dependencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methodology</td>
<td>The methodology chapter explains how the study was carried out and what kind of reasoning was behind methodological choices done by the researchers. Method and literature review are tightly related to each other defining what can be learned from the study overall. The chapter presents research strategy, design and breaks down areas regarding research data used in the study. The sample represents ten experienced consultant project managers in Finnish professional service company. In addition, this section evaluates the quality aspects related to the study performed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analysis</td>
<td>In this chapter, the researchers will introduce the most relevant aspects from gathered data regarding the research question. These findings are divided into similarities and differences extracted from the interviewed consultant project managers sample. The analysis is allocated in three parts. First showing the important similarities. Secondly, presenting the most interesting differences. And finally, setting the major themes into a four-field matrix forming project manager archetypes to illustrate how consultant project managers cope with liminality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conclusion</td>
<td>Conclusion will repeat the most crucial findings in the thesis. The chapter sums up the study and answers to the research question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Discussion and Further Research</td>
<td>Discussion and further research will present a dialogue between actual conclusion of the study and possible ramifications. Moreover, this chapter will talk about rising issues which could be scrutinized as further research.</td>
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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review presents important areas of research conducted to this day in order to provide support in analyzing and interpreting gathered empirical data. The chapter starts approaching the research question by looking at the drivers that produce liminality. This is done by introducing notions regarding human resources and they are presented as important knowledge integrators of the organization. This leads the discussion to project-based organizing of work and the nature of projects. After this background is covered, the concept of liminality is introduced and viewed in detail. This portrays the working environment of a consultant project manager. Furthermore, concepts identity, identity work and sensemaking are explained and linked to liminality as individual’s coping mechanisms. The chapter is concluded by presenting a visualization of the essential dependencies between introduced concepts.

2.1 CATALYSTS OF LIMINALITY

Liminality does not appear out of nowhere; it is caused by something. Therefore, this paper departs from a broader standpoint. It was Edith Penrose who stated already during 1950’s in her seminal book *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm* that “a firm is essentially a pool of resources” (2009, p. 132). An organization can establish a competitive advantage by exploiting the differences between resource pool they possess compared to competitors (Grant, 2015). What describes resources interestingly, is that single output may need combinations of different resources and a single resource can produce many outputs when used differently or in different context (Penrose, 2009; Wernerfelt, 1984).

2.1.1 Human resources as a key resource of an organization

Resources can be defined and categorized differently. One simple and broad definition is from Wernerfelt (1984, p. 172): “By a resource is meant anything which could be thought of as a strength or weakness of a given firm”. While resource categorizations might vary according to scholar, central to most categorizations is the notion that they recognize human capital as a resource (Barney, 1991; Grant, 2015; Penrose, 2009). This notion becomes even more important when it is understood that (physical) resources itself cannot be the inputs for
production, but rather the service that a resource can offer (Penrose, 2009). This calls for organizational capabilities, such as planning, coordinating, and processes, so in other words human capabilities in general (Grant, 2015).

Barney (1991) argues that for a resource to be able to produce competitive advantage, it needs to be valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable. Wright et al. (1994) illustrate how human resources can meet Barney’s (1991) criteria and indeed can be the source of competitive advantage. Different tasks demand different skills and people differ by their character and level of their abilities, which creates variance in individuals’ contribution for organization Wright et al., 1994). Therefore, it can be said that human capital possesses the ability to deliver value for an organization. The attribute of rareness can be illustrated through the idea that skills are equally distributed in society. For example, if we accept the assumption that cognitive skills are equally distributed in the society, then individuals with high cognitive skills form a rare resource (ibid.). Competitors must be able to recognize the important resource in order to imitate it. Imitation would also require similar circumstances where the same qualities of human capital is being used (ibid.). However, the process of individual qualities emerging into unit- or organization level is always unique (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Moreover, unique history (Barney, 1991), causal ambiguity and social complexity (Wright et al., 1994) together create circumstances that are practically impossible to copy. More specifically, causal ambiguity refers to situation when the link between competitive advantage and resources cannot be observed by outsiders. Social complexity describes a situation where human resources forms a social phenomenon which is difficult to manage systematically. Same characteristics also contribute to the notion that while single individuals might be mobile, human resources as a source of competitive advantage are not mobile (ibid.). Finally, the argument behind non-substitutability is a bit complex. An example is offered by Wright et al. (ibid.), if organization X possesses the most skilled individuals in the marketplace and enjoys competitive advantage through that, but then organization Y acquires or develops a resource (other than human resource) which enables organization Y to establish competitive advantage. According to Wright et al. (ibid.), organization X would be able to regain the advantage through acquiring the same resource from the markets and training their skilled workforce.

Hence, from this perspective it can be argued for the relevance and significance of utilization of human resources for an organization as a business environment is turning more complex and dynamic (Grant, 2015), new organizational structures and settings are developed to match the
challenges (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Bredin and Söderlund (2011, p. 4) describe this complexity by “integrating technologies and knowledge bases to be able to offer products and systems that meet new customer requirements”. Adding another perspective to resources, Grant (1996a, 1996b) states that knowledge is the most important resource of an organization since knowledge is a major input to all processes and this knowledge is stored in individuals. This way integrating that knowledge becomes a vital task for the organization instead of acquiring or creating knowledge. Since humans are only boundedly rational, meaning that their capacity to accommodate, store and process knowledge is limited (Simon, 1991), it becomes natural from organization’s perspective that in order to gain efficient knowledge integration, individuals need to possess different kinds of specialized knowledge and organization’s task is to coordinate the integration of that knowledge (Grant, 1996b). Individuals differ in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics, and these qualities do not turn into organization level competitive advantage by itself (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). In accomplishing that task, Ployhart and Moliterno (ibid.) highlight the meaning of unit’s task environment and how the members of work-unit act, think and feel. Task environment refers to the degree of unit’s tasks require coordination and are interdependent (ibid.).

Grant (1996a) suggests that knowledge integration can be seen from three perspectives: the efficiency of integration, the scope of integration and the flexibility of integration. For the purposes of this study, the weight is on efficiency. In order to achieve efficient knowledge integration, the key lies in maximizing the use of different specialized knowledge from individuals while minimizing the inefficiencies caused by cross-learning between knowledge domains (Grant, 1996b). Grant (ibid.) argues that one way of organizing is to emphasize the use of rules, guidelines, manuals and routines in simple tasks, where utilizing explicit knowledge plays a major part. Another way is to reserve problem solving and decision-making resources that people offer, to more important, complex and unusual tasks. When it comes to latter perspective of problem solving and decision making, structuring is still needed. Grant (ibid.) continues by stating that traditional hierarchy will not work in complex problem solving, since managers cannot effectively coordinate knowledge integration without gaining access to specialized knowledge. This calls for direct involvement of the specialist. Therefore, a team can serve as knowledge integration mechanism and offer a direct participation of a specialist. However, teams cannot be big enough to solve organization’s every problem. Thereby, teams can be signed to solve a specific problem of problems where fluid in and out
movement of specialists contributing with their specialized knowledge offer more efficient knowledge integration than traditional hierarchy (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Grant, 1996b).

This way of organizing work, as described above, is very close to what can be described as projects. Projectification refers to the increased use of projects as primary form of organizing work compared to more traditional organizational structures (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Primary reason for that is, that projects allow to form temporary organizations for knowledge integration of skilled workers, who possess different kinds of specialized knowledge about matter in hand (ibid.). This short introduction of resources and how the use of human resources has resulted in increased use of projects, was assembled to help in putting things into perspective when the paper now turns the focus into project-based work.

2.1.2 Projects and project-based organizations

Organizations are formed of individuals which become units. Projects and project-based working has given versatile form to deploy cross-functional teams to solve problems in short periods of time. Temporary nature of assembling and disassembling knowledge pools of people has become rapidly more generalized way to attach impermanent teams around core functions in organizations (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). This chapter presents integral aspects in order to describe deployment of human capital.

Projects started to gain popularity after World War II when technology and infrastructure were rapidly developed through project style working arrangements (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). The emerged topic of projectification is highly relevant since increasing number of people engage in project work (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). When organizations bend structures for having temporary characteristics designed for problem solving, they become fast associated with project-based working style (ibid.). Typically, projects are characteristics temporary, unique and constitute of solving some form of complex task (ibid.). Another characterization, highlighting the autonomous working approach, is that typically project goals are specified by someone else, such as top management, project sponsor or product owner, and it is the task of project manager and the project team to figure out the “how” - part (Sydow et al., 2004). Projects are also a way to increase focus to chosen matters for an organization (ibid.), but partially because of that they also create tension between the permanent organization (Bredin
& Söderlund, 2011; Hobday, 2000). Since projects do not typically tie up huge fixed costs, they offer flexible and low-cost pathway to run experiments (Sydow et al., 2004).

Projects are being carried out in different types of organizational structures. These structures vary from functional organization to pure project-based organization (PBO), while different forms of functional matrix structures lie in between of these two extreme ends (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). PBOs operate in multiple industries such as high technology, professional services, culture, and complex products and systems (Sydow et al., 2004). PBOs are hard to converge into one form due to considerable variety in systems and work arrangements they possess (ibid.). For Hobday (2000, p. 874), PBO is an organizational form where project is the “primary business mechanism for coordinating and integrating all the main business functions of the firm”. Another way of describing project related work settings, is through affiliation. Packendorff (2002) argues that in PBOs individuals’ primary affiliation is related to project instead of the permanent organization, and project work is routine rather than exception. In addition, the pure form of PBO signals the lack of functional coordination (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011).

According to Hobday (2000), a PBO is well designed approach to produce complex high value products and services. The PBO intrinsically recreates and decomposes organizational structures that respond to changing customer needs. These emerging characteristics call for ability to integrate knowledge in fast speed and in parallel cope with uncertainty and risks of the projects (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). The nature of work carried out in PBOs can be in the extremes of unique type of job or series of similar assignments. Whitley (2006) makes an illustration by describing singularity of project goals and stability of work roles. He argues that high singularity, or uniqueness, of goals signals for developing uncommon, one of a kind solutions to uncertain markets, where use of routines is difficult. Singularity being low the organization can produce multiple outputs where the core organizing is done by same people and outsiders conduct individual tasks (ibid.). When it comes to Whitley’s (ibid.) another measurement, stability of work roles, highly stable casting in roles enables to gather project teams within short notice where individuals are defined with skill-based identities. In addition, in these projects uncertainty and complexity remains stable due to clearly separated work tasks and capabilities of individuals. As separation and stability decreases, control over organizing tasks comes lose when fluidity increase in role stability (ibid.).
Deriving from above characterizations, the PBO is able to flexibly meet customer needs, foster innovation and integrate specialized knowledge. However, weaknesses of PBO are related to cross-organization coordination, performing routine tasks and achieving economies of scale (Hobday, 2000). Moreover, Sydow et al. (2004) point out that while learning might take place within project boundaries, PBO is weak at producing organization wide learning, because learning is more likely to happen at individual level (Whitley, 2006).

In sum, project-based work can be characterized as inherent temporariness and cross-functionality (Borg & Söderlund, 2014). This means that when individuals enter projects, they meet and work with professionals from other areas of expertise and move between working contexts. Work arrangements are more or less unique compared to each other (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006), which emphasizes the meaning of collaborative and interpersonal skill sets of individual project workers (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Moreover, since projects usually form a recognizable unit, it is easier than in permanent structures for management to hold individuals accountable of the results projects achieve or not (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2006). These characterizations introduced in this chapter embody various dimensions that can be captured by the concept of liminality.

2.2 SENSEMAKING AND IDENTITY WORK: TOOLS OF COPING WITH LIMINALITY

As described in prior chapter (2.1), the increasing number of projectified work as organizations are seeking more flexible and efficient ways to organize their businesses. There is increasing evidence that occupational structure is changing as service employment is expanding whereas manufacturing is shrinking (Barley & Kunda, 2011). At the same time, Barley and Kunda (2011) have noted that this has had an impact to two main occupational clusters decreasing stable employment and increasing temporary work. In addition, professionals are increasingly moving between organizations making careers more boundaryless and simultaneously periods of employment are becoming shorter (ibid.).

This incremental trend from fixed full-time jobs to temporaries has given specific focus on increasing number of transitions happening between organizational contexts and the group of people having this kind of behavior, like for instance, project workers. As project workers being
constantly moving in and out of projects and professional responsibilities, liminality as a notion expresses this transition including time and space (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Moreover, liminality puts out specific attention into transition phase involving feelings of anxiety and ambiguity (ibid.). However, liminality can also become permanent while having a continuous movement between assignments where person becomes numb for these transitions even though still moving as usual.

In order to understand unclear situations within sufficient level, people organize these situations by making sense (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking as an interplay between interpretation and action helping individuals to organize unclear situation happening by enacting back to the world and making it more understandable. To simplify this process, sensemaking starts from many external inputs as a chaos ending up to a state where required understanding of the situation is received using action or talk (Weick et al., 2005).

Following chapters (2.3.1 & 2.3.2) will present liminality caused by the circumstances that people who are temporary employed called temporaries, experience in their work. Moreover, this chapter explains how people make sense in these unclear situations that liminal transitions cause. These liminal transitions consist main elements that activate sensemaking and identity work. Identity and sensemaking literatures will be presented in different chapters but there is a very thin line between them in practice and according to literature. Sometimes the line might even be impossible to draw, as Weick (1995, p. 18) notices sensemaking is “grounded in identity construction”. Thereby, it can be stated that identity and sensemaking are to a certain extent inseparable. However, if trying to create a distinction between them, identity portrays more stable state from old identity to a new one, whereas sensemaking is more an ongoing process between sense maker and environment around. Hence, this paper adopts a viewpoint where identity is more of a stable understanding of self and sensemaking is a tool how to establish the desired stable state of identity.

2.3 CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY

Scholars have researched elements of ambiguity, temporariness and unsteadiness of work due to growing appearance of these themes in contemporary business organizations (Söderlund & Borg, 2018). Liminality as a concept has gained popularity during recent decades through series
of studies of temporaries and has managed to add depth into discussion regarding transition phases in working environment. Garsten (1999) distinguishes between temporary employees and fixed positions where the former describes employees as being in a transit between organizations, while the latter employees are fixed part of organizations. Liminality as an anthropology term depicts passage between spaces where transition is seamless and pointing out a clear border between phases is difficult or impossible. To illustrate this seamless transition, anthropology describing these kinds of passages are for example seasonal changes or transformations in individuals from childhood to adulthood (Söderlung & Borg, 2018). The term arrives from Latin word *limen*, which is usually translated into English by using the word *threshold* (Borg & Söderlund, 2015; Bredin & Söderlund, 2011).

