Project Steering Committees

The struggle at the interface of
the temporary and
permanent organization

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SUMMARY

This dissertation covers research on *Project Steering Committees* (PSCs). A PSC is a temporary body that oversees a project and to which the project manager reports. The project's daily operations are managed by a project manager. The organizations that fund and own the project will take measures to ensure that the project is executed in line with their interests. They will therefore direct project managers and hold them accountable, which literature refers to as project governance. This project governance can be carried out by a single person, referred to in this dissertation as the project owner. Alternatively, the funding or owning organizations might establish a governing body. The body can be a permanent committee that governs several projects. Another option observed in practice is a temporary group of senior managers who, together and part-time, govern the project, referred to as a Project Steering Committee (PSC).

What are PSCs

This research defines a PSC as a *boundary-spanning group that governs and supports a project at a strategic level and is accountable for reaching project success*. Boundary-spanning implies members from diverse organizations, departments, or business processes that affect or are affected by the project. The PSC is temporary and dedicated to a project. The members have to combine their accountabilities from their own permanent function and the temporary project. They govern the project at a strategic level and should not take over the project management tasks. Their accountability for project success concerns success in the eyes of funders, owners, and other stakeholders, thereby exceeding the accountability of the project manager. The PSC should also support the project and the project manager, for example, by enforcing decisions and championing the project within stakeholder groups. Some authors include the support function in the governance function; others see support as separate.

I found no literature on the percentage of projects governed by a PSC, although PSCs appear common. They are mentioned in various papers as a possible project governance body and there are practitioner-oriented books on PSCs. Some scholars even ask, "How satisfied is the PSC?" when measuring project success, thus implying the frequent use of PSCs. However, the number of papers directly addressing the PSC is limited. The literature suggests that the PSC (as a group) and its members (individually) should develop a focused understanding of the project's products, dynamics, and the environment that poses risks or presents opportunities. The members must balance their accountabilities in their permanent positions with the achievement of the project's overall goals, which may be partly in conflict. Members need to understand how stakeholders' actions influence the project and vice versa. Therefore, the duties of PSCs and their members are important to project success but may be challenging at the same time.

Research objective, approach, and questions

Literature shows that project governance is positively correlated with project success and that governance matters. In a PSC, senior managers devote time to project oversight. Strangely enough, the PSC as a body to be studied has been largely ignored in literature. This dissertation will help fill this gap by gathering empirical data and using literature and theories for interpretation. The main research question of the dissertation is "*How can project governance by a project steering committee influence project success?"*

The research uses a mixed-method approach. Starting qualitatively with interviews, subsequently quantitatively with a survey, and ending qualitatively with an expert session. It has four underlying research questions, each leading to one chapter in the dissertation. The studies cover a wide range of projects, such as in civil engineering, business redesign and ICT.

Research Question 1: What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of project steering committees?

Most scientific research on temporary bodies in project governance focuses on the project owner in the sense of an individual. A PSC has more members than just the project owner and can be vital for overseeing the project. Therefore, the study in Chapter 3 investigated the current practice in the formation and functioning of PSCs. Nine experienced project managers and four PSC members were interviewed on the formation and workings of the PSCs. Subsequently, a qualitative questionnaire was conducted with 32 project managers for triangulation.

The study found that a dedicated committee for oversight is a widespread practice. It should provide oversight consisting of governance and support activities. Such a PSC fulfills the role of project owner (as a group) and is thus accountable for project success. The PSC is the linking pin between the permanent organization and the temporary project organization. It provides resources, makes decisions, and offers a platform for involving stakeholders, who share their perspectives to build commitment and support decisions. Consensus-based decision-making is common because the resulting commitment from members appears to outweigh potential ambiguities in accountability.

If the organization has standards for project governance, this will be the starting point for the formation of the PSC. The project owner (in the sense of the person who chairs the PSC) adapts these governance standards or establishes oversight, as needed for the project. The project owner selects members for the PSC based on who funds the project, who represents the other major stakeholders, and who has access to vital resources or knowledge. This suggests that theories shareholder theory, stakeholder theory, and the resource-related view all apply. Personal characteristics of members, like competences, are secondary criteria in the member selection process. This means that the members might not have the right skills and knowledge on oversight to perform well as PSC member. Moreover, committee members are rarely trained.

The study implies that the support role of PSCs must be explicitly considered alongside the governance role, since support is needed when constraints between stakeholders are

irreconcilable or when resources are scarce. Also, future research on the authorities of committees and their members should take informal influence into account besides formal authorities. In practice, senior project managers can heavily influence the formation of the PSC and its agenda. So, project managers should also help members fulfill their duty to hold the project manager accountable, or top management must ensure that the PSC fulfills this duty. Members should complete training and take other mitigating measures if competences on project oversight are lacking.

Research Question 2: How are roles and responsibilities within project steering committees defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success?

The study in Chapter 4 focused on PSC members' perceptions of their own roles, other members' roles, and the dynamics of the PSC. Conclusions were drawn from 18 semi-structured interviews, documentation on the 6 discussed projects, and literature in the fields of project and organizational management. Literature is not clear on roles beyond representing the funder. This study established five roles, according to the structuralist view of role theory. The roles include representation of the funder(s), representation of the user group(s), representation of the supplier(s) of project resources, representation of the support organization(s) for project deliverables, and quality assurance. Across various types of projects, similar roles were found, and these roles provide clarity to the PSC members in practice. During the selection process for members, the categories of roles could be used to determine how stakeholders and resource providers will be engaged.

At the start of the PSC, the roles serve as a basis for determining and sharing each member's individual responsibilities, including the link between each member's role and its function within the permanent organization. In practice, individual responsibilities are ambiguous since members fulfill several roles, and responsibilities related to the roles are hardly made explicit and shared among PSC members. As a consequence, during project execution, PSC members often regard their PSC responsibilities as only a subset of their responsibilities within their permanent organization. This jeopardizes project success, as governance and support tasks may be neglected and responsibilities for success remain unclear. Also, PSCs hardly take time to deepen perceptions on goals and work on team-building. Both limit engagement as a group, limiting project success.

The PSC members typically have functionally diverse backgrounds, which helps quality decision-making by considering stakeholder interests and adding knowledge. Diversity can lead to relationship conflicts, hindering collaboration and project success. This supports the finding in the previous study that individual responsibilities and interests must be made explicit. It also points to the importance of building mutual trust and shared goals. When shared goals and mutual trust are present, and individual responsibilities are defined, these conditions help achieve success: they sharpen the decision-making process, foster commitment, prevent relationship conflict, and prevent gaps in activities.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between individual responsibilities of PSC members and project success?

By means of a questionnaire with 178 valid responses, the study in Chapter 5 quantitatively measured the impact of PSC members *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success*. It used the variables *Shared Goals* among PSC members and *Mutual Trust* between PSC members as moderators. It found a clear relationship among these four variables. The study proposed that members should have a minimum level of shared goals and mutual trust before they should act based on clear and communicated individual responsibilities. However, the data did not support the hypothesis that a threshold of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* is required for *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* to positively relate to *Project Success*. When asked directly in the survey, respondents indicated that members should first focus on achieving shared goals and building mutual trust before acting on individual responsibilities. The variables *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Mutual Trust*, and *Shared Goals* are a predictor of 48% of *Project Success*. Although this study does not meet Van de Ven's criteria for causality, the earlier exploratory study and the survey of respondents' opinions suggest a causal association. Therefore, the study implies that members should take time at the launch of a PSC to discuss their own and other members' responsibilities and how these influence actions and decision-making.

The study is unique in that it quantitatively distinguishes standardized roles of members. It found support for using five roles to select PSC members and determine their individual responsibilities. The four representation roles for *funders*, *user groups*, *suppliers towards the project*, and *groups maintaining the project's products* are generally covered in a PSC. These four roles for PSC members are about representing the contributing and affected types of stakeholders that influence project success. A PSC member with only the *quality assurance role towards the PSC* is often absent and should be used prudently, as members with only this role have limited accountability.

Research Question 4: What support can be given to PSC members to govern a project via a PSC?

Based on literature, the three studies, discussions with scientists and practitioners, and an expert session, a Quick Reference Card (QRC) on PSCs was created. It is intended for PSC members, project managers, and others involved in project governance. It applies to a wide range of projects and organizations. The completeness of the QRC cannot be claimed, but the expert session seems to suggest so. The QRC can be used as a starting point for corporate rules on project governance, as a guideline for setting up a PSC, as assistance to PSC members in shaping their roles, for project audits, and as a guideline in case of underperformance of project oversight. Potential PSC members and project managers should discuss and determine how it applies to their own setting. The format, as a one-pager, invites users to store the QRC for later

use and helps discuss the content in a group setting. **Figure 14** in Chapter 6 provides the final version of the QRC.

Discussion, conclusions and application (Chapters 7 and 8)

Data show that an engaged PSC can help the project progress, provided that combined action by senior managers is required to influence stakeholders or motivate the project team. A PSC can also help achieve success for the funding and owning organizations by providing direction, based on stakeholder involvement, and by holding the project manager accountable. PSC members have dual accountability: for the temporary organization and the permanent organization. The members should seek help when they lack competencies and should balance governance with supporting the project. The PSC can adapt the project strategy to a changing project environment and limit risks to funding and owning organizations. Providing direction is accomplished via decision-making with authority.

Governance by committee can add value compared to governance by a single person with the project owner role. First, members represent stakeholder groups. This provides direct access to information and other resources from these stakeholder groups. Second, members are functionally diverse, improving decision-making quality if relationship conflict is avoided. Third, members bring authority based on their permanent position, thus adding decision-making authority to the group. Fourth and last, when members work as a group on common goals and champion the project, the sum of the combined authority and information processing capacity is more than that of the sum of the individual members.

A PSC is a decision-making entity. Depending on the contracts behind the project, there may be several funding and owning organizations with formal decision-making authority, each sending a representative. This results in PSC members being unable to overrule one another, necessitating group decision-making. When a single organization funds the project and owns the project's products, a hierarchy among PSC members may exist. Even then, group decision-making is preferred over the chairperson deciding based on the advice of the other members. Group decision-making has three advantages. First, it is the duty of PSC members to align the permanent and temporary organizations. This means that the accountabilities of members in the permanent organization must give them a say in the PSC, and that a decision must be made that balances their interests with the common goal. Second, group decision-making improves decision quality, as found in the organizational management literature. Third, and last, group decision-making helps secure members' commitment to implementing the decisions. Members who are most affected should have the greatest influence on the decision. The chair should ensure that stalemates are resolved.

Role theory, organizational management literature, and the data from this research indicate that members should align individual responsibilities between members to prevent task conflict from escalating into relationship conflict. This can be supported by taking time for team development activities to share goals and build mutual trust. Since members typically

recognize this need only after project success is in jeopardy, team development activities for a PSC should be incorporated into corporate project governance guidelines. As the data indicate that senior project managers influence the organization of project governance, guidelines for forming PSCs should be added to project management methodologies.

Limitations and follow up

The quantitative study (Chapter 5) and previous case studies in literature tend to examine projects that at least partially delivered the required deliverables. My qualitative studies (Chapters 3 and 4) include PSCs that struggled to achieve project success. Still, future studies of PSCs that were restructured due to low performance might reveal additional insights into the information-gathering, processing, decision-making, and governmentality that led governors to act to turn the tide.

This research identified five standard roles that PSC members can use as a starting point for individual responsibilities. The interactionist perspective in role theory predicts that PSC members will continuously shape their roles through interactions with others. Empirical data comparing views at several points in time via longitudinal studies can deepen insights into how roles are shaped and how role shaping influences project success.

The qualitative data in this research primarily derive from respondents in the Netherlands. The quantitative data are mainly from Western Europe. Other studies on PSCs have been conducted in the Nordics and the USA. Decision-making is a vital activity in PSCs, and this process is influenced by culture. Therefore, studies of the inner workings of PSCs across various national and corporate cultures are warranted.

PSC members need and deserve support

As one respondent noted, PSC members have a duty to integrate their accountabilities across permanent and temporary (project) organizations without complaining, and they should possess the skills to do so. However, PSC members are generally selected for their permanent function. Being a senior, capable manager does not always imply that members understand the project's dynamics and outputs. Moreover, PSC members have limited time for their oversight duties, their understanding of what project oversight entails may be limited, and the project may have negative consequences for the stakeholders they represent. So, they deserve support and recognition for their sometimes challenging task and should be considered more thoroughly in both research and practice.

SAMENVATTING

Deze dissertatie gaat over onderzoek naar projectstuurgroepen (PSC's). Een PSC is een tijdelijk orgaan dat toezicht houdt op een project en waaraan de projectmanager rapporteert. De dagelijkse uitvoering van het project wordt geleid door een projectmanager. De organisaties die het project financieren en eigenaar worden van de op te leveren producten zullen maatregelen nemen om hun belangen zeker te stellen. Zij sturen daarom de projectmanager aan en vragen om verantwoording, wat in de literatuur wordt aangeduid als projectgovernance. Deze projectgovernance kan worden uitgevoerd door één persoon, in deze dissertatie aangeduid als de projecteigenaar. Een andere mogelijkheid is uitvoering door een groep. Dit kan een permanent portfolioboard zijn dat meerdere projecten bestuurt. Een andere optie is een groep senior managers die gezamenlijk, tijdelijk en parttime het project besturen, aangeduid als een projectstuurgroep (PSC).

Wat zijn PSC's

Dit onderzoek definieert een PSC als een grensoverschrijdende groep die een project op strategisch niveau bestuurt en ondersteunt en verantwoordelijk is voor het behalen van projectsucces. Grensoverschrijdend betekent dat leden afkomstig zijn uit verschillende organisaties, afdelingen of bedrijfsprocessen die het project beïnvloeden of erdoor worden beïnvloed. De PSC is tijdelijk en gewijd aan één project. De leden moeten hun verantwoordelijkheden uit hun permanente functie combineren met die uit het tijdelijke project. Zij besturen het project op strategisch niveau en mogen de taken van de projectmanager niet overnemen. Hun verantwoordelijkheid voor projectsucces betreft succes in de ogen van financiers, eigenaren van project-producten en andere stakeholders. Dit gaat daarmee verder dan de verantwoordelijkheid van de projectmanager. De PSC moet het project en de projectmanager ook ondersteunen, bijvoorbeeld door te zorgen voor naleving van besluiten en het project te promoten en ambassadeurschap. Sommige onderzoekers beschouwen deze ondersteunende functie als onderdeel van governance; anderen zien dit apart.

Ik vond geen literatuur over het percentage projecten met een PSC, wel indicaties dat PSC's frequent voorkomen. Ze worden in verschillende wetenschappelijke artikelen genoemd en er zijn praktijkboeken over. Sommige onderzoekers vragen zelfs: "Hoe tevreden is de PSC?" bij het meten van projectsucces, wat impliceert dat PSC's veel worden gebruikt. Toch is het aantal artikelen dat direct ingaat op de PSC beperkt. De literatuur suggereert dat de PSC (als groep) en haar leden (individueel) een gerichte kennis moeten ontwikkelen van de projectproducten, de dynamiek van het project en de omgeving van het project. De stuurgroepleden moeten hun verantwoordelijkheden in hun permanente functies balanceren met het behalen van de projectdoelen, waarbij deze verantwoordelijkheden deels met elkaar in conflict kunnen zijn. Ze moeten ook begrijpen hoe acties van stakeholders het project beïnvloeden en omgekeerd. De taken van PSC's en hun leden zijn dus belangrijk voor

projectsucces, maar tegelijkertijd uitdagend.

Onderzoeksdoel, aanpak en vragen

Uit de literatuur blijkt dat projectgovernance positief correleert met projectsucces en dat governance ertoe doet. In een PSC besteden senior managers schaarse tijd aan projecttoezicht. Opmerkelijk genoeg is er weinig onderzoek naar PSC's. Deze dissertatie helpt dit gat te vullen door empirische gegevens te verzamelen en literatuur en theorieën te gebruiken voor interpretatie. De centrale onderzoeksvraag luidt: *"Hoe kan project-governance door een projectstuurgroep het projectsucces beïnvloeden?"*

Het onderzoek gebruikt een mixed-method benadering: eerst kwalitatief via interviews, vervolgens kwantitatief via een survey, en tot slot kwalitatief via een expertsessie. Het bevat vier onderliggende onderzoeksvragen, elk leidend tot een hoofdstuk in de dissertatie. De studie bestrijkt een breed scala aan projecten, zoals civiele techniek, bedrijfsherontwerp en ICT.

Onderzoeksvraag 1: Wat is de huidige praktijk in de vorming en werking van projectstuurgroepen?

Het meeste onderzoek naar tijdelijke projectgovernance-actoren richt zich op de projecteigenaar in de betekenis van een individu. Een PSC heeft meer leden dan alleen de projecteigenaar en kan cruciaal zijn voor het toezicht op het project. Daarom onderzocht de studie in Hoofdstuk 3 de huidige praktijk van oprichting en werking van PSC's. Negen ervaren projectmanagers en vier PSC-leden werden geïnterviewd. Vervolgens werd een kwalitatieve vragenlijst afgenomen bij 32 projectmanagers ter triangulatie.

De studie geeft aan dat een project specifiek comité voor toezicht veel voorkomt. Het toezicht bestaat uit governance- en ondersteuningsactiviteiten. Zo'n PSC vervult de rol van projecteigenaar (als groep) en is dus verantwoordelijk voor projectsucces. De PSC vormt de schakel tussen de permanente organisatie en de tijdelijke projectorganisatie. Zij levert middelen, neemt besluiten en biedt een platform voor het betrekken van stakeholders. Input van stakeholders verbetert de kwaliteit van de besluiten en verhoogt commitment. Besluitvorming is vaak op basis van consensus, omdat de daaruit voortvloeiende betrokkenheid van leden zwaarder weegt dan mogelijke resulterende onduidelijkheden in verantwoordelijkheden.

Als de organisatie standaarden heeft voor projectgovernance, vormen deze het uitgangspunt voor de vorming van de PSC. De projecteigenaar (in de zin van de voorzitter van de PSC) past deze governance-standaarden aan of richt zelf toezicht in zoals nodig voor het project. De projecteigenaar selecteert leden voor de PSC op basis van wie het project financiert, wie de andere belangrijke stakeholders zijn en wie toegang heeft tot essentiële middelen of kennis. Dit suggereert dat shareholdertheorie, stakeholdertheorie en de resource-based view van toepassing zijn. Persoonlijke kenmerken van leden, zoals competenties, zijn secundair in het selectieproces. Dit betekent dat leden mogelijk niet over de juiste vaardigheden en kennis beschikken om goed te functioneren als PSC-lid. Bovendien worden commissieleden zelden

getraind.

De studie impliceert dat de ondersteunende taak van PSC's expliciet moet worden meegenomen naast de governance-rol, omdat ondersteuning nodig is wanneer belangen van stakeholders onverenigbaar zijn of middelen schaars zijn. Voor toekomstig onderzoek naar de bevoegdheden van PSC's en hun leden is het belangrijk om te kijken naar informele invloed naast formele bevoegdheden. In de praktijk oefenen senior projectmanagers grote invloed uit op de vorming van de PSC en haar agenda. Projectmanagers zouden leden dus ook moeten helpen hun taak om de projectmanager verantwoordelijk te houden, of het topmanagement moet hiervoor zorgen. Leden zouden training moeten volgen en andere maatregelen nemen indien competenties voor projecttoezicht ontbreken.

Onderzoeksvraag 2: Hoe worden rollen en verantwoordelijkheden binnen projectstuurgroepen gedefinieerd en toegepast, en wat is hun relatie met projectsucces?

De studie in Hoofdstuk 4 richtte zich op de percepties van PSC-leden over hun eigen rollen, de rollen van andere leden en de dynamiek binnen de PSC. Conclusies zijn getrokken op basis van 18 semigestructureerde interviews, documentatie over de 6 besproken projecten en literatuur op het gebied van project- en organisatiemanagement. Eerder onderzoek is niet duidelijk over rollen anders dan het vertegenwoordigen van de financier. Deze studie identificeerde vijf rollen, in lijn met de structuralistische benadering in roltheorie. De rollen omvatten *vertegenwoordiging van de financier(s), vertegenwoordiging van de gebruikersgroep(en)*, *vertegenwoordiging van de leverancier(s) van projectmiddelen*, *vertegenwoordiging van de ondersteunende organisatie(s) van de projectproducten* en *kwaliteitsborging*.

In verschillende soorten projecten werden vergelijkbare rollen gevonden en deze rollen bieden in de praktijk duidelijkheid aan PSC-leden. Tijdens het selectieproces van leden kunnen deze rollen worden gebruikt om te bepalen hoe stakeholders en resourceproviders worden betrokken. Bij de daadwerkelijke start van een PSC dienen de rollen als basis voor het bepalen en delen van de individuele verantwoordelijkheden van elk lid, inclusief de verhouding tussen de rol van een lid en de functie binnen de permanente organisatie. In de praktijk zijn individuele verantwoordelijkheden echter vaak onhelder, omdat leden meerdere rollen vervullen en verantwoordelijkheden nauwelijks expliciet worden gemaakt. Hierdoor beschouwen PSC-leden hun PSC-verantwoordelijkheden als een subset van hun verantwoordelijkheden binnen de permanente organisatie. Dit brengt projectsucces in gevaar, omdat bepaalde governance- en ondersteunende taken kunnen worden verwaarloosd en verantwoordelijkheden voor succes onduidelijk blijven. Bovendien nemen PSC's zelden de tijd om zich in percepties over doelen te verdiepen of aan teambuilding te doen.

PSC-leden hebben doorgaans diverse functionele achtergronden, wat de kwaliteit van besluitvorming bevordert doordat belangen van stakeholders worden meegenomen en kennis wordt toegevoegd. Diversiteit kan echter ook leiden tot relatieconflict, dat samenwerking en projectsucces belemmert. Dit ondersteunt de bevinding uit de vorige studie dat individuele

verantwoordelijkheden en belangen expliciet moeten worden gemaakt. Het wijst ook op het belang van wederzijds vertrouwen en gedeelde doelen. Wanneer deze aanwezig zijn en individuele verantwoordelijkheden duidelijk zijn, bevordert dit het projectsucces: het verscherpt het besluitvormingsproces, versterkt commitment, voorkomt relatieconflicten en voorkomt het vergeten van activiteiten.

Onderzoeksvraag 3: Wat is de relatie tussen individuele verantwoordelijkheden van PSC-leden en projectsucces?

Aan de hand van een vragenlijst met 178 geldige reacties mat de studie in Hoofdstuk 5 kwantitatief de impact van het *Handelen volgens Individuele Verantwoordelijkheden* van PSC-leden op *Projectsucces*. Daarbij zijn variabelen *Gedeelde Doelen tussen PSC-leden* en *Wederzijds Vertrouwen tussen PSC-leden* moderatoren. De studie vond een duidelijke relatie tussen deze vier variabelen.

De studie had als hypothese dat PSC leden een minimaal niveau van *Gedeelde Doelen* en *Wederzijds Vertrouwen* moeten hebben voordat *Handelen volgens Individuele Verantwoordelijkheden* een positieve correlatie heeft met *Projectsucces*. Dit werd niet ondersteund door de data, dus de hypothese werd verworpen. Bij direct vragen in de enquête gaven respondenten wel aan dat leden zich eerst zouden moeten richten op het bereiken van gedeelde doelen en het opbouwen van wederzijds vertrouwen voordat zij zich richten op individuele verantwoordelijkheden.

De variabelen *Handelen volgens Individuele Verantwoordelijkheden*, *Wederzijds Vertrouwen* en *Gedeelde Doelen* voorspellen samen 48% van het *Projectsucces*. Hoewel deze studie niet voldoet aan Van de Ven's criteria voor causaliteit, suggereren zowel de eerdere verkennende studies als de enquête een causaal verband. Wat impliceert dat leden bij de start van een PSC de tijd moeten nemen om hun eigen en elkaars verantwoordelijkheden te bespreken en vaststellen hoe dit acties en besluitvorming beïnvloedt. Alles is nodig, maar de prioriteit ligt bij de start op het doorleven van het projectdoel en het opbouwen van vertrouwen.

De studie is uniek in het kwantitatief onderscheiden van gestandaardiseerde rollen van leden. Zij ondersteunt het gebruik van vijf rollen om PSC-leden te selecteren en om hun individuele verantwoordelijkheden te bepalen. De vier representatierollen (voor financiers, gebruikersgroepen, leveranciers richting het project en groepen die de projectproducten onderhouden) zijn doorgaans vertegenwoordigd in een PSC. Deze vier rollen hebben betrekking op stakeholders die bijdragen aan het project of beïnvloed worden door het project. Een PSC-lid met uitsluitend de rol van kwaliteitsborging richting de PSC komt beperkt voor. Het inzetten hiervan vergt zorgvuldigheid, omdat leden met alleen deze rol beperkte verantwoordelijkheid dragen.

Onderzoeksvraag 4: Welke ondersteuning kan worden geboden aan PSC-leden om een project via een PSC te besturen?

Op basis van literatuur, de drie studies, gesprekken met wetenschappers en practitioners en een expertsessie is een Quick Reference Card (QRC) over PSC's ontwikkeld. Dit is voor PSC-leden, projectmanagers en anderen die betrokken zijn bij projectgovernance. De QRC is toepasbaar bij een breed scala aan projecten en organisaties. Hoewel de volledigheid niet kan worden gegarandeerd, suggereert de expertsessie van wel. De QRC kan worden gebruikt als uitgangspunt voor bedrijfsregels over projectgovernance, als richtlijn voor het opzetten van een PSC, als hulpmiddel voor PSC-leden bij het vormgeven van hun rollen, voor projectaudits en als leidraad bij slecht presterend projecttoezicht. Potentiële PSC-leden en projectmanagers moeten bespreken hoe de QRC in hun eigen context van toepassing is. Het formaat van één pagina nodigt uit om de QRC te bewaren voor later gebruik en ondersteunt het bespreken van de inhoud in groepsverband. **Figure 14** in Hoofdstuk 6 toont de definitieve versie van de QRC.

Discussie, conclusies en toepassing (Hoofdstukken 7 en 8)

De data laten zien dat een betrokken PSC het project helpt om voortgang te boeken als een gezamenlijke actie van senior managers nodig is om stakeholders te beïnvloeden of om het projectteam te motiveren. Een PSC draagt daarnaast bij aan succes voor de organisaties die financieren of de eigenaar zijn, door richting te geven op basis van stakeholderbetrokkenheid. PSC-leden hebben een dubbele verantwoordelijkheid: voor de tijdelijke organisatie en voor de permanente organisatie. Leden moeten hulp zoeken wanneer zij competenties missen en governance in balans brengen met ondersteuning van het project. Een PSC maakt het mogelijk om de projectstrategie aan te passen aan een veranderende projectomgeving en risico's voor permanente organisaties te beperken.

Governance via een groep kan meerwaarde bieden ten opzichte van governance door één persoon met de rol van projecteigenaar. Ten eerste vertegenwoordigen leden stakeholdergroepen, wat directe toegang geeft tot informatie en middelen uit deze groepen. Ten tweede zijn leden functioneel divers, wat de kwaliteit van besluitvorming verbetert, mits relatieconflict wordt voorkomen. Ten derde brengen leden bevoegdheden mee vanuit hun permanente functie, wat de besluitvormingsmacht van de groep versterkt. Ten vierde, wanneer leden als groep werken aan een gemeenschappelijk doel en het project actief ondersteunen, overstijgen de gezamenlijke bevoegdheid en informatieverwerkingscapaciteit die van de individuele leden.

Een PSC is een besluitvormend orgaan. Afhankelijk van de contracten achter het project kunnen meerdere permanente organisaties formele besluitvormingsbevoegdheid hebben, waarbij elke organisatie een vertegenwoordiger afvaardigt. In dit geval mogen PSC-leden elkaar niet overrulen en is groepsbesluitvorming noodzakelijk. Wanneer één organisatie het project financiert en ook eigenaar is van de projectproducten, kan er wel een hiërarchie zijn tussen PSC-leden. Zelfs dan verdient groepsbesluitvorming de voorkeur boven een voorzitter die beslist

op basis van advies van de andere leden. Groepsbesluitvorming heeft namelijk drie voordelen. Ten eerste is het de taak van PSC-leden om de permanente en tijdelijke organisatie op elkaar af te stemmen. Dit betekent dat de verantwoordelijkheden van leden in de permanente organisatie hen een stem moeten geven in de PSC en dat besluiten moeten worden genomen met afweging van hun belangen tegenover het gemeenschappelijke doel. Ten tweede verbetert groepsbesluitvorming de kwaliteit van besluiten, zoals bekend uit de organisatiemanagementliteratuur. Ten derde helpt groepsbesluitvorming met commitment van leden aan de uitvoering van besluiten. Leden die het meest worden geraakt door een besluit moeten de grootste invloed hebben. De voorzitter zorgt ervoor dat impasses worden doorbroken.

Roltheorie, organisatiemanagementonderzoek en de onderzoeksgegevens wijzen erop dat leden hun individuele verantwoordelijkheden met elkaar moeten afstemmen om te voorkomen dat taakconflict escaleert tot relatieconflict. Dit kan door tijd te nemen voor teamontwikkelingsactiviteiten, door doelen te bespreken en door wederzijds vertrouwen op te bouwen. Omdat leden de behoefte hierin vaak pas onderkennen wanneer het projectsucces al in gevaar is, moeten teamontwikkelingsactiviteiten van PSC's worden opgenomen in bedrijfsrichtlijnen voor projectgovernance. Aangezien de data laten zien dat senior projectmanagers invloed hebben op de organisatie van projectgovernance, is het advies om richtlijnen voor PSC's ook toe te voegen aan projectmanagementmethodologieën.

Beperkingen en vervolgonderzoek

De kwantitatieve studie (Hoofdstuk 5) en eerdere casestudies uit de literatuur richten zich vooral op projecten die ten minste gedeeltelijk de vereiste producten hebben opgeleverd. Mijn kwalitatieve studies (Hoofdstukken 3 en 4) omvatten PSC's die moeite hadden om projectsucces te behalen. Toch kunnen studies naar PSC's die te maken hebben met slecht presterende projecten aanvullende inzichten bieden over hoe dan de informatieverzameling, informatieverwerking, besluitvorming en mogelijke verschuivingen in governance lopen.

Het onderzoek identificeerde vijf standaardrollen die PSC-leden kunnen gebruiken als uitgangspunt voor het vaststellen van individuele verantwoordelijkheden. De interactionistische benadering van roltheorie voorspelt dat PSC-leden hun rollen voortdurend vormgeven op basis van interacties met anderen. Empirische gegevens uit toekomstige longitudinale studies — waarbij op meerdere momenten in de tijd naar opvattingen wordt gekeken — geven aanvullend inzicht in hoe rollen worden gevormd en hoe dit projectsucces beïnvloedt.

De kwalitatieve data in dit onderzoek komen voornamelijk van respondenten uit Nederland. De kwantitatieve data komen vooral uit West-Europa. Andere eerdere studies over PSC's zijn uitgevoerd in Scandinavië en de Verenigde Staten. Besluitvorming is een cruciale activiteit binnen PSC's en dit proces wordt beïnvloed door cultuur. Daarom zijn studies naar de interne werking van PSC's in verschillende nationale en bedrijfsculturen wenselijk.

PSC-leden hebben ondersteuning nodig en verdienen die ook

Zoals een respondent opmerkte, hebben PSC-leden de plicht om hun verantwoordelijkheden in de permanente en tijdelijke (project)organisatie te integreren zonder te klagen, en zij zouden de vaardigheden moeten hebben om dit te doen. Echter, PSC-leden worden doorgaans geselecteerd op basis van hun permanente functie. Senior en capabel zijn als lijnmanager betekent niet automatisch dat iemand de dynamiek en resultaten van een project begrijpt. Bovendien hebben PSC-leden beperkte tijd voor hun toezichtstaken, is hun begrip van wat projecttoezicht inhoudt vaak beperkt, en kan het project negatieve gevolgen hebben voor hun eigen stakeholdergroep. Daarom verdienen stuurgroepleden ondersteuning en erkenning voor hun soms uitdagende taak en moeten zij zowel in onderzoek als in de praktijk serieus genomen worden.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
CB	Corporate Board
CSF	Critical Success Factor, for projects
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning, an extensive integrated software system that streamlines operations in businesses
HR	Human Relations
OM	Organizational Management
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QRC	Quick Reference Card, in the context of this dissertation for PSCs
TCE	Transaction Cost Economics, a theory in governance
TMT	Top Management Team

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

After a study of industrial engineering, I started working as a project manager for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementations. These projects involve both complex IT applications and changes in business processes and the responsibilities of employees. I noticed hands-on the impact these changes have on managers and other employees and the resulting need for top management support. Typically, the governance and support of the project was provided by a Project Steering Committee (PSC), as recommended by the implementation methodology of one of the leading ERP systems (Murphy, 2016; 2011). As a project manager, I reported to the PSC. To me, PSCs were a mysterious construct, with managers discussing and asking for reports based on implicit role perceptions. A PSC could help the project, but it should also be carefully managed to avoid too much attention, so it would not jeopardize my responsibilities or make uninformed decisions. This dissertation is about those PSCs, though for various kinds of projects, instead of ICT only. This research will dive into their added value and how they operate and should operate. The following section in this introductory chapter discusses the motivation for the research based on my experiences as a practitioner. Follow-up sections in this chapter outline the research area, research objective, research questions, and research approach.