The origins of liminality derive from pioneering research of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1960, when he published his ideas in *Les Rites de Passage*, studying individuals’ life changing through ritual forms during lifetime. By ritual forms he was interested to study the threshold between phases and created patterns to address them (Söderlund & Borg, 2018). According to van Gennep (1960), there are three distinctive phases in passage rites: separation, liminality and incorporation. These phases can be seen in Figure 1. First, individual withdraws from normal daily life activities facing feelings of detachment. Secondly, in the liminal phase, one is experiencing ambiguity and uncertainty in transition between separation and incorporation. Thirdly, while incorporating into another stable state with new responsibilities and standards, individual is defined apart from initial state started (ibid.). Another anthropologist, Victor Turner (1977), was inspired by van Gennep’s work and developed a notion of being betwixt-and-between to describe the liminal phase. What was notable in Turner’s work, was that he portrayed individual into indefinable situations between social structures (Garsten, 1999; Söderlund & Borg, 2018). People sometimes enter liminality by choice through non-routine actions suspending their everyday social structure for that time (Söderlund & Borg, 2018). Turner (1982) defines this temporal social stage including perspective of what the individual was before the exception from routines happened and where this behavior could lead to. This exception can also be seen as a performative act. Temporary workers being betwixt-and-between do not have structural relation through regular employment rather transitory one passing by the organizational structure (Garsten, 1999). Diverging from the everyday social structures could be seen more likely to happen among temporaries due to lack of fixed relation to organizations. According to Borg and Söderlund (2014), liminality can have negative consequences when it happens in organizational context due to constant
movement between in and out from different contexts. Individuals have limited time for self-reflection in order to improve own learning due to ongoing shifts. Moreover, temporary workers are seen more untrustworthy by regular workers and they often have smaller possibilities to take part in training programs and social events (ibid.).

![The rites of passage](image)

*Figure 1 Stages in the rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960)*

2.3.1 Processual liminality

Liminality capturing the essence of betwixt-and-between consisting temporal and ambiguous aspects of contemporary work, has increased attention of liminality in management and organization research (Söderlund & Borg, 2018). Söderlund and Borg (ibid.) show the range of concept utility by viewing liminality through three themes: process, position and place. However, liminality as a place can depict individuals changing place either physically or remotely. For instance, commuting between home and work or people working from home are seen as forms of liminality in places. This type of liminality can concern many occupational groups. Therefore, this paper sets focal point on process and position dimensions due to research focus. Individual liminal processes in organizational context are commonly related to portray transitions between professional identities (Söderlund & Borg, 2018; Ybema et al., 2011). Furthermore, these transitions encompass loss and recovery of identity as an outcome of liminal experience intensifying sensemaking and emotions. Hence, processual liminality is strongly related to identity work. According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), identity can be acknowledged as a steady essence of being whereas elements of change are immersed into organizational environments or life situations causing emotions to actively deal with identity. The passage in liminal phase on organizational context enforces actively formatting identity to suit for new surroundings. The dialogue between new context and individual itself causes
reconstruction of liminar’s identity (Beech, 2011). By liminar, Beech (ibid.) means the object that goes through liminal phase. Furthermore, for Ybema et al. (2011) this process consists of active dialogue between past, present and future whereas identity can be described by being on the move. This process engages emotions and sensemaking due to losing old parts of identity and formatting new one (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014; Maitlis et al., 2013). Since, liminal process causes interruption to ongoing flow of reality, individual losses current identity and starts new identity formation. This active search shapes one’s identity work in order to find new identity as fast as possible streamlining liminar’s sensemaking processes (Söderlund & Borg, 2018).

The chapter (2.4) about identity work and work-related identity will focus more to describe different approaches how to cope with processual liminality creating stronger link between professional work and identity work process.

2.3.2 Positional liminality

According to Söderlund and Borg (2018), person situated in liminal position is moving between collective context, organizational structures, professional identities or positions. Ybema et al. (2011) refer to perpetual liminality in a setting where liminal position is seen as ongoing state. Garsten (1999) defines liminality as a permanent condition when person is jumping around between organization as a professional lifestyle. Like earlier mentioned (chapter 2.3), liminal position especially can cause negative consequences such as lacking feeling of affiliation, negative stress and limited access to in-house learning opportunities (Borg & Söderlund, 2015). However, having a liminal position gives more opportunities to format identity because it offers more freedom to move between professional communities. Still, liminar can face difficulties defining identity in such circumstances (Garsten, 1999). Since, this requires constant repositioning of oneself for different audiences and fostering multiple relationships (Ybema et al., 2011). Borg and Söderlund (2015) studied competencies used by mobile project workers facing liminality. These competencies diverged depending on the perception of interviewed person revealing that these competencies vary at temporal and flexible working conditions. Some people could make use of being betwixt-and-between and some did not (ibid.). Söderlund and Borg (ibid.) argued that, since liminal position provides more identity work interacting constantly with different professional groups, a person can have better abilities to integrate and convey knowledge into professional domains.
As a summary, studies of this field in liminality are divided between pessimistic and optimistic point of views regarding people being in liminal position. Scholars share a common interest in identity work and reconstruction but argue about does positional liminality facilitate or prevent multiple identity creation. The balance being on the move long periods causes diversion in studies. On the one hand, freedom of moving between professional groups to absorb skills and competencies. On the other hand, personal learning and performance from long-term perspective are deterred (Söderlund & Borg, 2018).

2.3.3 Liminality and organizations

What emerges from previous chapters of different perspectives regarding liminality, is how suitable this phenomenon is to address current organizational developments. Organizations strive for efficiency and flexibility to meet market demands (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Garsten, 1999; Tempest & Starkey, 2004), where difficult problem-solving plays central part (Grant, 1996a, 1996b). This has increased the challenges of staffing and usage of temporary workforce to meet the challenge (Garsten, 1999). Garsten (ibid.) explains that this has given rise to specific kind of temporary workers – consultants – a term which emphasizes the assumed high level of skills and expertise of temporary worker, since organizations give responsibility for temporary workers also in demanding task areas. Söderlund and Borg (2018) note that liminality can also be seen at organizational level in terms of process and position. Transitions in organizational level can be for instance, system transitions, change of strategy or business model for new markets. The use of consultants can help organizations in liminal transitions achieving the desired change (Garsten, 1999). Therefore, a career of consultant has become a tempting life choice, where freedom to choose between interesting assignments presents a major upside (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003; Garsten, 1999). Career of consultant contains strong elements of positional liminality. Borg and Söderlund (2014, 2015) have explored practices and competences of how individuals can successfully operate in liminal conditions. Their findings revolve around attitude and focus taken towards work.

2.3.4 Project manager as a liminar

As previous chapters were more descriptive regarding liminality from two main study perspective complimented with liminality in organizations, this chapter characterizes more
specifically one crucial group of people working in this environment, called project managers. It is important to understand the fundamentals how this position in project environment is inevitably relevant in order to pursue maximized output from resources used in projects.

According to Penrose (2009), resources and capabilities are paramount constituents to build competitive advantage. However, as mentioned, organizations are not able to create economic value from resources themselves. Innovative and effective management permits different ways to deploy resources creating chance to identify productive opportunities and generate performance (ibid.). Thus, bundles of resources offer possibility for growth and innovation, but manager possesses a key role to use them in order to create superior performance. Managers’ unique decision-making constitutes a key resource to grasp productive opportunities and create a possible link between resources and successful performance (ibid.). Still, this success in the organization is restricted depending on talented management and technical competencies. Underutilization of resources and current knowledge base of the organization may result in inefficiency and losing competitive advantage. However, Penrose (ibid.) does not define context for optimal level of resource deployment. Still, managers’ role is an inevitable part of generating competitive advantage as an actor of interpreting available resources and capabilities of the organization (ibid.).

The profession of project manager has truly legitimized itself by being the most common managerial task in present organizations, despite the high pressures project managers face on the job (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Project manager plays an important role in organization’s efforts in coordinating knowledge integration (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Moreover, it is recognized that project manager’s contribution is vital for successful projects (Alvarenga et al., 2018). Portraying project managers’ job focus in simple way, is to fulfill assignment specification according to the budget. This is far from surprising when considering the overall descriptions and bases for existence of projects (chapter 2.1.2). Therefore, for fulfilling these expectations, the most project manager task descriptions are mechanical and goal oriented. To mention a few from a competency model of project manager developed by Cheng et al. (2005):

- ensuring proper planning before starting
- ensuring client satisfaction and long-term relationships
- maximizing company profits by executing tight budget control
● making sure that quality meets stakeholder expectations by filling original requirements
● ensuring that all participants know their roles and responsibilities
● promote and share knowledge
● enhance team learning and development
● act as an example.

As it can be seen from the list above, the focus is well aligned with the nature of project descriptions. Perhaps that is also a reason behind the notion that majority of project management research and discourse revolves around the triangle of time, quality and cost (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). However, alternative views do also exist. Hodgson and Paton (2015) recognize that the role of project manager is to combine managerial and technical aspects for successful task execution. Bredin and Söderlund (2011) go as far as discussing of project manager having important role in PBO’s HR-related activities. These insights are especially supported by practitioners (Alvarenga et al., 2018). Still, the set-up is also a bit paradoxical. Alvarenga et al. (ibid.) found in their quantitative study of 740 professionals in the field of project management that the project manager was seen as one of seven hypercritical success factors for project success. Among project managers, softer and social aspects such as communication, client acceptance and project commitment raised as hypercritical aspects. Following similar line, Turner (1999) emphasizes the meaning of communication and negotiation-skills when arguing for the project’s significance to senior management and communicating plans for all levels and stakeholders. These notions constitute as clear indications of softer dimensions needed from project manager. However, what makes it paradoxical, is what Crawford (2005) learned when she was studying perceptions of senior management about projects. According to Crawford’s study (ibid.), senior management value project managers that can manage projects with high singularity, keep an eye on costs and avoid interfering matters relating to management in general. This might result in making the job of project manager more difficult, since practitioners themselves believe that focusing more on softer aspects would improve their work performance (Fisher, 2011).

To illustrate difficulties in managing projects, let us review few numbers. In a yearly study conducted by Project Management Institute (PMI), it was reported that 69% of projects were considered successful in terms of customer demands, cost and time (PMI, 2017). At an organizational level, only 7% of organizations achieved over 80% success rate in their projects when it comes to quality, cost and time (PMI, 2017). Moreover, 12% of organizations show
success rates below 60%. Primary reasons mentioned behind failures were changes in organizational priorities, project goals and poor requirements gathering before initiating projects (PMI, 2017).

What emerges from the above is that successful project management requires many attributes and project manager is affected by many forces while trying to satisfy the needs of several stakeholders. Being in the center of attention in project-based working settings, many times the responsibilities exceed the formal power that project manager possesses (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Project-based work fosters managers to take action, develop skills to build social relationships and be able to move between different project contexts (ibid.). The nature of project work causes social issues between people and demands particular leadership (ibid.). Project as a form of adaptable and flexible working culture, requires human relations-oriented approach to incorporate project team together in order to create feeling of unity (Turner, 1999). Since leader in project organizations often lack authority to reward their subordinates (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011), it underlines even more the importance how project manager appreciates workers and motivates them (Turner, 1999). However, project manager is most importantly responsible and evaluated for success of the project that is measured according to budget, time and quality (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Balancing between customers’ expectations and maximizing company profit demands related experience from the project manager to integrate all together. Perhaps, these are some of the reasons behind the notion that individuals do not start their working careers as project manager, instead some experience is needed to be gathered before stepping into the shoes of project manager (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011; Paton & Hodgson, 2016).

All in all, the work of project manager embodies strong elements of processual and positional liminality. On one hand, a project manager finds oneself in new context and surrounded by new people at the start of each project. On the other hand, this arrangement becomes more permanent since it all happens in ongoing fashion setting project manager in positional liminality as well. By elaborating the working environment with enriched characteristics of liminality where project managers have to cope with, the purpose of the chapter was to depict liminality at work from different angles. Hence, following literature presents a vital role in revealing what kind of actual activities context switches cause for individuals. The next chapter presents how individual conducts identity work which ends up creating changes in identity and self-presentation.
2.4 IDENTITY WORK AND WORK-RELATED IDENTITY

As Söderlund and Borg (2018) stated in their work, liminal phase triggers a dialogue between individual and context provoking changes in identity. Identity work is a conceptualized form of identity and struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) where the struggle is identified as transition from one identity to another (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). In addition, identity work is more extensive way to describe these struggles as identity work happens in different social contexts (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). When identity work is done through positive development, individuals can create more positive outcomes in their work (Dutton et al., 2010). Furthermore, positive outcomes in identity work are more likely to increase people’s capacity to handle more stress or setbacks (Caza & Bagozzi, 2009).

Broadly presented, identity refers to overtime and interactive process where multiple meanings connected to oneself and others (Gecas, 1982; Dutton et al., 2010), where the word “self” captures the essence of self-identity and the word “others” refers to social-identity (Watson, 2009). Thus, identity as self-presentation of a person is created as co-construction of notions self-perception and how other people see the person (Beech, 2011). Worth noticing is the fact that individual can carry multiple identities (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Moreover, this paper builds on the concept of work-related identity which then connects more specifically identity into “variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups, and memberships that individuals can use to compose a work-related self” (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 266). Interaction between people in working context enables means to create opportunities to assemble workplace identity (Paton & Hodgson, 2016).

Identity work is happening when individuals are formulating, repairing, sustaining, strengthening or reshaping their identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Work-related identity is embedded within activities related to work that are connected with person’s self-definition and parts of identity. Work is a life domain where most people spend majority of their time in adulthood. Furthermore, it is an important context related to professional activities and situations offering a central source to find meaning in sense of daily life and work-related identity (Dutton et al., 2010). Identity reconstruction starts when balance of identity is interrupted by triggering events outside from the environment (Beech 2011; Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). These events in working context might be, for instance, promotions, transfers, organizational entries or exits, occupational changes and interorganizational changes.
Loss of identity involves a liminal state in between the abandonment of an old identity and moving into a new one. Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) describe this search as loss and restoration of identity orientation. Oscillation between loss and restoration can be seen as movement of back and forth which happens due to external events. While moving from old to a new identity, the person is struggling to create new meaning of self (ibid.). This liminal period from “Who I was” to “Who I am becoming” can fall short or be successful. Being unable to let go from old meaning of oneself, leads to consuming state trying to complete this transit. Successful transit results desirably reinforce and increase authenticity of personal identity (ibid.). When individual tries to define oneself, it cannot be done without defining the external environment as well (Weick, 1995). Often in identity literature, this transition is described in the spirit of van Gennep’s (1960) three stage model (separation, liminality and incorporation). This liminal phase as a transition can take the form of inside-out, outside-in or reflective dialogue between both mentioned approaches within individual (Beech, 2011).

In inside-out approach, identity orientation is conducted experimenting temporary attachments to self or social identities (ibid.). This experimental search starts within the person and aims to form new identity through enactment where contradictions in identity work can occur. These contradictions can be changes in behavior in order to achieve for example access to a professional group of people. Testing different approaches helps to identifying desired identity from unwanted one leading to modified result (ibid). Outside-in approach in reshaping identity is ignited by, for instance, a shock, misalignment, bafflement or self-questioning to notices a new meaning from environment enacted. After changing the emphasis of a meaning, person acknowledge not being the same as used to be due this new insight. This can happen incrementally like dawning or all at once. Reflective dialogue entails combination of both internal dialogue and taking external influences into consideration. For instance, self-questioning and considering views of others, is a dialogic way to embed previously mentioned approaches together (ibid.). Furthermore, Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014, p. 80) argue that individual has to establish a balance between past and new normal when “the individual has developed a story of “who I am in light of the loss” and “who I am now.” Identity equilibrium is established, and the period of punctuated equilibrium is concluded.”
2.4.1 The self-presentation: Test and validate

People constitute and experience life as a narrative and that this narrative is our self-presentation, our identity (Watson, 2009). Narrative identity is based on conception that the person itself is story of some kind (ibid.) and the identity work is done through this narrative (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). However, by only looking from narrative or a story perspective own identity, can make self-understanding difficult. Not all people have sense of their own narratives (Watson, 2009). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010, p. 135) argue that “a self-narrative is a narrative that makes a point about the narrator”. A self-narrative assist in managing stress and explain changes at work by looking back through the narrative as comparison point of view. Moreover, it enables the person to look back and reshape identity through ongoing narrative creation for instance, between job role transitions (ibid.).

People have multiple self-narratives in their repertoire enabling to engage into work-related interplay using more flexible self-presentations (ibid.). This notion can be linked to Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) having a similar conception from identity point of view (chapter 2.4). The narrative plays vital role in how people test and validate themselves, for instance in their professional role. According to Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010), people create a story which they test between themselves and the environment through actions to sustain feeling of personal authenticity. This authenticity is valuable, because it maintains the balance in identity (ibid.). Authenticity is reached through evaluating oneself creating self-awareness that is appropriate in that moment for the person which has also got validation from other people (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). Individual seeks for balance between internal values and external expressions to find authenticity for own work-related identity (ibid.). Thus, Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (ibid.) state that if person is able to deliver internal values in harmony with external expressions to other people, self-meaning becomes more stronger and is more likely to cause long-term positive well-being.

Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) argue that identity work and identity play have different roles in identity reformation process. The scholars see identity work as more stable process protecting existing identity whereas identity play more inventing or reinventing oneself (ibid.). Identity play can be demonstrated, in an example of a child is playing with the mother where the child uses imagination to redefine himself/herself under mother’s protection setting boundaries. Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) describe achieving stable state in identity as a two-way
process where acceptance for narrative has to be validated internally and externally. According to Beech (2011), identity construction process is a dialogue between inner identity (self-identity) and outer identity (social identity). Beech (ibid.) argues that self-identity is influenced by social identity and vice versa due to loop that happens between these two identities. Self-identity is an ongoing narrative which person strives to keep stable whereas social identity is affected by external discourses (ibid.). Elsbach et al. (2005) state that this interaction between oneself and context represent a temporary outcome. Moreover, this two-way flux of actions within the person and between other people helps persons’ self-identity to shape and structure knowledge which enables to identify causal elements in situations modifying the narrative (ibid.).

Wrzesniewski et al. (2003), emphasize in self-identity construction process the fact that signals are coming from the working environment creating a meaning for job. The study concentrated on researching information and context effects on social identity reconstruction. The authors found out that the roles of coworkers have a great impact on individual conducting identity work creating or destructing meaning of work (ibid.). The meaning is generated through other people’s behavior within ongoing interaction, that creates own perception of reality for each person. For example, a person can feel like failing in a private relationship receiving negative feedback from the partner decreasing own personal meaning in this context that results in reducing personal value of person’s efforts. However, succeeding in another context, for instance workplace, by receiving and recognizing positive feedback through interaction, can create significance where a person can find new personal meanings for own evaluation (ibid.). This duality of internal and external interplay includes high sophistication which in the end affects the self-presentation of a person (Watson, 2009).

In summary, identity itself contains identity work that is ongoing and overtime process that involves liminal elements due to identified movement from old to a new identity. In addition, as each person is impacted by the environment around, person cannot define self without interaction with involved context. Identity work consider past, present and the future while identity oscillates between loss and restoration. All people are narratives of some sort that helps the person to attach dimensions like past and future to present. The next chapter will open up more closely how sensemaking happens and how matters coalesces when an individual starts from ambiguity and achieves requisite level of understanding in occurring situation.
2.5 SENSEMAKING

Prior chapter (2.4) handled how identity and identity work create self-definition and attach meanings to a person. Sensemaking materializes these meanings by informing and limiting identity and action. As a springboard for action, sensemaking happens most of the time seamlessly defining human behavior changing circumstances into comprehensive situations (Weick et al., 2005).

People go through sensemaking process in order to realize problems or events that are new, unclear or confusing. These external problems and events from ongoing reality trigger sensemaking. Using the process of sensemaking, people try to organize understanding in retrospective to answer the question: what is the story here? (Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking happens in retrospective because human understanding can only capture moments of vision from ongoing reality. This means that our understanding is built after moment has passed by as intellectual interpretation can start through lived experience (Weick, 1995). The literature underlines three main steps of the sensemaking process: notice the problem from environment, create interpretation and take action (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

In working context, people face events, surprises or confusion more likely while entering organization encountering reality shock of the new work environment (Louis, 1980). These types of events occur, due to conscious or unconscious ways of creating predictions about the future (ibid.). One way to generate a prediction of the future is to have an assumption or an expectation. For example, people who change jobs entering new physical and social world often have unrealistic or unmet expectation that causes violating event to trigger sensemaking (ibid.). It is good to make a difference here between interpretation and sensemaking because making sense includes interpretations. Interpretation is an activity to translate something for someone in another way which differs from the original. Sensemaking includes interpretation of cues constructed and bracketed from environment (Weick, 1995). Moreover, after own interpretation, person enacts with the environment and follow ups consequences for new interpretations (ibid.). Sensemaking is not about assessing the choice person makes, rather interplay between action and interpretation (Weick, 2005).
2.5.1 Sensemaking process happens socially

Sensemaking is not a solitary process (Weick, 1995), because even individuals who make sense themselves are directly or indirectly influenced by people (Maitlis, 2005). Even a monolog has an imaginary audience (Weick, 1995). However, a well discussed aspect between scholars in the research field is whether sensemaking is conducted within or between individuals. Furthermore, whether our intentions and feelings emerge within or due to other people (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). On one hand, scholars see sensemaking as a cognitive process creating frameworks, schemas or mental maps which are drawn by individuals to solve situations (ibid.). On another hand, it can be defined “as a social process that occurs between people, as meaning is negotiated, contested and mutually co-constructed” (ibid., p. 66).

According to Weick (1995) people are closely part of their own environment and responsible for creating personal constraints or opportunities. Ongoing action with retrospective thinking and sensemaking makes people generate their own environments, as well as those environments affect people (ibid.). The paramount part of sensemaking is social interaction including communication, language and talk which create situations, organizations and environments (Weick et al., 2005). In addition, social interaction in sensemaking shapes person’s interpretations and interpreting (Weick, 1995).

Pratt (2000) argues that when person’s sensemaking process is influenced by other people, one has faced sensegiving. According to Pratt (2000, p. 469), sensegiving is preferred to be provided through positive matters that are “uplifting and edifying” to expose mind for more positive impacts. The idea of sensegiving is to make people involved comprehend positive way to move forward (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Maitlis (2005) points out that sensegiving can be done either high or low level as it happens between the leader and stakeholders. Leaders sensegiving affects to control of sensemaking process done by stakeholders whereas stakeholders sensegiving has an influence on information flow between these two parties. Leaders and stakeholders that use simultaneously formal communication and organize meetings systematically achieve high levels of sensegiving. Since, the interplay is deliberate it enables high control for sensemaking processes in both sides (ibid.). This kind of systematic fashion also enables leaders having high levels of sensegiving to deploy resources in more efficient way but also control interaction with stakeholders better creating more opportunities. High control generates consistency to actions done by the stakeholders. Maitlis (ibid.) argues that public and
open forums cause decrease in ways to organize sensegiving and due to lack of these mechanisms to affect sensemaking process results lower the levels of sensegiving. According to Maitlis (ibid.), high levels of sensegiving carried out by stakeholders generates high circulation of information and therefore is highly animated. Active engagement causes continuous rhythm in interaction where different stakeholders take part into sensemaking process at different times. Low and scattered stakeholder’s engagement generates less information flow and disrupted sensegiving which prolongs sensemaking processes. Moreover, low levels of sensegiving interrupts the rhythm and makes it more cyclical rather than continuous. (ibid.). Thereby, avoiding harmful relationships and enhancing supportive ones, create stronger positive identification for a person from the organization (Pratt, 2000). According to Pratt (ibid.), while sensemaking contains creation of meaning, concept of sensebreaking breaks down this meaning. Sensebreaking disrupts fundamentals in sense of self and enables to create new space in mind which has to be fulfilled with meaning. For instance, employee career dream building in organization provokes one to compare current identity to ideal one and creates motivational aspirations to achieve this ideal state with new meaning (ibid.). Sensebreaking creates a mental void in one’s mind which has to be fulfilled causing human change (ibid.). Manager can use sensebreaking to challenge company current status in order to create new direction for the future (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

According to Weick et al. (2005), sensemaking is not concentrating finding out the truth rather improving a narrative that it becomes more versatile and resilient when facing critic. Maitlis et al. (2013) argue that emotions play a role in how sensemaking guided into social or individual direction. Furthermore, sensemaking is not always started by discrepancies of events, but rather the novelty of the cue requires also effort where individual has to be energized to engage with it. The study states that emotion provides the energy for this engagement but also concludes the plausibility related to the cue occurred (ibid.). Thereby, felt emotions are important during construction process of sensemaking as fuel until plausibility is achieved (ibid.). Although sensemaking is an ongoing and iterative process, it achieves temporary stable states. At these moments, plausibility of mental map or framework attain level where person is certain enough of own understanding regarding the cue (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking process is not about accuracy, rather it is driven by sufficient plausibility (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995).
The next chapter focuses on overall sensemaking process whether it is done in more individual or collective fashion. Although, sensemaking is socially carried out, the catalyst of the process and the main outcomes can start within the sense maker or other people.

2.5.2 Sensemaking process: Individual and collective

Maitlis et al. (2013) agree with paradigm of sensemaking that it happens in social context through interpersonal cues, triggered by other people to make a common sense through text or talk. However, sometimes sensemaking can be seen as solitary fashion action where interpretation happens within a person triggered by oneself or thought of others. Elsbach et al. (2005) define sensemaking process from cognitive point of view where individual’s mind interacts with environment. This happens in specific moment where existing mental model interacts with context that the authors call “situated cognition” (Elsbach et al., 2005, p. 423). Situated cognition includes ongoing sensemaking and temporally limited outcome (ibid.). Sensemaking is life lasting process as long as person has cognitive abilities since people are constantly in the middle of external stimuli. In the sensitive process of sensemaking, person extracts cues by taking out moments from ongoing flux of activities (Weick, 1995).

In comparison, Wrzeniewski et al. (2003) studied interpersonal sensemaking regarding sense of work meaning in order to increase knowledge how noticing other people’s actions at work affect to create work related meaning. According to Wrzesniewski et al. (ibid.), interpersonal sensemaking is a collective process where individuals notice other person’s or groups activities which are named as interpersonal cues. The cue can be a discrete and a small gesture, for instance, glance from other co-worker in a meeting which creates a stimulus to start interpersonal sensemaking (ibid.). These small actions can generate big impacts with unexpected outcomes (Weick et al., 2005). As people are motivated to reinforce their meaning at work, they search interplays or interplay partners to confirm themselves. However, individuals are in control which cues they decide to interpret in order to strengthen their view of the job or themselves (ibid.).

An interesting insight from Louis (1980) where her study disclosed the fact that socialization between workers is higher during transition between jobs. Socialization is typical part of adaptation process where the individual embraces expectations regarding the specific position in organization (Korte, 2007). Additionally, socialization practices whether being positive or
negative have an impact on one’s sensemaking process. By using successful ways of communicating with individuals, one’s own identities can become closely attached to the organization and therefore increase motivation. However, failing with these practices, effect is in contrary (Pratt, 2000). Louis (1980) points out that when a person starts a new job and before turning from an outsider into an insider, adaptation state requires socialization. For a newcomer, it is important to understand knowledge capabilities among people, company strategy and mission (ibid.). The distance of change between old and new setting positively correlates with work one has to do to adapt. For instance, change from university to first job is taken longer distance in sense of change than transition between two quite similar job roles (ibid.). Learning how to match own behavior with external needs increases the mastery of tasks (Chen, 2005).

2.5.3 Perception has an effect on cues and frames

Since all the organizational actions are generated by human competencies, Sandberg (2000) studied knowledge and skills used by people at work. Human competences are built from qualities that worker possesses creating an ability to perform (ibid.). The study shows that people use and develop knowledge and skills regarding how they experience their current job. Moreover, the competence is not primarily a set of qualities to conduct the work, rather created through perception of the work. Thus, individuals act according to how they personally comprehend the conception of the work and emphasize work areas accordingly (ibid.). Sensemaking is connecting the dots from environment to create understanding. Still, it is important to identify which ones of the dots give right or wrong signals (Klein et al., 2006).

As already mentioned, sensemaking starts when ongoing flow of reality is disrupted with a cue causing ambiguity that creates uncertainty regarding the outcome. A cue is a problem, event or situation that deviates from person’s expectation of reality (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In order to continue the interrupted action, individual first tries to look for reasons which caused the unexpected state. The source of interruption is dragged out from frameworks or mental maps such as institutional constraints, organizational premises, plans, expectations, acceptable justifications and previous traditions of predecessors (Weick et al., 2005).

Gacasan et al. (2016) studied how role of cues affect to project manager sensemaking. The study states that people face three kinds of cues: context, feedback and tacit knowledge. The authors divided context cues as primary and secondary sources to follow development of the
Feedback cues were generated through different communication channels such as discussion in meetings, emails and casual conversation. Moreover, through interaction with other project members (ibid.). Informal communication creates more surprising cues due to characterization as a non-routine action (Wrzeniewski et al., 2003). Feedback cues were noticed as a key cue for sensemaking due to varying nature of feedback received in both formal and informal way (Gacasan et al., 2016). Still, the absence of information was also registered as a feedback indicating a possible problem. Tacit knowledge as a cue depicts project managers ability to understand project field widely and how different elements of systems are connected (ibid.). Similar experiences from the past allow them to develop ability to use this already existing knowledge base generated through experience.