1.1. A CURIOUS PRACTITIONER

In my projects, the members of the PSC were senior managers impacted by the end results or managers who delivered resources: typically directors of operations, finance, sales, IT, and external consultancy companies. I noticed they were selected based on their position in the permanent organization, hardly on competencies needed for project governance, and rarely on the priority they gave to the project. I also experienced that even seasoned senior managers might have little clue about the dynamics and the products of ERP implementations. Besides, the members experienced conflicts of interest between their responsibilities for the permanent organization and the temporary project. For example, a sales director might see the need for flexibility in the ERP system to accommodate a customer intimacy policy, while the CFO wants standardized and automated billing processes. Some PSCs would make these conflicts of interest explicit and make a decision I could execute. However, other PSCs kept priorities and decisions vague, leaving it up to my project team and me to choose a direction. As a result, compliance with the decisions was at risk.

I noticed that PSC members struggle with their role, which leads to relationship conflicts between members or even the avoidance of their project responsibilities. For example, the director of a business unit might advocate a “can-do mentality” for quick learning and motivation. At the same time, an ICT director with a background at a big-five consultancy firm relied on external audits and strict governance to make sense of project dynamics. The differing views resulted in conflicts. More than once, I felt like a counselor. Responsibilities as a member were vague, competencies in managing business could be missing, and members might lack experience

in the dynamics of projects. Besides, they did not know how to combine their responsibilities for the permanent organization (their departments) and the temporary organization (the project): Should they fight for their department foremost or take responsibility for the project as a second "hat"? Therefore, after becoming more experienced as a project manager and gaining experience as a PSC member, I started to manage the PSCs. This was done by making the agenda, having bilateral meetings with the most powerful members, carefully choosing the topics for decision-making, and even making alliances to get (in my view, poorly functioning) members replaced. Some of these actions strike me as potentially undesired from the owning organization's perspective: The PSC members should steer and govern the project manager and not vice versa to avoid agency risks (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, I found them necessary to reach project results for which I felt accountable.

I also noticed the potential positive influence that well-functioning PSCs can have. This is done via decision-making based on priorities at the owning organization and by championing the project. While simultaneously helping the organization and its employees cope with the changes. And by challenging the project manager. In each project, there were a few moments when PSC members would engage to understand high-impact issues, reaching a decision outside the project managers' authority or point of view, and enforcing that decision in the stakeholder organizations. Moreover, by doing so, moving the project forward toward project success.

So, when I got the opportunity to start a PhD in the field of project management, I wanted to explore this interface between permanent and temporary organizations where people struggle and try to do their best for both worlds. To my surprise, there is hardly any literature on the inner workings of a PSC, as will be explored in the next section. Besides, the practitioner-oriented literature is anecdotal in nature (Murphy et al., 2016) and, in my personal experience, is mainly read by project managers and not by PSC members. All strengthening my eagerness to untangle the inner workings of PSCs.

1.2. THE PSC AS A BODY FOR PROJECT GOVERNANCE

A project is a temporary organization that delivers one-off results within boundary conditions such as time, scope, and budget (Bakker & De Kleijn, 2014) and should deliver a beneficial change (Müller, 2000). Projects are common; roughly one-third of all economic activities in Western countries are organized as projects (Schoper et al., 2018). Typically, the organization(s) that will use the project's deliverables initiate a project. A separate funding organization can be involved if the owning organization does not provide (all) the funds, such as for large public works (Miller & Lessard, 2000). The funding and owning organizations appoint a project manager to deliver the desired outcome, who then structures and executes the project. The funding and owning organizations have skin in the game: they provide funds and other resources, such as people and equipment, and they need the project's outcomes. Therefore, these organizations

will not leave project managers to their own devices. Instead, they will or should govern the project and the project manager and provide a link between their own (permanent) organizations and the (temporary) project for as long as the project lasts. Typically, they appoint a project owner (Olsson, 2018), who is to ensure the realization of the business case (Zwikael et al., 2019). Appointing a project owner helps achieve project success, as explained by principal-agent theory (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). This dissertation uses the definition of Zwikael & Meredith (2018, p. 485) for the *project owner* as "the senior manager who is held accountable by the funder for realizing the business case." For *project governance*, I use a definition by McGrath & Whitty (2015, p. 781) derived from the OECD: "the system by which a project is directed and controlled and held to account". Project governance positively affects project success via decision-making (Turner, 2020a) and aligning the project with strategic objectives.

Some authors remark that a committee can have the project owner role instead of one person holding this role (Crawford et al., 2008; Karlsen, 2020). This committee occurs in practice and is typically called a *steering committee*, *sponsor board*, or *project board*. This dissertation uses the term *project steering committee* (PSC) to avoid confusion with permanent coordination groups (e.g., Nolan, 1982). PSCs seem common since they are frequently mentioned as a possible governance body (e.g., Müller, 2016b; Rezania et al., 2019) and are one of the ten core roles in project management (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018).

The governance theory of *transaction cost economics* (TCE) emphasizes the need to balance governance expenses with the added value (Hillman et al., 2002; Williamson, 1979). This raises a question: Why and when is an effort by a group of senior managers who govern a project worth their time compared to one person only, or by a permanent body governing several projects, such as a portfolio board? Literature provides some guidance. As part of directing a project, a PSC should help the project move forward. Support to the project is especially needed in case of irreconcilable conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups that can determine project outcomes (Crawford et al., 2008). PSCs can make a difference when there are conflicting views between contributing and invested stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). A prerequisite is that PSC members ensure their decisions are enforced in the permanent organizations to support the project.

Some authors view the *support* function as separate from the *governance* function (Crawford et al., 2008; Loch et al., 2017). My first publication, as presented in Chapter 3, followed this distinction because the PSC members should realize they cannot suffice by providing directives and asking for reporting, but also must take action as a project champion. Chapter 3, therefore, combines the governance and support function of the PSC in the term *oversight*. More recent literature (e.g., Crawford, 2023; Volden & Klakegg, 2024) views support as part of governance, which was followed in the study and paper leading to Chapter 4. However, my research found that the support function might be ignored by PSC members. Therefore, in the refined definition of a PSC, this dissertation distinguishes between support and governance. This dissertation also argues that governance by committee is a common practice, takes precious

time from senior managers, and that these managers need awareness of and assistance in their temporary roles. At the same time, research on PSCs is scarce. The following section provides an overview of our current understanding of PSCs based on literature.

1.3. CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF PSCS

PSCs are used in practice, though it is unknown how often PSCs govern projects. The lack of data on the occurrence of PSCs is shown in a case study by Karlsen (2020), who speculates that PSCs are not common outside of the Nordic countries. This is contradicted by the work of the global project management organization GAPPS, which recently developed a *terms of reference* on PSCs (Global Alliance for the Project Professions, 2022). The *Research Handbook on the Governance of Projects* (Müller et al., 2023) has a chapter on PSCs, where the author states that the governance of a project can be done by a committee or a single person (Crawford, 2023). It refers to a practitioner-oriented survey indicating that PSCs occur in 50% of the projects that receive explicit governance. I found no other data in literature or practitioner-oriented books about how often PSCs are used in practice. However, the occurrence of PSCs seems to be taken for granted. Researchers Joslin and Müller (2016) assume that a PSC is a common practice since one of the questions in their survey is about the satisfaction of the PSC with project results. Project management organization APM mentions the PSC as an afterthought in an appendix of their book on project governance as a governing body that "has specific collective delegated governance responsibilities" (Association for Project Management, 2018, p. 20). Project management methodology PRINCE2 does guide the formation and execution of PSCs, which is referred to as a project board (Axelos, 2009).

The role of the project owner, mainly focusing on a single person, is well-researched (e.g., Helm & Remington, 2005; Zwikael et al., 2019). Section 2.4 in the next chapter will elaborate on this role and the funder's role. However, by definition, a committee has several members (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025), who can have various roles (Axelos, 2009), leaving unanswered the responsibilities and authorities of the other members of a PSC. Sharing of responsibility with committee members might also impact the project owner. I found no literature on the role definition and role taking of the members. McGrath and Whitty (2018b) provide thoughts about decision-making by committee, interestingly concluding that a PSC does not decide and is merely an advisory board towards the project owner. These authors did not validate empirically and did not discuss how lack of decision-making authority affects project success.

The members of the PSC are senior managers representing stakeholder groups (Murphy, 2016). They are all responsible for their own stakeholder group as part of their permanent function. They also have a responsibility for the project as a whole as part of their permanent role. The PSC and its members are, therefore, a vital linking pin between the temporary

organization (the project) and the permanent organization(s) (Too & Weaver, 2014). There will be conflicts of interest between the two responsibilities. I found no literature about the impact of this tension on the members.

I found some papers addressing the inner workings of a committee for project governance. First, Murphy (2016) conducted mixed-method research about the members' information processing, concluding that members' competencies on product deliverables combined with decision-making authority can help project success via improved information processing. Second, two single-case studies: Arnesson & Albinsson (2013) concluded that PSC members need to have a set of characteristics, such as a positive attitude towards the project and power in the permanent organization, for the PSC to have added value to project success. Karlsen (2020) noticed that members external to the owning and funding organizations add value via experience and network, and that a PSC can positively affect trust in the project team. Third, Lechler & Cohen (2009) state that PSCs can positively affect project success by integrating the customers' perspective, by which they mean stakeholder groups in the owning organizations. Fourth, Hjelmbrekke (2014) et al. promote assistance to the project owner by establishing a committee, where the supplier directly interacts with their customer (the project owner). Last, Loch et al. (2017) provide a list of recommendations for PSC members since they seem to struggle, and they state that the PSC has to provide solutions for the crises in projects. Recurring in all studies is that PSC members need to know the main drivers and actions of the project and have the information processing capacity to integrate data from the project and stakeholder groups. This provides informed decision-making, which transcends decision-making by the project manager and project owner.

The field of Organizational Management (OM) offers extensive literature on Top Management Teams (TMTs) and Corporate Boards (CBs). There are differences between TMTs and PSCs. First, permanent teams will have more time for team development and trust building (Musawir, 2024). Second, members of TMTs and CBs are selected based on the competencies required of top managers. Third, and last, TMT members are responsible only for the permanent organization, while PSC members are responsible for both the permanent and the temporary organization. This dual responsibility among members might lead to conflicts. So, OM literature can shed light on PSCs if combined with empirical validation.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

A research stream on project governance shows the importance of project governance for project success (Sankaran et al., 2025). The role and responsibilities of a person (the project owner), who provides governance and is the link between the project manager and the permanent organization, have been studied. In practice, a committee can assist the project owner, or a committee can even have the role of project owner. This project governance by a

temporary committee has been largely ignored in literature. The studies available make no distinction between the individual roles and responsibilities of the members. I have indications from my own practice and case studies that the members struggle with their responsibilities for the project. The gap in literature and PSC members missing guidance is relevant for society, given the importance of projects to deliver a product or change (Schoper et al., 2018) and the positive effect project governance can have on project success (Musawir et al., 2017). Therefore, I pose there is a gap in research on the inner workings of PSCs and their relationship with project success, which should be covered. Research should not just consider a PSC as a group performing the role of project owner, but as individuals working together both on their own organization's and common project goals.

This research will fill part of this gap by adding and analyzing empirical data, applying, and comparing literature from the OM field, and using literature from project governance. It will add to practice by giving project owners, project funders, PSC members, and project managers guidelines to organize project governance by committee.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the end a project is initiated to reach a goal, with the results quantified as *project success* (Kloppenborg et al., 2007). Following the Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory, the PSC should add to project success to make the effort worthwhile. So, project success will be part of the main research question. I also want to know the manner in which PSCs influence project success, leading to a how-question. The question will be broad since little literature on PSCs is available and practitioner literature is anecdotal.

This leads to the following research question:

How can project governance by a project steering committee influence project success?

The governance is for a project, so only temporary committees overseeing a project or a program will be considered. This dissertation looks at both projects and programs, since in practice the distinction is fluid (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). Literature on permanent coordination groups, sometimes called steering committees (e.g., Nolan, 1982), will not be used since these are only part of the permanent organization. I cannot claim to include all contingencies due to practical reasons. Therefore, the word *can* is used in the research question. It is unknown beforehand if and when a PSC has a positive contribution to project success; therefore, the term *influence* is used instead of *improve*. *Project success* is used in a broad sense since a PSC is responsible for achieving the business case (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018) and not just project management success (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Koops et al., 2017).

Given the limited amount of literature available, the first underlying key question is explorative in nature. It covers both the formation process leading to a PSC and the functioning phase after formation until termination:

Q1: What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of project steering committees?

Members' roles and responsibilities are not clear, while there is a need for role clarity. Therefore, the next key question covers how the roles and responsibilities of the members are shaped. In accordance with the main research question, the effect on project success is studied:
Q2: How are roles and responsibilities within project steering committees defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success?

Standardized roles are only a starting point for the selection of members and to determine individual responsibilities, tailored to the governance needed for the specific project. Mutual trust and goal sharing among PSC members are potential moderators. Testing the relationship between members focusing on individual responsibilities and project success deepens the findings from the qualitative studies. This brings the third research question:
Q3: What is the relationship between individual responsibilities of PSC members and project success?

After studying roles and responsibilities, the scope can be broadened to assist practitioners via research-based guidelines on the formation and execution of a PSC. This leads to the fourth key question:
Q4: What support can be given to PSC members to govern a project via a PSC?

The research is based on a perceived gap in literature, where guidance on PSCs seems to be needed in practice. PSC membership is typically one of the many duties of senior managers, leaving little time to become acquainted with project oversight. Therefore, I developed an easy-to-use Quick Reference Card (QRC) as a tangible product of the PhD research and had it checked by an expert panel to determine whether it can be used in practice in the formation and execution of a PSC.

1.6. RESEARCH APPROACH

The limited amount of literature and perceived issues in practice lead to field research, studying real people in real organizations (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). It started explorative by asking actors to gather their insights on processes in the PSCs. I followed the epistemological stance of a cautious realist (Blaikie, 2009): perspectives of informed respondents can shed light on reality. However, the world as they see it is based on their experiences and interpretations. Therefore, I gathered multiple viewpoints and used literature to gain insights into the underlying reality. I used triangulation with documentation and other respondents' views on the same phenomena, where possible. The research as a whole is a mixed method, combining exploration via interviews and a qualitative survey, testing hypotheses quantitatively via a survey, and evaluating the content and application of the QRC via an expert panel. **Figure 1** provides an overview.

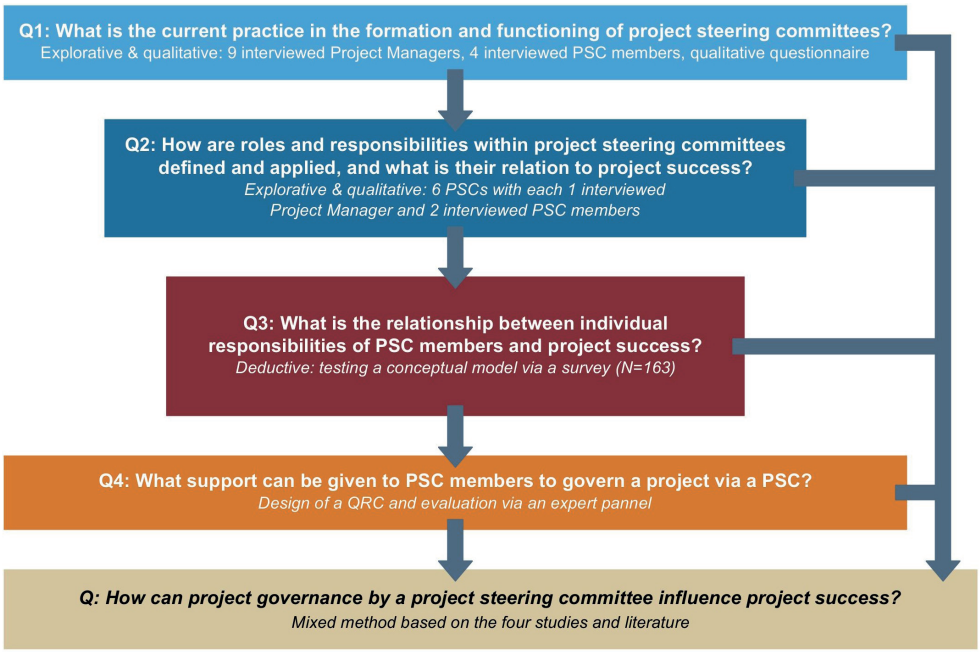

Figure 1: Research approach

First, the research used an inductive approach by exploring the current practice of PSCs through interviews with nine experienced project managers and four steering committee members. Project managers can compare governance across projects and experience the influence of governance by a committee on the project team. PSC members are accountable for the overall project results and operate as the linking pin between the temporary and permanent organization. The respondents gained their experience in a wide range of projects, including ICT, construction, and engineering. For triangulation, I checked the results via a survey of 48 experienced project managers. I analyzed data according to the methodology of Gioia et al. (2013).

Second, the research continued inductively by focusing on roles and responsibilities. I interviewed members from six PSCs; for each PSC, the project manager and two PSC members. The PSCs were on a wide variety of projects, including ICT, engineering, construction, and process redesign. Data were analyzed by coding, both emerging from the data and deduced from literature. Having three views per PSC enabled comparison of results.

Third, I deduced hypotheses on members working from individual responsibilities from literature and the inductive studies. These were tested deductively using a survey with 178 valid responses from PSC members and project managers. The survey also gathered additional data on PSC, such as on the perceived value and the usage of roles.

Fourth and last, I developed a QRC based on our empirical data and literature. The QRC

was evaluated for accuracy and usefulness in a group discussion by seven experienced practitioners on project governance.

1.7. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation follows the structure of the research steps, of which **Figure 2** provides an overview. Literature informs all studies and the discussion. Each study informs the following study and helps answer the overall research question.

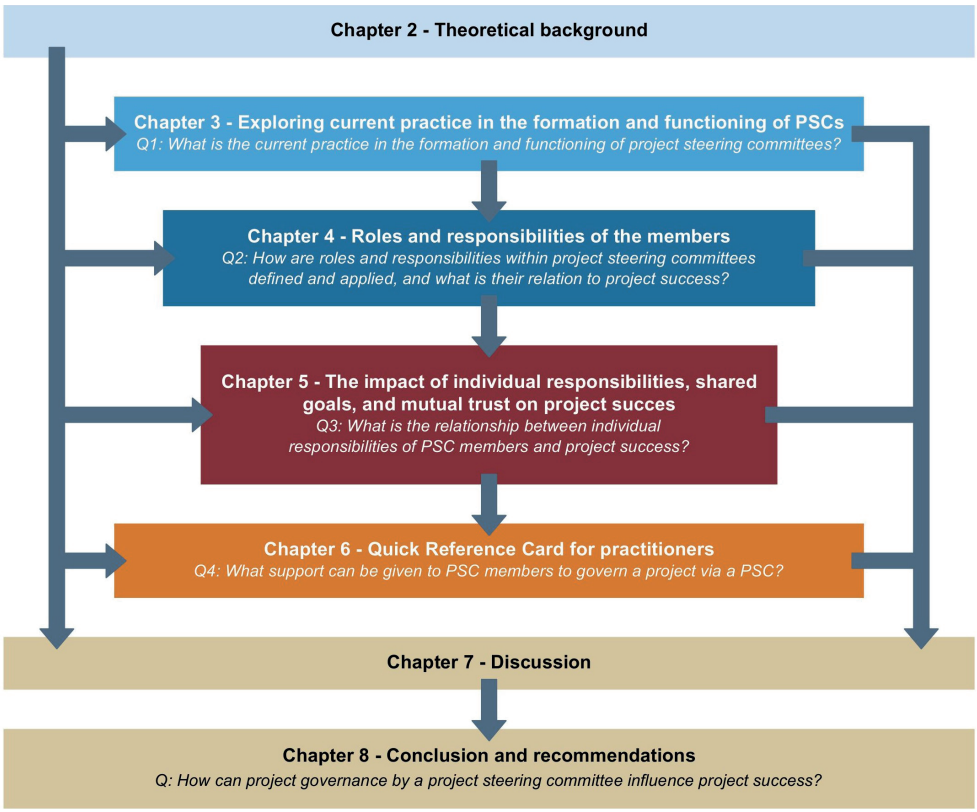

Figure 2: Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 2 discusses literature in the field of project governance and organizational management (OM). Chapter 3 explores current practice based on an explorative study; this chapter has been published as a paper (Stoppels et al., 2023). Chapter 4 dives into the roles and responsibilities of individual PSC members; this chapter has been published as a paper (Stoppels et al., 2025). Chapter 5 describes a conceptual model on roles and responsibilities,

tested using a survey. Which has been published as a paper also (Stoppels et al., 2026). Chapter 6 describes the construction of a QRC based on literature and the three studies. It covers an evaluation of correctness and practical applicability by an expert panel. The main findings from all studies are then discussed and compared to literature in chapter 7, leading to conclusions and recommendations in chapter 8.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical background

As described in the previous chapter, the PhD research started with curiosity about what happens in practice and how PSCs can be improved. That calls for a literature search to understand what science provides as guidance for PSCs, their members, and me as a researcher. In Dey's words, "there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head" (1993, p. 65).

As a starting point to gather literature, I searched EBSCO-Host, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar (first 100 records) with the terms *steering committee + project*, *project board*, *sponsor board + project*, *steering group + project*, *project sponsor*, *project owner*, and *project governance*. Besides, I checked all titles and, if needed, abstracts from project management journals (*International Journal of Project Management, Project Management Journal, International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, Journal of Modern Project Management, Project Leadership and Society*) as of 2015, since these might lead to new search terms. I explored practitioner-oriented literature and other publications by searching for books on PSCs and project governance on common WebShops with the languages English and Dutch (leading to e.g., Garland, 2009; Molen, 2015; Zwikael & Smyrk, 2019). Last, I checked the main project management methodologies and competence baselines for information on PSCs and project owners: *IPMA Competence Baseline* (IPMA, 2024), *PRINCE2* and *MSP* (Axelos, 2007, 2009, 2017), *PMBOK* (Project Management Institute, 2016), *APM publications* (Association for Project Management, 2018), and *GAPPS publications* (Global Alliance for the Project Professions, 2022). The resulting bibliography was managed using EndNote software. The bibliography will be provided on request.

The first analysis of papers showed that the term *Steering Committee* tends to be used loosely. This research only focuses on PSCs that oversee a project or program. So they should have decision-making power and be temporary. The term Steering Committee was already used by Nolan (1982) in the 1980s, but for a permanent coordination group for IT activities. Some papers discussing PSCs refer to the work of Nolan (e.g., Lechler & Cohen, 2009; Murphy et al., 2017), which is debatable. I avoid applying findings from permanent coordination bodies to the temporary PSC. Still, the theory in those studies can be reused, as will be done from the field of Organizational Management (OM).

At later stages in the research, key concepts deriving from the initial bibliography were looked into. Thus, the literature search was expanded on topics such as governmentality, theories in project governance, organizational literature on top management teams (TMTs) and corporate boards (CBs), and decision-making. I presented at scientific and practitioner-oriented seminars, got help from peer reviewers when submitting to journals, and discussed findings with scientists and practitioners. All leading to new literature to explore. At the time of drafting this dissertation, the bibliography contains about 500 publications on the research area. However, only a some directly address the PSC at group level and even less address the inner workings of a PSC.

2.1. GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT OF PROJECTS

A PSC is a *governance body* (Murphy et al., 2018). More specifically, a body for project governance, as opposed to the governance of projects (Turner, 2020a). A PSC is temporary and dedicated to a project. Governance can be defined as providing direction and holding the project manager accountable (McGrath & Whitty, 2015; Sankaran et al., 2025). Governance is about providing conditions for ordered rule (Stoker, 1998). Contrary to management, which is about "running the business" (Müller, 2016a). There is vibrant research on project governance. The Project Management Journal distinguished four strands (Sankaran et al., 2025). First, *Resilience*, about coping with project complexity deriving from the uncertain and interconnected nature of projects. Governance mechanisms need to improve resilience to cope with uncertainty. Second, *Organization*, focusing on projects spanning organizations. Third, *Public Project and Institutional Studies*, about projects with heavy government involvement such as by funding a project. Fourth and last, *Innovation*, about governance stimulating innovation in and via projects. As we will see in the rest of this dissertation, studies on PSCs can apply to all these research strands.

Crawford (2008) states that a PSC should govern the project if a failing project leads to high risk for the funding or owning organization, when performance is low, and if there is a chance of non-compliant behavior by the project team. The definition of governance, focusing on providing direction and holding to account, might lead to the impression that a PSC is contemplative in nature. Therefore, Crawford (2008) adds that a PSC has a support function. Practitioner-oriented books advise PSC members to be ambassadors of the project (Molen, 2015; Penders et al., 2016; Postema, 2016), as does literature on project owners (Breese et al., 2020). So, members need to take action, which includes management tasks. Support from the PSC is especially required when resources are lacking, conflicts of interest exist between stakeholders, or a weak project team is present (Crawford et al., 2008). PSCs consist of senior managers, so they might be a way to obtain top management support for the project. Studies have shown the criticality of top management support for project success (Scholten et al., 2010; Young & Poon, 2013). Also, the PSC is a boundary-spanning team (Murphy et al., 2018) where functionally diverse knowledge and networks come together. This helps information processing for topics outside the span of control of the project manager (Breese et al., 2020). Recent literature tends to regard support towards the project as part of governance, including championing the project (Sankaran et al., 2025, p. 3).

Literature is unclear on when forming a PSC justifies the time involved by the senior managers who are members. Martinsuo (2023) mentions that the size and strategic nature of a project should justify a PSC instead of using a portfolio board. How size influences the need, and what the strategic nature has remained unclear and warrant follow-up study. Also, her remark is in the context of project-based organizations, where portfolio management provides an alternative. Combinations of types of governance bodies exist, for example, an organization having the rule that all innovation projects report to a portfolio board, but those with at least

five project members also have their own PSC (Tuominen & Martinsuo, 2024). Zwikael & Meredith (2018) also mention the size as a criterion, stating that a PSC may not be needed for small projects.

2.2. THEORIES ON GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

As a body for project governance, theories used in project governance research can shed light on the inner workings of PSCs. Due to the multifaceted nature of PSCs' internal workings, the PhD research drew on multiple theoretical perspectives. Biesenthal & Wilden (2014) and Zwikael & Smyrk (2015) provide an overview of theories in the field of project governance. From the organizational management field, role theory was added (Biddle, 1986). It predicts that expectations and interactions will shape role-taking by PSC members. The next sections provide an overview of these theories.

2.2.1. Stewardship and principal-agent theory

Agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) and *stewardship theory* (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) are often used in tandem. *Agency theory* splits the *principal* from the *agent*. The agent handles management on behalf of the principal, the latter setting the objectives. The agent has more focus since the principal also has other accountabilities. Besides, the principal might miss competencies (Zwikael et al., 2019). Agency theory highlights the potential for the agent to have its own agenda. Therefore, there is a need to put in place measures that align their interests, such as reward systems. Agency theory has been applied to the roles of project owner versus the funder (Zwikael & Smyrk, 2015) and project manager versus the project owner (Andersen, 2012). For PSCs, it implies that conflicts of interest between the members lead to the members focusing on accountabilities in the permanent organization, since that is the primary source for compensation. It also points to the need for reporting and second-opinions to limit information deficiencies at the PSC.

Stewardship theory also splits roles; between the stewards who manage and the principal who delegates tasks. Stewardship theory proposes that stewards act in the organization's best interest with intrinsic motivation, thus pointing to the benefits of trust. It predicts the added value of stakeholder engagement (Oliviera et al., 2022). It has been applied to project governance in general (Turner, 2020a) and the role of the project manager versus the project owner (Müller, 2019). For PSCs, it implies that members will want to work on the shared common goals to reach project success, and the need to place trust in the other members and the project manager.

2.2.2. Shareholder theory and Stakeholder theory

Shareholder theory assumes that the main purpose of an organization is to maximize shareholder return on investment, which requires structures (such as contracts, processes, and policies) to ensure managerial action is always in the best interests of the shareholders (Friedman, 1962). The organizations that fund the project can be seen as shareholders. Taking a shareholder perspective will mean that the funder will want to control the project owner, who will control the project manager. It highlights the accountability of the project owner and the PSC to achieve the business case. Control can either be focused on behavior or outcomes (Müller et al., 2019).

In contrast, *stakeholder theory* considers the wider social responsibility of organizations (Littau et al., 2010). Typically, the project will affect not only shareholders, but also other stakeholders. As a governance structure, one of the primary reasons for a PSC is to mitigate conflicts among stakeholders which affect project success, which is achieved through a boundary-spanning team (Murphy, 2016). Therefore, (a portion of) the stakeholders will have representation in the PSC. This dissertation uses a classification by McGrath & Whitty (2017) for stakeholders in the field of project management. First, *invested* stakeholders. They influence the project and are committed, such as the funding and owning organizations. Second, c*ontributors*, where participation is needed to deliver the products, such as suppliers. Third, *observers,* who are uncommitted to the project but must accept or comply, such as regulatory bodies. Last, *end users*, they use the projects' products and have little influence, such as customers. Since invested and contributing stakeholders have direct impact on the project, it can be expected that these groups have direct representation in the PSC. The observers and end users could be managed by the PSC and the project team without direct PSC participation.

2.2.3. Transaction Cost Economics

The introductory chapter already raised the question: When is governance by a PSC worth the effort? The theory *of Transaction Cost Economics* (TCE) (Williamson, 1979) raises these kinds of questions. Every economic transaction has a cost (Musawir et al., 2017). Organizations adapt their governance structure to achieve the lowest possible transaction cost. Therefore, the cost of activities aimed at reducing risk, such as monitoring, should be balanced against the benefits (Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2018). A PSC consists of senior managers who spend time and effort on project governance. The amount of time and even the existence of the PSC must be balanced against the gains in project governance. If the risk to the funding and owning organization is low in the event of failure and the project does not require support from cooperating functionally diverse senior managers, why spend the time?

2.2.4. Resource-dependence theory

The *resource-dependence theory* (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), sometimes mixed with the closely related resource-*based view* (Barney & Ketchen, 2001), highlights the importance of access to financing, people, equipment, knowledge, and networks to meet business objectives. It is used

in research on Corporate Boards (CBs), explaining why some non-executive board members could be from outside the governed organization. These members should reflect the environment of the organization they govern. This helps to gather knowledge and have an influence on stakeholders (including observers). Especially where resources can not be sourced (Hillman et al., 2002; Mayes, 2009). The same applies to PSCs, as these may need to add members with access to resources outside the direct influence of the project manager and the project's suppliers. In project management, Derakhshan et al. (2019) utilize the theory as a basis for considering the benefits for suppliers when contracting.

2.2.5. Role theory

Studying the inner workings of a PSC will involve how the PSC members behave in their temporary role on project governance. In a PSC, members must combine responsibilities for the project with their responsibilities in the permanent organization. In the field of Organizational Management (OM), *role theory* has been used to shed light on the roles managers can have. It concerns the fact that humans behave differently, though predictably, depending on their social identity and situation (Biddle, 1986). Role theory posits that individuals occupy social positions and hold expectations regarding their own and others' behaviors. These expectations will shape roles. Defining roles can help balance the individual and team identity (DeFillippi & Sydow, 2016).

Role theory can be split into two perspectives. First, the *structural perspective* (Bechky, 2006; Biddle, 1986). This states that people's tasks, norms, and behaviors derive from organizational standards and what they are used to in previous interactions. These tend to be relatively stable (Sluss et al., 2011). In case of a PSC, roles can be derived from the standards of the permanent organization. Alternatively, roles can be based on members' previous experiences in a PSC or as a project manager. Second, the *interactionist perspective* emphasizes that people construct their roles through continuous interactions with others. In a group context, this role will stabilize over time. Breese et al. (2020) employed the interactionalist perspective as a lens to examine how project owners shape their role as the responsible party for a specific project. Role clarity from the start helps prevent a trial-and-error approach, thereby speeding up the sharing of expectations. This leads to a sense of certainty about the task to be completed and a pressure to perform, both of which are prerequisites for quality decision-making (Verville & Halingten, 2003).

People might be unaware of their expectations of their own and others' roles (Biddle, 1986). This will shape my research approach, especially since the members might lack a common vocabulary on project governance. There is no stable social system, as the PSC is temporary and the project is unique. The PSC members will have to start working as a team and respond to expectations from other PSC members, the project team, and stakeholder groups.

2.3. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The concepts of *accountability* and r*esponsibility* are essential for this research since governance creates structures, roles, and *accountabilities* that should align project outcomes with the desired business benefits (Musawir et al., 2017; Rezania et al., 2019). Accountability and responsibility are frequently and sometimes loosely used in scientific and practitioner-oriented literature on project governance, project owners, and PSCs (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a). A PSC can only steer if the funder and owner have provided authority, which comes with accountability. *Accountability* can be defined as "a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor must explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences" (Bovens, 2017; Zwikael et al., 2019). McGrath & Whitty (2018a) propose a definition focusing on results: "liability for ensuring a task is satisfactorily done." Project Management Institute PMI agrees by using "The condition of being solely answerable for an outcome." PMI adds "Accountability is not shared" (Project Management Institute, 2021). All those definitions are based on an agency theory perspective, where accountability helps prevent and correct a deviating agent (Rezania et al., 2019). McGrath & Whitty (2018a) define *responsibility* as "an obligation to satisfactorily perform a task". PMI agrees with their definition, "The condition of being obligated to do or fulfill something," adding that "Responsibility can be shared" (Project Management Institute, 2021).