Gacasan et al. (ibid.) found out that the situation complexity and stage of the project in these three categories of cues effects the level of importance in project management (ibid.). Project manager showed high reliance on feedback cues in situation that included high complexity regardless the stage of the project. When project managers faced low complexity like, for example, in the planning phase of the project, they relied on both feedback and context cues (ibid.). In the initial phase when project starts the number of unfamiliar cues is big in order to perceive overall picture. As long as the individual is unable to decode and combine cues into maps or clear entities, time and actual space sustain as a challenge (Louis, 1980).

Maitlis (2005) talks about the concept of sensemaking as a socially constructed process where individuals try to interpret and explain sets of cues with frameworks or mental maps. These rational frameworks are scattered constructions of reality which enable people to handle ambiguity and uncertainty better by creating possibility to take action. This personal construction is made through production of new framework or activating existing ones giving a mental space to handle ambiguity or uncertainty. All in all, interaction with environment using sensemaking offers questions and answers which feed decision making. Decision making makes people face cues which causes enactment (ibid.). However, if cues do not create enactment, it does not mean that there is no meaning for the person. The meaning can be too obvious, which creates delayed action or no action at all (Weick, 1995).
2.5.4 Enactment

Sensemaking can be treated as an interaction between actors who enact with their environments. These surroundings are made meaningful by actors selecting them. This two-way exchange also creates resistance to make these environments exist (Weick et al., 2005). However, this exchange can be also one-way interplay where environment does not respond to one’s action (Weick, 1995). People enactment impacts to their environment and create new information of the current situation and enrich the senses by telling a person what is going on (Sutcliffe, 2000).

In decision-making, accuracy of person’s perception of an event increases decision quality in evaluation between alternative actions (Weick et al., 2005). However, perfect accuracy is impossible to achieve in real-life organizations due to limited amount of time, often several ongoing situations and having many alternatives simultaneously (Simon 1991; Weick et al., 2005). Thus, people do not have to have perfect accuracy while making sense in order to solve a problem or understand the situation. For instance, managers perceptions are often imprecise from given information (Mezias & Starbuck, 2003) although this data in organizational context will be converted into actionable knowledge (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995). Important notion is that plausibility of story which has been told or received, keeps person interacting which is why reaching individual level of plausibility is valuable (Weick et al., 2005).

Porac et al. (1989) case of Competitive Groups as Cognitive Communities is a good example of how people’s myopic enactment impacted to construction of the reality. The case depicts a set of Scottish knitwear companies fairly isolated and located in town of Hawick at Borders region of Scotland where producers did not see foreign competition as rivals due to biased market cues (ibid.). These biased market cues were an outcome of collective sensemaking process. Being more specific, market cues were derived by only enacting with local environment of Scottish knitwear producer, raw material providers and narrow group of customers. This led to misalignment of reality which excluded the global competition environment existing outside of Scotland. Scottish knitwear producers enacted within an environment that had a great impact of creating the meaning to their local identity through tangible artifact as knitwear. This limited their perception to look further within environment because people did not want to jeopardize their meaning. Even though, external information existed for people in the area, their sensemaking was enacted with surroundings that was tightly part of generating Hawick identity (ibid.).
2.5.5 Balance of sensemaking process: Structure and meaning

As identity work, socialization, cues and enactment are part of sensemaking process, structure and meaning are about keeping it together. The following example of The Mann Gulch Disaster puts in practice process of sensemaking in simplified form but also enables to understanding the role of structure and meaning in this entity.

Sensemaking is an attempt to create order and make sense in retrospective to understand what is happening (Weick, 1993). People try to make matters accountable for themselves and to other people to get better grasp from things occurring. Weick (ibid.) reanalyzed the case of The Mann Gulch Disaster, from structure and sensemaking point of view in small organization. The case is based on a true story happened in area of Mann Gulch at United States in 1949, where 13 smokejumpers lost their lives while fighting the wildfire (ibid.). The study outcome showed that smokejumpers lost their lives due to concurrent collapse of structure and meaning in the middle of survival having affect to sensemaking process. The case includes three main points which eventually made the structure and meaning to collapse. First, when smokejumper arrived at the scene, the fire was categorized as “10 o’clock fire” meaning that it should be in control latest next morning 10 a.m. However, fire was spread out faster and became bigger than expected. After fighting against the fire but realizing the actual situation too late, smokejumpers could make made less and less sense from what they saw (ibid.). Second, during the operation, happened change of command from original foreman, Wagner Dodge, to second in command, William Hellman, who was more familiar among the smokejumpers to following the orders than sharing them. As the role structure became unclear to the crew, foremen Dodge and his colleague enjoyed a supper in middle of fight against the fire which confused smokejumper crew interpretation regarding seriousness of the situation. Finally, when the crewmembers were surrounded by the fire and foreman ordered them to drop their tools for trying to survive, smokejumpers lost meaning as a firefighter because their identity was tightly attached to these objects (ibid.). This steady erosion of meaning and structure led Weick (ibid.) into conclusion where loss of structure caused loss of meaning returning to more loss of structure ending up in primitive actions and chaos. People need to balance between structure and meaning in order to create coherent picture what is happening. According to Weick (ibid.), when meaning starts to decline people also start to pay more attention in structure declining with the in order to retain meaning. Temporarily balancing between structure and meaning realigns both again mutually.
This balancing act can be interpreted as an oscillation where a person leans on structure and meaning in turns in order to make sense of the situation.

2.6 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The summarizing visualization (Figure 2) presents how literature review main concepts are connected. In addition, the visualization points out dependencies and interactions between involved stakeholders. However, early introduced catalysts (chapter 2.1) are generating ways of deploying human resources to produce competitive advantage for an organization. Furthermore, projectification of the work as a consequence causes liminality. Although these catalysts are one of the key points of starting liminality in person’s working environment these aspects are not mentioned in visualization. Still, they are crucial to remember.

The visualization contains two circles where grey dash circle portrays temporal project organization and solid black circle line organization as a hiring client. There are three different stakeholders included: product owner, project manager and team of experts. However, visualization is a minimalistic version of stakeholders and in the reality is more diverse incorporating more of them. In addition, product owner is a generalization of other leading organs like for example, project sponsor, steering group or CEO depending on the size of the client. Project manager is in the center of the picture inside the temporal project organization circle due to main focus of the research question. The visualization is drawn from project manager perspective unifying concepts of liminality, identity work and work-related identity and sensemaking. Being specific with how concept of liminality enacts in this Figure 2, can be state that liminality is inside the project organization where project manager is an embodiment of this betweenness. Since, project manager is conducting identity work through interaction with stakeholders in the picture and reshaping own identity to fit to the context, feeling liminality in this time period. Liminality is the experience within the project manager as transit from old identity into new one happens through reconstruction. At the same time, project manager is under ongoing sensemaking process which is tightly in symbiosis with identity work and thus are overlapping each other in the visualization. Furthermore, temporary organization causing feelings, requirements and limitations which are drawn as black arrows describing these forces affecting the project manager work.
Figure 2 Single project
Figure 3 visualizes the continuously occurring changes in project manager’s working context as assignments and thereby clients often alter. The concepts inside the circles are identical to Figure 2 prior presented. However, visualization includes two different kinds of liminality early mentioned as processual and positional. Processual liminality is happening when project manager is between projects and changing the context whereas positional liminality is the circular movement of project manager as perpetual concept. The visualization attempts to portray continuous circulation of project manager.
3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter will reveal how the study was conducted and what were the reasons behind selected methodological choices. These choices were highly relevant, since theoretical concepts and method together determine what can be learned from the study (Patton, 2015). Due to the nature of research question, this study took the form of a qualitative research strategy with a cross-sectional design. To remind, this study aimed to find out how do consultant project managers cope with liminality. Firsthand data was collected by interviewing the employees of a Finnish professional service company and the data were then analyzed by using thematic analysis technique. Arguments behind these choices are provided in detail within the following sections. The chapter ends by evaluating the scientific quality aspects of the research being conducted and considering thesis’ ontological and epistemological aspects.

3.1 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Guided by the research question, this study adopted qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research approach fits the purposes of this thesis, since qualitative approach aims to add understanding, for example, in human behavior, motivations and opinions (Shuttleworth & Wilson, 2008). In comparison, quantitative methods rely on numerical data, qualitative focus on softer dimensions, such as words (Bansal et al., 2018). Words can be in the form of, for instance, print, verbal or electronic and can collected in various of ways (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For these reasons, qualitative methods are more suitable in exploring social issues which this thesis tries to uncover. Since social reality is by nature not a static state (Pettigrew 1997), similar to that idea qualitative research highlights process thinking (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The idea of process is vital for understanding consultant project managers’ working environment, since they are constantly switching working contexts. Pettigrew (1997, p. 338) emphasizes time and context, when he states that a process is “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions and activities unfolding over time in context”. In other words, the focus becomes more ongoing and dynamic than capturing a static moment and explaining that by using variables (Bansal et al., 2018). Qualitative strategy is open-ended approach that can produce surprises and changes in directions in the research process (Bryman, 2006). Therefore, it is likely that maintaining internal coherence with research questions, data and analysis requires a lot of
rethinking during the research process (Bansal et al., 2018). For example, the actual main research question was modified along the way before reaching its’ final form.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design gives guidance on data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This thesis followed the characteristics of cross-sectional study, a common design used in qualitative research strategy (Bryman, 2006). Typical features for cross-sectional study are, for instance, that it consists of more than one case and it is done in single point of time (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, even though this study was conducted in single point of time, interviewees were able to describe events, actions and activities unfolding over time. Cross-sectional design is considered to be strong in producing descriptive findings (de Vaus, 2001). Since it is done at one point of time, the emphasis is exploring variation and differences rather than change (ibid.). This notion is well backed up by the nature of research question of this study which calls for examining the differences between consultant project managers working in liminal conditions. Moreover, the absence of time dimension in the design, in terms of collecting data, allows the researcher to draw results and conclusions relatively fast (ibid.). Considering the time and resources of this study, this was also an important factor. What differences the cross-sectional design from multiple case study, is the focus that the study takes (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study puts emphasis on generalizable findings regarding consultant project managers rather than single case context.

3.3 RESEARCH DATA

This chapter explains how the data was selected, then collected by using semi-structured interviews and finally thematically analyzed.

3.3.1 Data selection

Data selection refers to sampling. Sample is a segment of the whole population that is selected to be researched, and therefore a sample should represent the population in a best possible way depending on strategy and design of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, in this study the aim was to select a sample that represents consultant project managers. Sample can be
selected on a probability or non-probability basis. Probability sampling is more common in quantitative research and it aims to reduce sampling errors when randomly choosing the sample (ibid.). However, this study was conducted by using purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, where a sample is strategically chosen and derived from research question (ibid.).

Project managers working for a Finnish professional service company represents the sample of this study, where the primary data was collected by semi-structured interviews. The company offers demanding consultancy services in highly technical domain. The business model of the company is to sell project managers into customers’ projects as a service. Client projects involve several industries such as banking, insurance, retail, healthcare and manufacturing. However, customer projects are mostly ICT-related projects. The company operates in Southern Finland and has an annual revenue of approximately 1,2 M€. They employ ten project managers at the moment. The project managers showed between 5 to 20 years of experience working as a project manager and they were between 32 and 52 years of age. Therefore, the sample was extremely useful for the purposes of the study, since each of the participants worked as a consultant project manager within different industries.

Figure 4 Sample experience allocation
Data drawn from the sample consists of ten qualitative interviews that were conducted in Helsinki, Finland between 13\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} of March in 2019. The interviews lasted between 53 minutes and 77 minutes and were performed in semi-structural manner.

3.3.2 Data collection

Typically, in qualitative research, data is derived from some kind of fieldwork, for example interviews (Patton, 2015). Interviews aim to uncover the mechanisms that cannot be directly observed (ibid.). Moreover, interviews in qualitative research aim to produce data that can be characterized rich, detailed and deep, rather than broad and superficial (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Semi-structured interview is a flexible way of interviewing, which leaves the interviewee with a lot of space in answering questions (ibid.). This enables that the interview can take more discursive form than other types of interviews, such as structured interview or unstructured interview providing more rigid or loose structure. This choice of interview style was important for this study, since issue under examination requires uncovering personal perceptions such as feelings and experiences. According to Patton (2015), a variety of questions can be asked. He introduces question categories related to interviewee’s experiences and behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background and demographic questions. Therefore, the interview questions of this study were formed with the help of above-mentioned guidelines by Patton (ibid.) and by the literature review built to search answers to the research question.

Questions were formulated open-ended to enhance the likelihood that respondent will use his or her own words in answering questions. By own words is meant, that the interviewee would be encouraged to speak freely and broadly according one’s judgement. The amount of the questions was kept at moderate level to leave the researchers enough space and time to ask for clarification and follow-up questions. This way, each interview had similar core aspects, but at the same time semi-structured interview design allowed to capture the uniqueness of each interview by guiding the interview towards interesting directions.

Altogether, 14 interview questions were constructed focusing mostly on feelings, experiences and behavior. The formulated interview guide (Appendix 1) constituted from three themes. First theme had its origins in Sandberg’s (2000) idea that what skills and competences individuals develop and use at work is dependent of how individuals perceive their work. Therefore, first
theme of perception consisted of questions about most important tasks, feelings about stress and uncertainty, private life vs work-life – balance and what gives greatest pleasures at work. Moreover, the interviewees were asked to draw a curve that expresses their stress-levels during a typical project. Second theme covered the sensemaking activities that project managers engaged during a project. Here the focus was to find out what happens at the start of the project and how the project managers start to make sense after arriving to new working context. Moreover, under examination was what happens during the project, how interviewees spot possible problems, and interpret and communicate whether everything is going as they have planned. Last theme related to work-related identity and its changes. The aim of this section was to uncover what creates the feeling of being integrated to new project and do the project managers experience changes in themselves.

Interviews were conducted as follows. After short small talk to set a relaxed atmosphere and recap of the purpose of the study, the same 14 questions, that formulated the core of the interview, were asked from each participant. The authors were careful that singular questions were asked, meaning that only one question was asked at a time to reduce possible tension and uncertainty (Patton, 2015). Questions were presented exactly the same way, but not necessarily in the same order, which is another feature of semi-structured interview, according to Bryman and Bell (2015). This way transitions between questions and themes were kept smooth to increase the natural flow and discursive atmosphere of the interview (Patton, 2015). During the interviews, one of the researchers led the interview, while the other listened carefully, made notes and was ready to ask for follow-up questions and clarifications. Interviews were conducted in Finnish language, since the interviewees and researchers were both Finnish natives. Moreover, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.3.3 Data analysis

Interpreting the collected data is central in qualitative research (Flick, 2009). Analyzing qualitative data is one kind of state of the art, since there are no strict rules how to do it (Patton, 2015). However, some guidelines exist (ibid.). One of the challenging points is that qualitative approach usually creates large amount of rich data (Shuttleworth & Wilson, 2008). Patton (2015) advices that the goal should be to separate signals from the noise. In more specific and ambitious words, explain the connection between process and outcome (Pettigrew, 1997). To spot signals from the noise, this study adopted the approach of thematic analysis, which consists
that researcher aims to recognize themes and sub-themes and then finds connections between them (ibid.). This was suitable for the purposes of this study, since it offered flexibility to work with themes found from the data with the help of theory, and it has no rigid steps or procedures (ibid.).

A theme is something that answers to the question “what is this expression an example of?” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Moreover, themes are categories emerging from the data that relate to researcher’s focus and can contribute to theoretical understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes can be searched from, for instance, repetitions, similarities and differences, theory-related concepts or even from something that is not being said out loud during the interviews.

Data analysis of this study followed several advices of others by starting it early right after the interviews were conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Patton 2015). Interviews were listened again and transcribed shortly after the interview was conducted. This allowed the researchers’ iterative travelling between data and theory to deepen the understanding of aspects emerging from the data. Therefore, it was also possible to improve the quality of the interviews towards the end. Once researchers got more acquainted with the data, during the second and third round of listening and after discussions between the researchers, begun the coding process. According to Flick (2009), the main purpose of coding process is to understand the gathered material by creating categories and putting them into an order that makes sense. An Excel document was created where all the answers from different interviewees were grouped under each question with a note of which participant actually said it. One important aspect in this phase of data analysis is the possible data fragmentation, meaning that if parts considered interesting are taken out of context it can create false understanding by interrupting the narrative dimension of data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This was avoided by indicating clear note about the context when giving codes. Furthermore, following the advice of Patton (2015), data were analyzed with clear purpose in mind to connect findings into literature review and research question.

During the first phase of thematic analysis, everything in the interview transcripts that was considered interesting and meaningful in understanding project managers’ job was given a code. These were, for example, words, descriptions of feelings and behavior, and examples from work-life. This initial phase also contained grouping codes into more general categories. The aim at this point was to find enough homogeneity within the categories and enough
heterogeneity between the categories (ibid.). At this point, some of the codes were abandoned. This happened mainly because a code was rare, or it did not fit into any relevant category according to the researchers’ judgement. Second phase consisted of finding patterns and connections between the categories. At this stage, some of the categories started to show more relevance compared to other categories in understanding overall causes and consequences of described behavior. Since this study seeks understanding of the research question through literature review, the third phase consisted of connecting the categories developed in the second phase to theoretical themes of the interview guide. These were namely perception, sensemaking and identity. After careful consideration, it was decided to create a four-field matrix to be able to show the interesting variance between the interviewees. In this matrix perception and sensemaking formed the axes, while the third notions of third theme, identity, are presented in the matrix.

This kind of process described above starts from close to text and gains more abstract form when advancing towards theory through the phases (Flick, 2009), and it was considered particularly helpful in order to organize and increase understanding of collected data. This process will get visible form, when it is presented with the actual content later in the analysis (chapter 4).

3.4 RESEARCH QUALITY ASPECTS

The valued basic principle of science is its pursuit of objectivity. The general criticism towards qualitative research in social sciences concerns its subjective approach, meaning that researchers are always biased to a certain degree because of their preunderstanding of investigated matter, background, values and so on (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The aim of this section is to assess the quality aspects of this study by considering reliability, validity, ethical aspects and limitations of the study.

3.4.1 Reliability

The concept of reliability is related to replicability. Ideally, this means that the study could be repeated, and it would provide the same results again (de Vaus, 2001). However, this effect is almost impossible to produce in social world, since social situations cannot be perfectly
replicated and arranged or observed again (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Of course, this does not mean that reliability could not be enhanced. Several steps have been taken to improve the reliability of this study.

The most important thing to improve reliability is represented in the whole methodology chapter, which is as transparent as possible in describing the whole research process. In a systematic manner it uncovers the reasoning behind chosen research strategy and design as well as selecting, collecting and analyzing the data. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), multiple observers can also enhance the reliability of a study. This advice was certainly followed, since the study was conducted by a team of two researchers. Particularly during the interviews this improved the quality when there was an extra pair of eyes observing, asking follow-up questions and clarification. Furthermore, the research process included plenty of discussions between researchers of deciding the research strategy, design, analyzing and interpreting the data which researchers had to agree on at the end. The research process also included numerous peer reviews of fellow students with constructive feedback which was gladly considered by the researchers. Moreover, one trial interview was arranged 11th of March 2019. This gave the opportunity to practice the flow of the interview and after that interview questions were also fine-tuned by researchers.

The interview questions were sent beforehand to the interviewees, with short introduction of the purposes of the study. This was done to make sure that interviewees would have some time to prepare for the interviews, since potential source of biased data relies in the possibility that interviewees would have no opinions (de Vaus, 2001). This choice proved to be successful and interviewees were well prepared.

3.4.1 Validity

Validity is more suitable measure for qualitative research, since it can be better evaluated than reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Validity concerns the findings of the study. Internal validity describes the connection between the notions made during the research and the claims and ideas researchers make out of them (Bryman & Bell, 2015; de Vaus, 2001). External validity considers to what extent the findings and ideas developed through the study can be generalized more widely to describe other settings as well (Bryman & Bell, 2015; de Vaus, 2001).
Referring to internal validity, according to de Vaus (2001) the whole logic and structure of research should aim to help favor one explanation over the other when considering what the observations are about. Following the advice of Patton (2015), the whole analytical process was documented. This meant that researchers were able to consider and reconsider the choices made during the way in the pursuit of best possible explanations for the emerged findings. The analysis of the study consists of two parts, where the first part of similarities (chapter 4.1) and differences (chapter 4.2) are more descriptive, whereas the second part moves towards more interpretive approach presenting a framework (chapter 4.3) of project manager types found. However, despite these types including interpretation, they are backed up by reflection with theory, empirical findings and translations from the interviews. This is important because for a researcher to produce interesting and significant results, researcher “is not there as a mere mouthpiece” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 598). Therefore, the researchers of this study argue that if efforts would be made to replicate this study and explore project managers working in liminal conditions through identity and sensemaking lens, explanations made in this study would at least partially be represent again.

The main obstacle of generalizing findings of the study to describe other social settings as well, is unrepresentative sample (de Vaus, 2001). This means that, in such situation, the sample would fail to represent larger population. In general, sample sizes in qualitative research are quite small (Patton, 2015). The sample represented in this study consists of ten rather experienced project managers. Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that the more homogeneous the population, the smaller the sample size can be. It can be assumed that population of consultant project managers as occupational group are relatively more homogenous than many other occupational groups due to the high expertise and experience needed in successful execution of the task. In addition, interviewed project managers work independently from each other at client locations performing project manager tasks. Therefore, it can be argued that this study is able to produce generalizable findings. Furthermore, whereas building a framework of project manager archetypes contains interpretation, it also is a minor step towards generalization which adds on to the generalization aspect of the study. The aspect of generalization can be seen as one kind of trade-off, as Eisner (2001) made a notion that important aspect of qualitative research is to produce comparability and it should not be seen just through the lens of generalization.
3.4.3 Considering ethical aspects

Ethical aspects should be also considered when conducting research. These aspects are mostly focused on making sure that the participants’ interests are covered. Central aspects when considering participants are privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and avoidance of harm to participants (de Vaus, 2001; Flick, 2009).

Considering privacy, only the issues that were considered to effect on research reliability, validity and other important contextual matters are revealed. For example, age and working experience of the respondents was considered being valuable information when assessing the perspective of the respondents. Furthermore, revealing general information about the organization and where it operates, was considered adding on reliability and validity of the research. However, revealing this information does still guarantee the anonymity of the organization and the interviewees. Regarding confidentiality, the data from the interviews were handled with extreme caution. The data were not handled in any cloud-based tools but saved in researchers own computers protected by passwords. Furthermore, interviewees real names were not used, and interviewees were given a codename, since they still needed to be recognized.

Informed consent refers to the aspect that interviewees were given a freedom of choice whether to participate or not to the research (Flick, 2009). Before that general background information about the study was provided to the interviewees along with the purposes of the study. However, as said, this information needed to be rather general, since the researchers wanted to make sure that too much pre-information would not affect the interviewees answering. After taken these actions, it can be concluded that no harm was caused to interviewees when participating in this research.

3.4.4 Limitations

Despite the researcher’s efforts to enhance the quality of research, there are always some limitations. All qualitative studies are unique to some degree and are therefore based on opinions and judgement. The interviews of this study were conducted in Finnish language and then translated into English. A professional translator was not used during this translation process. This choice was done, since both interviewers and interviewees were native Finnish speakers. Therefore, it was considered that the quality could be enhanced by allowing to capture
interviewees’ specific expressions in their native language. In other words, while interviewing in Finnish enhanced the quality of interviews, translating answers into English represents potential limitation. However, it can be said that the level of translation is at least moderate, since the researchers study in master program taught in English.

In addition, the sample of this study consists of Finnish project managers. Therefore, Finnish culture is affecting the way project managers answered to interview questions. Finnish people form a small nation in Northern Europe and thereby their credibility in describing wider population can be questioned. According to Hofstede Insights (2019), in work-life Finnish people value equal rights, direct and participative communication from the leaders, decentralization of power and merit over organizational politics. In comparison over Western giants, such as USA, UK and Germany, these values are widely shared among these countries. Maybe the biggest difference among these countries is that Finnish people are, compared to mentioned counterparts, motivated more on the basis liking what they are doing instead of intense competition (ibid.).

Since the researcher is the research instrument in qualitative study, it is polite to say something about the researchers as well (Patton, 2015). This research team consisted of two Finnish male students, who were not professional researchers. Previous experience of research work of this magnitude is limited to Bachelor thesis. Both researchers have several years of working experience in banking.

3.4.5 Considering ontology and epistemology

“The way we think the world is (ontology), influences: what we think can be known about it (epistemology)” (Fleetwood, 2005, p. 1). After reading the above quote, it becomes clear that ontology and epistemology are somewhat inseparable. They together form a philosophical standpoint from where a study can be evaluated. Both ontology and epistemology can be understood objectively or subjectively. When ontology is understood objectively, the reality can exist independently apart from social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and therefore it can be neutrally observed and accessed (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). On the other hand, when ontology is viewed subjectively, human cognitive processes produce the reality (ibid.). Furthermore, subjectivist ontology emphasizes that a reality is socially constructed and constantly molded by social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Weick, 1995).
Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and the relation that researcher might have to the knowledge. Objective understanding of epistemology refers to the assumption that there is a theory-neutral observational language (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) and social reality can be studied by similar to natural science methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Subjective view of epistemology suggests that social reality needs to be studied differently and aim for understanding the subjective meanings of social actors. This means that for the subjective stance of epistemology, instead of explaining human behavior the goal is rather to understand human behavior (ibid.).

This thesis examines the behavior of project managers. Moreover, thesis aims to shed light on the approaches and attitudes that enables project managers to cope with liminality. Considering ontological view of this thesis, these managers form parts of workforce in client organizations where they follow rules and pursue targets set by someone else. Although their perceptions of environments vary, this stance signals that there is an external reality independent from social actors (ibid.). Moreover, this thesis sees consultant project managers as an occupational group, not as specific individuals.

When thinking about epistemological standpoint of this thesis, it can be argued that, in answering the research question more weight has been given to explaining rather than to understanding the choices made by the participants. This is supported by methodological choice of using cross-sectional design derived from the research question (de Vaus, 2001). Furthermore, strong deductive elements, grounding understanding of the investigated phenomenon on existing theory, provide more objectivity in the thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This supports the generalization of the findings that are presented in chapter 4.
4 ANALYSIS

This part of the thesis will lift up the most interesting aspects from the gathered data relating to research question. These aspects contain similarities and differences between the interviewed project managers. The analysis has high emphasis on differences due to their value answering the research question. However, some similarities will also be introduced since they reveal important aspects as well. The analysis consists three parts and is structured as follows. First, the important similarities between the project managers are viewed. Second part shows the major differences between the project managers. For clarity, these similarities and differences are introduced through the same themes, perception of work and sensemaking. To further illustrate the differences, of how the interviewees cope with liminality, the third part of the analysis sets the two major themes in a four-field matrix. This matrix further describes the interesting variance between the interviewed project managers, and forms project manager archetypes that were recognized from the analyzed data.

4.1 SIMILARITIES

This chapter shows the relevant similarities among the respondents related to research question.

4.1.1 Perception

During the interviews it became clear that the role of consultant project managers was experienced ambiguous in the middle of many stakeholders. The interviewees were widely aware of these aspects and highlighted the meaning of communication and sharing knowledge in their work. They saw themselves in the middle between experts and management, product owner or steering group where information was flowing daily between both ends. Moreover, they acted as a translator to these ends translating high level business vision from project steering group to pragmatic needs to implement into product or service through executing team and vice versa. The below interview translations describe how the interviewees generally felt their role as a project manager.

If you don't discuss and communicate with people, it is impossible to get along in project-based environment. It doesn't matter how good you are otherwise. One needs to be present, take others into consideration and be able to move around in
the organization. This way you understand how the organization works and then you can organize the project.

Project manager B

My job is to interpret and clarify the customer’s expectations. Sometimes the customer’s goals can be very business-driven and then it’s very important that the project manager is able to translate this for something concrete, so that every team member understands what is expected and they can create tasks for themselves. And then everything needs to be monitored, continuous loop between the customer and the team is vital. This keeps me on the map what my team is doing and why.

Project manager C

Another common experience among the interviewees was related to stress, uncertainty and haste. These were aspects that all of the interviewees experienced during their work. Moreover, these matters also have their effect on private life and work-life balance. It was recognized that it is an area that needs to be acknowledged and actively handled. However, these things were not seen in purely positive or negative light, but rather under impression that it is typical for the job of project manager.

I find myself even seeking for stress and uncertainty into my job. I can’t see myself working with routines for longer periods. It is sort of a cliché, but I feel I need these to be at my best. Otherwise I might even feel that it’s hard to make the minimum effort.

Project manager N

There is always the feeling of uncertainty at first, but then you get to know with people.

Project manager Z

Of course, all this effect my private life. The more stress, the harder it is to sleep when things at work stays in the head. It requires that you really know yourself.

Project manager C

During work it is hard to relieve the stress. Of course, achieving some milestones during the project helps a little. I cannot deny that this would not affect to my private life.

Project manager D

At the beginning of the project, there is more “load”. I can open my work computer at home in the beginning so that certain things can go ahead and move. However,
this should not be done for a long time. I allow it within certain limits to get things started or if there's a crisis situation.