I argue that accountability is more comprehensive than responsibility, as it includes liability (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a). Another difference is that accountability is about ensuring a task is done satisfactorily, whereas responsibility is about performing the task. McGrath & Whitty link accountability directly to the right to approve; accountability must be accompanied by authority (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). PMI claims that only individuals can be accountable; groups cannot. This makes sense since a person must justify himself (e.g., at court or to a CEO) and not a group. Still, in the organization management (OM) field, there is a research stream on *group accountability*, of which Kou & Stewart (2017) provide an overview. They define group accountability as "the implicit or explicit expectation that a group's collective actions will be justified to, and evaluated by, an external audience with the ability to mete out consequences." They define this as a *relational definition* of accountability, rather than the *objective definition*, which focuses on codified rules. The relational definition is about how accountability is "lived and breathed" (Stewart et al., 2023). The accountability PSC members will have in their permanent organizations, and the shared responsibility (or even group accountability) might shape how members feel accountable for project success. The discussion chapter of this dissertation will further discuss group accountability and group approval.

2.4. THE INNER WORKINGS OF A PSC

Appendix A provides an overview of the papers and other scientific publications found on PSCs. It addresses studies focusing on PSCs and studies mixing permanent and temporary bodies for governance. Studies on PSCs that involve members other than the project owner are limited to case studies (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013; Karlsen, 2020; Loch et al., 2017) and a survey on the oversight of ERP implementations (Murphy et al., 2017). Since the PSC can assume the role of project owner (Crawford et al., 2008), and the project owner (in the sense of a person) could chair the PSC (Zwikael et al., 2019), this literature is relevant to shaping views on the internal workings of PSCs.

2.4.1. Project owner and project funder

This dissertation follows the definition by Zwikael and Meredith (2018) for the *project owner* as "the senior manager who is held accountable by the funder for realizing the business case." Following the definition, the primary concern of the project owner should be to achieve the business case in the sense of the reasons for the project, thereby taking care of the interests of the project funder. The *project funder* is a senior manager from the funding entity who has the authority to approve the project and allocate funds (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). The project owner typically chairs the PSC (Olsson, 2018) and has a role after the project's termination to ensure the project's products are used to the benefit of the funder (Meredith & Zwikael, 2020). The project owner should understand the strategic goals to make informed decisions, focusing on the intended benefits rather than project management success. Key activities include approving the business case (in the sense of a document), monitoring the project, providing resources, addressing arising problems, motivating the project manager, managing risk (with a focus on benefits), and stakeholder management (Kloppenborg et al., 2014). For strategic projects, the owner should be internal to the owning organization and have seniority (Meredith & Zwikael, 2020; Olsson, 2018). These and other authors implicitly regard the project owner as the link between the temporary and the permanent organizations. The owner can translate what the permanent organization needs into what the project should deliver and can influence the permanent organization to provide resources and make changes happen (Breese et al., 2020).

2.4.2. Main activities of the PSC

The PSC and its members should have a strategic focus (Loch et al., 2017). Members should agree on the overall goals. The interest from the permanent organizations might align with the overall goal, but during the implementation, conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups might come forward. As discussed by practitioner-oriented books, the funding organization has an interest in limiting investment, while the users of the projects' products might want scope extensions. Additionally, the interests of user groups and organizations that maintain the

projects' products may not align (Molen, 2015). Therefore, bringing together the views and interests, and balancing them, is a primary activity of the PSC. Power relations between PSC members will shape the outcomes. However, having discussions within the PSC helps provide a unified direction to the project manager and ensures calmness in the project's surroundings (Penders et al., 2016).

Providing direction, holding the project manager accountable, and providing support necessitates information. The project team will provide part of the information. However, since the PSC represents stakeholders and must align project goals with the strategy of the funding and owning organizations, it also needs information beyond that provided by the project team (Loch et al., 2017). Based on resource-dependency theory, PSC members must provide information from key areas within their stakeholder groups, as is the case with corporate boards (Hillman et al., 2002). Members need to have the absorptive capacity not only to gather information but also to understand how it relates to project success and translate this into solutions for issues (Loch et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2018). The team as a whole should have access to the necessary information to achieve project success and the capability to understand and transform this information for risk assessment and solution provision.

The primary manner in which PSC governs is through decision-making (Loch et al., 2017). Literature is not clear on whether the project owner (as the chair) decides or whether the group decides. A clear accountability (from an objectivist view) leads to one person making the decision. However, the two case studies on PSC suggest that collective decision-making is employed (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013; Karlsen, 2020). Members should inform their teammates of their actions and their impact on them, have an understanding of the consequences, and engage in frequent discussions about the mutual and collective expectations of all members. This helps complete and realistic decisions as well as team members' commitment to the final decisions (Carmeli et al., 2009).

2.4.3. Key requirement for members of a PSC

Following shareholder theory (Friedman, 1962) and the role of the PSC as a project owner (Crawford et al., 2008), the interests of the funder(s) must be represented. This implies that at least some of the members should have the confidence of the funder(s) and the ability to understand what makes project ownership and project investment success. Following stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and resource-dependency theory (Hillman et al., 2002), some of the members should also represent stakeholders and provide access to scarce resources needed for project success.

Little is known about key requirements for PSC members. PSC members will experience tensions between accountabilities for the temporary and permanent organization (DeFillippi & Sydow, 2016; Loch et al., 2017), so the members should be able to balance interests of the project, their own stakeholder group and other stakeholders. After reaching a decision, they need the skills and willingness to communicate decisions and manage consequences in their

own permanent organization.

Requirements for project owners, in the sense of a person, have been studied. The person fulfilling the role is typically appointed by a senior executive from the permanent organization (Helm & Remington, 2005). This person should have authority in the permanent organization, have personal power, have credibility in the eyes of stakeholders, understand the business, be politically savvy, have the skills to connect the project and the temporary organization, have the willingness to battle for the project, the ability to motivate and ad hoc support the project team, have excellent communication skills, be compatible with other key players, be able to challenge the project, and be able to assist the project manager in getting the right people (Helm & Remington, 2005; Kloppenborg et al., 2007; Kloppenborg et al., 2014; Louw et al., 2022). The studies hardly distinguish what derives from the function in the permanent organization and what are personal skills. They highlight the relevance of motivation, suggesting that the funder should actively engage in the project and its oversight, without taking over the project manager's responsibilities (Louw et al., 2022). Accountability for project success extends beyond daily job responsibilities (Breese et al., 2020). It remains unclear whether a good, motivated senior manager in a permanent organization is automatically a good project owner for a temporary project.

Literature research revealed no data on how the key requirements of individual members relate to requirements on the group level. No studies were found on how the characteristics of the project and the permanent organizations influence the key requirements for a project owner.

2.5. PROJECT SUCCESS

Project success and its success criteria are well researched (Bakker & De Kleijn, 2014). Since the project owner is accountable to the funder, this research should at least include success in the eyes of the funding organization (Koops et al., 2017). The (future) owning organization needs the project's products; thus, success in the eyes of the owner should also be taken into account (Zwikael et al., 2019). PSCs should also consider stakeholders' satisfaction since the PSC is a body where stakeholders collaborate (Lechler & Cohen, 2009). Which leaves open, according to which stakeholders the project should be successful. McGrath & Whitty (2017) provide an example of criminals as the observer kind of stakeholders; still, they will not be invited to a PSC for a project improving security. Zwikael & Smyrk (2012) propose three types of project success. *Project management success* is about achieving the project plan and is typically the accountability of the project manager. *Project ownership success* is about achieving the business case and typically involves the project owner's accountability. *Project investment success* is largely determined by the funder's assessment of the investment's worth. The PSC can take the owner role, so it should at least be responsible for project ownership success.

From a shareholder perspective, the PSC should at least take measures to maximize the chances of achieving project investment success. If the term *project success* is used in this dissertation, it implies all three kinds of success.

In the three types of project success, the perspectives of the project owner and the funder as stakeholders are explicit. The perspectives of other stakeholders are only indirectly implied in the project owner's success. Stakeholders should be considered from a normative perspective (Müller et al., 2023; OECD, 2004; Unterhitzenberger, 2023). Taking the interests of stakeholders into account can also help ensure project success, as the contributing and some of the observing stakeholders may be needed for product delivery and using the products to achieve the business case (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). A study shows that the stakeholder school of governance is more often correlated with success than the shareholder school (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Other scholars do add stakeholder satisfaction as a criterion for project success (Bakker & De Kleijn, 2014; Khan et al., 2013). This dissertation will include stakeholder satisfaction as part of project success, though it does not claim that all stakeholders should be satisfied.

Governance is about creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action (Stoker, 1998). Based on literature studies, Turner (2020a) and Biesenthal & Wilden (2014) conclude that project governance is associated with better project success, but the underlying mechanism is unknown. Turner (2020a) proposes that governance has a positive relationship with decision-making, which in turn can contribute to project success. The PSC is a body where decision-making takes place, so in PSCs, decision-making might be a mediator for project success. Literature also suggests that project owners should balance the management of risks and the provision of structure (Müller, 2016a). Thus implying that PSCs should balance providing unified direction and leaving the project manager leeway. Governance provides a framework but does not prescribe actions for the project manager (Müller, 2016a; Turner, 2020a). The PSC should refrain from taking over project management responsibilities

2.6. CONCLUSION FROM LITERATURE

We conclude that a gap exists in literature. On the one hand, PSCs are considered good practice for project governance (Murphy et al., 2018), while governance positively relates to project success. Additionally, the PSC is considered a device that enables senior managers to support the project jointly. On the other hand, only a handful of studies describe the inner workings of a PSC (e.g., Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013; Karlsen, 2010). Existing studies on the individuals who oversee a project primarily focus on the project owner, rather than the other PSC members (e.g., Zwikael et al., 2019). So, empirical data are needed to enrich the existing theory. Theories from project governance are well established. Together with theories from organizational management, they can help shed light on the inner workings.

Literature suggests perspectives on a PSC. First, they serve as a means to provide

governance and limit risk for funding and owning organizations. Thus, the focus is on the relationship between an agent (the PSC) and the principal (the funder). The group can gather multiple perspectives as input for a unified direction and hold the project manager accountable. Second, the PSC serves as a collaboration platform for stakeholders to achieve a common goal, thereby supporting the project. This collaboration is essential when none of the stakeholders has full decision authority, critical resources are outside the direct influence of the project owner, and there are irreconcilable conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups. Third, PSCs are meeting points for both temporary and permanent organizations.

The primary activities in the PSC involve gathering, processing, and transforming information, which ultimately lead to decision-making. The PSC could also champion the project and motivate the project team as support. The next chapter will explore and add empirical data on these inner workings of the PSCs.

CHAPTER 3

Exploring current practice in the formation and functioning of PSCs

After providing an overview of literature on PSCs in the previous chapter, this chapter will report findings of an explorative study on the inner workings of a PSC. It will answer the first research question *Q1: What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of project steering committees?* This chapter has been published as paper *Exploring current practice in the formation and functioning of PSCs* in the *Journal of Modern Project Management* (Stoppels et al., 2023). Minor changes were made to match the layout with the rest of the dissertation. Appendix B provides additional context of the projects and organizations discussed in the interviews.

ABSTRACT

Literature aimed at practitioners recommends dedicated Steering Committees for oversight of a project. However, most scientific research focusses on project governance in general or the role of the single owner. This chapter adds to literature by inductively exploring the formation and the functioning of a Project Steering Committees, based on experiences of both members and project managers. Nine project managers and four Steering Committee members were interviewed. Data was analyzed, leading to five aggregate dimensions: on relevance and goals, the formation process, decision-making, roles and responsibilities of the members and ideal characteristics of the members. Findings were triangulated by a qualitative questionnaire. The study shows that dedicated Project Steering Committees are used for oversight of a project. As predicted by literature, the oversight consists of governance and support activities. The Steering Committee structure is primarily based on existing practices in the organization and the needed support from owners and other stakeholders. The project owner, often in consultation with the project manager, selects Steering Committee members based on functional representation. Competences needed for a role in the Steering Committee and interest in the project are generally taken for granted, but not always present. Follow-up research can focus on the roles and responsibilities of the members, characteristics the members should have, and the decision-making process.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Projects need oversight by senior management in order to be successful (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014), often executed by a Steering Committee (Müller, 2016b). The oversight can consist of both governance and support activities (Crawford et al., 2008; Loch et al., 2017). The funding organization generally starts by appointing a project owner, who in turn appoints a project manager for the daily management of the project (Fama & Jensen, 1983). Typically, the project owner is accountable for the project success, and the project manager is accountable for the project management success (De Wit, 1988; Kloppenborg et al., 2007). The role of the project owner and the relation between owner and project manager has been investigated before. Involvement of owners in the socialization activities of a project positively relates to project success (Andersen, 2012). Individuals who see their role as project owner separate from their line function, are the most focused on benefit management (Breese et al., 2020).

Literature aimed at practitioners recommends a group of people forming a Steering Committee, which provides oversight towards the project (Axelos, 2017; Müller, 2016b). According to Zwikael and Meredith (2018, p. 485) "a *Project Steering Committee* (PSC) is a group that acts at strategic level, and is responsible for achieving the business case as well as ensuring the progress of the project." The project owner (in the meaning of one individual senior manager) typically chairs the PSC, while other members are key stakeholders. However, it is not clear when to use a PSC as opposed to a single person who is the project owner. Project management organization PMI (Project Management Institute, 2016) states that an increase in project complexity leads to the application of more governance resources and processes. The amount of governance needed also depends on risk appetite, culture, and project management maturity. Thus, it suggests a PSC might be preferred for complex projects, without clearly defining what complex entails. PSCs can have a vital role in achieving project success (Lechler & Cohen, 2009; Somers & Nelson, 2001), especially in projects that deliver a complex product combined with extensive impact on stakeholders.

The inner workings of PSCs receive little attention in research, as stated by Lecher & Cohen (2009) and Murphy (2016). Indeed, only two case studies were found, on building new vessels for a navy (Karlsen, 2020) and innovation in healthcare (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013). Murphy (2016) studied PSCs for ERP implementations with the lens of information processing. Still, when a group of people provides oversight, it is unclear how the formation process takes place and what the tasks and responsibilities of the individual members are. Commonly used project methodology PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2017) provides guidelines on PSCs (referred to as project boards), though no scientific support has been found (McGrath & Whitty, 2020a). Therefore, this study seeks an answer to the question:

What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of Project Steering Committees?

In literature a steering committee can be viewed as a permanent body, such as Lechler

and Cohen (2009) using this term for a portfolio board coordinating multiple projects. The term Steering Committee is also used for a temporary body, like in the case study by Arnesson & Albinsson (2013). McGrath and Whitty (2018b) mix both usages, by referring to both the work of Nolan (1982), who used the term for ICT coordination groups, and Murphy (2016), who does explicitly focus on temporary committees for a project. The formation of temporary PSCs is tailored to the goals and specifics of the project (Molen, 2015) and the members might have limited experience in supervising a project (Loch et al., 2017). Therefore, the empirical study discussed in this chapter focused only on temporary PSCs that are dedicated to a single project or program. Within these PSCs, the study concentrated on committees for projects which needed extensive governance due to their complexity and risk for the organization at failure (Crawford et al., 2008). These projects included ICT, civil engineering, and production enhancement projects, which all had multiple stakeholder groups with partially opposing interests.

This chapter will refer to a PSC as a body which can provide both governance and support, following Crawford (2008). It will use *oversight* as the overarching term, in the meaning of "watchful and responsible care" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2024), which is in line with the use by Loch et al. (2017).

The study was conducted in several steps. First, it looked at literature to explore the field. The outcomes support the suggested gap between perceived importance of PSCs and knowledge about formation and its functioning. Second, interviews were held with nine experienced project managers and four PSC members to explore the oversight of projects in practice. The transcripts of the interviews were used to distill concepts and aggregated dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013) on the practice in PSCs. Based on the concepts found, a qualitative questionnaire was sent to 48 experienced professionals for further exploration of the field from a project manager's perspective, as project managers over the course of their career typically deal with a variety of PSCs. In total, 32 completed questionnaires were received. Results from the interviews and the questionnaire were compared and provided recommendations for further research and guidelines for practice to improve the oversight of projects.

This chapter follows the structure of the study, starting with a literature review. Next, the methodology of the empirical study is provided. Results from the interviews and from the questionnaire are presented subsequently. The comparison of the results from interviews, questionnaire and literature is presented in the discussion section, followed by describing validity and implications for literature and practice. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

3.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.2.1. Governance role of PSCs

To understand the governance role of a PSC, we need to know what governance is in the realm of projects. McGrath & Whitty (2015) concluded that project governance is "the organizational governance of a project = the system by which a project is directed and controlled and held to account" (McGrath & Whitty, 2015, p. 781) . Müller, Shao et al. (2016, p. 1) add that the holding to account is both on performance and conduct. McGrath & Whitty also remarked that in the realm of projects "Governance is the confluence point where the competing interests of the temporary project organization and the more permanent parent organization must be resolved." (McGrath & Whitty, 2015, p. 755), which sheds light on the role of the PSC as a linking pin between the permanent and temporary organization.

Several theories from the field of corporate governance have been applied to project governance, of which Biesenthal & Wilden (2014) and Müller (2016b) provide an overview. One of these is *agency theory* (Eisenhardt, 1989), which assumes self-interested and rational actors. So, the project owner and project manager should each have incentives and be controlled to act in the interest of the shareholders. *Stewardship theory* (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) provides a contrasting view, assuming the actors want to act in the best interest of the organization, and thus points to the importance of trust. The *theory of transaction cost economics* (Williamson, 1979) implies that organizations adapt their governance structure to achieve the lowest possible transaction cost. It states that risks and cost involved in governance should be balanced. For example, an occasional high-risk project might warrant a dedicated PSC consisting of senior management. Whereas a type of project that the funding organization knows well might suffice with governance by a stand-alone project owner or an existing steering committee of projects. The *resource-based view* highlights the importance of effective utilization and access to resources to meet business objectives. It is used to determine the composition of Corporate Boards to obtain members with access to different kinds of vital resources outside the organization (Hillman et al., 2002). The same might be true for PSCs, to help gain access to resources outside the influence of the project manager. *Shareholder theory* assumes that the main purpose of an organization is to maximize shareholder return on investment, which requires structures (such as contracts, processes and policies) to assure managerial action is always in the best interests of the shareholders (Friedman, 1962). Contrasting, *stakeholder theory* takes the wider social responsibility of organizations into account (Freeman, 1984).

These theories on governance can help to clarify the goals of a PSC but do not suffice to deduct hypotheses on how PSCs operate. Nevertheless, they are useful to interpret results from inductive research (Blaikie, 2009). Letting representatives from major stakeholders participate in decision-making can be undesired from an agency point of view, since these might focus on their personal goals and own departments. But looking from a stewardship perspective, involving these representatives could lead to commitment to follow-up decisions

after the 'go live' of a project.

One of the few studies on the effect of a PSC on project success was conducted by Somers & Nelson (2001). They discovered that having a PSC is one of the Critical Success Factors for ERP implementations, since it enables senior management to directly monitor the project team's decision-making by (dis)approving major decisions (Whitten et al., 1998), thus to direct the project. However, their study leaves open why a committee is needed instead of a single person fulfilling the role of project owner. A paper by McGrath and Whitty (2017) on types of stakeholders notes that variations in oversight arrangements can accommodate the differing interests of roles like customer, sponsor, owner and the entity controlling the deliverer (the project team) in case these roles are not united into one person. Lechler and Cohen (2009) point to an advantage of using a committee for oversight: to include perspectives from multiple stakeholders in the decision-making which improves customer satisfaction.

3.2.2. Support role of PSCs

Most studies describe PSCs as a governance body and therefore with governance functions. The support role, as noticed by Crawford et al. (2008), seems largely ignored. For example, PMI provides a guide "Governance of Portfolios, Programs and Projects" (Project Management Institute, 2016), which mainly focusses on direction and control. McGrath & Whitty (2013) advise to be careful using a PSC if the mandate exceeds that of the members, since it jeopardizes the authority structure at the funding organization; thus they focus on the governance role. However, Olsson et al. (2008) mention that two distinct kinds of project owners can be found. First, a project owner that focusses on the business case (type 1). And second a project owner that supports the project manager and enables project delivery (type 2). Project management methodology PRINCE2 does take a wider view than just the governance aspect, by using *direction* (instead of governance) as the main theme for the oversight of projects (Axelos, 2009), in which they also include support tasks like resolving user requirements and priority conflicts. The present chapter explicitly includes the support role and defines *support* as "to hold up or serve" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2024) like taking care of impediments and a willingness to partner with the project team (Helm & Remington, 2005).

3.2.3. Composition of a PSC

Practitioner oriented literature provides some insights on the composition of a PSC. First, PMI advises to determine the governance required based on project complexity (Project Management Institute, 2016). That lines up with the theory of transaction cost economics since the risks should justify the hours spent on governance. The members of governing bodies are typically executive level individuals from the organizational groups that have a stake in the project. The PMI guide is not clear on who could be in the lead determining and organizing a project governance structure. PMI points to the importance of senior management support, so they might be involved in the initiation of the project. Second, PRINCE2 states that the person of

project owner (which they refer to as executive) must be appointed by corporate or program management (Axelos, 2009). The project owner is responsible for the structure and the selection of members of the PSC. The criteria to select members are to obtain a "balanced view on behalf of the wider organization" (Axelos, 2009, p. 16) and to have members who can decide for the groups they represent.

Well-researched roles in the oversight of projects are the *project owner* and *project sponsor*. The naming of owner and sponsor is not used consistently in literature, as found by Zwikael and Meredith (2018). They propose to use project owner as "the senior manager who is held accountable by the funder for realizing the business case." Thus, they make a distinction in roles and avoid using sponsor by using funder. Zwikael and Meredith conclude that the owner is a person who might chair the PSC, select the project manager, provide strategic direction, approve the project plan, and monitor the progress. McGrath & Whitty (2020b) add that the person who owns the project outcomes should be the chair. This chapter follows the definition of owner made by Zwikael & Meredith. As will be shown in the results section, there can be several persons holding the role of project owner.

Olsson (2018, p. 831) provides a list of best practices regarding the project owner for project governance. The project owner:

- has full responsibility [*sic*] for the project;
- understands the responsibilities and has the experience to drive decision-making;
- ensures that the project is aligned with organizational strategies;
- has a good relationship with the project manager and they work well together;
- has enough time to dedicate to the role.

Helm & Remington (2005) provide ideal characteristics of the project owner according to project managers in civil engineering infrastructure projects. These are on position in the organization, personal competences, knowledge of the organization, compatibility with other key players and attitude towards the project.

In PRINCE2, the group that directs the project manager is named a *project board*, "this is the most senior level within the project management team [*sic*]. … The project board is accountable [*sic*] for the success of the project within the boundaries set by corporate or program management" (Axelos, 2009, p. 12). Note that PRINCE2 makes the project board part of the project management team, but provides guidelines on both governance and support. PRINCE2 uses *accountable* (McGrath & Whitty, 2020a) for the group, while Olsson (2018, p. 831) in his best practices uses the more limited term *responsible*. PRINCE2 explicitly defines three roles in the PSC. First, "The *executive* … is accountable for the project's success and is the key decision-maker … The Executive's role is to ensure that the project is focused throughout its life on achieving its objectives and delivering a product that will achieve the forecasted benefits" (Axelos, 2009, p. 15). Second, "The *senior user* is responsible for specifying the needs of those who will use the project's products, for user liaison with the project management

team and for monitoring that the solution will meet those needs" (Axelos, 2009, p. 16). Third and last, "The *senior supplier* represents the interests of those designing, developing, facilitating, procuring and implementing the project's products" (Axelos, 2009, p. 16).

No other literature has been found on roles of members of PSCs. Also, no studies were found on the effect of using the recommendations on roles of PRINCE2 on achieving project results. Besides, PRINCE2 is not clear on accountability: the project board (PSC) is accountable but "ultimately" the person who has the role of executive is accountable (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a).

3.2.4. Decision-making

Governance focusses on transparency and accountability (OECD, 2004), which might be jeopardized if the project owner is not the only decision maker in the PSC. A senior user (as a stakeholder) who can decide, but is not held accountable, can take advantage for his own goals (Olsson, 2018). This matches the fundamentals of agency theory (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). Patel and Robinson (2010) concluded that having accountability clearly vested in a single project owner helps ensure effective governance. Which was supported by Musawir et al. (2017) finding that having a project owner as the single point of accountability predicts project success.

So, how should a steering committee decide if only the single project owner is accountable? McGrath & Whitty (2018b) claim that most PSCs are actually an advisory board towards the project owner. Reimers (2002) poses this should even be the case. In his study on ERP implementations in China, he found that department managers having veto rights in the PSC led to a decline in service level. On the other hand, Hällgren and Lindahl (2017) found that consensus-seeking behavior reduces the need for escalations and thus contributes to timely decision-making. Whether consensus-based decision-making by committee is beneficial for achieving project results is unclear.

3.2.5. Conclusion from literature

Literature on PSCs has been mainly written by and for practitioners. This indicates the practical need for guidance on how to set up and execute a PSC to help achieve project performance. Underlying scientific research, however, is scarce (Murphy, 2016). It is known that complex projects justify the cost of extensive oversight (Müller, 2016b; Williamson, 1979). At this stage, it is not clear when a PSC is needed, and when a stand-alone project owner or permanent steering committee of projects would suffice. Existing research does provide insight on the role of the project owner (Breese et al., 2020) and, to a limited extent, on the relation between governance and project success (Turner, 2020a). PSCs can be important for both governance (providing direction and control) and support (to hold up or serve) of the projects (Crawford et al., 2008). The project owner typically establishes and chairs a PSC (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). Other members are representatives with authority from major stakeholder groups, with roles like senior user and senior supplier (Müller et al., 2019). Literature provides ideal

characteristics for the owner (Helm & Remington, 2005). For the other roles, ideal characteristics like on function in the organization, interest in the project, and personal competences are unclear. This all points to the knowledge gap of how the committee as a whole and its members individually could provide governance and support to benefit project results.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

Since theory on project oversight is not well enough developed to formulate testable hypotheses, this study used an inductive and explorative approach to understand what is going on. The focus was on multi-actor projects that deliver a product or service. Within these projects, the study considered perspectives from practitioners to gather rich information. Their perspectives can shed light on the reality, according to the epistemological stance of a cautious realist (Blaikie, 2009).

To explore the functioning of PSCs, nine experienced project managers and four PSC members were interviewed. They were selected via theoretical sampling from a wide variety of projects from twelve organizations, based on the researcher's network. The projects of the PSC members were at least in the realization phase. The interviews allowed to clarify the context and the meaning given by the interviewees to actions in the PSC. As a second research step, a questionnaire was developed based on the exploratory interviews and sent to 48 experienced professionals for further exploration of the field. Project managers typically must deal with a variety of PSCs, thereby broadening the research's view.

3.3.1. Data collection and analysis of the interviews

For the first step, the total set included participants with a wide range of characteristics:

- experience with projects in civil engineering, ICT custom made, ERP implementation and enhancing production plant capabilities;
- experience with projects in multinational and medium sized organizations;
- for the project managers: employed by the customer organization, hired by the customer organization, or employed at an ICT systems integrator.

Participants were interviewed individually using semi structured interviews. The main topics were project governance, use and goals of PSCs, roles of members of the PSCs, ideal characteristics of the members and the formation process of the committee. Each interview lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. The participants approved a summary of the interview. **Table 1** lists the project managers and the PSC members with their role, the projects discussed and the type of funding organization.

Given the inductive character of the research, the method developed by Gioia et al. (2013) was used to systematically analyze the transcripts by categorizing emergent concepts

and ideas: First, each transcript was analyzed individually in order to extract what the respondents revealed on the current practice of PSCs. All findings were listed, largely in their own wordings, as 1st-order category statements. Their own wording was only adjusted to compensate for slang or company specific jargon and translated to English. This led to 295 1st order category statements. The number of categories is high compared to other research using the method of Gioia et al. since various kinds of projects and organizations were analyzed and the researcher wanted to keep the data rich at this stage. Next, the 1st order categories for all the interviews were analyzed and compared to each other, considering the context in each transcript, since the meaning can vary among respondents and contexts. This 2nd order analysis led to 138 common themes. Finally, the 2nd-order themes were combined into five aggregate dimensions, structured according to the aspects of the workings of PSCs they clarify.

Figure 3 illustrates these steps. On the right side it provides examples of categories, themes, and dimensions.

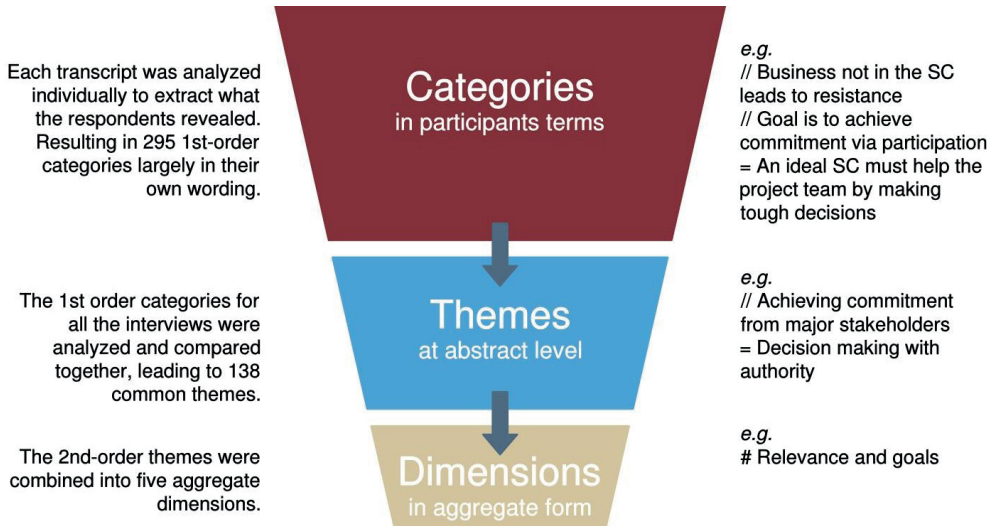

Figure 3: Data analysis following Gioia et al. (2013) exploring PSCs

Table 1: Participants in the interviews

Participant	Role participant	Projects discussed	Funding organization
P1	Project manager	*A.* Development and implementation of an E-commerce platform	Truck manufacturer
	Project manager	*B.* Custom software development and implementation	National government, customs department
P2	Project manager	*A.* Car-tunnel renovations	National government, department of public works
	Project manager	*B.* Custom software development and implementation	National government, department of public works
P3	Quality Assurance	*A.* Portfolio of IT projects	High tech company
P4	Project manager	*A.* European ERP implementation for automotive wholesale	Wholesale company
	Project manager	*B.* Implementation Manufacturing Execution System at production plants	Food company
P5	Project manager	*A.* New public transport infrastructure	Local government
P6	Project manager	*A.* Renovation of a gas terminal	Oil & Gas company
	Project manager	*B.* Portfolio management of production plant projects	Food company
P7	Project manager	*A.* Megaproject, new metro line	Local government
	Project manager	*B.* Update of metro safety systems	Local government
P8	Project manager	*A.* New Student Information System including redesign of processes	Vocational education institution
P9	Project manager	*A.* Implementation of an ERP System for a mid-sized organization	Retail company
S1	Senior user	*A.* Implementation of new software (custom made and ERP) for a business process	National government
S2	Senior user	*A.* Upgrading a production plant for new business in process industry	High Tech company
S3	Project owner	*A.* New Student Information System including redesign of processes	Vocational education institution
S4	Process owner	*A.* Implementation of new ERP system including redesign of business processes	High Tech company

3.3.2. Data collection and analysis of the questionnaire

The exploratory interviews led to insights in the functioning of PSCs. For further exploration of the field, as a second step a questionnaire was developed based on the outcomes of the interviews. This questionnaire was sent to 48 experienced project managers within a project management firm, who work on behalf of various customers. Thus, participants were working in a wide variety of sectors, such as government, education, industry, and wholesale. The questionnaire was completed by 32 participants (67% response rate). They worked in projects in Dutch organizations, in eleven different sectors and 66% had an investment value above €1M. Most of these projects (91%) were ICT related, with exceptions in civil engineering, production plant enhancements, and business change programs. Since 30 of these project managers voluntarily added their name, the researcher could ask for clarification. In the analysis section of this chapter, the insights from interviews and questionnaire will be compared so see whether the interview insights are applicable to a larger group of projects.

3.4. RESULTS

Condensing the 2nd-order themes from the interviews led to the aggregated dimensions listed in Appendix C, of which table 2 provides a summary. This section describes the results of the interviews and the survey and is structured according to these five dimensions. The coding between brackets refers to the participants interviewed, and projects discussed as provided in table 1. In the text about the results from the survey, the scores between brackets represent a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Detailed data is available upon request.

Table 2: Aggregated dimensions based on analysis of the interviews exploring PSCs

Aggregate dimension	Content
Relevance and goals	What is the overall reason for an oversight structure? What are the goals of the PSC? To which person or committee does the project manager report?
Formation process	Who proposes the oversight structure, based on which criteria? Who decides what the structure will be? What kind of members are needed in a PSC?
Decision-making	What is the decision-making authority of the committee? How does decision-making take place?
Roles and responsibilities of the members	What are the roles, tasks, and responsibilities of the members? To what extent are roles important for project results?
Ideal characteristics of the members	What would an ideal PSC member look like? Based on personal competences, personal values, attitude towards the project, and informal position in the organization.

3.4.1. Relevance and goals

All project managers interviewed reported to a committee created specifically for the project, none to a stand-alone project owner or a permanent committee. In the survey, most of the projects (78%) reported to a temporary PSC. The other projects reported to a stand-alone project owner (13%), or a permanent portfolio board (9%). In the interviews, one organization used a combined portfolio board for the oversight of smaller projects and a dedicated PSC for each project above €1M (P6B). Three of the civil engineering projects (P5A, P6A, P7A) and one ERP implementation (S4A) had two or three dedicated temporary committees on different decision-making levels.

The names of the committees varied: steering committee (P1A, P1B, P2A, P4A, P5A, P10A, S1A, S4A), direction-group (P8A), project board (S1A), program board (S2A), portfolio board (S4A), management team (P7A), program council (S3A), and decision review board (P6A). Names are not consistent with literature, for example, at an ERP implementation the temporary PSC was called a *portfolio board* (S2A).

According to both project managers and PSC members, the main purpose of a PSC was to help a project reach its project goals, which consists of both the business case and the project management goals. Central theme was that the PSC provided the link between the standing organization(s) and the project organization, by

- making sure the project-goals align to overall organization-goals in a changing environment, the *direction* part of governance;
- making decisions with authority for the project to move forward;
- providing resources;
- providing structure and clarity for the surrounding organization;
- communicating to peers, top management, shareholders, and the project team;
- championing the project;
- providing a platform for the main shareholders to work together by exchanging information, interests, and shared goals.

The project managers were aware that the PSC has a task in directing the project, but seldom mentioned the task of holding the project manager to account on conduct and performance. For example, they never spontaneously mentioned the possibility of the PSC organizing audits to check progress of the project independently of the project manager. They heavily emphasized the support role of the PSC, “to work as a team to reach the finish line” (P1B) and “to assist the project team” (P6B). The results from the survey were in line with the interviews. Project managers strongly indicated that a PSC controls the project results (84% score 4 or 5). They experienced much less control on their conduct (56% score 1 or 2). There was some support that the PSC challenged the project manager; a third (38%) scored neutral (score 3) and half agreed (50%, score 4 or 5). However, most project managers did not perceive coaching by the PSC or project owner on how to deal with the organization’s culture (50% score

1 or 2, 34% neutral with score 3).

When these participants were asked, "Would your project have succeeded without having a PSC?" responses only varied from "very difficult" to "definitely not." As one of the project managers voiced "There would have been several moments where the whole project would have been at risk of being cancelled. What saved us is that we had a platform where parties felt free to speak to each other and where the directors engaged in the project and gained insight and knowledge." (P5A). In the survey, when stated "In this project a PSC with several members is necessary to reach the project goals," 88% agreed (score 4 or 5).

3.4.2. Formation process

When choosing a structure for oversight, according to the interviews, organizations used existing corporate standards on project governance as a starting point. About half of the organizations had clear standards (P2A, P3A, P4B, P6A, P6B, S1A, S2A, S4A). One of the projects discussed was a tunnel renovation, which was a type of project the funding organization had experience with. The existing way of working was used without modification (P2A). Other organizations adapted an existing governance standard to the needs of the project. For example, in a high-tech organization, the corporate rules prescribed a separate project board for each project. However, the project owners decided to form one program board to cluster oversight for all projects which were needed for the upgrade of a production plant (S2A).

In most of the projects discussed in the interviews, the oversight structure was designed specifically for the project from the start. The project owner (in the sense of a person) and the project manager were the key actors in the formation. First, they considered the formally contracted involved parties. This occurred in the civil engineering cases (P5A, P7A) and an ERP implementation case (P9A). For example, if a municipality funded part of the project, a representative from that municipality would become a member of the PSC (P5A). Next, they identified other important stakeholders who would use the product of the project. For example, at an ERP implementation, the director of operations was typically a member of the PSC (P9A). Finally, they determined the managers with access to critical resources. For a custom-made software project at a national government, access to internal ICT specialists was critical, so a senior manager from ICT was invited to the PSC (P1B).

When the project owner had decided what kind of roles they needed in their PSC, potential members were typically determined via their regular function in the organization (P1A, P1B, P2A, P3A, P4A, P5A, P6A, P7A, P9A, S2A, S3A, S4A), such as being a finance director or quality manager. Therefore, specific interests and competences were secondary in the selection process of the PSC members. A person who was asked to participate rarely refused (only at P8A) or sent a replacement to attend the meeting (only at P1A). The results from the survey are in line with those from the interviews, since all project managers indicated that the members of the PSC were chosen based on their function in the standing organization (score 4 or 5). They agreed less on whether the members were chosen based on personal competences;

half mostly agreed (score 3 and 4) and half disagreed (score 1 or 2). They also had varying opinions on whether members were selected based on their personal network, this was evenly distributed. About half (56%) indicated that personal interest in the project was not important for selection (score 1 or 2).

3.4.3. Decision-making

The decision-making process in the PSCs seems to be a continuum from decision-making by the owner only to consensus-based decision-making. None of the committees discussed in the interviews decided based on voting. The clearest case of decision-making by the owner was the use of a *Decision Review Board* at the oil & gas company (P6A). Note that this title is misleading since the board only advised the executive. Even here, the owner sought consensus to avoid resistance, and the committee had members who could formally veto decisions in their area based on their line function. In all other projects, the norm was decision-making as a group, ideally decision-making based on consensus. For example, a project manager in a struggling civil engineering project used joint decision-making involving representatives from contractors, to improve working collectively instead of focusing on their roles (P7A). In the survey the tendency towards consensus-based decision-making (54%) was less strong than in the interviews. In some cases (14%) the PSC did not decide at all.

The study observed some conflicts resulting from shared decision-making. One of the participants mentioned (P1B) “the PSC was one big interest group; the members kept on making demands and the owner had to pay”. Similar conflicts of interest were mentioned on budget and lead-time in two other cases (P5A, P9A). However, both the project managers and PSC members still preferred joint decision-making to achieve commitment from all members and major stakeholders. One PSC member regarded consensus-based decision-making as the means to achieve the best business processes surpassing interests of business units (S4A).

Formally, the decision-making authority of a PSC was equal to the authority of the function in the standing organization of the members (P1B, P2A, P5A, P7A, P8A, P9A, S1A, S2A, S3A). However, in practice if the members worked together, they extended their influence. For the construction of a new mode of public transport, formally the members had limited decision-making power because their parent organizations had to decide on specifications and budget (P5A). Informally, they had considerable power by deciding what would be on the agenda of their parent organizations and by preparing options together with other PSC members and the project team. At a program to upgrade a high-tech production plant, the decision-making authority was limited because each separate project had to be approved by the executive committee. Because the members of the PSC were working as a team and influencing their surroundings, the Project Assurance Department felt they overstepped their authority (S2A), even though the PSC members worked within the formal authorization.

Project managers influenced decision-making by preparing the agenda for the PSC in all projects discussed, having one-on-one meetings with members, and in several cases

technically chairing the meetings (P1A, P6A, P9A, S2A). One project manager indicated that the project owner should have been the chairperson, to improve his or her commitment (P1A).

3.4.4. Roles and responsibilities of the members

Participants agreed unanimously that focusing on the PSC's goals and working as a team was more important than focusing on their individual roles. This could be seen in most committees using consensus-based decision-making and allowing discussions in committee meetings (P2A, P5A, P7A, P8A, P9A, S1A, S2A, S3A, S4A). They made statements like, "It's more important to understand working as collective than pursuing your own role "(P6B) and "We [as committee members] said, let's focus on what connects us" (P7A). However, the roles had value in the selection of the participants, "to achieve a balance between the disciplines" (P6B).

If the participants used a method for designing roles in the PSC, it was PRINCE2. Even if no explicit method was used at the formation, the project managers indicated the roles were alike the PRINCE2 roles of owner, senior user, and senior supplier. All PSCs discussed had at least one project owner. In a production plant enhancement in the process industry, there were two project owners: one director from the country organization and one director from the division organization (S1A). All but one PSC had various senior users, who were responsible for deciding on behalf of an organization, process or department and making sure decisions were implemented there. The exception was an ERP implementation at a vocational training institution, where directors of the business units (faculties) were represented in the project management team, but not in the PSC; the project owner in retrospect would have given one of them a role in the PSC to help business change management (S3A). Most ICT projects (except S3A) and two of the civil engineering projects (P2A, P6A) had senior suppliers, either directly from the contractor or via the ICT manager or a contract manager. Two project managers in civil engineering projects indicated that in retrospect they should have made employees of the main contractors part of the PSC to make them feel part of the team and to improve accountability (P6B, P7A). Last, several projects had an additional non-PRINCE2 role of quality assurance and/or general advice, such as an information manager (P8A, P9A) or quality manager (P4A, P6A, P8A, S2A). **Table 3** provides an overview of the roles for each project discussed, when left empty the role was not explicitly discussed.

Table 3: PRINCE2 roles in projects discussed exploring PSCs

Projects discussed	Executive	Senior User	Senior Supplier	Quality Assurance (non-PRINCE2)
P1.A. Development and implementation of an E-commerce platform	Y	Y	Y	N
P1.B. Custom software development and implementation	Y	Y	Y	
P2.A. Car-tunnel renovations	Y	Y	Y	
P2.B. Custom software development and implementation	Y	Y	Y	N

P3.A. Portfolio of IT projects	Y	Y	Y	
P4.A. European ERP implementation for automotive wholesale	Y	Y	Y	Y
P4.B. Implementation Manufacturing Execution System	Y	Y	Y	
P5.A. New public transport infrastructure	Y	Y	Y	N
P6.A. Renovation of a gas terminal	Y	Y	Y	Y
P6.B. Portfolio management of capex projects in food industry	Y	Y	N	
P7.A. Megaproject, new metro line	Y	Y	N	N
P7.B. Update of metro safety systems	Y	Y	N	
P8.A. New Student Information System including redesign of processes	Y	Y	Y	Y
P9.A. Implementation of ERP system for a mid-sized organization	Y	Y	Y	Y
S1.A. Implementation of new software (custom made and ERP)	Y	Y	Y	N
S2.A. Upgrading a production plant for new business in process industry	Y	Y	Y	Y
S3.A. New Student Information System including redesign of processes	Y	N	N	Y
S4.A. Implementation of new ERP including redesign of processes	Y	Y	Y	N

The interviewees were asked if the members received training on the oversight of projects. Both project managers and PSC members indicated there was limited focus on training, with some exceptions (P1B, P8A, S4A). The most extensive (one-day) training was at the ERP implementation of the high-tech organization (S4A). However, this training was only introduced after a reorganization of the oversight structure due to limited project progress. Even then, at first only part of the committee members chose to participate. An oil company had an obligatory training for project owners, though not mentioned by the project manager (P6A). Committee members were supposed to understand their role by reading the project plan, being a good manager in the standing organization and having meetings with the project manager. Some PSC members indicated that in hindsight more training or team building could have helped performance (S2A, S4A).

3.4.5. Ideal characteristics of the members

Members lacking competences were mentioned during the interviews (P1A, P3A, P8A, P9A). Lack of interest in the project also occurred, leading to uninformed decision making (P9A). One of the participants remarked "The senior users were senior managers and were supposed to have the business change management skills," which they did not always have (P3A). When asked in the survey if the PSC members had enough personal competences for their role, a small majority of project managers agreed (56% score 4 or 5). One participant clearly indicated a lack of competences (score 1) at an ERP implementation.

The ideal characteristics can be personal competences, personal values, attitude towards the project and informal position in the organization. Frequently mentioned characteristics were being action oriented (P1A, P1B, P3A, P4A, P4A, P9A, S2A), having authority (P1A, P4A,

P8A, P9A, S1A), acting in the interest of the project (P1B, P4, P5A), understanding characteristics of working with projects (P1A, P6A, P7A), and understanding deliverables for the project (P6A, P8A, S2A). One of the participants summarized several ideal characteristics as "being undisputed in the organization" (P9A).

3.5. DISCUSSION

The study looked at the current practice regarding PSCs according to experienced project managers and PSC members and thereby contributed to further understanding formation and execution of PSCs. This section discusses the empirical findings and how they relate to literature.

3.5.1. Relevance and goals

All interviewed project managers reported to a dedicated committee, not just to a stand-alone project owner or a permanent portfolio board. The questionnaire showed a similar outcome, where most of the projects report to a PSC. This is in line with the findings by Müller et al. (2016a, p. 170), where 97% of all project managers indicated that they report to a PSC. It contradicts a proposition by Karlsen (2020) that a reason for limited research on PSCs is they are mainly used in the Nordics.

For the governance role of an oversight committee, the common use of a PSC can be explained by transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1979), as the complexity of the discussed projects warrants the effort on governance. Looking at the support role, Lecher and Cohen (2009) found committees useful to coordinate multiple stakeholder perspectives. Thus they support a stakeholder orientation in governance, which can help achieve project success (Joslin & Müller, 2016). The current results confirm the importance of the support role; the respondents indicated the projects needed a PSC as vehicle for coordination between senior managers.

The empirical results show the overall goal of a PSC is to achieve project goals, which matches the *type 1 owner* as defined by Olsson (2018) and thus indicates that the committee takes the role of project owner (Crawford et al., 2008). PSC's can provide governance and support with governance consisting of directing and holding to account. The *direction* part of governance is indeed clearly visible, and the committee should be able to authorize the implementation of decisions (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b). The "holding to account" part of corporate governance is less clear from the empirical data. The questionnaire data supports that project managers are held to account on results, however in the interviews this was hardly mentioned spontaneously. Maybe PSCs have limited focus on holding the project managers to account, or the respondents take this for granted, as suggested by Olsson (2018). The support role, as highlighted by Crawford et al. (2008), can be clearly seen in several of the goals mentioned in the interviews, like "communicating to other managers, top management, shareholders and the project team".

3.5.2. Formation process

Results showed that in the formation process experienced project managers helped inexperienced project owners, which is supported in literature (Walker, 2012). The final decision on the oversight structure was made by the project owner. The extensive and growing literature on the governance of projects (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016) suggests existing governance rules would be the starting point for the owner. However, for most of the PSCs discussed in our interviews, there was no corporate framework on project governance available.

Results from the interviews and the questionnaires indicate that the main selection criterion for members is their function in the standing organization. First, functions to be represented are based on formal contracts, like who funds the project, which is line with shareholder theory. Next, functions representing major stakeholders are selected, which is in line with stakeholder theory. Last, functions providing access to critical resources were selected, in accordance with the resource-based view. So, all these three theories can be used a lens for the formation of a PSC in further research.

3.5.3. Decision-making

In most of the projects discussed in the interviews and in half of the projects from the questionnaire, the norm was consensus-based decision-making. This is consistent with the findings of Lecher & Cohen (2009), who state that in most committees decisions are made collectively. This poses the question of what group decision-making means for accountability. Zwikael et al. (2019) found some CEOs indicated that the project owner is accountable and others that the PSC as a group is accountable. Most literature as well as PRINCE2 advise decision-making by the project owner only (Axelos, 2017; Musawir et al., 2017; Olsson, 2018; Patel et al., 2010), which contrasts our findings on what happens in practice. Thus, this calls for a deeper understanding of the trade-off between improved commitment and a loss of clear accountability in case of consensus-based decision making in the PSC.

The results showed that the formal decision-making authority of the PSC was equal to the authority of the function in the standing organization of the members. Such a committee McGrath and Whitty (2018b) would refer to as an advisory committee, since in these committees' decisions will not compromise the accountability of existing organizational roles. However, several of the participants in our study feel that the power of the group is larger than that of its members, call it some sort of informal power, which is not included in the research of McGrath & Whitty.

Project managers mentioned that frequently they chaired the PSC meetings, though they would have preferred the project owner did for commitment. This reminds of a remark made by Müller (2016b) that senior project managers will tend to manage a PSC if the members have little understanding of modern project management. However, from our data it is unclear why a project owner does not chair. Literature indicates project managers chairing the committee and heavily influencing the agenda will blur the division between the PSC's and project manager's

accountability and thus should be avoided (Turner & Keegan, 2001).

3.5.4. Roles and responsibilities of the members

The results show that in the formation process, roles are defined to identify functions (mainly in the standing organization) whose holders could fill these roles. The roles can be identified according to PRINCE2, although several steering groups have a fourth non-PRINCE2 role of quality assurance and/or general advice. This corresponds with the findings in a case study of an ERP implementation where a quality assurance consultant was part of the PSC (Johnstone & Tate, 2018). Our results also indicated that most of the focus of the members should be on working as a team, challenging other members, and immersing oneself in the interests of other roles. Defining roles though focusing on working as a team is not a contradiction *per se*, the main reason for using roles could be to obtain a wide number of perspectives and to make sure all major stakeholders are represented when working on a common goal. Indeed, Musawir *et. al* (2017) found that a single point of accountability in the person of the project owner is essential for achieving the benefits, but having clearly defined roles and responsibilities in their study revealed no relation to project investment success. This again leads to questions for further research on the importance of clear accountability for a task vested in one person, versus working as group.

3.5.5. Ideal characteristics of the members

Helm and Remington (2005) provide a list of ideal characteristics for project owners, which matches our results on characteristics for PSCs members in general. Characteristics mentioned are personal competences, personal values, attitude towards the project, and informal position in the organization (besides the formal position which was a selection criterion). Findings on availability of competences needed for project results are divers. At least in the ICT projects PSC members seem to lack the competences needed for project oversight. Project managers tried to compensate via one-on-one meetings, while formal training or coaching of PSC members hardly took place. In literature there is scarce information on whether the members have the required competences (Loch et al., 2017). The case study by Karlsen (2020) however does mention the PSC members receiving training, thus nuancing the current results and providing directions for further research.

3.6. VALIDITY AND LIMITATIONS

Project managers as well as steering committee members were interviewed to compare their views. The subsequent questionnaire further added perspectives from the broader project managers' point of view. This provided confirming information but also showed limitations of the interview results, such as consensus-based decision-making being less common than the

interviews suggested. Follow up research could be broadened by involving more steering committee members.

The results of both the interviews and the questionnaire show variations in meanings of terms like *steering committee* and *governance* in the views of the respondents. For example, what PRINCE2 calls the *senior responsible owner* was referred to as the *program manager* by one of the PSC members interviewed (S4). This supports the value of the qualitative research approach by allowing probing and indicates that context is important to interpret the results.

The limited sample size of this exploratory research might lead to missing contingency factors influencing formation and performance of PSCs. Also, the research was limited to The Netherlands- although multinationals were involved – so findings could be biased towards a Dutch corporate culture. Future research could widen the scope by including projects from other countries or projects with multiple owners and sponsors.

3.7. IMPLICATIONS

The study has several implications. First, in literature, the support role of PSCs must be explicitly taken into account besides the governance role since support is needed in case of irreconcilable constraints between stakeholders or scarcity of resources. Second, research on authorities of committees and its members should take informal influence into account besides formal authorities. Third, papers must be explicit on whether they describe a temporary PSC, or more permanent committees where group formation processes have already taken place and membership might be a part of the position in the permanent organization.

Further research is recommended on a number of topics. First, on decision-making in the PSC given the potential tradeoff between holding one person to account for project results and the reasons found for group decision-making (decision quality and commitment). Second, responsibilities and roles of the individual members must be made clear since ambiguity might lead to further limiting accountability and the risk of members not taking action. Third, the study suggests the ideal characteristics of the members are in line with those needed from the project owner. However, these might be dependent on their PSC role and the characteristics of the project, which also justifies further research.

The study also has implications for practice. First, PSCs can be a worthwhile body for project oversight if a project has high risk for the funding organization at failure or support by a group of senior managers who represent stakeholders or resources-suppliers is needed. Second, in practice, senior project managers can heavily influence the formation of the PSC and its agenda. So, they should also help the members to fulfill their *held-to-account* role or should be limited in this influence. Third, due to members being mainly chosen based on their position in the permanent organization, members should follow training and take other mitigating measures if their competencies or other characteristics are lacking.

3.8. CONCLUSION

Literature aimed at practitioners advises the use of PSCs to oversee complex projects. Most scientific research, however, has been on the role of the project owner or project governance in general. A PSC has more members than just the project owner and can be vital for supporting the project. Therefore, this study investigated: *What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of Project Steering Committees?* Nine experienced project managers and four PSC members were interviewed on the formation and workings of the PSCs. After preliminary analysis, subsequently a qualitative questionnaire was conducted with 32 project managers for triangulation. The results from the interviews were compared to the results from the questionnaire and to literature.

The study found that a dedicated committee for oversight is widespread practice for complex projects like large civil engineering projects, production plant enhancements and ICT projects leading to new business processes. It should provide oversight consisting of governance and support activities. Such a PSC fulfills the role of project owner (as a group) and is thus accountable for the project goals. The committee is the vital linking pin between the standing organization and the project organization. It provides resources, makes decisions, and offers a platform for involving stakeholders, who share their thoughts to obtain commitment and make high quality decisions. Consensus-based decision-making is common, since resulting commitment from the members seems to outweigh potential ambiguous accountability.

If the organization has standards for either project governance or governance of projects, these will be the starting point for the formation of the PSC. The project owner (the formal chairperson of the PSC) adapts these governance standards or (in absence of standards) sets the oversight, as needed by the project. The project owner selects members for the PSC based on who funds, who represents the major stakeholders, and who has access to vital resources or knowledge. This suggests that shareholder theory, stakeholder theory and the resource-related view all apply. Characteristics of members, like interests and competences, are secondary criteria in the member selection process. This means that the members might not have the right skills/knowledge on oversight to perform well as PSC member. Moreover, the members of the committee are rarely trained.

This study added empirical data to the debate on oversight of projects via steering committees. This data can provide input to strengthen evidence based best practices for PSCs and direct further research.

CHAPTER 4

Determining the roles and responsibilities of the PSC members

The previous chapter provided insights into current PSC practices. One of the findings is that members are selected based on who funds, who represents major stakeholders, and who has access to vital resources. This chapter explores the standardized roles of those members and the corresponding responsibilities. It answers the second research question *Q2: How are roles and responsibilities within project steering committees defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success?* This chapter has been published as the paper *Establishing the roles and responsibilities of Project Steering Committee members* in the *Project Management Journal* (Stoppels et al., 2025). Minor changes were made to align with the rest of the dissertation's layout. Appendix B provides additional context of the projects and organizations discussed in the interviews.

ABSTRACT

Project steering committees are used for project governance, though their functioning has received little research attention. This study establishes roles and responsibilities of project steering committee members. Based on interviews with project steering committee members and project managers, backed by literature, we define five roles: representing funders, representing users, representing suppliers, representing the support organization of project deliverables, and quality assurance. Members' roles help identify positions in the project steering committees and individual responsibilities, linking the temporary and permanent organizations. If trust and shared goals are present among project steering committee members, clear responsibilities sharpen decision-making, build commitment, and prevent relationship conflict, thereby improving the chance of project success.

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Project steering committees (PSCs) are used in practice as governance bodies for projects (Crawford, 2023). Governance provides "the value system, structures, processes, and policies that foster transparency, accountability, responsibility, and fairness to allow projects to achieve organizational objectives and foster implementation that is in the best interest of all stakeholders" (Müller et al., 2017, p. 14). A project governance body will provide direction and hold the project manager to account for performance and conduct (Müller, 2016a). Effective governance balances this control task with support for the project (Volden & Klakegg, 2024). A PSC is defined as "a group that acts at a strategic level and is responsible for achieving the business case as well as ensuring the progress of the project" (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018, p. 485). PSCs consist of senior managers representing stakeholder groups, forming a boundary-spanning team (Murphy, 2016). PSCs facilitate collaboration between stakeholders (Harvey et al., 2025). They should resolve conflicts between funders (Zwikael et al., 2019) and may play a role in fostering learning and creativity (Pemsel & Söderlund, 2024).

Note the difference between governance of projects and project governance (Müller, Zhai, et al., 2016). The first is about creating value through groups of projects. The latter focuses on a single project, as is the case at a PSC (McGrath & Whitty, 2015; Müller, Shao, et al., 2016) and is the focus of this chapter. Project governance positively relates to decision-making, which can help project success (Turner, 2020a). Also, governance aligns the project with the strategic objectives of the funding and owning organizations (Musawir et al., 2017). A recent editorial in *Project Management Journal*® (PMJ) summarizes research on project governance (Sankaran et al., 2025). It describes four contemporary strands of research. First, resilience, pointing toward project complexity arising from the uncertain and interconnected nature of projects. Governance mechanisms need to improve resilience to cope with uncertainty. Second, organization, focusing on interorganizational projects, where tensions arising from the various institutional logics have to be mitigated. Third, public projects and institutional studies, involving government-funded projects and public–private partnerships. Fourth, innovation, where a flexible governance structure and a flexible governmentality stimulate creativity and innovation in projects and in project portfolios. Studies on PSCs are relevant to the strand of resilience, as PSCs can help deal with multiple stakeholders and gather and integrate diverse viewpoints (Stoppels et al., 2023). Also, the organizational strand is relevant in studies on PSCs, because PSCs provide unified direction in cases involving multiple stakeholders (Axelos, 2009).

A PSC is typically chaired by the project owner (Olsson, 2018; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). The project owner is "the senior manager who is held accountable by the funder for realizing the business case" (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018, p. 485). The funder is "the senior manager from the funding entity who has the authority to approve the project and allocate its funds and/or resources" (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018, p. 483). Research on the project owner has stressed the impact of the project owner on project success (e.g., Breese et al., 2020). The PSC, however,

typically has more members than the project owner. Managers of contributing stakeholders may not act on instructions from the project owner, as they often bring their own interests and capabilities (Musawir, 2024).

Since transaction cost economics theory suggests that the cost of governance activities should be worth the mitigated risks (Williamson, 1979), the composition of the PSC needs careful consideration. As will be detailed in the Theoretical Background section, there is limited research on the goal of a PSC as a group. There is even less research focusing on the roles and responsibilities of PSC members, although there are indications that they struggle with their responsibilities (Breese et al., 2020; Loch et al., 2017), while they rarely receive role-specific training (Reich, 2007).

We conclude that there is a mismatch between the acknowledged importance of project governance, the common use of PSCs as a governance body, the time senior management invests in PSCs, and the limited research on the functioning of PSCs. This mismatch may jeopardize project success or result in inefficient use of managers' time. Therefore, this the study in this chapter will study PSCs in project management practice, with a focus on establishing the roles and responsibilities of PSC members. This study aims to answer the question: How are roles and responsibilities within PSCs defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success? The level of analysis is the dynamics of individual PSC members and their perceptions, which have an impact on the PSC as a whole. In line with the remark by Wang et al. (2024) on projects, we view a PSC as a self-adjusting sovereign organization that adjusts to the characteristics of the project (Ahola et al., 2014).

The remainder of this chapter will first provide a theoretical background on PSCs. Next, the inductive research method is described, and subsequently, the findings of the 18 interviews with PSC members and project members are discussed and confronted with literature. We conclude by answering the research question and providing theoretical and practical implications.

4.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To understand existing research on PSCs, we searched the EBSCO research database for articles on *steering committee*, *steering group*, and *project board*, combined with *project* or *program*. The search included literature on *project owners*, *project sponsors*, *project oversight*, and *project governance* from *Project Management Journal®*, *International Journal of Project Management*, and *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*. The availability of literature on PSCs proved limited; therefore, we added literature on top management teams and corporate boards because these "make decisions, solve problems, coordinate tasks, and keep members informed" (Bang & Midelfart, 2017, p. 335), which has an overlap with PSCs in the decision-making activities. Organizational literature provided insights into functional diversity and team conflict. Surprisingly, little was found about the relationship between individual board members'

accountability and the group's accountability. Studies on standardized roles of members also seem scarce. A reason can be that top management teams and corporate boards are permanent bodies, where the roles are aligned with the permanent function of members in the permanent organization (Menz, 2012).

4.2.1. Characteristics of a PSC

The PSC should ensure that project success is achieved (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). For project success, this study uses a broad perspective, including the success for the owning organization (Kloppenborg et al., 2014) as measured at the end of the project (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Using a committee for governance instead of one person is a means to coordinate multiple stakeholder groups (Lechler & Cohen, 2009) and facilitate cooperation (Harvey et al., 2025). Stakeholder theory predicts that members will have social responsibilities (Freeman, 1984), as can be seen in the definition by Müller et al. (2017) of governance. The members form a boundary-spanning team ((Murphy, 2016), which provides means for direct access to critical knowledge and other resources the project needs. This enhances the quality of information processing and, consequently, decision-making (Stoppels et al., 2023). Work on corporate boards provides similar insight: corporate boards offer a network with access to resources outside the governed organizations, providing information and legitimacy (Bainbridge, 2002; Boivie et al., 2021). While aware of their responsibility toward shareholders by monitoring top management, corporate board members mainly regard themselves as a sparring partner for top management (Boivie et al., 2021). So, both the holding to account and support functions are mentioned.

Unlike corporate boards, PSCs can also be seen as the pin connecting the temporary project organization and the permanent organizations (Lechler & Cohen, 2009). They link the project and the funder (Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014). Müller (2016b) also regards a PSC as a link to other stakeholders to engage them and foster trust, which is supported by findings by Joslin and Müller (2016) that an organization with a focus on multiple stakeholders has more successful projects than organizations with a sole shareholder focus. PSCs, therefore, consist of senior managers representing stakeholder groups (Murphy, 2016). Based on the work of McGrath and Whitty (2017), we define stakeholders as individuals or organizations who have an interest (positively or negatively, aware or non-aware) in the execution of the project or the project's products. Note that not all stakeholders will have representatives in the PSC (Stoppels et al., 2023). There is a focus on those who can affect the outcome (Littau et al., 2010) and are thus needed to support the project. As the link to funders and other stakeholders, the PSC aligns the project deliverables with the goals of the permanent organizations (Too & Weaver, 2014) and provides the means for the project to deliver. Breese et al. (2020) add that a project owner who separates the responsibilities for the permanent organization from those for the temporary project helps to focus on the business case of the project, thus helping project success. There is a tension between the temporary organization and permanent governance in the stakeholder

organizations, which needs further study (Wang et al., 2024).

4.2.2. The relevance of establishing roles in PSCs

To know the functioning of a PSC, we must understand what members should do and what their roles and responsibilities are. A role is "an expected behavior pattern" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025) and a responsibility, the "obligation to perform a task" (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a, p. 687). Accountability is the stronger "liability for ensuring a task is satisfactorily done" (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a, p. 688). The interviews focused on responsibilities since, in practice, the distinction between these terms is often missed (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a).

We found five reasons to define roles in PSCs. First, clarity on roles for those involved in project governance is essential for accountability (Turner, 2020a; Wang et al., 2024). Meredith and Zwikael (2020) state that having one person accountable for business benefits positively correlates to project success. McGrath and Whitty (2018a) add that a role must have clear responsibilities to perform tasks satisfactorily. A lack of clear responsibilities in portfolio boards and PSCs leads to poor portfolio results (Elonen & Artto, 2003). Second, enabling decision-making: Decision-making is an essential theme in project governance (e.g., Project Management Institute, 2016). In a PSC it has to be clear who can decide (McGrath & Whitty, 2020b). Arnesson and Albinsson (2013) describe an innovation project where the authority of the PSC members was lacking and responsibilities were unclear, leading to a lack of motivation, jeopardizing the oversight. Third, enabling coordination: A clear role structure is important as a mechanism for coordination (Bechky, 2006) to ensure that the actors know who performs which tasks and no tasks are forgotten. Fourth, the definition of roles can help select functionally heterogeneous members, which in top management teams supports high-quality decisions, given there is consensus about the organization's goals (Michie et al., 2006). Last, clear roles can help prevent tensions between the identity of a person in the temporary organization (like a PSC) and in the permanent organization (Turner, 2020a), because members will know what to expect of one another and why others behave the way they do (Tidd et al., 2007). This is supported by role theory, stating that role ambiguity can cause conflict (Biddle, 1986)

4.2.3. The roles and responsibilities of PSC members

The literature describes the roles of the project owner and the project funder. Accountability for project benefits should be vested in one individual project owner (Breese et al., 2020; Meredith & Zwikael, 2020), who should know the strategy, culture, policy, managers, and project management approach. Meredith and Zwikael (2020, p. 66) advise forming a PSC with the "project owner acting as either a member or head of the committee." McGrath and Whitty (2020b) are stricter by stating that the owner of the project outcome should be the chairperson. This owner is often a senior manager and acts as the link between the project and the funding organization. Zwikael et al. (2019) provide a list of 22 responsibilities of the owner, most of which cover achieving the business case or cooperating with the project manager. Olsson (2018,

p. 831) adds the importance that the project owner "understands the responsibilities and has the experience to drive decision-making," though Stoppels et al. (2023) found that in practice, individual responsibilities of members are not always clear. Both Zwikael and Meredith (2018) and Breese et al. (2020) apply role theory, which presumes that expectations of an actor having a role and other actors in the surroundings influence the shaping of an actor's role (Bechky, 2006). Zwikael and Meredith (2018) mainly follow the structuralist approach in role theory (Bechky, 2006; Biddle, 1986), pointing out the importance of clear definitions upfront. Breese et al. (2020) follow the interactionalist approach, where the project owner shapes the role and should separate it from the daily responsibilities.