Project manager B

As illustrated in the above interview translations, all the interviewees described predominant and ongoing challenges between balance of private life and work. Interviewees were either having a hard time to separate work and private life or did not even try to do so. The various of ways project managers tried to deal with work stress revolved around hobbies, family and friends. This shift from old project to a new one had a clear affect obscuring line between the project managers’ private life and work due to a big chunk of unfamiliar matters. This shows the liminal position, as consultant project manager possesses, between organizations and cross-functional teams for time-limited periods facing ambiguous beginnings of projects. The interviewed project managers recognized exponential stress and ambiguity in the beginning of the assignments when portraying their projects through. The stress was described emerging from undone work which caused haste and pressure.

4.1.2 Sensemaking

As already mentioned, the interviewed project managers highly emphasized communication and sharing information in order to be able to successfully operate as project manager. The interviewed project managers handle constant uncertainty and ambiguity when they were determined to steer project toward its objective and vision, while using both sensebreaking and sensegiving as a part of their communication. Sensebreaking was shown in communicating common vision to other stakeholders in order to mold common understanding and gain support to reach the set objectives in surroundings. Moreover, sensegiving was generated though wide range of means, for example, through informal conversations, formal meeting discussion, telephone calls or emails. The interviewed project managers put a big emphasis on recognizing key actors in project, whose influence or expertise had a big impact on project outcomes. Among these actors, the interviewees often searched for “a guru” or a leading architect to get contact for gaining a broad pragmatic overview. These actors were usually people with great technical expertise or individuals who had been a long time in the client’s organization.

Clear communication is absolutely essential if you want to succeed. Here, many stakeholders are always involved.
Is the steering group meeting once a month or twice a month? How long and who will attend the meetings? I talk with stakeholders, whether communication to other vendors is conducted independently or are the messages always going through the customer involvement. The ways of communication are the things what begins to create the structure.

One area that project managers showed similarities was related to enactment. It became very clear that it was felt by project managers that client anticipates that a project manager will engage quickly and had to be able to lead the project, even though the project manager comes from outside the organization and works as a consultant. This demand was felt even though the interviewees did not know the specifics of the projects. Action was clearly perceived as a key driver by the interviewees in order to create ability to make complicated projects successful. This was done igniting a loop between action and interpretations resulting from actions. Following translations describe thoughts about enactment.

You just simply need to start doing. If you make a mistake, then it needs to be corrected. One just goes through it and revise the direction.

Usually project starts without full understanding of the environment and the project itself. My own and my team’s knowledge grows as we continue. It is okay, that is the way it goes. I find this natural.

Ambiguous setting, felt by the interviewees, was often dealt with an effort to divide it into smaller more understandable components to grasp the essence of what is going on in the environment. This was done by prioritizing of handling the tasks that were thought effecting a lot in others. Another idea was to pick easy and visible tasks in the beginning in order to get some parts of the work ready.

In projects we get approval for decisions and make decisions. If I go into a big fuzzy new project which seems blurry, I can start taking those little things out of there and begin to create visibility and structure.
Regarding enactment, project managers showed a strong need to make plausible sense out of what is happening in the project. Worth noticing, as a similarity between the project managers, was the interviewed project managers’ desire to have a sufficient understanding regarding the technical issues without going too much in detail sustaining team’s own area of expertise. Project managers knew the fact that clients expected certain level of understanding which was already promised while hiring them for the assignment. Interestingly, when asked for clarification, all the project managers showed similarities in the estimation that they were aware of 60-70% of the details that was going on in the project. They also stated that while they might like to know more, it is not possible or even relevant since the goal is to advance the project in best possible way.

Important anchor points for the interviewed project managers’ foundation of plausibility were aspects like budget, time and quality. This was because these aspects were seen as vital responsibility areas in executing project manager’s job. In addition, interviewed project managers remarked examples when situation or view was unclear or fuzzy, they often returned to context cues such as to self-made task list or documents, such as checklists, project maps or implementation plans in order to analyze and then to solve the situation by organizing the confusion of ongoing things into understandable clusters.

*I would be stressed if I wouldn't know what was going on in the project. I have to have a good understanding of what to do.*

Project manager K

*Although the work might be administrative, the customer expects technical understanding. I don't want to be the one who doesn't understand anything at some meeting.*

Project manager X

*If someone comes and asks where we are going in the project, a project manager needs to be able to comment budget, time and quality.*

Project manager D

4.1.3 Identity work

Similarities were also found in identity work being something that interviewees needed to engage. All the interviewed project managers acknowledged and endorsed the fact that they
come outside of the organization which sets them always in a different position than other internal stakeholders. It was felt that liminal spaces exist parallel between organizational and social structure where borders were fluid and hard to define. Thus, the interviewed project managers occupy liminal space where they were neither in the client organization nor their employer.

_In some assignments I have felt like a "second-class citizen"._

Project manager K

_Of course, each has its own ways to create a particular structure for the project. If I consider myself, it is important to get to know people at the top level and understanding my own role; for example, if it requires more interactions with experts or satisfying management. This may change the setting._

Project manager D

As it can be seen from above translations, interviewees encountered in the beginning of the project an urge to define their own role and often a straightforward need to map out other stakeholders which had practical value for the assignment through discourse. This involved formal and informal debate with different people regarding the assignment. In the liminal phase, it was experienced that individuals were in a challenging transition using wide range of identities and confronting contrast between previously used identities while reconstructing of a new one. As interviewees described how they started to create structure shows, that individuals were under constant ongoing identity work, dialogue inwardly and outwardly maintaining or reshaping self-presentation. The personal narrative of the interviewed project managers was influenced by other narratives created by people through discourse.

Since the interviewed project managers had extensive knowledge and a long background working as a consultant, they exuded certain confidence in their own competencies and kept simplicity as a focal point even in complicated matters. Furthermore, the interviewees stated that all projects included unexpected events in some point. Tacit knowledge, gathered from previous experiences, were seen particularly helpful. The interviewees always wanted to find a solution and not add feelings of uncertainty among the stakeholder or make them nervous regarding the solution while searching for it. This was seen as an important aspect, since possible uncertainty could increase nervousness. The interviewed project managers encountered unexpected events or confusion systematically being able to balance between
meaning and structure. This oscillation between meaning and structure kept their sensemaking together in the working environment and ability to keep identity work ongoing. Experience also made the interviewees see themselves rather as an external help than a talented consultant for each project stakeholder group making sure that the project is successful. This kind of positioning was felt increasing positivity in overall atmosphere in projects. This was seen resulting in better handling of stress and positive outcomes regarding project goals.

*If I don’t know what to do… for a moment I stop doing things and at least try not to be nervous about the situation. A little break can help if you are at home or you can start sparring with someone at work. You might easily start to wrestle with some simple things alone. I must go and talk with someone. I usually tell the problem to my team members. By telling it to another (person), the answer may come in that moment.*

Project manager Z

All in all, project managers found their way to reconstruct own identity through identity work regarding their work. The interviews showed that eventually project managers were able to find a state to be totally functional and help the team. This state can be interpreted from identity authenticity point of view where the internal ambitions and needs were express in the work environment which were accepted by other stakeholders. Interviewees long careers state repetition of this successful identity work and still working as consultant project manager.

4.1.4 Summary

A coherent illustration of typical project, felt by the interviewees, can be portrayed via stress-curve. The interviewees showed remarkable resemblance when they were asked to draw a typical stress-curve (Figure 5) during projects. Stress derivatives when interviewees either mentioned different factors or sources which created stress and ambiguity packing them in to extreme ends of project. The stress derived in the beginning from ambiguity and in the end from emerging deadline compounded with unfinished work. As project managers’ stress-curve indicates, all interviewees identified more stable stage in the middle of the project called implementation phase. Implementation preceded by the interviewed project managers’ identity work through socialization and interaction between project managers and other stakeholders in order to reach and maintain common understanding of project objectives and development degree. Hence, common understanding was established, less sensemaking and identity work was needed, and stress levels started to decrease.
There is more uncertainty in the beginning when you do not understand the client's business and organization what is sought in the client's mandate. Pressure and stress are involved in a certain way at the beginning and at the end, because in the middle phase we can only implement the project and have already got little bit into it and understand it so then stress and haste are not that much in present.

Project manager A

As a recap to further clarify the above Figure 5, the curve describes how stress typically rises in the beginning of the project. This usually ends when project managers felt integrated to the project and the phase of processual liminality comes to an end. This particular point will be opened up in further sections, since it showed variance between the interviewees. Then follows the phase of “business as usual”, which was usually described as not that stressful, once milestones were met. At the end, stress rises as the deadline gets closer. When stress is on the rise at the beginning, according to interviewees it is related to uncertainty. Uncertainty rises from the environment of unfamiliar new project context, new people and a lot new information to be quickly absorbed. However, the stress at the end of the typical project was not caused by uncertainty in the same sense. While there might be uncertainty involved, the stress at the end was mainly caused by workload, meaning there is just simply haste. It was mentioned by the interviewees that towards the deadline, workload typically grows, but usually efficiency of the project team grows simultaneously. One important notion was that the project managers believed and speculated, that this stress-curve would distinguish them from the project worker.
level. It was widely assumed by the interviewees that this stress portrayed in the early stage of the project would relate specifically to project manager, and not the expert team in general. This was due to the nature of tasks of project manager in the beginning, where lot of prioritizing and organizing of work needs to be done with inadequate information.

Overall, the interviewed project managers clearly demonstrated common experiences of liminality proving the usefulness of selected research sample. The interviewees expressed both, positive and negative feelings towards liminality caused by temporary work. Positive feelings related to freedom, learning and meeting new people. On the other hand, uncertainty, stress, workload and effects on balance between work-life and private life were seen as disadvantages. Moreover, the interviewed project managers recognized their mediating role in the middle of many stakeholders. Operating in this position requires communication and sharing information. The interviewed project managers demonstrated notable similarities when it comes to enactment in sensemaking, since it was widely perceived that the nature of the job as a consultant project manager was that projects start with inadequate information. Similarities were also spotted in plausibility when it came to awareness about technical details during projects. However, the overall level of plausibility was perceived differently when discussing integration and acceptance as a part of new team. This will be analyzed later whereas the analysis now shifts the focus into differences between the interviewed project managers.

4.2 DIFFERENCES

This chapter continues the analysis by moving on to the major differences found in the interviews. As already explained in the introduction of the analysis chapter, also the differences are described through the two main themes, perception of work and sensemaking. Together these dimensions formulate the individuals’ tools in coping with liminality. Below (Figure 6) graphic illustration shows the main themes in two axes. The analysis will end by developing more complete version of the presentation below.
4.2.1 Perception

As it can be remembered from similarities, all of the interviewed project managers perceived their role in the middle of many stakeholders, effected by many forces, and requiring clear communication and sharing information. However, when further asked what things project managers felt being the most important in order to execute this role successfully, differences started to occur. For many of the interviewed project managers, the meaning of trust and trust building were seen as vital success factors. Therefore, the following translations will address the meaning of trust.

*All stakeholders must feel that you are the right person for the job.*

Project manager B

*In order to get a successful project, you need to get the client’s trust. Of course, there is some trust at the management-level, because the client has ordered the job from your company, but they need to notice soon that you can do the job. I mean,*
especially the team that you’re working with. It’s important for getting the project going to the direction you want.

Project manager D

Trust is essential, because if you don’t have it from all stakeholders, then you don’t have anything. If you think about the team spirit and the whole atmosphere there, they are important parts of delivering the results and also that you aren’t just surviving there.

Project manager X

The interviewed project managers demonstrated various of ways in trust building. This was something that was mentioned constantly in systematic manner. Since trust was seen important, it is natural that trust building was also something worth constant efforts. Next interview translations will view some of the ways project managers mentioned how to build the trust.

It starts already in the first contact, which can be already before day 1 actually start working in the client location. Being proactive is important, you start to build network and trust by showing activity.

Project manager D

When it comes to trust building, I try to show the kind of attitude that I’m here to help the best way I can. Both, the customer as a whole and the experts in the project team.

Project manager X

Usually people think that a consultant shouldn’t be asking what to do, because that’s something that is expected that consultant knows already. But I’ve found that it’s a good way, this kind of openness and honesty creates trust.

Project manager B

In comparison to the importance of trust, another aspect of perceiving the work of project manager revolved more around the classical project management triangle of budget, time and quality. Especially the first two dimensions were highlighted by the interviewees. Quality was considered more as something that can be negotiated during project, for example, by rethinking the scope of the project.

Budgeting and making sure that the deadline holds is extremely important. There is always a reason why something is done in a particular project. One of the most
important drivers for that is the money. There is no way around that. And then there is the schedule, when it has to be ready. And usually it will take until the last day.

Project manager K

Budget and time are what guide these projects, whether you like it or not. I haven’t seen any project where the client says that “make us this thing no matter what it costs”. There’s always the budget from the client and the deadline when they need it. If you don’t master these two things, it’s easy to blame the project manager, if the project fails to deliver.

Project manager C

Interestingly, what was also discovered, was that it seemed that project managers that perceived their work through more hard values (budget, time/schedule and decision making) found it sometimes easier to separate work and private life and get rid of the work-related thoughts during free time. Furthermore, it was recognized by the researchers that project managers who viewed the essential parts of their job through softer values, such as trust building and communicating, possessed more social attitude and approach towards the job. In comparison, project managers who perceived classic triangle of budget, time and quality as essential part, demonstrated more technical approach when describing what actually happens in the workplace. The interviewed project managers, characterized by technical approach, showed strong reliance in project management systems and tools. Thereby, it can be stated that perception of work divided into two different categories, technical and social perceptions of work. The first two translations below illustrate social approach and the two latter ones show example of technical approach.

It’s easy to notice that the overall atmosphere improves when you give time to other type of discussion as well, not just hours or euros.

Project manager B

For me, hard and soft dimensions are not mutually exclusive. You should have the soft values and the people always with you, since the atmosphere effects to quality. That’s why I put effort in communication and try talk much with the core team and try to get to know them as persons as well.

Project manager K

When using the right method, the quality comes almost automatically.

Project manager E
Agile methods have helped in starting projects, when you don’t quite know what to do. And also, when the goal is defined vaguely, then Scrum and SAFe helps.

Project manager E

4.2.2 Sensemaking

These differences among attitudes and approaches demonstrated by the interviewed project managers can also be seen clearly when project managers talked about how they start to make sense and organize the work after arriving to new working context at the start of new project. First translation below demonstrates social approach, second one shows technical approach.

I go and discuss with other people and I try to understand the environment. I ask people about their roles… from customer’s employees but also from suppliers. Architects can help with technical things. I ask myself “what happens here?” It’s also to show interest by asking good questions. The understanding starts to build through observations from these discussions.

Project manager X

I start by organizing where to register the requirements and specifications, and where the history is kept. That needs to be clear. And what tools the team will use, is it SharePoint, Microsoft Teams, Confluence or JIRA and so on… It’s important that everyone knows and have access to information.