We found that literature is scarce on roles besides the project funder and project owner. Müller et al. (2019, p. 9) mention that PSCs consist of at least the project owner, and PSCs "frequently include representatives of the main suppliers, end users of the project's output, higher management, and others" while referring to project management methodology PRINCE2. This is peculiar, given that PRINCE2 has no *others* role (Axelos, 2009) and lacks foundation in literature (McGrath & Whitty, 2020a).

Murphy (2016) remarks that at ERP (standardized software) implementations, the PSC members are executives who represent stakeholder groups and together form a boundary-spanning team, so they should be able to bridge gaps between organizations, departments, or processes. This suggests they are managers of departments that will use or maintain the project products. McGrath and Whitty (2017) defined four types of stakeholders based on their interest in the project execution or products. First, Invested, financially or emotionally; has influence on the project, for example, the project sponsor. Second, Contributor, the participation is needed, such as a supplier. Third, Observer, uncommitted to the project but must accept or comply, such as a regulatory body. Last, End user, uses the project's products, such as customers. They add that the Invested and Contributor direct the project and the Observer and End user can advise and must be managed to limit risks. The impact of having functional heterogeneous members is a leading theme in top management team literature. This is also relevant to PSCs, since members tend to represent different funders, owners, functional departments (Karlsen, 2020), and even processes (Stoppels et al., 2023). Heterogeneity in functional background broadens information gathering and solution processing, and provides a network of people who contribute. Functionally heterogeneous backgrounds of top management teams support information sharing between functional teams, thus improving performance (Walrave et al., 2024). A theme in organizational management literature is the impact of trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001, p. 456). Functional heterogeneity will lead to different viewpoints, resulting in task conflict. Trust is necessary for group members to consider benign reasons for this conflict (Simons & Peterson, 2000), so "they see the conflict as stemming from the needs of the work itself" (Tidd et al., 2007, p. 364), thus avoiding task conflict leading to relationship conflict. The latter harms team performance (Wit et al., 2012).

Decision-making is one of the most important activities in the PSC to execute governance

(Loch et al., 2017). McGrath and Whitty (2013) look at the committee level, stating that PSCs typically cannot overrule authority in the permanent organizations. This indicates that the committee receives authority from the permanent organization, like the budget from the funder. It also implies at the member level that members need authority based on their function in the permanent organization (Stoppels et al., 2023). Consequently, the roles within the PSC should lead to members with access to critical resources (Karlsen, 2020) and managers with authority to decide on the project's products (Murphy, 2016). According to the case study from Arnesson and Albinsson (2013), PSC members' agreement on project goals is a prerequisite for effective decision-making. The field of organizational management encompasses extensive research on group decision-making, as well as some studies on the relationship between roles and responsibilities. Decision quality can be improved through the functional separation of responsibilities among members. This leads to diverse mental models, which may reduce groupthink (Jones & Roelofsma, 2000). Minichilli et al. (2009) add that having members with different perspectives leads to evaluating various scenarios and thus improved decisions. In the decision-making process, a moderate level of task conflict (disagreement about the task's content) positively correlates with team performance (Wit et al., 2012). Prerequisites are group cohesion, the members' understanding of each other's responsibilities, and members having shared goals (Jones & Roelofsma, 2000; Schippers & Rus, 2021). Therefore, members with distinct and clear roles and responsibilities can enhance decision quality, which in turn positively correlates with project success (Turner, 2020a).

4.2.4. Conclusion from the literature

The PSC links the permanent and temporary organizations, where the owner and other stakeholders collaborate to provide governance. Variations in responsibilities and functional heterogeneity of members can help decision-making quality. According to a structuralist approach in role theory, establishing roles helps shape and communicate these responsibilities. Doing so and ensuring all responsibilities are covered will lead to quality information gathering and processing. To avoid relationship conflict, goals must be agreed upon, trust should be established, and individual responsibilities and motives clarified.

As can be seen in literature, each PSC should have a member with the role to represent the funder, who has accountability for the overall benefits. Literature is less clear on the roles of other members, but several sources indicate that these roles should represent specific stakeholder groups. Thus, a second role represents the users of project deliverables. A third role represents the stakeholder group of resource providers (people, equipment, and information). A fourth quality assurance role provides information and skills unavailable within the owning organization. The primary responsibilities of these roles in the PSC and how role taking of PSC members relates to project success remain unclear from literature.

4.3. RESEARCH METHOD

The study will identify individual roles of PSC members. Since these are understudied, this calls for an explorative and inductive approach. We took the epistemological stance of a cautious realist (Blaikie, 2009), implying that the perspectives of respondents can shed light on reality. Characteristics of the project and its stakeholders are expected to influence the PSC. Therefore, we studied several PSCs on various types of projects. Semi structured interviews are suited, since they help get close to the respondents' interpretations of their activities and allow for follow-up questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Asking multiple respondents for one PSC helps to compare views on roles, uncovering overlaps and differences in perceptions. So, for each PSC, we interviewed two members and the project manager. The PSC members would focus on their role and the expectations of the other members. The project managers could reflect on the impact of 'role taking' in the PSC on project success and compare it to previous projects. Discussing issues in a steering committee might be sensitive; therefore, we took time to build trust between the interviewer and the respondents.

4.3.1. Data collection

Via purposeful sampling, we selected projects with conflicts of interest between involved stakeholders and a high risk to the owning organization in case of failure, thus indicating the need for governance (Crawford et al., 2008). We made sure each project had a dedicated PSC with decision-making authority. Following the project categories used by Joslin (2014), the selection of projects included at least one engineering, one IT, and one organizational change project. This resulted in the selection of six PSCs for data collection, responsible for projects with budgets between €8 million and €250 million (**Table 4**). All project-owning organizations were based in the Netherlands, hence sharing a similar cultural context. For each PSC, we requested background documentation on the project from the project manager. The project manager was the first to be interviewed, with a minimum interview time of 90 minutes. This provided an opportunity to gather context on the project and its impact on stakeholders. Then, for each project, two PSC members were interviewed individually. This led to interviewing 18 people (12 PSC members, six project managers), each discussing one or more projects, which is generally sufficient for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

In the interviews, we focused on the actions, motivation, and effects at the individual PSC member level. For example, we asked, "What is the effect of your contribution and your role on project performance? Why?" To gain a deeper understanding of cooperation, we asked each participant to describe a recent difficult decision and how they shared facts, interpreted them, and projected likely future developments (Uitdewilligen & Waller, 2018). We also explored who made the final decision. Appendix D provides an overview of the interview questions.

Table 4: Overview of cases and interview respondents

Code	Type of Project	Complexity	Industry	Involvement of the Respondent in PSC	Line Management Position (Permanent Organization)
A1	ERP implementation. Redesign of HR and payroll processes including ERP software and custom programming for 27.000 employees	Divisions with own responsibility, processes, and IT systems plus changing role of staff/ departments	Services	Project manager	HR manager and process owner
A2				Senior user	HR director
A3				Executive	Board member
B1	Business process redesign for product configuration management; Is the largest part of a multibillion-dollar program; includes changing processes and IT systems	Involves coordination between development, production, and maintenance divisions	High-tech	Project manager	Project cluster manager
B2				Global business process lead	Global business process lead
B3				Executive + Representative R&D department	Director material development
C1	New production facility for testing of a high-tech product	Requirements from the production and development departments change during the construction phase	High Tech	Project manager	Project manager
C2				Budget owner/ Executive	Director of real estate, development and strategy
C3				Internal supplier	Manager of the project managers for real estate
D1	Large engineering project to improve protection against flooding and expand nature reserves	External stakeholder groups and nine funders with own authority (municipalities, provinces, central government, water authorities)	Govern-ment	Project manager	Project manager
D2				Representative is one of the funders and users	Provincial executive
D3				Representative is one of the funders and users	Alderman

Code	Type of Project	Complexity	Industry	Involvement of the Respondent in PSC	Line Management Position (Permanent Organization)
E1	Upgrade of a production plant to improve product specifications	Production process must continue uninterrupted, and all budget overruns must be approved by the mother organization	Heavy industry	Project manager	Project manager
E2				Senior supplier	General manager of projects and consultancy
E3				Executive/ sponsor	Plant manager
F1	IT and physical security infrastructure	Includes both technology and changing behavior of the employees	Research	Project manager	Project manager
F2				IT representative/ supplier	Director of information services
F3				User representative	Director of operations of one the largest division

4.3.2. Data analysis

The respondents validated a summary from their interviews. The interviews were transcribed to facilitate coding (Blaikie, 2009) via qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS (version 24). Data analysis started inductively by letting codes and concepts on roles in PSCs emerge from the transcripts by reading attentively to understand the meaning given by the respondent and catching this in phrases. As a second step, we rechecked all transcripts, using the emerged codes and insights deducted from literature, leading to a finalized list of 166 codes. Analyzing the last three interviews led to only three new codes, indicating data saturation. Third, we combined these codes into code groups. Fourth, we checked the co-occurrence of codes, such as the combination of responsibilities of members of PSCs and the role they fulfill, cross-case analysis, and within-case analysis. Last, for presentation purposes, we combined the code groups into four aggregated dimensions. The codes and categorization can be requested from the authors. Co-occurrence of codes showed no indication of consistently contrasting views between project managers and PSC members.

4.4. RESULTS

The following sections present the findings, structured according to four aggregate dimensions: (1) the goal of a PSC; (2) initiating a PSC; (3) roles and responsibilities of members; and (4) execution of roles by members in the PSC. The coding in parentheses in the following sections refers to the first column of **Table 4**.

4.4.1. The goal of a PSC

Project managers and PSC members agree that the PSC serves as a collaborative device, where the main stakeholder groups are represented and collaborate to achieve alignment on decisions and actions. Additionally, it is a body that oversees the project team's work to mitigate risk for the funding organization and achieve the intended goals. As one project manager stated: "First, one tries to align all parties in the steering committee, and then all members must make sure the decisions are implemented at home" (C1).

The project managers need information sharing, commitment, and fast decision-making to move the project forward and achieve its deliverables. The PSC members mentioned they were involved to understand the impact on their stakeholder group, to influence decision-making, and to take action to implement decisions in their organization. The large engineering project for flood protection (D) was a special case, as nine of the 10 PSC members represented funders. They used the PSC to achieve consensus among themselves and formulate actions for their permanent organizations, enabling them to decide on budgets and design criteria. Summarizing, the PSC is "a place where stakeholders not just approve a proposal by the project team but are partners in the decision-making process" (C3).

4.4.2. Initiating a PSC

A senior manager in the organization typically consults with the project manager about who should be in the PSC. This leading manager can be the project owner (A, B, C) or an expert on project management (E, F). Choosing to use a PSC for governance and the roles of members are based on "this is what we always do" (A, E, F) or explicit corporate rules (B, C). No roles were derived from literature or project management standards except PRINCE2 (E). At the large engineering project (D), representation is a direct consequence of which entities financially participate: If a province funds part of a large engineering project, the executive from this province with the corresponding portfolio is automatically in the PSC due to the investment involved.

Members are selected based on who represents the funder(s), the main stakeholder groups at the owning organization(s), the critical resources the project needs, and, to a lesser extent, knowledge or process ownership. Other characteristics (such as interest in the project and personal competences) are considered if several persons can represent a stakeholder group. For example, in the ERP implementation (A), the project owner wanted one human resources (HR) director at the division level to represent HR for all divisions, and she chose an HR director with affinity to the project's products and excellent reputation among colleagues. None of the respondents considered adding members external to the owning or supplying organizations.

4.4.3. Roles and responsibilities of members

Except for the large engineering project (D), roles and responsibilities for PSC members were not described. One organization formally used PRINCE2 (E), though the generic roles were not translated to members' specific responsibilities. As the project owner stated, "When I became the new project owner, I just reread the PRINCE2 book I had kept from a training 20 years ago" (E3). Appendix E provides the fulfillment of roles for the PSCs discussed.

All respondents agreed on the role of representing the funder who decides on the budget and "has skin in the game" (A2). They have titles like "project owner," "executive," and "chairperson." There can be several members with this role, which can be beneficial since all members will have to return to their constituency in case of a cost overrun, thus making them reluctant to request scope extension. Most members fulfilling this role had a second role in representing the users. At the business process redesign project (B), the project owner had limited formal budget and planning authority, but represented a heavily impacted and powerful department. The chairperson was formally someone representing a funder, although at half of the PSCs, a project manager technically chaired the meetings. In all PSCs, the project manager prepared the agenda. Only one PSC (A) has a single, undisputed project owner. In the other PSCs, a leading coalition decides if consensus cannot be reached. The absence of a single strong formal chairperson necessitated group decision-making and a stakeholder perspective, rather than solely the shareholder perspective.

All projects had several representatives of users of the project deliverables. This could be based on departments/organizations (B, C, D, E, F), processes (B, F), or members representing a combination (A). Important responsibilities involved providing information about the impact of options for decisions, providing user requirements, and acting in their organization to prepare using the project deliverables for "when the users become owners" (B2). Not all major stakeholders at the owning organization were covered, e.g., at the ERP implementation (A), it was unclear who represented the staff departments, leading to an underestimation and partial ignoring of their business impact. Most representatives of users also had the role of providing project resources by delivering project members.

Most PSCs have members whose sole role is to represent a supplier. These PSC members work at the owning or funding organization, with an exception at the ERP implementation (A), where directors from two external suppliers were included. These externals used the PSC for escalation and sign-off, sometimes hijacking the meetings and preventing the business case from being discussed during the PSC meetings.

The "representatives of the support organization for the project deliverables" were also mainly employed by the owning or funding organization. However, at the ERP implementation (A), a director from the main external support organization was included. At the large engineering project (D), the organization for nature conservation had a seat. We found confusion about the PRINCE2 role of senior supplier: a respondent defined the PRINCE2 senior supplier as "people maintaining the competences you build up," which in PRINCE2 is part of the "senior user" role.

Another respondent was explicit on the separate support role for project deliverables: "The director of the IT company is responsible for maintenance, not for implementation" (A1).

At the ERP implementation (A), a top-level board consultant had the role of "quality advisor" toward the PSC, by clarifying the impact of decisions and probing the quality and progress of the project. This was necessary because the representatives had difficulty understanding the project's status and the impact of decisions. However, it jeopardized the position of other members and the project manager by making decisions in others' domains. At the upgrade of the production plant (E), a procurement officer was a member to add knowledge about contracting.

A role of "steering committee support" can be added for preparing documents (A) or project controlling (C, F). People holding this role are at the meeting, but are not members and do not have decision-making authority.

Members in practice often hold multiple roles. Such as an alderman providing part of the funding, representing their own municipality, and providing capacity from civil servants: "Participating is not just having your say, adding topics to the agenda, and cofinancing; but also, delivery of manpower" (D3). Users from outside the funding, owning, or supplying organizations were never represented in the PSC by someone from their organization.

We asked the members about the primary responsibilities per role. **Table 5** presents the co-occurrence of all roles and the responsibilities mentioned at least twice. Based on our data, the representative of the funder focuses on both investment and business benefits and is formally the chairperson. The representative of the user must accept the products, add knowledge about usage, add resources, and manage their own stakeholder group. The representative from the supplier adds resources and knowledge about the capabilities of the resources. The representative from the support organization must accept the products from a maintenance perspective. A quality assurance or advisory role can be added to align stakeholders or processes.

Table 5: Roles of PSC members with their responsibilities based on interviews

Role in the PSC	Main Responsibilities
Representation of the funder(s)	Check if the business case will be met Deliver budget Gather information from own stakeholder group Get support from top management Organize decision-making in the standing organization Support the project Act in the standing organization Technically chair the PSC Understand the impact on own area of responsibility

Role in the PSC	Main Responsibilities
Representation of the users of the project deliverables	Check impact options on business case Deliver nonmonetary resources from standing organization Determine business need Gather information from own stakeholder group Make decisions Organize alignment between stakeholders and processes Also represent departments that do not have members in the PSC Prepare using the project's products Share information with other members outside of PSC meetings Keep close contact with project team Stakeholder engagement Take action in standing organization Understand impact of decision on area of responsibility Accept the project's products Add knowledge to the PSC
Representation of the supplier	Deliver nonmonetary resources from standing organization Gather information from own stakeholder group Make decisions in the PSC Understand impact of decision on area of responsibility Add knowledge to the PSC Cooperate with project manager
Representation of the support organization for the project deliverables	Accept the project products for maintenance
Quality assurance or advisor	Organize alignment between stakeholders and processes Organize coherent solution including processes outside scope of project

4.4.4. Execution of roles by members

Respondents mentioned two reasons for establishing roles in PSCs. The first is to select members of the PSC, based on what the project needed to succeed and how to limit the risk to the funding organization. At the large engineering project (D), the members were derived from the contract between the funders. At the other projects, representatives of invested and contributing stakeholders were invited. Some respondents spontaneously mentioned PRINCE2 roles as helpful for the selection of members. In none of the projects were the roles explicitly translated into the responsibilities of each member.

A second reason for establishing roles is to help identify which stakeholder group a member represents. However, one respondent said: "everybody works based on their personal experience and that's not clear at all" (E2). This caused confusion during the lifetime of the PSC, leading to a lack of personal responsibility. The authority of the security manager versus the project owner was not apparent at the security infrastructure project (F). The project manager (F1) expected the representative of the largest user group to take care of communication, but this representative assumed this was an action of the project team, leading to delays. Unclear decision-making on internal resources (E) led to PSC members seeking consensus-based decision-making, which even helped project success due to exchanging knowledge and interests. This was possible due to mutual respect. At the ERP implementation (A), lack of clarity in roles

negatively influenced project success, since members presented positive metrics according to their own interpretation of responsibilities, while nobody identified gaps.

Respondents had difficulty separating their role in the PC from their position in the permanent organization, "Everybody takes the perspective from the line function" (F3). In three PSCs, the PSC has an overlap with the management teams in the permanent organization. The PSC members did not mind this lack of distinction between the role in the PSC and in the permanent organization if members share the overall project goals. However, project managers do indicate that the lack of distinction negatively affects results, since responsibilities for stakeholders outside their own departments are not covered, and priority for the project is lacking.

We explored how focusing on individual responsibilities and on shared goals impact each other. Respondents indicated that members sharing the overall goals of the project is a prerequisite before working from their own responsibilities. Some add that a second prerequisite is mutual trust; to share interests and doubts without "quarrels" (F2) and a willingness to understand the other's viewpoints. If these two prerequisites are met, working from the role and "pushing the borders" (E2) is beneficial to project success. First, it adds perspectives and improves the quality of decisions. Second, it fosters commitment to decisions, which leads to compliance. Third, it provides PSC members with knowledge of why a decision was made, which facilitates implementation within their own stakeholder group. Fourth, it limits the chance that actions and issues are forgotten. Last, it helps members support one another in stakeholder engagement.

All respondents agree that decision-making is one of the most important activities of a PSC. Options should be prepared by experts from the project team. Some PSCs discuss and make complex decisions in separate meetings to gain focus. Types of decisions are mainly on target processes and products. For example, shaping HR processes (A), aligning configuration management of machine parts between departments (B), ensuring access of ships to a harbor (D), and identifying the needed capabilities of the production line (C, E). Decisions on funding and planning were less frequent; the PSCs for the upgrade of a production plant (E) and the business process redesign (B) even had no authority at all to approve scope changes and budget overruns. However, the members would jointly influence decision-making higher in the organizational hierarchy. For all roles, PSC members should understand the status and the impact of decisions on their area of responsibility and be critical toward each other; if not, the PSC will not steer, and "it just comes to us" (A3).

Respondents indicated that decision-making authority is derived from the member's position in the permanent organization, rather than from their role in the PSC. For example, in the upgrade of the production plant (E), the director of operations was the project owner and decided on topics impacting operations. However, if this impacted budget or planning, he needed the consent of the director of the projects department, who had just a supplier representation role in the PSC. In the project to improve security (F), "the security officer could

not be the project owner, since he has no authority over the IT and real estate departments" (F3). If consensus could not be reached, the most senior members in the permanent organization would decide. However, at five of the six projects discussed, the preferred method for decision-making was via consensus, to gather all perspectives and gain commitment. Gaining commitment is especially important if a decision impacts the responsibilities of several PSC members in their permanent organization. If consensus could not be reached, the decision was based on consent or made by a coalition of the most senior managers. In the public engineering project (D), members could not overrule one another. These PSC members indicated that consensus is only necessary between members who are impacted by a decision, and others should refrain from joining the discussion. In the words of a provincial executive: "I will not mingle in the discussions of the neighboring province," and "members who do should be put back in their box" (D2).

4.5. DISCUSSION

Table 6 compares our interview results and literature. Contrasting views (in italics) are discussed next, including the broader implications and limitations of our study.

Table 6: Comparison of results to literature

Aggregate Dimension	Interview Results	Literature
Goal of a PSC	Collaborating device between stakeholders	A means to collaborate (Lechler & Cohen, 2009) between invested and affected stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017).
	Means for decisions with authority	Decision-making is essential in governance (Crawford et al., 2008).
	Less focus on the "held to account" part of project governance	*Holding project management to account is essential* (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016), but barely mentioned by project managers (Stoppels et al., 2023)
	A means to support the project manager, such as members acting in own stakeholder group	*Literature focuses on a PSC as a governance body* (e.g. Project Management Institute, 2016), but should also be viewed as management with tasks to provide support (Müller, 2016a).
Initiating a PSC	Membership can be based on formal contracts; Only in half of the PSCs did the project owner take the lead in asking members	*The funder or project owner as "Principal" (Andersen, 2012; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018) are expected to take the lead in formation to assure governance.*

Aggregate Dimension	Interview Results	Literature
Roles and responsibilities of members	1st role: Representation of the funder(s)—to make sure the benefits are reached, deliver the budget, support the project, and as a linking pin to the funders	Project owner focus on the business case maximizes funder's value and adds networks, competence and resources to help project delivery (Olsson, 2018). This role is an invested stakeholder (McGrath & Whitty, 2017).
	2nd role: Representation of the users of the end products—to provide information for PSC, accept the products, and assure acceptance of agreed-upon products for own user group	McGrath & Whitty (2017) would split representatives of users into contributing stakeholders (participation is needed for delivery), and tertiary stakeholders (use the output of the project). Part of the PRINCE2 role "Senior User" (Axelos, 2009).
	3rd role: Representation of the supplier—to add knowledge on what is feasible and deliver resources or products	Supplier representatives are contributing stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). Findings are supported by the resource-based view in governance literature (Hillman et al., 2002). Corporate Boards have external members to provide of direct access to resources including knowledge and network (Bainbridge, 2002).
	4th role: Representation of the support organization for the end products—to provide information for the PSC, accept the products, and prepare support	These will be typically contributing stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017), since their support is needed to maintain delivered products and thus achieve benefits. Part of the PRINCE2 role "Senior User" (Axelos, 2009).
	5th role: Quality Assurance—to provide knowledge and check oversight processes	Can be observer stakeholders where acceptance is needed (McGrath & Whitty, 2017), though could also be advisors without formal authority. This role should not be used according to PRINCE2 (2009), though is observed by Karlsen (2020). Usage corresponds to literature on Corporate Boards to add expertise internal members lack (Hillman et al., 2002).

Aggregate Dimension	Interview Results	Literature
Execution of roles by members	Roles are a means to select members representing stakeholders	Focus on stakeholders helps project success (Joslin & Müller, 2016) A reason for Corporate Boards with members selected for network or knowledge is direct access to critical external resources (Bainbridge, 2002) PSCs as a group have limited authority (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b) so should have members with authority (Stoppels et al., 2023)
	Roles are a means to determine individuals' responsibilities, to make the members act in the interest of the project as part of their function in their own organization	Business benefits will only be met if the permanent organization uses the project deliverables (Breese et al., 2020)
	Responsibilities are unclear, risking that major stakeholder groups are not represented and having unclear accountability for project success	*Contrasting to what happens in practice,* working from clear responsibilities is important: - It can improve decision-making by getting all important perspectives on the table (Minichilli et al., 2009) and having direct access to information (Schippers & Rus, 2021), thus adding scenarios (Bainbridge, 2002; 2009); - Shared decision-making builds commitment (Carmeli et al., 2009) and thus compliance (Janssen et al., 1999); - Having clear accountabilities for a part of project governance makes members take action and limits social loafing (Bainbridge, 2002), thus improving project success (Breese et al., 2020; Murphy, 2016); - Tensions are reduced since it is clear to other members why a member acts in a certain way (DeFillippi & Sydow, 2016); - Providing contrasting views limits groupthink (Jones & Roelofsma, 2000).
	Members tend to focus on the responsibilities they have in the permanent organization, but should regard PSC work as more than part of the daily job	Project owners who are "just doing the daily job" take no ownership and thus risk project results (Breese et al., 2020). As found for TMTs, members should understand the dual responsibilities for the unit they lead and the overall performance (Bang & Midelfart, 2017).
	Decision-making is one of the most important activities in a PSC; Roles serve as a means to vary stakeholder representation and expertise, thereby enhancing information gathering and processing	Functional heterogeneity in TMTs helps decision quality (Michie et al., 2002). Functional heterogeneity helps information gathering & processing, but can lead to conflicts (Deng et al., 2020) Joint decision-making in TMTs positively associates with decision effectiveness (Carmeli et al., 2009).

4.5.1. PSCs as the linking pin between the temporary and permanent organization

The PSCs we studied operated at the interface between permanent and temporary organizations, with funding organizations and other stakeholders collaborating to provide governance to the project, including support tasks. Whereas scholars earlier explicitly distinguished between project governance and project support (e.g., Crawford et al., 2008), these now appear to be integrated (Crawford, 2023; Sankaran et al., 2025). We, along with other scholars, define governance as providing direction and holding project management accountable (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016). A common meaning of *direction* is providing "guidance and supervision" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). Our data clearly show that PSC members should take ownership and act in the permanent organization to help the temporary project. Embedding the term *support* in *governance* carries the risk that research and practice may overlook this duty of PSC members to act.

We drew on literature on top management teams and corporate boards to expand beyond the realm of project governance literature, which provided insights into the types of conflicts and the importance of goal sharing. PSCs justify their own research, thus expanding organizational literature. However, there will be differences between PSCs and top management teams/boards. Future research could focus on learning and knowledge transfer (e.g., Volden & Klakegg, 2024), as PSCs and their members act at the intersection of permanent and temporary organizations. Such research would add to the research strand innovation (Sankaran et al., 2025).

4.5.2. Start a PSC by clarifying all roles and responsibilities of members

Results show that five PSC roles can be distinguished in practice. The first three roles, the representation of the funder, users, and suppliers, are directly in line with PRINCE2. As per shareholder and stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Friedman, 1962), the funder and main user groups will always require representation (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014). There might be several funders, as we saw in our data, which is why we prefer not to use the term project owner. A project owner tends to be associated with a single person who should chair the PSC (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). Our first three stakeholder groups are also recognized in earlier work of Murphy (2016) and McGrath & Whitty (2017).

Separating the fourth role of representing the support organization of project deliverables from the PRINCE2 senior user avoids confusion because "use" implies "put into service, especially to attain an end" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025), which suggests a one-time activity. The support organization will have fundamentally different interests from the users, such as achieving standardization and simplicity. The role of representing the support organization in a PSC can be considered when support is essential for realizing the benefits.

A fifth role of quality assurance, to add knowledge for decisions or hold the project manager to account, might be considered if other members lack expertise. This aligns with establishing nonexecutive corporate boards alongside top management teams to provide

external viewpoints (Bainbridge, 2002). Interview results indicate caution when using this role, as the member added for knowledge in the ERP implementation (A) indeed improved information processing but jeopardized the roles of other members by heavily influencing decisions in their area of responsibility. Roles are needed to define the members' individual responsibilities.

Our data show that members tend to just start their project governance activities after joining the PSC, without making responsibilities explicit or sharing interpretations. For the members, this shapes their responsibilities and authorities within the PSC as a subset of their function within their permanent organization. A resulting risk is that certain areas of responsibility are not covered in the PSC. Members representing various stakeholder groups lead to functional heterogeneity, thereby improving decision quality (Michie et al., 2002) and leveraging diverse knowledge within the permanent organization. One of the user representatives indicated: "I want to be involved in analyzing and delivering the main deliverables in *my* area of expertise" (A3). The authority is mainly based on the function in the permanent organization (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b). Business benefits will only be realized if the permanent organization uses the project deliverables (Breese et al., 2020), suggesting the need for convergence between responsibilities from the permanent and temporary organization.

Role theory presumes that an actor's role is shaped by the expectations this actor has, and the expectations expressed by other actors. Structured role systems can help shape both expectations (Bechky, 2006). As our data shows, PSCs have characteristics of temporary teams, and roles are barely defined at the start. According to the structuralist view in role theory, there is a need to clarify individual responsibilities to the members through structured roles. Most members will have a combination of roles for specific departments, organizations, and/or processes. Also, looking at the responsibilities in **Table 5**, on an aggregated level, these are not always distinct between roles. For example, the representative of the funder is responsible for the overall business case, the other representatives are responsible for those parts of the business case involving their stakeholder group. Therefore, in line with the interactionist view in role theory, members should also take time to tailor roles to the demands of the project and its governance. In their work on project owners, Breese et al. (2020) point to risks of them "just doing the daily job," so being only a figurehead and not taking ownership. Our data indicates that for all PSC members, their role should be more than just business as usual (Olsson, 2018). As found for top management teams, the members should understand the dual responsibilities for the unit they lead and the overall project's performance (Bang & Midelfart, 2017). They should act and "manage the business" (F1) during the project to deliver governance, and after the project to realize business benefits. Clarifying roles and responsibilities among the PSC members seems, therefore, an essential starting point.

4.5.3. Acting according to individual responsibilities to influence project success

PSC members acting from their personal responsibilities bring diverse perspectives to decision-making (Minichilli et al., 2009), while quality decision-making enhances project success

(Turner, 2020a). Besides, it helps members take action and limit social loafing (Bainbridge, 2002). Our data added the importance of members understanding the impact of decisions on their area of responsibility and taking ownership. If individual responsibilities are not discussed explicitly, members will make assumptions and cannot steer. We have seen that members who know and act according to individual responsibilities can help project success (B, C, D, E). Members who do not fail to discuss risks for the owning organization (A, F).

The members must balance and integrate responsibilities from both permanent and temporary organizations. They will need to learn to understand the project's goals and their impact on their own and others' areas of responsibility. Only if group members share the overall goal and don't feel they have to negotiate will they add interests and perspectives to the decision-making process and transform their views based on others' input (Franco et al., 2016). If the overall goals among members differ, the variation in functional background of the members reduces decision quality (Michie et al., 2006; Walrave et al., 2024). As found in our data: "we often have to remind the members they must take into account the whole organization, not just their division," but also "if another steering committee member has explained the reasoning behind a viewpoint, consensus will start to exist" (A1).

Literature indicates that having a single person accountable for the business case enhances project success (Zwikael et al., 2019). Still, our data show that PSC members should combine individual accountability with at least a responsibility for the overall project success. Accountability implies authority and vice versa (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). Therefore, whether a group can decide is linked to whether a group can be held accountable. The apparent discrepancy between individual accountabilities and group decision-making can be explained by the concept of 'group accountability' (Kou & Stewart, 2017), a concept from the organizational management literature. As Stewart et al. (Kou & Stewart, 2017), phrase: "the [group] accountability is collectively lived and breathed" and emerges from relationships and social exchanges. A sense of group accountability motivates members to dedicate time to shared goals. The emergence of group accountability is accelerated by shared decision-making, as our data show. It will also shape the roles of individual members, such as by members filling gaps. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*—Seventh Edition sums it up nicely, though intended for project teams: "Regardless of who is accountable or responsible for specific project work, a collaborative project team takes collective ownership of the project outcomes" (Project Management Institute, 2021, p. Section 3.2). Future research could build upon the work of Stewart et al. (2023) to further explore group accountability versus individual accountability, and on the work of Breese et al. (2020) about perspectives on roles. The notion of group accountability should be considered in future research applications of principal agency theories (Biesenthal & Wilden, 2014) by viewing both the principal and the agent as parts of groups that influence accountability and authority. This expands the call of Musawir (2024) to study principal–principal relationships by also including agent–agent relationships.