Project manager Y

Similar distinction continues when interviewees talked about what forms structure to the project. It was widely agreed that the interviewed project managers needed structure for the project so that it could be efficiently managed. The first two interview translations below show social attitude whereas the third one demonstrates technical one.

Through people when you understand their roles in the organization and how you can use these people. I mean in the organization, not just in the project. And also, for example suppliers. This way kind of like task areas start to formulate.

Project manager B

If it’s missing, basic structure can be created through how you run the meetings. How often are board meetings with client, once or twice a month for example. Then with your own team, how long you want them, who attends and so on. Communication is the way to start building structure.

Project manager A
The system offers many occasions for people to say what they think, for example retrospective meetings.

Project manager E

Sensemaking during projects was also noted during interviews. These sensemaking processes varied between individual and collective sensemaking. These occasions usually were spotted when interviewees discussed decision making in general or situations where project plans were under construction. Moreover, moments where projects ran into situations where it was unclear how to continue or how project managers interpret or internally explained to themselves that everything was going into the right direction were also mentioned. The first two interview translations below picture individual emphasis in sensemaking whereas latter two illustrate collective approach in sensemaking.

*Experience helps in decision making, sometimes I can trust my intuition. You can’t take too long with decisions.*

Project manager E

*I use the help and knowledge of experts and stakeholders, but usually it’s my decision. I prioritize and chop things into smaller parts to figure out what’s next.*

Project manager N

*I prefer making the project plan together with the team. When you do it together, it increases commitment. It’s harder to create commitment and trust, when you come outside as a consultant, but even more important.*

Project manager K

*We create the picture (status of the project) interactively together, I don’t do it alone. This way I make sure that I’m not building a bubble for myself, instead I want to make use of the expertise in the team. This is how I make myself wiser as well. People tell more than documents, documents can lie.*

Project manager D

Remembering from the general perception of the project manager’s role by the interviewees, as communicating and sharing information were recognized as central ingredients of being able to successfully manage projects, some differences occurred in this area. On one hand, part of the project managers thought that sharing all the information is a good thing and is enough to keep everyone informed. On the other hand, some of the interviewees showed filtering of
information. Filtering here refers to activities that some of the interviewees actively shaped the information going to the project team. These aspects refer to different levels of sensengiving activities used by project managers. The first two interview translations below demonstrate open way of sharing information, whereas the latter two show active sensengiving where the project manager tries to effect others’ perception of situation.

*I see that communication works the best way when it’s as open as possible. I think that today people filter information way too much.*

Project manager N

*You need to share the information and be open. I’ve learned that I quickly share everything without minding spelling mistakes. Important thing is to share. Usually everything goes to whole team, unless there is something really sensitive.*

Project manager Y

*I try to think about the information when I pass it forward. Because what happens sometimes is that small things become big, even though they aren’t so. That’s how the team doesn’t have to worry when I see what information goes to them. You don’t need to bother them with small things.*

Project manager B

*What I usually do, if I pass on the whole information, is that I try to write a summary in the beginning where I clarify the main points and what is expected from whom. It saves time for experts and is also polite.*

Project manager A

### 4.2.3 Identity work

This part focuses on describing the phase when the interviewed project managers felt integrated and accepted to new working context, the new project. As remembered from the similarities stress-curve (Figure 5), the interviewed project managers were consistent in their views about projects in general when it comes to phases. It was perceived that projects consist of beginning, middle and end. The middle part was commonly described as the phase of “doing” or “business as usual”. This phase with many milestones rarely presented major surprises, at least not big enough to be described anything other than just normal. However, interviewees had some differences in terms how they described the transition between the beginning and the middle phase. This is the phase that was promised to come back to. These issues, of feeling integrated,
were noticed when the project managers discussed areas such as what makes them feel that they are accepted in the new environment, how do they interpret that and how they pictured the situation when uncertainty starts to decline after arriving to new context. Below translations portray the variation between the interviewed project managers in terms of what kind of cues they interpret and the level of plausibility with mental frameworks form the feeling of being integrated.

*I see that because development is monitored all the time, that if you get good feedback in retrospective meetings, things are moving forward, and people are satisfied. When it is like that, I know I’m in and accepted.*

Project manager E

*At first, there is a lot of uncertainty, because of all the new people you meet, lot of information and knowledge, but you worry about what’s the right knowledge. But after a while when you see these people, you recognize their roles and what they can do, then the uncertainty starts to decline.*

Project manager D

Identity work regarding project managers work-related identity differed between interviewees. How they described own social interaction with the stakeholders varied. Some interviewees needed more interplay between other people involved in order to start to feel comfortable in the next working context. The struggle moving from old identity to new one required for some interviewees voluntarily predispose themselves for more cues than other. Moreover, the work-related identity was reshaped more in one-to-one settings for those who asked for more interplay with product owner or team of experts. Interviewees who searched for more interaction between stakeholders demanded more action to reach authenticity regarding their identity in the end. Some interviewees reached authenticity with less interaction.

*I think it’s the moment when you’ve created connections to the environment and the team and the doing starts. That they know you and you know them. The feeling when you arrive there in the morning and say hello to everyone as they would be almost your friends, not just experts. You can talk about the game yesterday or something like that.*

Project manager A

*For example, an email from the client organization with direct feedback, or someone taps on your shoulder when we’re standing by the coffee machine, which is kind of a silent approval.”*

Project manager C
Maybe it’s something you notice when people come and talk to you and ask about things without a request. That they don’t just think everything on their own but are kind of like seeking for some guidance.

Project manager Y

Interesting difference also in the sample group was how identity work was done between self-identity and social-identity to achieve plausible narrative. Although self-identity can be seen more as a stable form compared to social one, identity reconstruction for some interviewees clearly happened seeking plausibility from inside by preferring to do decision independently without other stakeholders if it was possible in the work setting. Some interviewees searched for support for own narrative from social interplay involving other people to get consensus for the decision. Moreover, there were also interviewees which could not be pointed out only to one group previously mentioned as they alternated between self-identity and social-identity.

We have created a relationship between me and other stakeholders to discuss about things. We can spar, twist and turn things regarding to project together. All sides quickly accept if a bad solution has been made. Transparency in the discussion and the team trusts that the project manager knows the boundaries of doing that through conversation.

Project manager B

4.3 FOUR-FIELD MATRIX – LIMINALITY PRACTICES OF CONSULTANT PROJECT MANAGERS

As promised in the introduction of the chapter 4.2, this final part of the analysis of differences completes graphical illustration started in the beginning of previous section. It will do so by setting the two major themes, perception of work and sensemaking into four-field matrix (Figure 7). This matrix then provides an illustration of project manager archetypes portraying their approaches and means in coping with liminality. Depending on the working attitude and approach towards the job, and sensemaking emphasis being individual or collective, these archetypes are named the realist, the connector, the performer and the moderator. In the matrix, the biggest differences can be noted between the connector and the performer. While presenting the matrix and the archetypes involves minor generalization and interpretation, each of the interviewed project managers could be roughly pointed into one category.
Even though the word *liminality* is not mentioned in Figure 7, it is important to keep in mind that everything that will be described through the archetypes below, takes place in liminal environments. Therefore, the archetypes represent different means of coping with liminality.

4.3.1 The realist

*The realist* project manager’s practices consist of combining social attitude and approach towards work and individual sensemaking emphasis. *The realist* can be best described by being the strong engine of the project who makes sure that the project will meet its goals.

*I have a strong urge to progress things by doing and get them finished. It all comes down to communication and being convincing.*

Project manager N
This strong urge, seen in the above translation, calls for realistic and pragmatic approach whereas strong prioritizing considering project scope plays vital part in order to get things done in time. This shows in decision making where decisions are made by self if possible, relying on experience. This way the realist helps the project to move forward as quickly as possible. The realist accepts the minor risks possibly taken while working this way.

*Usually I prioritize things on my own before taking them to others. I discuss with the client that what kind of scope is possible in this schedule. On bigger issues, I seek for acceptance of the client, but if I can approve them myself and take the decision, I’ll do it of course.*

Project manager N

While the realist possesses social attitude and approach towards work, it does not occur systematically. It is more about sharing information and communicating own ideas than engaging in active two-way dialogue with others, especially the project team. However, the realist is active in interpreting others and absorbing information from them, but sensemaking processes still emerge mainly in individual manner. This results in more cyclical way communication revolving around certain issues or problems. The realist plays an active part in communication but does not activate others to sensegiving activities and this is why overall sensemaking is not likely to happen collectively.

Greatest pleasures of work, the realist experiences from achieving the project goals and smaller pleasures rise from meeting the milestones during the project. It is hard to separate own feelings about the work from project status for the realist. As a consequence, the realist is capable of using both, structure and meaning as a springboard for sensemaking, whereas it is likely that structure has bigger emphasis.

*Of course, mainly from achieving the goal. Of course, along the way can be minor things, for example if someone invents new ways that make our work easier. It’s when the client gives feedback that okay this is what we wanted.*

Project manager C

The realist relies strongly on experience and sometimes even intuition. Moreover, the realist possesses clear view how he or she wants to run the project and is also capable to skillfully communicate that to client and influence in client’s decision-making. Thus, the realist usually
does not have to do many adjustments to self. As a result, identity change is likely to occur in inside-out manner, since the realist proactively effects into environment.

To summarize, the main strengths shown by the realist are the capabilities in advancing the projects quickly according to client’s demands. Individual stance of sensemaking, supported by reliance in experience, enables efficient decision-making which might even be strongly based on intuition. However, this type of action might mean that the realist fails to view the broad set alternatives in advancing project that frequent interaction with other stakeholders could provide. Hence, the best possible alternatives are not always even considered.

4.3.2 The connector

The connector type of project manager combines social attitude and approach towards work, and collective emphasis in sensemaking. The connector can be best portrayed with a strong desire of to be able to benefit the client by removing obstacles from the project team and helping team members to perform at their best.

Of course, a project manager needs to be able to communicate what is the situation with budget, time and quality, if asked. But the way you communicate within the project, that is where you show your experience. You don’t need to tell everything. The experts don’t need to know if the project is using too much money, it is the burden of the project manager.

Project manager D

The social approach shows in the connector’s ability to interpret wide range of social cues. Therefore, the connector puts emphasis also into adjusting things like behavior and clothing into the client’s organizational culture. For the connector, it is important to build solid understanding about client’s organization, not just project organization, but about client’s area of business as a whole. This understanding sometimes results in re-formulation of project objectives, since the connector is capable in interpreting issues from several angles. These factors allow the connector to quickly understand the multiple roles possessed by others in the organization and effectively utilize team members.

Once you have a set of tasks to do, you need to think how you will assign them. Some people like to have a clear task what to do. Others work better if you give
them a problem to solve. It’s about knowing the type and what motivates and what doesn’t.

Project manager A

The communication is ongoing, and the connector also actively engages others into sensegiving activities and therefore, the people constitute as a structure of the project for the connector. This way the emerged collective sensemaking allows to build and maintain shared understanding of project’s status. Therefore, it is not likely that big surprises emerge during project that are orchestrated by the connector.

I talk to others that “what does this really mean?”. This way we can really be critical in assessing the project. I seek for arguments behind our choices from my trusted co-workers, because many times they have the knowledge and expertise, but then we weight it together.

Project manager X

The connector aims for holistic view and understanding of managing projects. The connector possesses wide narrative repertoire and is therefore capable of making broad range of adjustments in professional identity. This results in active dialogue between the connector, client organization and project members, where the connector actively interprets the environment and tries various of ways in establishing credibility. Thereby, identity change occurs most likely in reflective manner. The connector finds multiple meanings for the job and is capable of enjoying many aspects of work without forgetting the actual goals of the project.

Working with a good team gives me more satisfaction, than just achieving the result. The best thing is that if we achieve the result in a way that we’ve taken everyone on board, even the weak ones.

Project manager D

The thing that you can enjoy working in the project organization. I definitely count that as a success as well.

Project manager B

What I like in the role of a project manager, is to help people and organize things. I think that I’m part of the team at the same level wearing just a different hat, they’re not my subordinates, they’re my colleagues.

Project manager A
In sum, it seems that the connector is capable in making use of liminality. The connector sees liminal environments as a good learning platform and suitable for their working style and strengths. The key to this is the connector’s ability to quickly attach to client’s organization by skillful socialization. Moreover, it can be said that when it comes to structure and meaning in sensemaking, for the connector, it is more likely that meaning holds more dominant position when engaging sensemaking activities.

The main strengths of the connector revolve around the social capabilities. The connector is skillful in letting everyone feel that they are important, and that each individual possesses valuable strengths. This results in good atmosphere in projects where everyone wants to participate and contribute. However, making this type of idealism work efficiently can take time. This needed time may be the kind of luxury that the project or project manager does not have. Moreover, the tendency of the connector to look client organization as a whole and beyond the project might result in temporal loss of focus.

4.3.3 The performer

The performer type of project manager illustrates the combination of technical attitude and approach towards work, and individual stance in sensemaking. From the technical viewpoint, the performer shows extremely strong reliance to project management systems, technology and tools. The system formulates the basic structure in advancing the project and building communication channels.

*When we use the Scrum, then we know every two weeks where the project stands.*

Project manager E

*Openness and communication are built into Scrum and SAFe.*

Project manager E

Communication remains at formal level as the performer does not activate and stimulate others to engage sensegiving processes other than the selected project management system naturally offers. Communication is therefore cyclical and mainly consists of the performer sharing information while the overall level of communication is low whereas active phases in
communication revolve around problems. The project management system formulates the structure for the project while the performer’s own feelings of enjoyment of work are tightly connected to the final outcome of the project.

*Project achieves the goals it was supposed to, otherwise my own feeling can’t be good.*

Project manager E

As meaning is tied to structure and structure strongly guides the work of the performer, the performer illustrates strong emphasis on structure instead of meaning when engaging sensemaking. Sensemaking is likely to happen by individual emphasis, since the system-oriented activities do not create much social cues for interpretation and dialogue. Thus, the performer makes often decisions by self in order to advance the project. However, the risk level is not likely to rise, as it might happen for the realist, since there is the strong reliance on system in the background and therefore decisions made by the performer are not likely to be surprising to other stakeholders.

The performer values long assignments and often feels that he or she works in similar manner even though there are context changes, and adjustments in identity does not need to be made. Therefore, no significant identity work is needed. As a result, the performer works in a manner that decreases the effects of liminality. Strong system-oriented and technical focus creates comfort for the performer and this way environment gets molded and the effects of liminality diminished. It can be argued that because of this reason it seems that for the performer it is easier to gain balance between private life and work-life compared to other project manager archetypes in the matrix.