Respondents indicated that members should trust each other before focusing on their individual responsibilities as PSC members. Underlying this is the distinction between task conflict and relationship conflict (Simons & Peterson, 2000). PSCs are functionally heterogeneous because members represent stakeholder groups (Murphy, 2016). This functional heterogeneity can facilitate information gathering and processing (Benoliel & Somech, 2016), thereby enabling adaptive responses to environmental changes and supporting quality decision-making. However, functional heterogeneity can also lead to conflicts, as members work is based on different information and responsibilities stemming from their roles within the permanent organization (Deng et al., 2020). If this conflict is a task conflict, it can help decision quality (Wit et al., 2012). However, if this results in relationship conflict, it hinders working together (Parayitam et al., 2010). Therefore, relationship conflict should be avoided by clearly defining individual responsibilities and interests, and by fostering mutual trust and shared goals. As a result, other members understand behavior as resulting from the work itself and not coming from ulterior motives (Tidd et al., 2007).

Based on our case data, we expect there will be a degree of shared goals and mutual trust where the effect of acting from individual responsibilities to project success is positive, and a situation where this effect is negative. If common ground for PSC members is lacking, acting according to individual responsibilities only leads to haggling and pursuing their own interests (Parayitam & Papenhausen, 2016). Our qualitative study suggests that working from individual responsibilities based on roles affects project success. A future study could quantitatively test the moderating effects of shared goals and mutual trust.

4.5.4. Limitations

Our research involved both PSC members and project managers, allowing the comparison of their views, enriching our dataset. The current study, however, focused on respondents working for Dutch organizations. Future studies can expand to other countries.

Validity was enhanced via summaries checked by respondents, full transcripts, and a coding process in a publicly available tool. A limitation of interviews is that respondents might take certain responsibilities for granted and not mention them explicitly. A quantitative follow-up study can develop and test a conceptual model about members acting according to individual responsibilities, shared goals, mutual trust, and project success. Alternatively, a design thinking-based study can develop means to help funders and PSC members identify roles and translate them into individual responsibilities for the goals at hand. Stakeholder theory and role theory can be used as a lens. The governmentality (Müller et al., 2017) of the PSC members will also influence cooperation between PSC members and decision-making, including compliance with decisions by their own stakeholder group, thus providing another avenue for future studies.

4.6. CONCLUSION

Project governance is essential for project success (Musawir et al., 2017; Turner, 2020b) and comprises a leading strand in project-organizing research (Sankaran et al., 2025). PSCs are used in practice as bodies for governance of the project (Stoppels et al., 2023). They are a collaborative group for invested and contributing stakeholders to ensure that project success is reached (Müller et al., 2015). Answering the question "How are roles and responsibilities within PSCs defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success?" our study focused on the perception of members of the PSC on their own role, on the other members' roles, and the dynamics in the PSC. Conclusions were drawn based on 18 interviews, documentation about the discussed projects, and literature from the fields of project management and organizational management.

Literature is not clear on roles beyond representing the funder, and this study added to literature by establishing five roles, according to the structuralist view of role theory (Bechky, 2006). The roles include representation of the funder(s), representation of the user group(s), representation of the supplier(s) of project resources, representation of the support organization(s) for project deliverables, and quality assurance. Across various types of projects, similar roles were found, and these roles provide clarity to the PSC members in practice. During the selection process for members, the categories of roles could be used to determine how stakeholders and resource providers will be engaged, based on the benefits and risks to the funding organization and the support needed for the project.

At the start of the PSC, the roles serve as a starting point to determine and share the individual responsibilities of each member, including the link of each member's role to its function in the permanent organization. In practice, individual responsibilities are ambiguous since members fulfill several roles, and responsibilities related to the roles are hardly made explicit and shared among PSC members (Stoppels et al., 2023). As a consequence, during project execution, PSC members often regard their PSC responsibilities only as a subset of the responsibilities in their permanent organization. This jeopardizes project success, since governance tasks may be ignored, and responsibilities for project success are unclear. Also, PSCs hardly take time to deepen perceptions on goals and work on team-building. Both limit engagement as a group, limiting project success (Murphy, 2016).

The members have functionally diverse backgrounds, which helps quality decision-making by considering stakeholder interests and knowledge (Benoliel & Somech, 2016). Diversity can lead to relationship conflicts, hindering collaboration and project success. This requires making individual responsibilities and interests explicit and building mutual trust and shared goals. When shared goals and mutual trust are present, and individual responsibilities are known, these responsibilities help achieve success: it sharpens the decision-making process, fosters commitment, prevents relationship conflict, and prevents gaps in governance activities. PSC members must balance individual accountability, deriving from their permanent position, with

group accountability for the project. This challenge requires additional research and support in practice by project managers and fellow PSC members.

Our study supports follow-up research on the relational interplay between individual members' roles and the steering committee's overall duty in dealing with disruptions and alleviating tensions between stakeholders. This is in line with recent recommendations on the project governance research strands "resilience" and "organization" (Sankaran et al., 2025).

In summary, we recommend that PSC members balance providing direction, holding the project manager to account, and providing support. Practitioners should explicitly use our five standard roles as a starting point, where one member can have several roles. PSC members should then work together (following interactionist role theory) to translate these roles into individual responsibilities in steering the project. This goes hand in hand with goal sharing and trust building. Failing to build a collective identity may lead to relationship conflict and merely "doing the day job" (Breese et al., 2020, p. 25). Taking the effort will help achieve a sense of group accountability combined with individual accountability, thereby improving the chances of project success.

CHAPTER 5

The impact of individual responsibilities, shared goals, and mutual trust on project success

The previous chapter discussed the roles and responsibilities of members. One of the findings is that if mutual trust and shared goals among PSC members are present, clear responsibilities sharpen decision-making, build commitment, prevent relationship conflict, and avoid gaps. This chapter quantitatively tests and describes the relationship between members *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Shared Goals*, *Mutual Trust*, and *Project Success*. It answers the third research question *Q3: What is the relationship between PSC members focusing on individual responsibilities and project success?* This chapter is based on the paper *Project Steering Committee Members and Project Success: A Quantitative Study on Individual Responsibilities, Shared Goals, and Mutual Trust*, which has been published in the *Journal of Managing Projects in Business* (Stoppels et al., 2026). Minor changes were made to align this chapter with the rest of the dissertation's layout. Appendix B provides additional data on the PSCs' projects in the survey data.

ABSTRACT

Projects that pose high risks to the funding or owning organizations, or those that require support, need oversight by senior managers. This is typically conducted through a Project Steering Committee (PSC). PSC members each have individual responsibilities stemming from the permanent and temporary (project) organizations. The PSC needs shared goals and mutual trust to balance those responsibilities. The relationship between PSC members *acting according to individual responsibilities*, *shared goals*, *mutual trust*, and *project success* is unclear. This study quantitatively tested these relationships and verifies the use of roles for members. A conceptual model of the relationship between PSC members *acting according to individual responsibilities* and *project success* was tested using a survey with 178 valid responses. Additionally, the survey gathered opinions of PSC members and project managers on PSCs. The study found that PSC members acting from individual responsibilities positively affects project success regardless of the degree of shared goals and mutual trust. Four representation roles are generally covered in PSCs: funders, user groups, suppliers, and groups that maintain the project's products. The study is unique in including PSC members as respondents. PSC members are agents to their stakeholder group and, at the group level, to the funding and owning organization. The study confirms the value of four stakeholder-representation roles for members. It emphasizes the importance of defining clear and distinct individual responsibilities for members, rather than focusing solely on shared goals and mutual trust.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Project success is positively related to project governance, where competent decision-makers influence both (Turner, 2025), and governance is needed to align the project with business objectives (Musawir et al., 2023). *Project Steering Committees* (PSCs) are one of the possibilities for the governance of a project (Müller et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2024). A PSC is a group that acts at a strategic level and is responsible for achieving the business case and the progress of the project (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). This places PSCs in the research field of project governance, which studies the governance of a single project. It has four contemporary research strands (Sankaran et al., 2025). PSCs are in the strand *Resilience*, as they help deal with multiple stakeholders and viewpoints (Murphy, 2016). Also, the *Organizational* strand is relevant, as PSCs provide unified direction in case of multiple funders and owners (Miller & Lessard, 2000).

Committees, by definition, consist of several members (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). One of the members' potential roles is representing the funder(s), often referred to as the project owner, which is well-studied (e.g., Breese et al., 2020). Less is known about the other roles of members in the PSC and the inner workings of the PSC in general (Lechler & Cohen, 2009; Murphy, 2016).

The PSC is responsible for achieving the business case (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). Changes in the project environment or in the project itself can influence the business case (Al-Twairesh & Al-Mudimigh, 2011), which the PSC must recognize and act upon (Loch et al., 2017). The PSC's performance should be evaluated using a broad definition of project success that encompasses the owner's and investor's success (Zwikael & Meredith, 2021). The study in this chapter uses the definition for success by Joslin & Müller (2016, p. 613) as "… the achievement of a particular combination of objective and subjective measures, manifested in the success criteria and measured at the end of a project". The accountability of a PSC for the business case implies it must have decision-making authority (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b; Stewart et al., 2023); therefore, our study does not include advisory boards.

This study presents insights from theory and empirical data that could aid management practice by clarifying how individual PSC members contribute to project success. Additionally, it deepens the current application of agency theory (Breese et al., 2020) by distinguishing between governance at the group and individual levels. The PSC, as a whole, serves as the project owner. But the members themselves have individual and dual responsibilities: for the project as a whole and for the stakeholder group they represent (Stoppels et al., 2025). So, the PSC is an agent to the funding organization and a principal to the project manager. PSC members are agents to both the funding organization and their own stakeholder group, while also part of the group that is the principal towards the project manager. We also respond to the call of Murphy (2018) to study the inner workings of PSCs.

In the remainder of this chapter, we first provide the theoretical background. This leads to a conceptual model linking PSC members acting from individual responsibilities to project

success. We then provide the research methodology and analyze the study's reliability. The results are presented, leading to a discussion on the link between PSC members and project success. Last, we present conclusions, including theoretical and practical relevance.

5.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

5.2.1. The PSC and its members

One way to view PSCs is as the linking pin between permanent organizations and temporary projects (Lechler & Cohen, 2009), where stakeholders collaborate (Müller et al., 2015). Senior managers cooperate and form a boundary-spanning team (Murphy, 2016). Both agency theory and stewardship theory support the appointment of a project owner (Breese et al., 2020; Zwikael & Smyrk, 2019). The PSC as a group can have this role of project owner (Crawford, 2023; Crawford et al., 2008). The project owner focuses on project success on behalf of the funder, though should also take the interests of other stakeholders into account (Müller et al., 2017). The PSC members represent affected and contributing stakeholder groups (McGrath & Whitty, 2017; Murphy, 2016), of which the funder is significant but not the only stakeholder (Stoppels et al., 2025).

The PSC consists of senior managers who are primarily selected based on the stakeholders they represent within the permanent organization (Harvey et al., 2025; Murphy, 2016). As a result, members must balance the interests of the project with those of the permanent organizations they represent. Their responsibilities from the permanent function can conflict with the overall interest of the project. For example, ERP implementations (large integrated software systems) lead to process changes that may result in increased workload or complexity for the department a PSC member is responsible for (Allen, 2005).

Our previous studies have shown that members tend to struggle with these dual responsibilities (Stoppels et al., 2023, 2025). This can lead to them either focusing mainly on the interests of their permanent organization or prioritizing project goals and neglecting individual responsibilities derived from the permanent organization (Loch et al., 2017). This raises the question of whether PSCs should explicitly define individual responsibilities and then act accordingly to achieve project success.

A PSC and its members should govern and support the project (Crawford et al., 2008). The governance involves providing direction, based on the interests of the funder and other stakeholders. It also involves holding the project manager accountable for performance and conduct (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016). This means that information must be gathered and transformed to make decisions (Karlsen, 2010; Murphy, 2016). In practice, the project manager attends meetings: to report, provide information during discussions, and prepare the agenda (Stoppels et al., 2023). The project manager has no decision rights and is not a PSC member (Axelos, 2009). The support duty of PSC members involves them serving as champions (Andersen,

2012). At times, they need to act, such as ensuring compliance with decisions within their own stakeholder group. They should be careful not to manage the project team, as this is the project manager's accountability (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018).

5.2.2. Project success

Project success and success criteria are well-researched (Joslin & Müller, 2015). It originated from a narrow definition of the triple constraints (cost, time, scope), later developed to include long-term stakeholder perspectives (Cellerino et al., 2025). Following Cooke-Davies (2002), the PSC is responsible for project success and not just project management success. Therefore, it should encompass the perspectives of stakeholder groups and the project's long-term outcomes. Khan et al. (2013) define five project success dimensions: *Project Efficiency*, *Organizational Benefits*, *Project Impact*, *Future Potential*, and *Stakeholder Satisfaction*. Project efficiency is generally managed by project management, though the PSC should provide direction and hold the project manager accountable (Stoppels et al., 2023). The individual with the project owner role, often chairing the PSC (McGrath & Whitty, 2020b), is primarily responsible for benefits realization (Zwikael et al., 2019). Future potential is relevant to the success of future projects, as part of the responsibility of PSC members within their permanent organizations (Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015). PSCs should consider the satisfaction of stakeholders, not only morally (OECD, 2016) but also since a stakeholder orientation helps project success (Joslin & Müller, 2016), and the PSC itself is a body where stakeholders collaborate (Lechler & Cohen, 2009).

5.2.3. Individual responsibilities of PSC members

Earlier work (Stoppels et al., 2025) provides an overview of why clear responsibilities for each member are needed. First, clear responsibility among PSC members helps project success, as it shapes actions that contribute to the goals of the funder and other stakeholders (Müller et al., 2017; Too & Weaver, 2014; Turner, 2020a). Zwikael et al. (2019) provide an overview of the responsibilities of the project owner, who is an agent for the funder and should focus on benefits realization before and after the project's output is delivered. Breese (2020) adds that the owner should take full ownership of the project's benefits by separating the project's oversight role from the permanent function. Second, Bechky (2006) describes how role clarity serves as a mechanism for coordination in temporary organizations, enabling each member to know what to do and what others can expect from them. Third, explicit and communicated roles can prevent tensions in the team (DeFillippi & Sydow, 2016).

Standard roles can help determine members' responsibilities. In earlier work, we proposed five roles for selecting members and as the starting point to determine individual members' responsibilities and authorities (Stoppels et al., 2025). These roles are *Representation of the Funder, Representation of User Groups, Representation of Suppliers of Project Resources, Representation of the Support organization for Project Deliverables,* and *Quality Assurance towards the PSC*.

5.2.4. Shared Goals

A PSC must ensure alignment with the funding or owning organizations' goals (Project Management Institute, 2016) and provide unified direction (Axelos, 2009). Besides, "goals affect performance by directing attention and action, mobilizing effort, and motivating individuals" (Clerkin & Jones, 2013). Members should agree on these goals since a previous study (Stoppels et al., 2023) showed that a PSC is more than an advisory board towards the owner and tends towards shared decision-making. Arnesson and Albinsson (2013) found that agreement among PSC members on the project's goals is needed for success.

Schippers and Rus (2021) studied the influence of shared views among Top Management Team (TMT) members on the quality of shared decision-making. They stress the importance of a common goal and task clarification via sharing, discussing, and integrating information among team members. Loch et al. (2017) mention "goal agreement" as one of the important challenges of a PSC, in which they include the importance of achieving clarity on what the goals imply and where conflicts of interest among members exist.

Therefore, it is expected that members sharing goals helps project success. We define "shared" as "to have in common" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). This includes members knowing the goals, agreeing upon them, and using them for guidance when acting or making decisions. Chow & Chan (2008) examined the influence of social networks, mutual trust, and shared goals on employees' intention to share knowledge in organizations. They found that shared goals positively affect knowledge-sharing intention.

5.2.5. Mutual trust

Joslin & Müller (2016) predicated that governance based on trust helps project success, which is supported by the findings from Zwikael et al. (2015) on trust between the project owner and project manager. Both focus on trust by the governors towards Project Management. It can be expected that mutual trust inside the PSC is also important for project success. In ERP implementations, interdepartmental cooperation based on trust and clear goals is a key success factor (Somers & Nelson, 2001). PSC members sometimes struggle with their duties related to project oversight (Loch et al., 2017), so they should feel confident asking their fellow PSC members for help.

Research on management teams indicates that members sharing goals make them want to solve task conflicts (disagreement about the content of the task). This, in turn, leads to quality decision-making (Janssen et al., 1999) and members willing to accept decisions (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Relationship conflict (the perception of personal resentment and incompatibility), on the other hand, should be avoided; it limits information processing and makes the members focus on each other instead of reaching group goals (Wit et al., 2012). When members lack mutual trust, they are likely to interpret task conflict (resulting from PSC members acting according to individual responsibilities) as hidden agendas or personal attacks. In the words of Simons & Peterson (2000, p. 109): "companies can realize the benefits of task conflict with

minimal danger of relationship conflict if an appropriate basis of intragroup trust is established."

5.2.6. Conceptual model

We argue that PSC members acting from clear individual responsibilities (Bechky, 2006), having shared overall goals (Janssen et al., 1999), and having mutual trust (Simons & Peterson, 2000) helps achieve governance towards and support of the project. Thus, it could add to project success. Based on findings and literature from Organization Management and data from interviews in our earlier study (Stoppels et al., 2025), we add that PSC members will only engage in information sharing, discussing, and integrating if they trust the other members and share overall goals (Franco et al., 2016). If not, we expect members to consider only the interests of their function within the permanent organization, leading to task conflict that can lead to relationship conflict (Simons & Peterson, 2000). On the contrary, if members trust each other and share the same overall goal, working from individual responsibilities enhances information processing by bringing diverse viewpoints to the table, enabling members to act effectively within their respective areas of responsibility.

The PSC being functionally heterogeneous (Murphy, 2016) underscores the relevance of both negative and positive effects, as well as the significance of mutual trust and goal sharing (Deng et al., 2020). The field of organization management shows that management teams with goal consensus capitalize on differences between team members (Bang & Midelfart, 2017).

Our findings are summarized in the conceptual model of **Figure 4**, suggesting that having *Shared Goals* and *Mutal Trust* moderates the relation between *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* and *Project Success*.

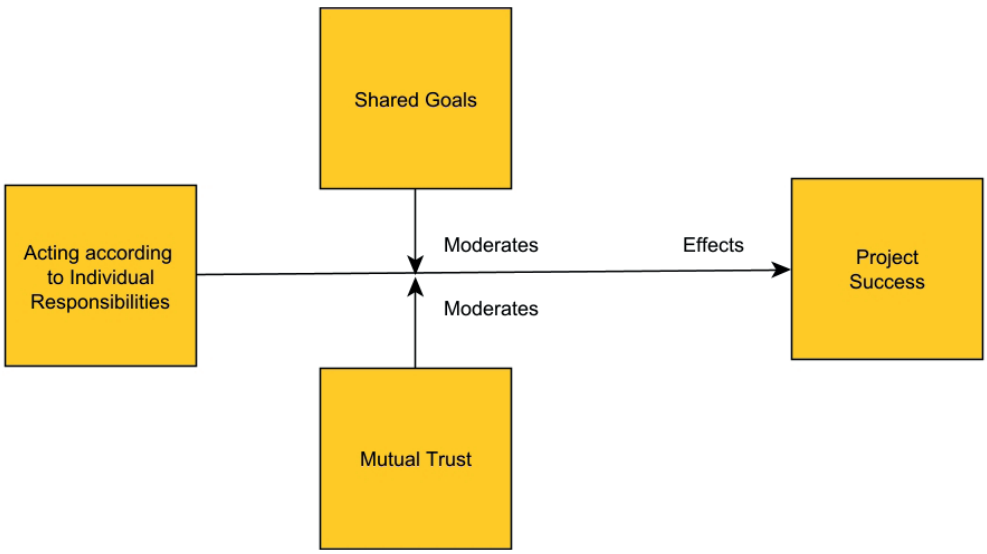

Figure 4: Conceptual model linking Acting according to Individual Responsibilities to Project Success

If this model holds ground, there must first be a relation between *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* and *Project Success*. So, we pose hypothesis H1:
H1: Acting according to Individual Responsibilities has an effect on Project Success

Second, we expect a degree of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* to be needed to prevent task conflict from becoming relationship conflict. Literature shows that task conflict helps project success, while relationship conflict does not. A minimum level of team trust is needed for knowledge sharing (Lee et al., 2010), and trust can be a moderator rather than directly affecting success (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Based on interviews with members from six PSCs, our previous study added that members should be free to act based on individual responsibilities. However, they are bound by preserving mutual trust and shared goals (Stoppels et al., 2025). Therefore, we expect a different effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success*, between high and low degrees of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust*. So, we propose hypotheses H2, split into three parts.

H2a: The effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Shared Goals* AND *Mutual Trust* are present, compared to when one or both are not present.
H2b: The effect of *Acting according* to *Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Shared Goals* is present, compared to when this degree of *Shared Goals* is not present.
H2c: The effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Mutual Trust* is present, compared to when this degree of *Mutual Trust* is not present.

5.3. METHODOLOGY

Given that the hypotheses are derived from literature and previous studies, we chose a deductive approach using new empirical data. We follow the epistemology of the cautious realist (Blaikie, 2009), stating that respondents' perspectives can shed light on reality. Our previous studies were qualitative and exploratory, leading to a list of standard roles and the relevance of members working from clear and communicated individual responsibilities in a setting of mutual trust and shared goals. Quantitative research enables validating the occurrence of these roles and testing hypotheses about the influence of variables on project success. A structured survey enables the data collection needed to test hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

5.3.1. Design of the survey

The survey questions were taken from previous studies, if available. This helps construct validity and adds reusable data to the field of project management research. The survey consists of

four sections. The first is to check respondents' agreement with using the data, how long ago they experienced the PSC, whether the project has delivered at least part of the end-products, and whether the PSC was dedicated to a specific project. The second is to gather data on the four variables: *Project Success*, *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* of PSC Members, *Shared Goals,* and *Mutual Trust*. The third section gathers opinions about PSCs, such as whether individual responsibilities are clear and which roles are present. The fourth and last section is on the respondent, PSC, and project metadata. Appendix F provides an overview of the survey questions, which were available in English (43 responses), German (18 responses), and Dutch (117 responses).

5.3.2. Variables

To measure project success, we follow Joslin & Muller (2015, 2016), as their survey questions are based on existing project success dimensions, are extensive, and have been used in two relevant studies. A review encompassing all aspects of Project Success, with studies by Bakker & de Kleijn (2018) and Zwikael & Meredith (2021), revealed no gaps.

For the variable *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* of PSC members, the survey questions were grouped into three sets: about roles and responsibilities being defined, about members acting based on individual responsibilities, and about the attitude members have towards these responsibilities. The questions in the first set were defined explicitly for this study. The questions for the other two sets were adapted from a quantitative study by Michie et al. (2006) about the impact of diversity on collaboration and decision-making in TMTs.

The questions on *Shared Goals* were grouped into three sets: Knowing the goals by the members, agreement on the goals by the members, and members working based on the shared goals. They were adapted to relevance and wording for a PSC from quantitative studies by Lee et al. (1991), Michie et al. (2006), and Chow & Chan (2008).

We defined two sets of questions to assess *Mutual Trust*. The first set concerns perceptions of the other PSC members' personal characteristics regarding trust, with questions adapted from Simons and Peterson (2000). The questions in the second set concern the relationship between the members, adapted from Janssen et al. (1999). We addressed benevolence, honesty, and competence (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Each question has a five-point Likert scale. For example, in the resulting variable Project Success, a score of "5.0" means the respondent answered "Strongly agree" on all the underlying questions. **Table 7** shows the variables, the sets, and the source. This chapter uses the abbreviation in brackets in formulas for readability.

5.3.3. Data collection

The first version of the survey was pilot-tested by 15 project managers, leading to minor adjustments in wording. These responses were not used in the analysis. Data collection was conducted through snowball sampling, as there is no formal organization of PSC members.

Respondents were approached through the researchers' network, and via six project management organizations (APM Austria, BPUG, GAPPS, IPMA-NL, PMI Benelux, and NAP-network), and one organization of project owners (NETLIPSE). We explicitly asked respondents to forward the email invitation to PSC members, as these were the most difficult to approach. We included responses from project managers, as they attend PSC meetings and can evaluate project success for stakeholders (Cheung et al., 2010). The survey was conducted online between April 2023 and August 2024 using the Qualtrics platform (2023) and in two time periods. After the first period, 60% of the respondents were project managers. Therefore, we specifically targeted PSC members in the next round, resulting in a 53% response by project managers overall. We tested the variation for the four main variables between the two periods and found no significant effect. Responses were anonymous, and the University's ethics committee approved the survey design.

We asked respondents with experience in a PSC dedicated to a project somewhere in the last three years. At least part of the end-products had to be delivered to ensure knowledge of project success (Cooke-Davies, 2002). We did not select the projects based on their type, size, or duration, but we did measure these factors. Checking for valid responses through the survey questions resulted in the exclusion of 29 out of 207 responses. Since the object of study is the PSC, respondents were asked to answer the questions for their most recent PSC that fits the criteria mentioned above.

The study employed recommendations by Kamakura (2010) and Podsakoff & MacKenzie (2003) to minimize common methods bias, ensuring anonymity through the survey and achieving construct validity by reusing questions from previous research and conducting pilot testing.

Table 7: Variables and sets for the measurement

Variable	Sets of questions	Source
Acting according to Individual Responsibilities *(ActingResponsibilities)*	Roles, defined	Defined for this study specifically.
	Roles, acted upon	Adapted from Michie et al. (2006), who quantitatively studied the impact of diversity on collaboration and decision-making in TMTs.
	Roles, attitude towards	Adapted from Michie et al. (2006).
Shared Goals *(Goals)*	Knowing the goals	Adapted from Lee et al. (1991), who quantitatively studied the relationship between goal setting and goal communication for interdependent tasks. Adapted for goals in PSCs and reduced the number of questions.
	Agreement on the goal	Adapted from Michie et al. (2006). Their questions were specific to a case, so were adapted for PSCs and projects.
	Working on the goals	Adapted from Michie et al. (2006) and Chow & Chan (2008). The latter studied the relationship between shared goals and mutual trust on knowledge sharing in organizations.

Mutual Trust *(Trust)*	Perceptions on personal characteristics of members	Adapted from Simons et al. (2000) who studied task conflict and relationship conflict in TMTs.
	Relations between members	Adapted from Janssen et al. (1999) who studied role shaping in management teams.
Project Success *(Success)*	Project efficiency Organizational benefits Project impact Future potential Stakeholder satisfaction	Taken directly from Joslin & Müller (2015) with the kind cooperation of Robert Joslin. They studied the relationship between project management methodology and project success. The question on safety was adapted to "safety performance" since pilot testers from IT projects did not understand the original phrase.

5.3.4. Method for data analysis

To provide insights into modeling relationships, data were presented and analyzed graphically, as Field (2017) recommends. Since we aim to find an association between several predictors and the *Success* variable, we used multiple linear regression as the primary data analysis technique. The three-dimensional graphics suggest linear modeling provides a good fit. The corresponding p-values are obtained by t-testing. All data analyses were conducted with the open-source statistical environment R (R Core Team, 2022). The studies used several regression models. For readability, we added a "#" followed by a sequence number to each model.

5.4. ANALYSIS OF RELIABILITY

To test if the questions can be combined into sets and the sets can be combined into variables, we calculated Cronbach's Alpha for each variable (**Table 8**). A value above 0.7 indicates a good match (Hair et al., 2010); when it is lower, further investigation is justified. For the variable *Trust*, Cronbach's Alpha is on the low side. The end of the survey has optional text fields for the name of the PSC and for general remarks. We rechecked the underlying questions on *Trust* with the data from these text fields and other data, considering the context of the PSC and how respondents might interpret them. We also calculated the correlation matrix of the sets within *Trust*. We concluded that they measured various aspects of the same variable. The high Cronbach's Alpha for the variable *Success* confirms the findings of Joslin & Muller (2016), who used the same construct and reported an Alpha of 0.92.

Table 8: Cronbach's Alpha for the variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Actingresponsibilities	0.73
Goals	0.85
Trust	0.58
Success	0.89

5.5. RESULTS

5.5.1. Demographics

Figure 5 provides the respondents' demographics. There are slightly more project managers than PSC members, but the overall number of PSC members is unique for research in project governance. The data encompasses a diverse range of project types and sizes.

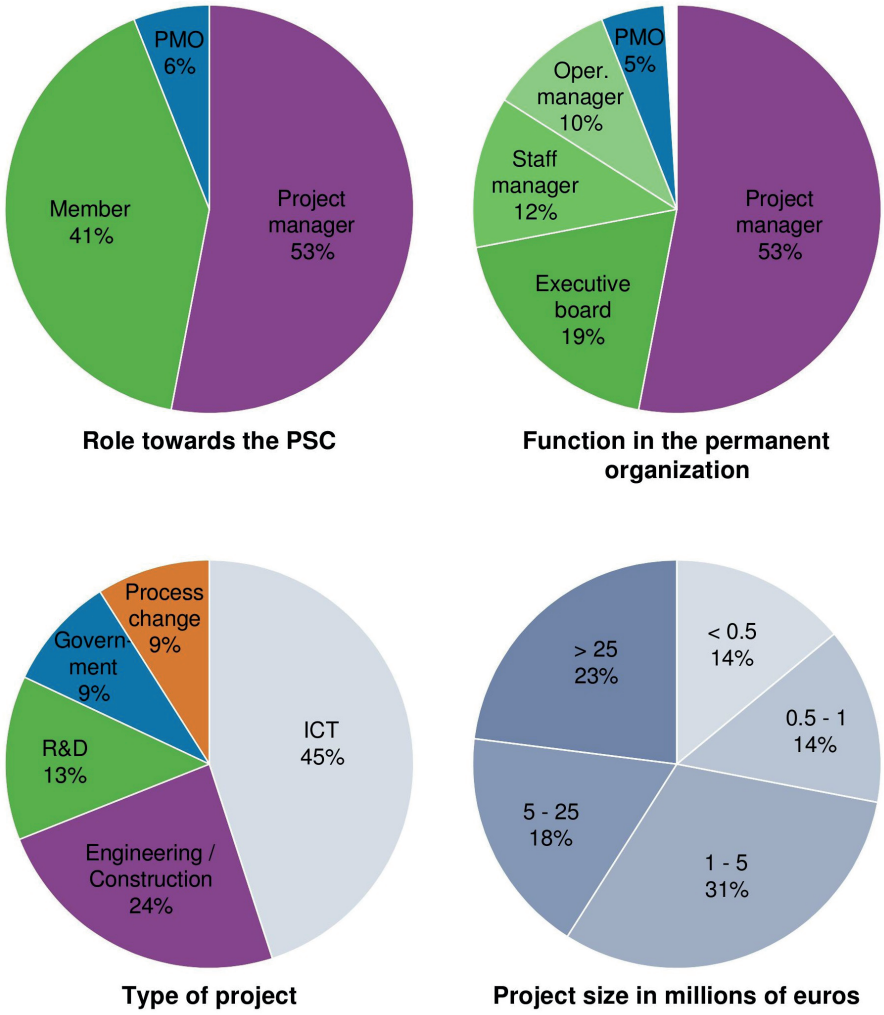

Figure 5: Respondents' and projects' demographics

Four of the six participating project management organizations were based in the Netherlands, resulting in 73% of the projects primarily located there. Both project managers

and PSC members considered themselves experienced, with 84% of PSC members and 97% of project managers scoring 4 or 5.

5.5.2. Testing Hypothesis 1 from the conceptual model

To test the hypotheses for the conceptual model, we used linear regression. The first hypothesis (H1), that there is an effect of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success,* can be confirmed via simple linear regression using the following model #1:

$$\text{Success} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Actingresponsibilities}$$

We found an effect of *Actingresponsibilities* of $\beta_1 = 0.48 \pm 0.06$, with a P-value smaller than 0.001 (**Figure 6**).

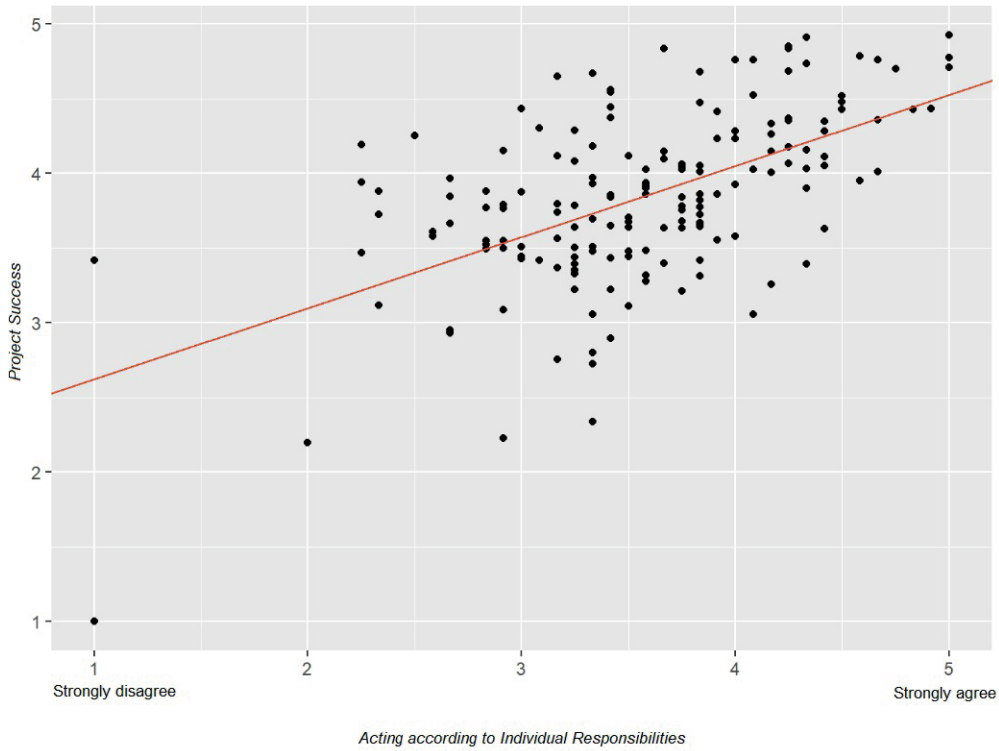

Figure 6: Relationship between Acting according to Individual Responsibilities and Project Success – scatterplot with trendline

5.5.3. Predicting Project Success

Given that we know the values of *Actingresponsibilities*, *Goals*, and *Trust*, we asked ourselves if this helps predict *Success*. First, we looked at correlations, of which **Table 9** provides an overview. These are moderate to strong correlations, all well above 0.5.

Table 9: Correlations between the four variables

Variable	Actingresponsibilities	Goals	Trust	Success
Actingresponsibilities	1.00			
Goals	0.56	1.00		
Trust	0.56	0.70	1.00	
Success	0.56	0.63	0.59	1.00

Working from the conceptual model relating *Actingresponsibilities* to *Success*, the three-dimensional linear model #2 predicts *Success* based on the other three variables:

$$\text{Success} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Goals} + \beta_2 \times \text{Trust} + \beta_3 \times \text{Actingresponsibilities}$$

This linear regression leads to estimates of β_0 ,β_1,β_2, and β_3, which are shown in **Table 10**.

Table 10: Estimated coefficients for the prediction of Success using Model #2

Variable in function	Estimate	Std. Error	P-value
β_0, intercept	1.41	0.20	< 0.001
β_1, Goals	0.27	0.07	< 0.001
β_2, Trust	0.16	0.07	0.02
β_3, Actingresponsibilities	0.21	0.06	< 0.001

So, we can conclude that all three variables *Actingresponsibilities*, *Trust,* and *Goals* predict *Success* although for *Trust,* the significance is less strong than the other two. The R-squared of model #2 is 0.48, so given *Actingresponsibilities, Goals and Trust* are known, 48% of the variation in *Success* can be predicted.

5.5.4. Testing Hypothesis 2 from the conceptual model

Hypothesis 2 claims that the effect of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success* is different when a certain degree of shared *Goals* and Mutual *Trust* are present, compared to when one or both are not present. So, there should be a threshold value of both *Goals* and *Trust,* which changes the correlation between *Actingresponsibilities* and *Success*. For the threshold, we started with the mean values of *Goals* (3.86) and *Trust* (3.73). For each response in the database, we added a new variable $\mathbb{1}$, where $\mathbb{1} = 1$ if the threshold value was met and $\mathbb{1} = 0$ if not met. This provides two stratifications in the data, which makes it possible to test the significance of β_3 (the difference

between the effects of *Actingresponsibilities* between the stratifications). We need three models #3 to test the three sub-hypotheses:
Hypothesis H2a: both *Goals* AND *Trust* have met the threshold, Model #3A:
$Success=\beta_0+\beta_1 Actingresponsibilities+\mathbb{1}_{HighTrustGoals}(\beta_2+\beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$
Hypothesis H2b: *Goals* has met the threshold, Model #3B:
$Success=\beta_0+\beta_1 Actingresponsibilities+\mathbb{1}_{HighGoals}(\beta_2+\beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$
Hypothesis H2c: *Trust* has met the threshold, Model #3C:
$Success=\beta_0+\beta_1 Actingresponsibilities+\mathbb{1}_{HighTrust}(\beta_2+\beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$
The left side of **Table 11** shows the estimation results for β_3 in the three models #3A, #3B, and #3C.

Table 11: Estimated coefficients for the prediction of Success using Model #3

	Threshold = mean		**Threshold = 3**	
Model	**Estimate of β_3**	**P-value of the test $\beta_3 = 0$**	**Estimate of β3**	**P-value of the test β3 = 0**
Model #3A: *Goals* AND *Trust*	-0.15	0.19	-0.18	0.15
Model #3B: *Goals*	-0.17	0.13	-0.17	0.13
Model #3C: *Trust*	-0.06	0.58	-0.06	0.58

We found no significant difference between the effects of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success,* assuming high or low *Goals* and *Trust*. So, it's likely that hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c must be rejected. Even if, in reality, there is a difference between the stratifications, this is small and will have no practical consequences. One reason might be that the range of measured *Trust* or *Goals* is too limited. Indeed, the average values for *Goals* and *Trust* are above the neutral ("neither agree nor disagree") value of 3. Therefore, we retested the difference between stratifications with lower threshold values of 3. As presented on the right side of **Table 11**, this led to minimal differences.

5.5.5. Differences between project managers and other respondents

Testing the hypotheses separately between project managers and PSC members leaves too few data points. We did, however, check if the indicated *Success* differs between project managers and PSC members, as shown in **Figure 7**.

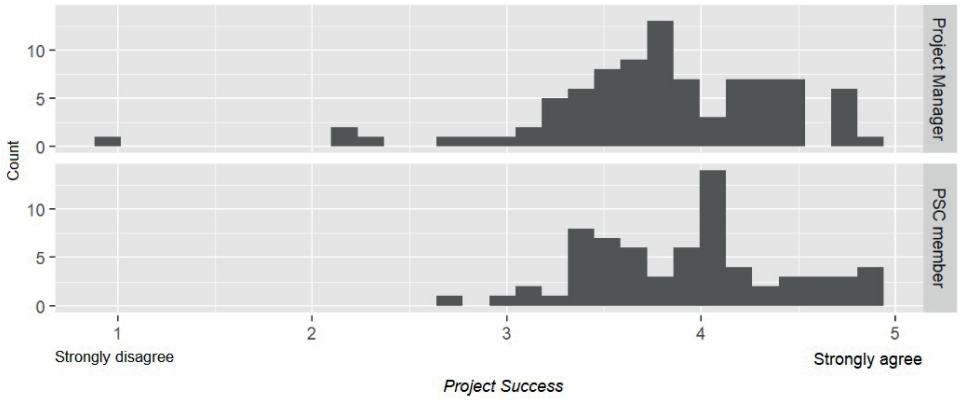

Figure 7: Comparison of rating Project Success between Project managers and PSC members

As the figure shows, the distributions are mainly the same. We quantified the difference in means using linear regression, which confirmed that the difference is not significant (p-value = 0.172).

5.5.6. Roles in the Steering Committee

Figure 8 provides an overview of the roles present in the PSC and in which combinations. The "Set size" on the left shows the role's occurrence. One PSC member can have several roles. In a previous study (Stoppels et al., 2025), we defined the role of "Quality assurance". In the survey questions and the figure below, we split this into a role to check quality assurance (*No representation but a role to check quality on behalf of the PSC*) and to advise (*No representation but a role to advise/add skills not present in the PSC)* because Karlsen (2020) only mentions the second.

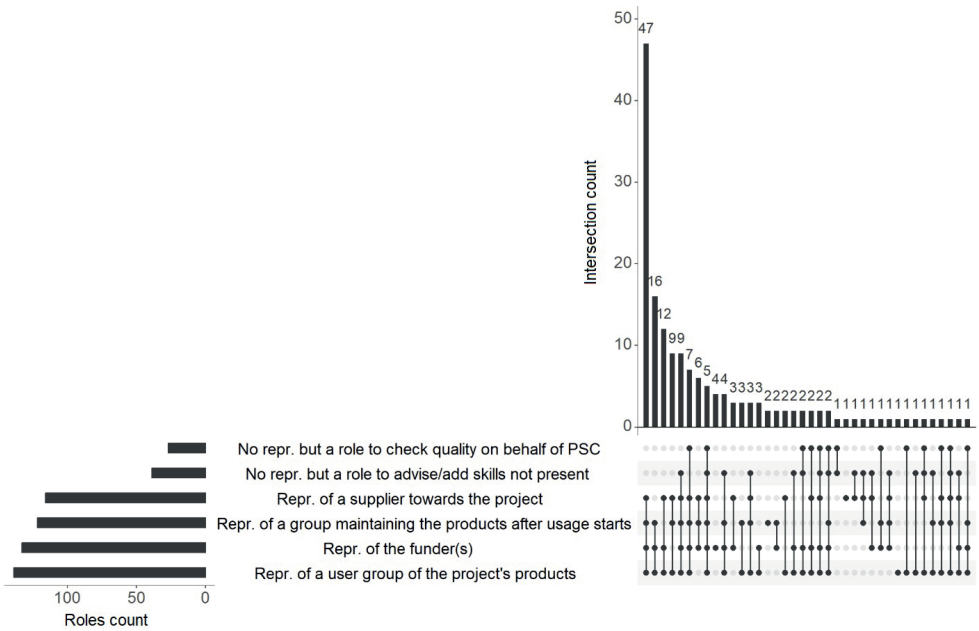

Figure 8: Roles that are present in the Project Steering Committee

The roles of representing funder(s), user groups, suppliers towards the project, and groups maintaining the project's products are typically present. The roles of quality assurance or advice are rare, though they occur. The figure shows that some PSCs lack representation from the funder, so we contacted the respondents who voluntarily left their email addresses. They either indicated the funder was indirectly funding via a project owner or that the budget had to be approved by a portfolio board.

In the survey, we also asked whether each role should be present. Respondents strongly agreed on the need for all the representation roles, with more than 80% in agreement (score 4 or 5). These roles are *Representation of the Funder, Representation of User Groups, Representation of Suppliers of Project Resources,* and *Representation of the Support organization for Project Deliverables.* Opinions on the need for a role solely for *Quality Assurance towards the PSC* were diverse: 49% scored 4 or 5.

5.5.7. Opinions on Responsibilities, Shared Goals, and Mutual Trust

The survey also asked respondents to rate the reasoning behind the hypotheses on a five-point Likert scale, thereby assessing their views on the conceptual model. **Table VI** shows the questions and the percentage with scores 4 or 5. Results indicate that respondents seem to agree with the conceptual model, although our statistical testing does not support it.

Table 12: Opinions about acting to individual responsibilities, shared goals, and mutual trust (N=163)

Question	Percentage score 4 or 5
If members act according to agreed-upon personal responsibilities, this improves project success	79%
Having shared goals are a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities	90%
Mutual trust among members is a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities	90%

5.5.8. Opinions on the relevance of a PSC for Governance and Support

A PSC can be needed for governance or support (Crawford et al., 2008). Governance is needed for risk limitation towards the owning organizations. Therefore, we asked if the owning organization is at risk if the project fails. To address the potential need for support, we measured the perceived importance of the PSC in solving conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups and stakeholder commitment. **Table 13** shows the percentage of responses for levels of perceived risk for the organization if the project fails and the need for PSC involvement in stakeholder management. Hardly any projects are in the low/low area, where, according to the literature, there is no need for a PSC.

We also asked if the project needs a PSC to succeed. Respondents see the need, with 90% in agreement (Agree or Strongly Agree).

Table 13: Responses on PSC needed to limit risk or for stakeholder management (N=163)

		PSC is needed for stakeholder commitment or resolving conflicts of interest in stakeholder groups	
		High	Low
In case the project fails, the owning organization is at risk	High	48%	4%
	Medium	12%	3%
	Low	30%	2%

5.6. DISCUSSION

This discussion section compares the survey results to the literature and the conceptual model.

5.6.1. Testing the conceptual model

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed, since *Actingresponsibilities* and *Success* were shown to have a strong positive correlation. Previous studies indicate this could be a causal relation, since acting from clear individual responsibilities sharpens decision-making, builds commitment, prevents conflict, and prevents gaps in activities (Stoppels et al., 2025).

Hypothesis 2 states that the effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* differs when a certain degree of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* are present, compared to when one of the two or both are not present. Based on the data gathered, this

was not confirmed. However, respondents agreed with this hypothesis when asked directly, thus aligning with a previous qualitative study (Stoppels et al., 2025). The first reason for the discrepancy might be that the PSCs studied are mainly in the higher *Mutual Trust* and *Shared Goals* area (78% of responses have both above 3). Thus, the data lacks a range, even while we calibrated towards the mean. The same lack of range in our data is in *Project Success* (88% of responses above 3). For projects in trouble, members might start acting primarily based on interests from their position in the permanent organization (Stoppels et al., 2025). Finding enough PSCs with lower trust to expand the dataset might not be feasible given that in our study seven professional organizations have cooperated. Follow-up studies can be qualitative on specific projects having difficulty moving forward or lacking trust among PSC members.

The second reason for the discrepancy might be that the conceptual model needs adjustment. Both this study and the previous study (Stoppels et al., 2025) indicate that project managers and PSC members think a minimum of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* are needed before *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* improves *Project Success*. Our quantitative data show that *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* always has a positive relationship with *Project Success*. So, it might be a matter of priority in team development: acting from individual responsibilities is always beneficial, but when shared goals or mutual trust are lacking, improving those takes priority over clarifying individual responsibilities.

A first alternative conceptual model could focus on the effort and timing of activities by the PSC to achieve shared goals, mutual trust, and members acting according to their individual responsibilities. A second alternative conceptual model could include decision-making and holding the project manager to account as mediators. Thereby, following recent work by Turner (2025) on decision-making as a mediator between governance and project success, and including the holding to account part of governance (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016). In such a model, Mutual Trust, Shared Goals, and Acting from Individual Responsibilities could be the influencing variables, with Project Success as the dependent variable.

5.6.2. Predicting Project Success

Knowing *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities, Mutual Trust* and *Shared Goals*, 48% of *Project Success* can be predicted. We found a strong positive correlation between the four variables, but each variable adds to the prediction of *Project Success*. It seems advisable to work on achieving all three and measure them at project reviews.

Although we could not compare per project, the data suggest that whether the respondent is a project manager or PSC member does not influence the scores on *Project Success*. This finding is reassuring for previous and future research, as studies on project governance typically use project managers as respondents (e.g., Bucero, 2024; Joslin & Müller, 2016) or respondents who identify themselves as project owners on LinkedIn (e.g., Musawir et al., 2017).

5.6.3. Roles in the Steering Committee

We found that the four representation roles, as proposed in our earlier work (Stoppels et al., 2025) and in line with the project management method PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2009), are generally covered in the projects in our dataset. We found indications of quality assurance roles toward the PSC being present, thus confirming earlier findings (Stoppels et al., 2025). This earlier study suggested that members whose only role is *Quality Assurance towards the PSC* could add skills and knowledge on project oversight, the product to be delivered, or stakeholders. Based on a case study, Karlsen (2020) explicitly recommends including external members (not working at a funding, owning, or supplying organization) to bring expertise and trustworthiness. However, our previous study found examples where the lack of accountability towards a permanent organization led to free-riding or jeopardizing the authority of other PSC members. These pros and cons may be reflected in the survey respondents' mixed opinions. We infer that individual roles and responsibilities should be considered when designing a governance structure. The PSC at the group level is an agent to the funder and a principal to the project manager. But so is each individual member.

5.6.4. Measuring Project Success

Since the study reused *Project Success* questions and the project categorization from Joslin & Muller (2016), the data can be used in future meta-studies. Given the high Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.9) of the variable *Project Success* found by both Joslin & Muller (2016) and this study, it could be considered to reduce the number of questions in future studies that only need *Project Success* on an aggregated level.

Literature suggests project efficiency is mainly independent of long-term value in the eyes of stakeholders (De Wit, 1988; Musawir et al., 2017). If so, we would expect the Cronbach's Alpha for *Project Success* to be lower than 0.9. Therefore, this and previous studies may experience a halo effect at respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003). They might project their opinion on the more observable project success dimension, *Project Efficiency*, to the less observable ones, such as *Future Potential* and *Stakeholder Satisfaction* (Khan, 2012).

5.6.5. Relevance of PSCs

The data support the two reasons for a PSC, as stated by Crawford et al. (2008): governance and support. There are hardly any PSCs in the study where the need for both is low. In line with previous qualitative studies (Stoppels et al., 2023), projects with a high need for support require a PSC when "things get rough". Respondents indicated that the project needed a PSC to succeed, but there may be a bias because respondents are accustomed to having one. So, follow-up research could focus on projects posing high risk and requiring support, where no PSC was used for oversight, but other governance institutions were used instead (Müller et al., 2017).

5.7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study quantitatively measures the impact of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Shared Goals*, and *Mutual Trust* of PSC members on *Project Success*. It is unique in explicitly including PSC members as respondents, thereby addressing the call by Pitsis et al. (2014) to regard project governance as a concern beyond project managers.

We found a clear relationship among these four variables. We proposed that members should have a minimum level of shared goals and mutual trust before acting from their individual responsibilities. Our earlier explorative study suggested that this common foundation is needed to prevent transaction-based negotiation, which jeopardizes information sharing, discussion, and integration. Organizational Management literature supports this, showing that relationship conflict may arise when shared goals and mutual trust are lacking, potentially harming decision-making quality (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

However, our data did not support the hypothesis that a threshold of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* is required for *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* to positively relate to *Project Success*. When asked directly in the survey, respondents indicated that members should first focus on achieving shared goals and mutual trust before acting from individual responsibilities. We conclude that members knowing individual responsibilities and acting from them is always beneficial, but there is a priority. This implies for practice that, when initiating a PSC, members should start by clarifying and sharing goals and building trust. Understanding how members do this justifies future research, such as longitudinal case studies of members' role-taking.

The variables *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities, Mutual Trust,* and *Shared Goals* are a predictor of 48% of *Project Success*. Although this study does not meet Van de Ven's (2007) criteria for causality, our earlier exploratory study and the survey of respondents' opinions suggest a causal association. Therefore, our study implies that members should take time at the launch of a PSC to discuss their own and other members' responsibilities and how these influence actions and decision-making. Moreover, members should work on team processes to improve mutual trust and informed agreement on the overall goals.

The study is unique in that it quantitatively distinguishes standardized roles of members. We found support for using five roles to select PSC members and determine their individual responsibilities. The four representation roles for funders, user groups, suppliers towards the project, and groups maintaining the project's products are generally covered in a PSC. These four roles are about representing the contributing and affected types of stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017) that influence project success. The role of quality assurance towards the PSC is unfilled and should be used prudently, as members with only this role have limited accountability. The roles can be used in practice, and PSCs' inner workings could be further studied based on these roles.

The study's main weakness is the limited number of projects with low trust among

members and low project success, which might limit the size of the effects we detect. With our snowballing approach, the non-response bias is unknown. There may be a bias towards more successful projects, as a project manager might have a better relationship with PSC members in these projects and be more inclined to forward the survey. Another limitation is that common-method bias cannot be ruled out: the same respondents answer questions about all variables. Future studies would benefit from benchmark data on project success related to project, governance, and contextual indicators, to which our data can be a part of the input.

Our findings indicate that PSCs play a significant role in project success, based on the perspectives of both PSC members and project managers. This justifies further investigation into the inner workings, success factors, and other variables that influence the effectiveness of PSCs in project oversight. Critical case studies of PSCs supervising failing projects (B. Flyvbjerg, 2006), combined with an interactionalist view of role theory (Bechky, 2006), can provide insights.

Our study adds to agency theory by highlighting that PSCs are not a uniform group but a heterogeneous governance body. The members are, at the same time, agents to their own stakeholder groups and to the funder & owner. Also, the members are part of a group that (at group level) provides unified direction as a principal towards the project manager. The study adds to the project-governance research strand *Resilience* (Sankaran et al., 2025), highlighting the added value of coping with a dynamic environment by having functionally diverse senior managers from contributing and affected stakeholders at the table. Our study adds to the research strand *Organizational* by showing the inner workings of a frequently used governance body, as a collaborative device between organizations and departments. Practitioners should make an effort to understand the impact of overall goals on PSC members' individual responsibilities and should build mutual trust within the PSC by understanding the other members' responsibilities. This enables PSCs to offer unified direction and contribute meaningfully to project success.

CHAPTER 6

Quick Reference Card for practitioners

PSCs consist of senior managers whose work as PSC members is typically only a side job (Breese et al., 2020). As uncovered in the first explorative study (Chapter 3), members are expected to have the correct competencies, though they might miss the skills and understanding needed for project governance (Helm & Remington, 2005; Loch et al., 2017). So, based on empirical data and the latest scientific literature, I wanted to assist PSC members and project managers in forming and executing a PSC with a well-founded instrument they are willing to use.

In practice, members start without training (Breese et al., 2020). Our interview data show that books (e.g., Garland, 2009; Molen, 2015; Müller, 2016b; Penders et al., 2016; Zwikael & Smyrk, 2019) are often deemed too time-consuming to read. Therefore, I chose to design a Quick Reference Card (QRC) as a starting point to create awareness and deepen understanding. Expecting the QRC will be kept and used by PSC members and project managers when needed.

The QRC was initially based on literature and data from the three empirical studies (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Earlier versions were used in PSCs, discussed with scientists, published in a practitioner-oriented journal (Stoppels, 2023), and presented to groups of project managers. The feedback led to rephrasing and topic replacement. The resulting version was presented during an expert session as the final step. In November 2024, seven seasoned project governance practitioners discussed the QRC's content and application. This led to minor revisions, resulting in the final version. The QRC and the expert session answer the fourth research question *Q4*: *What support can be given to PSC members to govern a project via a PSC?*

Sections 6.1 to 6.5 in this chapter are based on the QRC version discussed during the expert session. Section 6.6 covers the findings from the expert sessions and the resulting changes to the QRC.

6.1. DESIGN OF THE QUICK REFERENCE CARD

A Quick Reference Card is a "concise bundling of condensed notes about a specific topic" (Wikipedia, 2024). In our case, the topic is the formation and execution of a PSC. The QRC primarily targets PSC members and secondarily project managers. It begins with the PSC's goals, followed by the formation and membership criteria, and concludes with guidelines on what members should and should not do. Limiting the format to one A4 makes it possible to use the QRC as a handout and poster.

An important design decision was whether the content should be prescriptive (rule-based) or non-prescriptive (principles-based), a debate that is ongoing in the design of project management methodologies (Müller et al., 2019). I chose a prescriptive design to facilitate direct application by non-experienced PSC members. A drawback of prescriptive design is that the statements (notes) might not be applicable in every circumstance.

6.2. HEADER OF THE QRC, ON THE GOALS OF A PSC

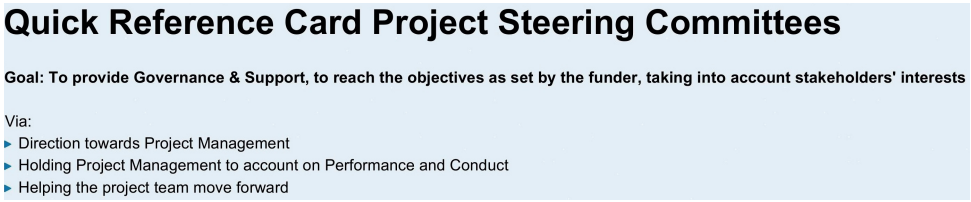

Figure 9: Header of the QRC for PSCs

The QRC header provides the goals of a PSC, as shown in **Figure 9**. The QRC explicitly mentions the support needed by the PSC by helping the team move forward. As the study in Chapter 3 showed, some members only focus on decision-making and control, jeopardizing project success. The funder is leading in defining the objective to be reached by the project. A stakeholder orientation helps achieve project results (Joslin & Müller, 2016), and one way to view a PSC is as a collaborative device between stakeholders (Murphy, 2016).

6.3. SECTION ON THE FORMATION

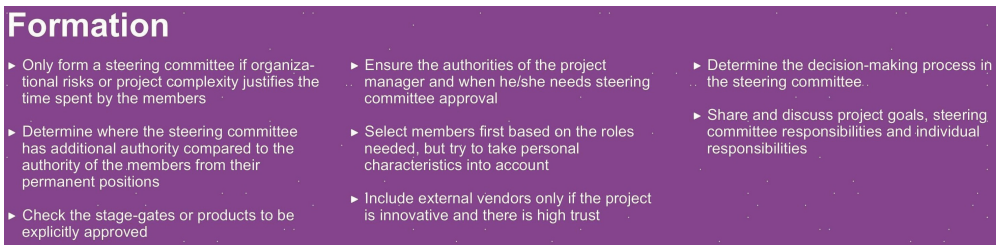

Figure 10: Section Formation of the QRC for PSCs

Figure 10 shows the section on the formation of the QRC. A PSC is needed if the risk of failure is high for the owning or funding organization (Crawford et al., 2008). Some authors cite project size as a reason for governance of the project (Martinsuo, 2023; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). The empirical data of my studies did not confirm this influence of project size, but rather the influence of project complexity. Users of the QRC should discuss what makes the project complex (Bosch-Rekveldt et al., 2011) and what this means for project governance. A categorization of complexity can help the discussion (Bosch-Rekveldt et al., 2011).

McGrath and Whitty (2018b) state that, as a group, PSCs have no authority. My studies concur that authority is primarily derived from the members' authority within their permanent organizations. Still, members might represent stakeholder groups of which they are not members

themselves, necessitating temporary authority for that stakeholder group. Additionally, the PSC as a whole will have delegated authority from top management, at least for budgetary matters. The authority should match the accountabilities.

Project methodologies, such as PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2017), emphasize the importance of stage gates and products in controlling progress. The project manager's authority must also be decided on and communicated. Chapter 3 of this dissertation shows that members are primarily selected based on the representation of those stakeholders that influence project results and (to a lesser degree) of stakeholders that are influenced by project results. This makes sense when considering the PSC as a place where stakeholders meet (Murphy, 2016). Personal characteristics of potential members are secondary for selection, but sometimes can and should be considered.

My studies provided cases where respondents valued the role of external suppliers, as they have a vested interest and bring diverse perspectives. Following stewardship theory, suppliers can add knowledge about the feasibility of options and have the project's interests at heart. Using agency theory, they may utilize their knowledge and influence to maximize their interests at the expense of the owning and funding organizations. Zwikael & Smirk (2019) state that they can not be a member because conflicts of interest must be avoided in decision-making. This argument is debatable, as all members of a PSC can have conflicts of interest, and project managers view the PSC as a means to achieve unity among key project influencers (Chapter 3). We can conclude that caution must be taken. The QRC proposes that external suppliers should only be added if needed for new perspectives, as in the case of innovative projects (Karlsen, 2020). Besides, only if mutual trust is present, the information shared won't be abused.

Decision-making is an essential activity in a PSC. Procedures must be decided at the outset (Loch et al., 2017). My studies have shown that shared decision-making appears to be a common practice. However, at several owning organizations, the project owner (in the sense of a person) formally makes the decision. This highlights the need to clarify the decision-making process during the formation phase.

Understanding of the overall goals will vary among members. Therefore, the goals and their impact on the steering committee, as well as individual responsibilities, should be discussed to achieve a focused understanding (Loch et al., 2017).

6.4. SECTION ON THE MEMBERS

Figure 11: Section Members of the QRC for PSCs

Figure 11 illustrates the section on the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of QRC members. Standardized PSC roles are relevant for selecting members and determining individual responsibilities, as discussed in Chapter 4. Members of temporary teams can start with a degree of mutual trust based on expectations from roles (Costa et al., 2018), adding to the importance of PSC members knowing which roles are possible and who holds these roles. Standard roles were defined in our qualitative study as described in Chapter 4 and confirmed quantitatively in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 concludes that acting from individual responsibilities predicts project success. The standard roles serve as a starting point for determining individual responsibilities; therefore, they are listed in the QRC. There will likely be stakeholder groups (departments, organizations) without direct representation. Consequently, it must be agreed upon who brings their perspectives to the table.

The first explorative study showed that PSC members' competencies needed for project governance might be lacking, as Loch et al. (2017) confirmed. Besides, PSCs have limited authority at permanent organizations, and members are senior managers with responsibilities besides the project. Mitigating measures are possible, such as one-on-one preparation meetings with the project manager.

6.5. SECTIONS ON DO'S AND DON'TS

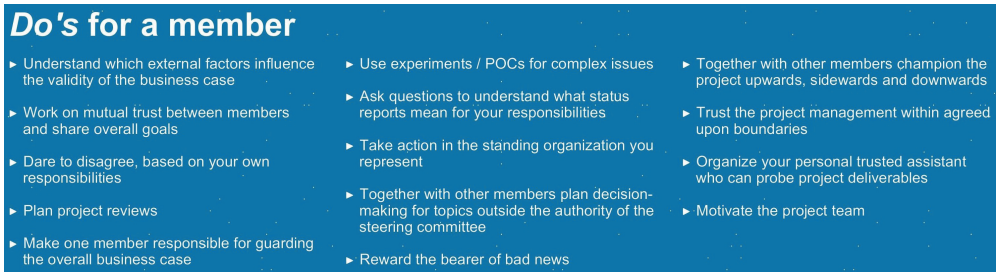

Figure 12: Section Do's of the QRC for PSCs

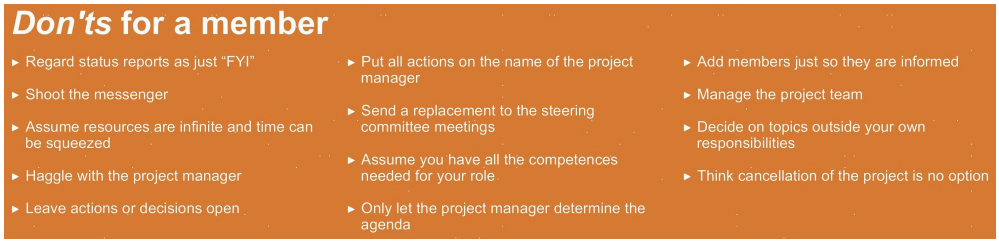

Figure 13: Section Don'ts of the QRC for PSCs

Figure 12 and **Figure 13** provide the do's and don'ts sections. They are mainly based on advice from interviewees in the first two studies, the work by Loch et al. (2017) on PSCs, and practitioners' feedback during discussions and presentations of previous versions of the QRC. The definition of a PSC includes the responsibility for achieving the business case (Meredith & Zwikael, 2020). This business case might change over time and needs to be continuously aligned with the needs of relevant stakeholders (Musawir et al., 2017). Options in decision-making have to be validated based on their impact on the business case. Therefore, members need to understand the factors that influence the business case. It might even become invalid, in which case the PSC must consider terminating the project.

The positive effects of mutual trust and shared goals have been discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Within this setting, members should act in accordance with their individual responsibilities and dare to disagree, as task conflict helps improve the quality of decision-making (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Some of the statements are not supported by earlier literature, but they were mentioned during the interviews in the first two studies. First, PSCs should plan project reviews (at least at stage gates), but some do so only when project success is jeopardized. Reviews help hold the project manager to account by providing an independent perspective. Second, the bearer of bad news —often the project manager —should be acknowledged to prevent the flow of

information from being disrupted (Murphy et al., 2016). Third, PSCs should not haggle with project managers on planning and their chosen process approach. This disrupts the information flow and leads to decisions that cannot be implemented. Fourth, Project managers are responsible for managing and planning projects (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018); the PSC is not. However, asking clarifying questions and gathering second opinions can be helpful. Fifth, some respondents in the explorative study mentioned that trusted assistants could help members gather information, review reports, and review decision options. Literature points to the information asymmetry between principals (the PSC) and agents (the project manager) (Turner & Müller, 2004). Sixth, members should not take status reports at face value; thus, they should use trusted assistants and ask clarifying questions about reports.

Literature clearly shows that having one person accountable for the business case positively impacts project success (Breese et al., 2020; Zwikael et al., 2019). The qualitative studies and the survey showed that several PSC members can represent (different) funders, so accountability for project success needs attention.

Literature on project owners clearly points to governors' duty to serve as project champions (Andersen, 2012). That means taking action in the permanent organizations and motivating the project manager and the project team. If all actions discussed in the PSC are to be taken by the project manager, this indicates that the PSC members are avoiding part of their responsibilities. Regularly sending replacements indicates that a PSC member gives the PSC too low a priority.

A stewardship perspective from the project owner to the project manager enhances project success (Turner, 2020b), with a governmentality of trust. The PSC is responsible for governance, creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action (Stoker, 1998). Therefore, the PSC must decide on the agenda and not the project manager. As Chapter 3 shows, automatically accepting the project manager's proposed agenda might jeopardize the governance task. The project manager is accountable for project management success (Kloppenborg et al., 2007), so the PSC should not manage the project team.

6.6. RESULTS FROM THE EXPERT SESSION ON THE QRC

Experienced project governance and project management practitioners were selected for an expert session in a group setting. The goal of the session was to evaluate the design and assess the application of the QRC. **Table 14** provides an overview of the participants. They were selected to achieve a variety of project types and types of organizations and to include the view of board members. During the 2.5-hour session, participants filled out a form listing the statements in the QRC per section. Each statement was individually indicated as "Valid Y/N" and the statement's relevance was assessed on a five-point Likert scale. Then, the statements with a *No* or substantial differences on the Likert scale were discussed in a group setting. At

the end of the session, I asked the experts if they missed statements, which they denied. The group also discussed how the QRC can help the project succeed. After approval of the participants the meeting was recorded for analysis. Because sensitive projects were discussed, the recording will be deleted after the finalization of this dissertation.