The key strengths of the performer lie in the steady performance that the performer produces. The performer works in predictable manner where no major surprises are expected. This type of working style creates stability around the performer and the client knows exactly what they get. However, this type of managing projects might not be best suited in extremely high-complexity projects which require a lot informal communication.
4.3.4 The moderator

The moderator type of project manager portrays practices that derive from technical working attitude and approach towards work, and collective standpoint of sensemaking. Whereas the performer’s technical approach shows in reliance in system, technology and tools, the moderator is not that attached to project management system than the performer and is capable of running the project in multiple ways. The technical emphasis is likely to show as working tools constitute the main structure in managing projects. Feelings of uncertainty are likely to rise if the procedures of common use of tools are not fully shared.

The moderator is capable of interpreting wide range of technical and social cues. Furthermore, the moderator puts emphasis on listening to experts in the project team and other stakeholders, and is very interested in their opinions, since own vision of effective project management does not necessarily favor one method over the other.

*It’s about learning while doing, you need to ask, ask and ask.*

Project manager Y

Collective sensemaking constitutes mainly listening to others, since the moderator activates others to sensegiving activities by asking a lot of questions while staying partially in the background. While information flows in two ways, it might still not be at the same time as active dialogue. This results in cyclical phases that are shown in problem solving situations.

*For example, if there is some technical thing, I contact the key experts. We create a sort of a war room where we solve the problem.*

Project manager Y

As above already stated, interpreting the environment plays a big part for the moderator where he or she tries to form the understanding of what kind of behavior and leadership is expected from him or her. Therefore, identity change is likely to occur in outside-in manner as the environment effects highly in the moderator. This change might not occur at the very beginning, since formulating the interpretation of what is expected might take some time.
To summarize, *the moderator* pays a lot of attention in listening to other stakeholders. This forms the key strength of *the moderator*, since it enables to consider wide range of alternatives in advancing projects and engages stakeholders. However, this might also result in loss of focus and unnecessary changes of directions in managing projects.
5 CONCLUSION

This thesis departed from the interest towards the job of project manager. The concept of liminality captures many of the contemporary business world’s elements and challenges. Project managers as an occupational group lie in the heart of liminality as changing assignments between temporary organizations constitute essential elements of their job. After getting acquainted with the topic and existing literature of liminality, a research question was formulated. This thesis aimed to add understanding in how consultant project managers cope with liminality. Moreover, in order to provide fresh angle into the existing field of research, this thesis builds on identity and sensemaking literatures as tools that individual uses when coping with liminality.

In order to arrive into conclusions regarding the research question, a study was designed. By using qualitative research strategy with cross-sectional design, research data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of ten consultant project managers working for a Finnish professional service company. The data gathered from the interviews were thematically analyzed supported by existing theory.

The study was able to identify interesting insights from the job of consultant project manager. The interviewed project managers clearly acknowledged their liminal position. Transitional liminality was recognized when the project managers were changing working contexts and arriving to new one. This engaged project managers into identity work and sensemaking process. This was demonstrated through the stress curve, drawn by the interviewees, which showed considerable increase in the beginning of the project due to uncertainty and ambiguity. However, noticeable was the fact that curve decreased rapidly after the integration to the project had happened. This finding was strongly believed by the interviewees separating them from the employee-level liminal experience.

Positional liminality gains more central focus when it is understood how the interviewees cope with liminality in ongoing basis. As a main finding, this study was able to recognize different approaches and attitudes shown between the project managers. These findings departed from individual’s own perception of their work, which the researchers identified being either technical or social. Moreover, sensemaking processes of the interviewees occurred with an
emphasis toward individual or collective manner. Therefore, the variance shown based on mentioned two themes, perception of work and sensemaking, is demonstrated by setting the themes into four-field matrix. This matrix then characterizes four different archetypes of project managers and shows how they cope with liminality. These archetypes are named the realist, the connector, the performer and the moderator.
6 DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The chapter will build a versatile discussion from studied phenomenon point of view in order to cover several perspectives. Discussion will be allocated in two section to clarify how the study results could be interpreted according to these viewpoints. First, discussing about the academic value of the work. Secondly, diversifying the dialogue into practitioners for more pragmatic standpoint. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate how these study results could be helpful for different stakeholders to understand more side-effects of coping with liminality. The discussion will include argumentation regarding generated angles and apply theory independently. Furthermore, this section will raise future questions and areas of possible research where authors of this study do not possess answers but rather try to evoke further research for existing or future academics.

6.1 Contribution for academics

In this paper, study elaborated a theoretical four-field matrix presenting forms of archetypes in working environment where liminality occurred, and the data were derived from qualitative research method interpreted through analysis. The goal of the study was to shed light on liminality practices used by consultant project managers from sensemaking and identity standpoint. Moreover, to increase understanding regarding consultant project managers actions in liminality. Theoretical four-field model was built upon analyzing empirical data containing evidence that managerial position in project-based environment engages managers in different liminal stages causing variation how managers deal with them. This variety came up as consultant project managers expressed diverge ways of coping practices within liminality. Even though, most of the interviewees were highly experienced and successful in their work, these professional results were made with different methods. These findings were made through work attitude and sensemaking point of view.

Borg and Söderlund (2014) earlier study of project workers liminality practices in projects is one of the closest studies carried out by now related to this paper. However, this thesis aimed for academic contribution especially to consultant project managers who faced ambiguity and stress due their professional position. Sensemaking and identity work gave a unique approach to investigate closer these transits that liminality brings out because they encompass specific research clarifying ambiguity and managing change. The principal insight was the fact that
project managers used enactment constantly in order to manage transits in successful ways. This enactment happened even though there was no certainty regarding outcomes. Still, more important was that this enacting incrementally increased project manager understanding how to find ways to achieve the predetermined goal of the assignment with stakeholders. These ways were found from different sensemaking processes and personal work perception point of view. Project manager was a key element in project environment due to their meaning as a central actor affecting through their own action with stakeholders to work towards common goal. Project managers as a vital engine conducting action had high impact to ensure the success of the projects. It can be argued that if the project manager could not handle liminality in the working environment it would put the whole project in danger. Project manager is usually the first member to be fired and changed if the project is not achieving its’ goals in the early stages. This shows the high value of consultant project manager ability enactment most of the time in a way which benefits the final objective.

Since this study was conducted by using cross-sectional design, it proved to be good in describing the variance between participants. Hence, it would be interesting and worth of studying the same issue by using a different method. This would be done by seeking for further clarification regarding the findings of this study and opening up the phenomenon even more. For example, by setting up a longitudinal research design where the focus would be in exploring single individual or group for a longer period of time. If this current study has opened up how consultant project managers cope with liminality, longitudinal design could open different angles to produce insights that would help us to improve understanding in why the specific approaches and choices are used by the consultant project managers.

Organizations are seeking for an advantage to get hold on a steady market position and build outperforming entity compared to rivals in the industries. This paper literature review started from the catalysts of liminality and research question was scrutinized by using identity work and sensemaking literature. The study results after finding four differing forms of archetypes, allows to discuss possible influences which could streamline human resource management. Since organizations cannot possess all the knowledge, external project managers become useful to integrate needed knowledge in order to sustain competitive and efficient way of doing business. The main benefit in contingent labor is the fact that it is easier to substitute than fixed staff. Still, organizations do not have certainty is the hired consultant project manager the best fit for the assignment, business context and existing team of experts. On one hand, archetypes
in four-field matrix encompass varying features to conduct their work, but the matrix does not point out is one better than another. On another hand, archetypes contain characteristic which could work better in different working environments if there would be more explicit information from the assignment and stakeholders involved. It could be argued that these nuances can become relevant as the trend at the work market is slowly turning towards temporal workforce. Matching flexible resources between assignments could have a greater impact to keeping project in budget and on time which are currently the hardest measurements to achieve. If the projects could find better matches regarding individual knowledge and way of perceiving the work, projects might have higher possibility to be successful and positive experiences. In other word, in ideal world projects could be managed in better ways causing less stress and haste compared to current situation. An external project manager with capabilities to generate above average performance in the projects and keeping assignment on time would have standing out influence. Ability to match resource with better hit rate between the buyer and supplier would increase efficiency and flexibility.

Currently project managers are moving between projects in liminal environments and are facing problems to engage trainings or have time for self-reflection in order to increase self-learning. As the archetypes incorporate different characteristics according to work attitude and sensemaking viewpoints, this could open possibilities to develop these theoretical personifications from one field to another. It could be argued that, trainings and self-learning could be affected by acknowledging project manager current status in the four-field matrix as caricature characterization and could help to form ideal goal related to person in the future. By recognizing the human resource in more detailed level could help organization to be more specific how to develop own resource and deploy them in better way.

Since, identity literature recognizes that the more significant the change in environment, the more it causes identity work for the individual to adapt into new environment. This study explored the issue of consultant project managers switching working contexts. However, these contexts were not specified or characterized, neither the context were individual was departing or where the individual was arriving. It would be interesting and useful to further understand what kind of context switches would be the easiest or the most difficult for the liminar going through the transition. This kind of understanding would result benefiting both, the hiring companies and the companies that deliver the job. Contexts could be characterized, for instance, by using Whitney’s (2006) dimensions of singularity and work role separation and stability.
Furthermore, another thing closely attached to this type of thinking would be to identify working contexts that suits the best for project manager archetypes found in this study, *the realist, the connector, the performer* and *the moderator*.

6.2 Contribution for practitioners

It can be argued that this trend towards more flexible organizational structure can cause fundamental changes in some industries in the long-term horizon. This naturally can have influence on project manager occupation in the future. On one hand, project-based working increases creativity and adds more stimuli to people working with context shifts generating highly expertized individuals. On the other hand, time for self-reflection is minimal where stress and pressure are constantly present which creates vulnerability for unsustainable way of working. Companies are hiring external consultants primarily to manage change which happens due to rapid shifts in organization strategies. For example, ongoing development of technology enables creating platforms producing network effects which can shake market fundamentals resulting as a change in consumer behavior. Still, the social complexity among workers is something that organizations cannot temporarily recover. External consultancy provides flexible temporary staffing to for example shift business direction or increase efficiency but somewhere has to exist limits as well. It can be argued that until some point using temporary workforce enables smooth swift movements in organizational level, but it can jeopardize organization business if temporaries will start to have connections handling business core functions. Since, consults are passing by professional groups of people helping organizations to conduct change, engagement with crucial part of the business might make organization dependent on external knowledge. This might not be beneficial from hiring organization standpoint because it would diminish or lose the original idea of using flexible labor. Thus, it can be argued that hiring the external consultant as regular worker might be necessary if absence of the knowledge disturbs business. Organizations are focusing more and more on core business operations shrinking full-time staff in order to increase agility among tough competition. A question can be formed: how much organization can decrease amount of staff without harming the core but be as agile as possible making competition possibly even irrelevant?

The study made a remark that processual liminality occurs when consultant project manager experiences the context switches when moving out from prior assignment and moving in into new working context. Furthermore, this entry stage into new working environment was clearly
crucial to manage in order to be successful as a project manager. Otherwise, pressure, ambiguity and stress could take over and start to decrease manager’s personal performance causing survival mode rather than controlled situations in the project. Still, employee turnover ratio in project manager position is considerably high. It could be argued that people do not either manage or enjoy the work enough to continue longer periods. Another possible explanation could be the fact that client organizations and professional service providers are doing constantly mismatching between their people and projects. On one hand, project manager is one of the most common managerial job titles in global market. On another hand, the turnover is extremely high. It could be argued that project managers with matching capabilities from perception of the work and sensemaking perspective according with purpose of assignment, might foster and ease the experience of liminality. If the negative elements of liminality could be decrease into level that is easier to handle in daily basis, possibly the retention among people working as project manager might increase. As this study supports, the meaning of work experience plays a big role being a successful project manager. Thus, by acknowledging different characteristics of project manager, this would enable possible development and find better matches between these characteristics and working contexts in the early stages of project manager’s career. Hence, create longer relationships between employees and employers avoiding constant turbulence managing own internal talent in form of people. All in all, simply longer trajectories among project managers as a result. It often makes companies business difficult if the turnover is high as people possess the knowledge from their work and do not share often as an organizational learning process.

By understanding how key position like project managers handle as one embodiment of this flexible workflow trend, can create valuable insights to enhance resource utilization and keep project staffed optimally. It can be argued that there is a strong evidence of this temporal staffing, also known as “gig economy”, rising from the horizon where stable way of working is challenged more flexible way of working. It could be argued that people do not prefer life lasting relation with one and same organization rather gathering experiences from different companies changing employer more often than few decades ago. However, these ambitions usually decrease when saturation of gathering experiences have been fulfilled where regular work with fixed week structure becomes more attractive. Nevertheless, this change in people mindset requiring more flexibility has its’ side-effect to the market as a whole. Development is inevitable and organizations have to find the best way to manage their own resources accordingly to survive. Markets evolving to more difficult entities underlines the resource the
organization possesses inside. All the organizational activity is either made or controlled by human actions which until near future are paramount aspect to deploy in the survival of the fittest.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

TRANSLATION

Dear respondent,

We are two master students from Linköping university, Sweden. We study in a program called Strategy and Management in International Organizations. At the moment we are writing our master thesis. That is why we are now approaching you with our interview questions.

Our thesis explores project-based working environment. In this type of environment, a project worker is often between things, for example, between own organization and the client’s organization. More specifically, a concept called liminality portrays the environment. Previous research has not fully explored the issues of liminality from project manager’s perspective. This is now what we as researchers are interested about.

The literature review of the study is formed through the concepts of liminality, work-related identity and sensemaking. Therefore, the interview questions relate to these areas. Overall, the thesis aims to answer how consultant project managers cope with liminality?

We would like to thank you in advance in participating our research project. Interviews should not take more than an hour. We would appreciate if you have the possibility to prepare for the interview by viewing the questions beforehand.

Best Regards,

Antti Chrons and Jussi Kaivola
Perception

1. How would you describe your role and most important tasks as a project manager?

2. What gives you the greatest pleasures in the job of a project manager?

3. How do you experience stress, pressure, uncertainty and haste in your job? How do you handle these issues?

4. How do you balance between private life and work-life?

5. How do you balance between hard (time, cost, quality) and soft aspects (managing experts) in your projects?

Sensemaking

6. What happens before the project starts? (ideally vs reality)

7. How would you describe your first actions when you start a new project as a consultant project manager? Where do you focus your attention?

8. What do you see as structure in your projects? How do you create it?

9. How do you spot relevant information from the overall information flow?

10. What do you do if you don’t know “what’s next”?

11. How do you know that you know enough in order to start making decisions in a project? How about during the project, how do you interpret and explain to yourself that everything is under control?

Identity

12. What makes you feel that you’ve been accepted to leader of the project team?
13. When stress, uncertainty, pressure and haste (if felt) start to decline? What causes that?

14. What kind of changes do you see/feel in yourself during and between projects?