Table 14: Participants in the QRC expert session

Participant	Experience
1	Program Director of megaprojects in public civil engineering and ICT in The Netherlands
2	Project Assurance Manager in an international manufacturer of basic-goods
3	Founder of a consultancy firm in project management, author of books on project governance, trusted advisor of corporate boards, project manager of IT projects
4	CFO of an equipment manufacturer, member of non-Executive Boards
5	VP responsible for product development programs in a global high-tech manufacturer
6	Director for the development of part of a large city; including housing, offices, and infrastructure. Chair of a European organization for product owners in public works
7	Director for all large projects in a global chemical company (new plants, ICT), chair of an industry organization for the process industry in The Netherlands

In the text below, the numbers in brackets indicate the participant.

6.6.1. Goals of a PSC

The participants in the expert session wanted to change the phrase "the goal" of the PSC to "accountable." In the same vein, they suggested changing responsibility to accountability throughout the QRC. The reason is that PSC members should realize their contribution comes with obligations. In the Organizational Management field, this aligns with the view of accountability as "collectively lived" and derived from relationships and social exchange (Stewart et al., 2023), rather than from an objective reporting line. As discussed in the previous chapter, the PSC, as a group, can not be formally accountable; only individual people can. However, members should start to feel accountable as a group.

The original statement, "Helping the project team move forward," could imply taking over the project manager's management responsibilities for the project team. What was meant was support towards the project as a whole and to the project manager. The PSC and its members should champion the project, thus indirectly motivating the project team and influencing and directing stakeholders. This led to a rephrasing in the QRC towards "Helping the project move forward." However, the PSC could still bring the project team together when things get tough to express confidence in the team [2,4]. This corresponds to the importance of governmentality in literature (Müller et al., 2017). As one of the participants states, "Governing can become cold; it should include being warm towards people" [4]. Providing "Direction" by the PSC should be on "the what" and not "how" [3, 4, 6], and not taking over the responsibility of the project manager in organizing the project. An essential aspect of providing direction is deciding which risks to accept [1, 5]. Therefore, a statement on "accepting risks" was added.

One of the participants addressed the PSC as a link between the temporary and permanent organizations by stating, "The PSC is a vital link between the project manager and the departments involved" [1]. Members are accountable to their stakeholder group, so they must be aware that they need to decide after data gathering, data transformation, and getting buy-in [7]. Members are at the same time accountable for reaching the project goals. So, members "have a dual loyalty" [1], leading to tensions. The PSC members should deal with complex, conflicting topics, "because that's their job" [1]. So, the PSC as a group manages tensions and keeps them away from the surrounding organizations [7].

6.6.2. Formation

The degree to which the authority of PSC members and the group is apparent upfront varies between PSCs. After discussion, the experts agree that a statement about the "additional authority" a PSC has compared to the authority of its members should remain. Also, members can have accountabilities for more departments than in their permanent positions. Decisions can be complex due to a lack of information or conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups: "A change in process can be beneficial for department A, but takes more effort at department B. Still, the PSC has to decide" [7]. The expert meeting confirmed that the PSC must explicitly decide to proceed to the next gate as a means of governance. The expert session participants insisted that accepting risks is vital to decision-making and should be part of the agreed-upon process.

There were opposing opinions among the experts on whether contractors (external suppliers) should be in the PSC. The type of contract is leading: in the case of an *alliance* (where suppliers have an interest in keeping overall investment low), PSCs can include the supplier, but not in the case of *turn-key* projects [7]. An example where contractors in the PSC add value is in a large (>€100 million) innovation project [7]. One participant would never add contractors but manage them via a procurement officer [5]. Others add contractors to secure their moral commitment at the top management level [1, 3, 4] if their motives are more than making money or adding knowledge [3, 4, 5]. All agree that adding contractors should only be done after the contracting phase, and lead to meetings with and without contractors (when discussing contracting).

6.6.3. Members

The participants advised that the permanent organization should not be copied in the PSC [2, 3, 7]. The members of the PSC decide on a project, and the group should be as small as possible [2, 5]. Having many members can be a symptom of members having a hierarchical position that is too low in the permanent organization. For representation, the advice is to check who has authority in the permanent organizations and who is affected and who affects project success. This corresponds to the distinction between contributing and affected stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). Especially if not all affected stakeholders have direct representation, determine

which PSC members represent them. A PSC is "no democracy" [7], and others in permanent organizations must accept the decisions.

There was confusion about interpreting the statement "suppliers towards the project." Some only thought about external suppliers/contractors. Therefore, we changed the phrasing in the QRC to "Representative of the (internal or external) supplier." After discussing the roles, the participants agreed that separating the representation of the support organization from the *senior user role* in PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2009) helped provide clarity. Opinions varied about the desirability of members whose only role is *quality management on behalf of the PSC*. Having members without direct accountability for a stakeholder group can lead to "free riding." However, these members could add direct access to critical resources (information, people, equipment) via their personal network [2, 4, 5, 6, 7].

6.6.4. Do's for a member

The PSC should not organize decision-making inside the project team. Several situations were discussed where a PSC has to organize and influence decision-making in stakeholder groups and top management, such as to acquire additional project budget. Decision-making within the authority of the PSC should be in the PSC, not via side discussions.

The QRC statement "use experiments for complex issues" was removed, since all participants agreed that the way of working in the project is the project manager's authority. This contradicts the advice of Loch et al. (2017), who seem to mix the responsibilities of the PSC and the project manager.

There was a discussion on the person accountable for the business case. In the private sector, the functionary who should be the project owner is often apparent and is primarily accountable for the business case. Therefore, some experts argue the statement "make one member accountable for the overall business case" can be removed. However, still "the other members are accountable for informing the project owner when he/she is planning to make the wrong decision" [7]. Several funders and project owners are more common in governmental projects. This might lead to a lack of clear accountability for the business case. So, the experts concluded the *Do* "Make one member accountable for the overall business case" should remain.

6.6.5. Don'ts for a member

When I presented the QRC at practitioner-oriented seminars, some attendants remarked that a *Don't* was hard to read due to the double negative. However, the experts at the expert session expressed that this section should remain. This helps get attention, and the experts recognize the statements occurring in practice.

Most debate was about the *Don't* on "Decide on topics outside your own responsibilities." Members have a "double hat" [7], including a shared responsibility and, thus, the need for shared decision-making. The members should be senior enough to balance all views and interests and decide based on an overall shared goal. The statement is based on earlier findings

in my research that heavy involvement in decisions that do not touch an individual's responsibilities frustrates progress. Participants add that members should help one another when a decision harms the other's area of responsibility within the permanent organization. They therefore indicated that the *Don't* statement "Decide on topics outside your own responsibilities" should be replaced with "Just reject proposals without providing alternatives" [5].

Experts agree that PSCs should decide on the decision-making process at the start before things get rough, as proposed by Loch et al. (2017). A *Don't* to be added is on the "Control paradox" [6]: when the project has low performance, PSCs tend to ask for more information, leading to more questions, leading to asking more information. The PSC should accept a degree of risk and discard "the illusion of control" [1].

6.7. APPLICABILITY OF THE QRC ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

All experts indicated that having the QRC can initiate discussions on the formation and execution of a PSC, in turn helping project success. The statements enable PSC members to understand their dual responsibilities, the view of "wearing two hats" (Breese et al., 2020). It helps reduce role ambiguity (Biddle, 1986). The format of a one-pager helps PSC members and project managers read the QRC and keep it for later use. The QRC should be discussed at least during a PSC's initiation when pressure is still low. A PSC can and should limit risks (not fully mitigate them) and move the project forward by making brave decisions and sometimes taking action. Doing so helps the project manager bridge the gap with permanent organizations and create stability in the project environment. The PSC's processes deserve attention; "70% of the issues in a project are the direct responsibility of the PSC" [2].

The QRC applies to all organizations and types of projects the participants were responsible for, though some statements need clarification in their organizational context. So, the potential drawback of a prescriptive design, as mentioned in section 6.1, does not seem to apply. Participants working at multinationals suggest follow-up studies to test the application in various cultures. The QRC was found applicable: Three participants [2, 4, 7] spontaneously mentioned plans to introduce the QRC as the standard in their organizations, to be read and discussed by PSC members, and for project reviews. Indeed, at the time of writing, I (the PhD candidate) have been contacted by practitioners with follow-up questions about 30 times, based on them receiving a QRC from their organization or via snowballing.

6.8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE QRC

The QRC is based on theory (Chapter 2) and empirical data from two qualitative studies (Chapters 3 and 4) and one quantitative study (Chapter 5). The QRC fulfills a practical need and can be utilized in the formation and execution of a PSC. It applies to a wide range of projects and organizations. The completeness of the QRC cannot be claimed, but the expert session seems to suggest so. The rule-based design helps the application, though some statements might be obvious in specific contexts. The QRC can serve as a starting point for project governance within the owning and funding organizations and as guidance for PSC performance checks. Potential PSC members and project managers should discuss and determine how it applies to their own setting.

The format, as a one-pager, invites users to store the QRC for later use and helps discuss the content in a group setting. The QRC should be used as a starting point for corporate rules on project governance, as a guideline for setting up a PSC, as assistance to PSC members in shaping their roles, for project audits, and as support in case of underperformance of project oversight. **Figure 14** provides the final version of the QRC. Appendix G shows the changes between the versions before and after the expert session.

Figure 14: Quick Reference Cards PSCs final version

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

This discussion chapter integrates the findings from literature and the four empirical studies. First, it discusses the existing definition of a PSC and proposes a refined definition. Second, section 7.2 provides reasons to establish a PSC and its effect on project success. Third, the research in this dissertation focuses on the internal workings of a PSC and the actions of its members. Therefore, section 7.3 discusses what it is like to be a member. Fourth, decision-making is a vital activity of a PSC and will be addressed. Fifth, the measures taken for scientific rigor are provided. Sixth, section 7.6 offers the scientific contribution of the research. Seventh and last, it gives the practical contribution.

7.1. TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION OF A PSC

Previous chapters used the definition by Zwikael & Meredith (2018, p. 485) for a PSC as: "a group that acts at a strategic level and is responsible for achieving the business case as well as ensuring the progress of the project." The basis of the definition has value, although it overlooks elements.

I agree with *a group that acts at a strategic level. Group* is implied in the definition of a *committee* as "a body of persons" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). The term *acts* means doing something, members have to take action in the interest of both the project and their permanent organizations. This makes a PSC more than just a group of people who receive reports and approve or disapprove them. Decision-making involves gathering and processing information by the members, implying that members need to take an active stance (Murphy et al., 2018). A PSC serves as a link between permanent organizations and the project. This is not just between the project and the permanent organizations, but also between the permanent organizations for topics involving the project. The data and literature confirm that this should be *at a strategic* level, taking a long-term view for the permanent organizations. *Ensuring the progress of the project* is undoubtedly an obligation of the PSC, pointing to the duty to support the project.

The middle part of the definition needs improvement. The phrase *is responsible for* implies the satisfactory accomplishment of a task (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a). For an engaged PSC, the group and its members will be evaluated on project success, regardless of individual accountabilities being met. Therefore, the group will be held *accountable* for the consequences of its actions, rather than its members being responsible. Group accountability will be addressed in Section 7.4. In literature, the *business case* can be a document: a "structured proposal for business change that is justified in terms of expected costs and benefits" (Al-Twairesh & Al-Mudimigh, 2011, p. 44). The PSC should also consider the continuously changing project and its surroundings, so project activities need to remain aligned with the (emerging) needs of relevant stakeholders (Musawir et al., 2017). So, it's better to change *business case* into *project success*, where project success encompasses project management success, project

owner success, and project funder success (Zwikael & Smyrk, 2012).

One of the reasons for establishing a PSC is to mitigate risks for the funding or owning organization in case of project failure (Crawford et al., 2008). This is supported by the skills needed by project owners to assess and mitigate risks for the permanent organization (Louw et al., 2022). Following shareholder theory, the PSC should balance risks for all stakeholders involved. As the expert panel for the QRC mentioned, there will always be risks associated with the project and the permanent organizations. Therefore, the PSC must understand the risks with long-term implications, accept them, or initiate appropriate action. The topic of risk management is lacking in Meredith and Zwikael's definition. *Governance* encompasses risk management and can be used in its definition instead of *acts*. We also explicitly add the support duty of the PSC (McGrath & Whitty, 2017), in the QRC phrased as "helping the project move forward".

Murphy et al. (2018, p. 4826) use an elaborate definition of PSC as "*an ephemeral, autonomous boundary-spanning governance body consisting of senior level executives or boards who must possess dynamic capabilities in the form of decision-making, absorptive capacity, IS [Information Systems] competence, and change leadership that are formed for a specific project*". It has merit in focusing on the temporary nature by using the word *ephemeral* (meaning 'lasting a very short time'), but that can be covered by adding the accountability for a project. A project is, by definition, temporary. It is descriptive of the capabilities, which seems more normative than providing a definition. PSCs are only autonomous to a certain degree (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b), as they typically operate within the hierarchy of permanent organizations. It lacks a description of the PSC's accountability. Murphy's definition highlights that the group is boundary-spanning, indicating it involves multiple stakeholder groups and has a broader reach than the project management team.

Therefore, I build on the definition of Zwikael and Meredith and incorporate elements from the definition of Murphy. As an improved definition for a PSC, I propose *"A boundary-spanning group that governs and supports a project at a strategic level and is accountable for reaching project success."*

7.2. WHEN TO USE A PSC?

Now that the PSC has been redefined, the question arises when a PSC should provide project oversight. First, this section argues that there should be a role (not a person per se) of project owner between the project manager and the funder. Second, it offers reasons for governance via a group, rather than just one person holding the role of project owner. Third, this section discusses the effect a PSC can have on project success.

7.2.1. Split between the project owner and the project manager

Some people I met stated that each project should have a PSC to provide oversight. Researchers Zwikael and Smyrk (2019, p. 66) agree: "All projects have a steering committee, even if only a committee of one." Part of the reasoning behind this view is that there should be a distinction between project management and project ownership. Zwikael & Meredith (2018) provide four reasons to separate the *project owner* from the *project manager*. First, their accountabilities differ. The project manager typically focuses on project management success, also known as the triple constraints (De Wit, 1988; Kloppenborg et al., 2007). The project owner focuses on project success, including achieving the business case. Second, the project manager might have been chosen for an operational mindset instead of a strategic one. Third, the project manager holds a temporary role, while benefits are typically realized after the project's products are delivered. Fourth, the person holding the role of project owner is generally involved in developing the business case, whereas the project manager might not be (Crawford et al., 2008).

7.2.2. Why a group for governance?

This leaves open why there could be a group providing project oversight, rather than a single person in the role of project owner. This section discusses the reasons based on literature and my data.

The first reason is the quality and impact of group decision-making versus individual decision-making. Bainbridge (2002) wrote a paper with the title "Why a board", reasoning why there are Boards of Directors instead of just one CEO making decisions for organizations. He argues that group decision-making is superior to individual decision-making because of the synergistic effects of group interaction. Even when an individual may have better judgment than the group, it is never clear who that individual is. This reasoning is even more applicable to PSCs, given the unique nature of a project and the need for information gathering, processing, and transformation by representatives from multiple affected and contributing stakeholders. My research adds that group decision-making enhances participants' commitment to enforce decisions within their stakeholder group.

A second reason for establishing a committee is that, in practice, decision-making authority may not be vested in a single person. First, multiple funding organizations may exist, each seeking to formally influence the project's direction (Miller & Lessard, 2000). Second, the funding organization may differ from the organizations that will own the project outputs and typically must approve them. Third and last, PSC members may represent a stakeholder group that cannot be overridden in certain areas. All three reasons are evident in our data on PSCs for public works: the national government is the primary, but not the only, funder; other organizations will use and own some of the project's products; and local municipalities cannot be overruled on matters of safety within their jurisdiction. In the second study, only one of the six PSCs studied had a clear person who formally chaired the PSC and had the authority to make decisions. In all other PSCs, in the event of a stalemate in group decision-making, a

decision had to be made by a coalition of the most senior managers or those most affected by the decision. This contrasts with the PRINCE2 project management methodology (Axelos, 2009), which states that the chair decides and other members provide advice. Instead, the chair of the PSC must ensure a decision is made. As one of the project managers phrased it, "I need to have the customer at the table." If there is no single customer (meaning: project owner and funder), these customers make decisions together. These organizations will then appoint representatives to a body that oversees the project: a PSC to provide unified direction to the project manager.

A third reason is that the variety of PSC members helps provide access to scarce resources and influence stakeholder groups at a strategic level. Resources can include funding, people, equipment, knowledge, and influence at observer-type stakeholders (McGrath & Whitty, 2017). This is evident in the case study by Karlsen (2020), where some members were appointed solely to have access to knowledge from outside the owning organization and to enhance legitimacy. A budget and formal authority might not be enough to secure the people and equipment the project needs; an engaged and committed senior manager from the contributing stakeholders helps. Our data supported this: members with roles of representing users of the projects' products, organizations maintaining the products, and suppliers to the project provide information and deliver resources.

A fourth and final reason for governance by a group is that a project typically delivers capabilities that yield benefits only after the project ends. Discontinuity between the temporary project and the permanent owning organization can jeopardize project success because the capabilities may not be utilized as intended (Musawir et al., 2017). Having senior managers from the permanent organization involved in project oversight helps bridge the gap and improve project success.

7.2.3. Effect of a PSC on Project Success

In the qualitative survey described in Chapter 4, 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the question, "This project needs a steering committee to succeed." The data from the interviews show the same; almost all respondents indicated that there were moments during the project when the PSC helped the project move forward. So, how does a PSC help project success? This section follows the split between providing direction, holding to account, and providing support as discussed in section 2.1.

Looking at *providing direction*, members representing stakeholder groups or business processes help define and balance business needs. This is a continuous process, and the strongest predictor of project success (Musawir et al., 2017). Providing direction is primarily achieved through making decisions (Loch et al., 2017). The functional diversity and individual accountabilities of members enhance decision quality and compliance with the decision. A PSC can improve project management success by thorough decision-making on changes to scope, budget, and planning, and protecting the project manager from scope changes by unauthorized

stakeholders. It can also balance the types of project success, such as accepting changes to scope, budget, or planning in order to improve project owner and project funder success. A group of functionally diverse and senior managers can judge the impact of changes in the environment of a project or requested decisions on success for owners and funders.

Looking at *holding the project management to account*, the functional diversity of PSC members can help interpret reporting by the project manager and reviewers. Members should also translate the project's status and intended products to the impact on their own stakeholder group. The PSC is also a body that can enforce stage gates for conscious decision-making and learning. The interviews indicate that members know they should hold the project manager to account. However, they tend to focus on the results rather than including the behavior of the project manager, while governance should involve both (Müller, Shao, et al., 2016).

Looking at *providing support*, this is one of the substantial advantages of oversight via a PSC. PSCs remove obstacles and solve conflicts in the permanent organizations (Crawford et al., 2008; Karlsen, 2020). Top management support is one of the highest-ranking critical success factors for projects (Ahmed & Philbin, 2022), and the PSC can be a means to execute and improve this support (Young & Poon, 2013). Respondents indicated that the PSC could help the project by championing the project and making "difficult" decisions outside the scope or point of view of the project manager. When senior managers work together on a common goal, they combine access to information, information processing capacity, and influence in the permanent organizations.

Literature and the empirical data identify potential pitfalls of oversight via a PSC. First, there is the risk that committee members regard themselves as a client and expect the project owner to pay (on behalf of the funder) for scope extensions without sharing the pain. The first study described in Chapter 3 mentions a case in which the project owner in a governmental setting kept asking the funder for more money to keep the other PSC members happy. However, this was the exception. In other PSCs, the members felt that expanding the scope in one area implies limiting the scope in another. They felt a group accountability to limit budget overruns and to collectively own negative news. Second, Reimers (2002) mentioned that in an ERP implementation in China, group decision-making took too long. In my research, none of the respondents cited this as an issue. The information processing and transformation take time, but lead to better decisions. Third, members might assume other members understand the real status of a project and the impact it will have on the business case. This can be diminished by making individual accountabilities clear at the start of the project and by discussing the benefits as a group. Fourth, the PSC might be hijacked by either external suppliers or the project manager. Chapter 4 describes a case involving several external suppliers in the PSC that adopted an agency view, utilizing the PSC to limit their accountabilities. Clever project managers can also manipulate the PSC (Murphy, 2016). My study indicates that, in general, project managers take a stewardship perspective; they feel they have the best interests of the project at heart. However, when project managers are the leading actors in the PSC, this jeopardizes the

holding-to-account part of governance, and the necessary direction based on changing business requirements can be missed. Therefore, PSC members must recognize that their accountabilities and authorities differ from those of the project manager. The PSC is accountable for project success and can positively affect it by providing governance and support, serving as a collaborative forum for stakeholders, and linking the permanent and temporary organizations.

7.3. COMPOSITION OF A PSC

The data support the findings by Loch et al. (2017) that PSC members tend to struggle in executing oversight. They are typically selected based on their function within the permanent organization. In the PSC, they must combine accountabilities from both their permanent organization and the temporary project. In practice, members tend to begin without defining processes within the PSC, establishing a shared understanding of goals, or making individual and shared accountabilities explicit. Besides, members typically receive no training on project oversight. This section focuses on the members who compose a PSC.

7.3.1. Selection process of PSC members

The PSC represents contributing and affected stakeholders. Therefore, members are primarily selected based on the stakeholder group they represent. The need for governance influences the selection process. The higher the risk to and the impact on stakeholders, the more senior the permanent function of the members will be. The members should also have some understanding of and interest in the project's products, which is a reason not to aim for maximum seniority. Areas within the permanent organization where business change is needed lead to selecting members who manage the involved processes and people. The selection of members (persons) is mainly a consequence of the function they have in the permanent organization. Only when several individuals have the same kind of function, the personal interests and competencies tend to be considered.

The structural perspective in role theory predicts that standards (e.g., in the organization) will shape roles (Bechky, 2006). The data support this, although standards are not always explicitly stated. As one respondent phrased, "This is what we always do." Project-based organizations or large organizations might have these standards. Even there, our data show a lack of clarity regarding the roles of PSC members. The major project management methodologies (e.g., Project Management Institute, 2016) mention the possibility of oversight via PSC, but do not provide insights into the workings of the PSC. The exception is PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2009), which provides roles for members. This dissertation assists organizations by providing research-based standard roles for PSC members.

The data show that the person or body that selects the members varies across projects and organizations. It can be a (future) project owner, other (groups of) senior managers, or a

project management office (in case of project-based organizations). There were even cases where the supplier took the lead in forming a PSC as part of their implementation standard. The latter makes sense when the project is unique for the funding and owning organizations, and the supplier has relevant experience. As pointed out by agency theory, the funder and owner should still ensure that measures are in place to hold the supplier accountable.

7.3.2. Roles and responsibilities of PSC members

The data support the interactionist perspective in role theory (Bechky, 2006). Members shape their own roles and responsibilities based on continuous interactions with others. This should be a deliberate effort at the start of the PSC. The project is unique, influencing the need for governance and thus the responsibilities of members. Also, the accountabilities of a PSC member not only derive from their accountabilities in the permanent organization. There is a shared accountability for the overall project goals, and the member might represent a broader stakeholder group or focus on part of the project's deliverables or business case. Some experts in the session on the QRC assumed that making accountabilities clear is trivial. Still, our data hardly showed this occurring in practice; PSCs tend to just start. In project-based organizations, for the type of projects that deliver recurring business products, accountabilities for the permanent and temporary organization might be aligned and roles clear. For example, in the case of the repetitive renovation of highway tunnels (Chapter 3), being a PSC member is part of the permanent function of most members. If the same owning organization were to undertake an ERP implementation, it would constitute a unique project for them, thereby requiring clarification of the individual roles of PSC members.

The view of Project Owners "wearing two hats" (Breese et al., 2020) should apply to all PSC members. Accountability for project governance is not just about doing the daily job. It involves investing in understanding the main business drivers of the project, identifying the main opportunities and risks for their own area of responsibility, and comprehending status reports. Role theory predicts that the degree to which a member views himself/herself as a PSC member is influenced by the number of relations the member has in that role (Sluss et al., 2011). PSC membership typically takes a maximum of a few hours per week. Consequently, the number of relations in the permanent role is much higher. Still, a sense of identity as a PSC member, including feeling accountable for project success, is needed. My data show that the combined complexity of unclear roles and limited opportunities to build role identity (due to the limited amount of time spent) is underestimated in practice. Members should therefore encourage one another, the project manager, and other senior managers to work cooperatively, including by providing feedback on role expectations (Bechky, 2006).

Agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) predicts that members may focus on their accountability in permanent organizations, as this is where the primary reward system is in place. Stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1991) adds that members also want to do what is best for the project as a whole, driven by personal motivation. Our data show that the stewardship view

does apply. PSC members want to work on common goals. However, they will need other members, top management, and project management to combine accountabilities for the permanent and temporary organizations, especially when the project owner is not a top manager in the same permanent organization as the PSC member. The project manager can help provide alternatives to decisions and insights. Other members can help provide benefits for all stakeholder groups and information (including good and bad news).

The PSC is a governance body (Murphy et al., 2018). This can lead to the misconception that PSC members are governors who keep their distance, who reactively decide when asked, and who focus on assessing the project manager's work. Members also need to take action and understand the key drivers of project success. Stoker (1998) made this part of his definition of governance: "Governance is concerned with …, which is accomplished through a framework for ethical decision making and *managerial actions* based on transparency, accountability, and defined roles."

7.4. DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Decision-making is one of the elements of governance (McGrath & Whitty, 2015) and a mediator between governance and project success (Musawir et al., 2017; Turner, 2020b). My data (chapters 3 and 4), literature (Turner, 2020a), and practitioner-oriented literature (Penders et al., 2016) agree that supervision is executed via making decisions with authority (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b; Molen, 2015). Literature is unclear on whether the PSC serves as an advisory committee to the project owner or if the group makes the decision. Meredith & Zwikael (2020) claim that one person should be accountable for the business case, suggesting that group accountability for the business case is not possible and would be detrimental to project success. Project management methodology PRINCE2 states, "Although the project board [PSC] is responsible [sic] for the project, the executive, supported by the senior user(s) and senior supplier(s), is ultimately [sic] accountable for the project's success and is the key decision maker" (Axelos, 2017, p. 63). As McGrath and Whitty (2018b) highlight, this results in ambiguity on the members' decision-making authority. Murphy (2016) disagrees with PRINCE2 and states that an engaged steering committee is accountable [sic] for project outcomes and that members must have accountability for "certain aspects of a project." Karlsen (2020) and Wang (2024) also claim that a PSC is a governance institution that can be accountable for project success. My research supports the findings from Murphy and Karlsen. A real PSC steers by making collective decisions. In line with Murphy, it does not mean that all members have the same decision authority. The authority of a member is based on individual accountabilities and the impact of the decision on their stakeholder group. Therefore, the decision-making process has to be tailored to the dynamics of the project and to stakeholders. As pointed out by Loch (2017),

the PSC should decide on its decision-making process at the start, before tough decisions have to be made.

Authority implies accountability and vice versa (McGrath & Whitty, 2018a; Zwikael & Meredith, 2018); therefore, whether a group can decide is linked to whether a group can be accountable. As discussed in section 2.3, in literature conflicting views exist on whether a group can be accountable or only individuals. One owning organization in our first study (Chapter 3) has the policy that there "must be a direct line of sight," meaning one person is accountable for project success and will be held to account via the hierarchy in the permanent organization. This corresponds to the project owner being accountable to the senior management of the owning or funding organization for target realization (Karlsen, 2010; Müller & Turner, 2005; Zwikael et al., 2019) and a statement by Project Management Institute PMI that only a person can be accountable and not a group (Project Management Institute, 2021). However, a PSC discussed in this study for the same organization decided based on consensus, which, according to the respondent, helped achieve project success. All PSC members whom I interviewed will face consequences in their business setting, based on whether the project is successful or not. So, they will at least be held accountable for their contribution to the group's results.

Research on *group accountability* in the field of organizational management provides valuable insights. Informally, people external to the PSC will start to view the whole PSC as a project champion where the group's decision authority is more than that of the individual members. As Stewart et al. (2023, p. 691) phrase it: "the accountability is collectively lived and breathed" and emerges from relationships and social exchanges. A sense of group accountability motivates members to dedicate time to shared goals. Kou & Stewart (2017) add that group accountability is an emergent state and is relational. It comes from interactions among group members and expectations from outside the group. In a well-functioning PSC, members will begin to feel accountable for the overall goals (rather than just for satisfactorily performing tasks). This process is accelerated by the shared decision-making our data shows. As Kou & Stewart note, it will also shape the roles of individual members by, for example, members filling gaps. My findings are confirmed by a CFO in a paper on project owners, remarking: "The steering committee is accountable [sic] for the performance of a project" (Zwikael et al., 2019, p. 511). Project management methodology PMBOK sums it up nicely, though intended for project teams: "Regardless of who is accountable or responsible for specific project work, a collaborative project team takes collective ownership of the project outcomes" (Project Management Institute, 2021).

For both the objective and relational definition of accountability, a PSC must have members who have authority in their permanent organization relevant to project success. I disagree with McGrath & Whitty (2018b) that a group can only be called *steering* if it has authority as a group. Even when the group may not formally have authority, its members can collectively exert authority and feel accountable by working together. Therefore, as a team, they steer. Members are, and should feel, accountable for tasks in the PSC arising from their

permanent functions. At the same time, group accountability should emerge so that the PSC, as a group, champions the project and members assist one another.

7.5. SCIENTIFIC RIGOR OF THE RESEARCH

This section uses the distinction between internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Blaikie, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to evaluate the scientific rigor of the research. The research as a whole was strengthened by using a mixed-method approach. First, it began with broad exploratory questions and a qualitative survey for triangulation. Second, it explored roles. Third, the research was both quantitatively and deductively focused on roles and responsibilities, while also gathering descriptive data on topics uncovered in previous studies. Fourth, it concluded with an expert session to validate the findings relevant to practitioners through a group discussion. The research was continuously informed and shaped by reflections from practitioners and scientists. The papers in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 were presented at a scientific conference, which resulted in feedback and subsequent revisions. The QRC and other findings were presented to and discussed with practitioner groups in project-based organizations, companies providing project managers, and an organization for project owners. During the data gathering for the first three studies, I chose the status of an outsider to minimize the influence of my own actions on results (Brink, 1993). The PSCs I participated in as a practitioner were therefore not used for analysis. In the studies, I tried to consciously maintain a learning orientation and postpone drawing conclusions until after data gathering, to minimize interpretations based on my own values (Brink, 1993). I used my experience on projects and project governance to establish rapport with the interviewees, enabling them to share the underlying reasons for their actions and the consequences.

Internal validity refers to the extent to which research findings accurately reflect reality, rather than being influenced by unrelated variables from the outside (Brink, 1993). Respondents included PSC members and project managers, providing at least two different viewpoints. The expert team members (Chapter 6) had experience as project managers, project governors, funders, and members of the Top Management Team (TMT), enabling them to compare viewpoints across various actors. In the interviews, respondents were asked to provide examples that would help the researcher understand the actions taken and their consequences. Construct validity was enhanced by using a mixed-methods research approach and, in the quantitative study, by reusing previously applied and tested constructs for variables when available. Where available, documentation was gathered for triangulation.

External validity refers to the degree to which the findings are applicable across different groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Both the qualitative and quantitative studies deliberately involved various types of projects. Types of projects and owning & funding organizations can impact PSCs, such as the degree to which conflicts of interest exist between members. Whether

a hierarchy exists in the PSC (derived from permanent organizations) influences the decision-making process and, therefore, may also impact the findings. The data indicate that the same processes of providing direction, holding the project manager to account, and providing support occur, regardless of these characteristics. As discussed in Section 8.3, avenues for future research, a limitation of the research is that the owning organizations are mainly based in the Netherlands. The impact was mitigated by the use of literature based on studies from a diverse range of cultures, including China (Reimers, 2002) and the USA (Murphy, 2016). Still, the application of the findings across a wide range of corporate and country cultures cannot be proven.

Reliability is about the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the research (Blaikie, 2009). The interviews in the first two explorative studies were transcribed. In the first study, the method of Gioia was used to structure the analysis (Gioia et al., 2013) . In the second study, coding was performed using the Atlas.ti tool. Both help to enhance scientific rigor in analysis, and they support other scholars in replicating the analysis. The survey was tested on a test group, and the data from this group was discarded. In Chapter 5, the study utilized previous constructs for the survey questions where available. A limitation of all studies in my research is that the data on PSCs were gathered at a single point in time during the project, while PSCs and projects will develop over time. Therefore, a recommendation is to execute future longitudinal case studies. This helps determine if specific characteristics of the PSCs and their members evolve and might have a different effect based on project phase and issues encountered.

7.6. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

Literature chapter 2 concluded that the limited amount of research on PSCs does not align with the regular occurrence of PSCs in practice. Besides, PSC members are struggling to fulfill their duty of project oversight. Therefore, the principal added value of this PhD research lies in providing empirical data on the inner workings of PSCs. The PSC links the temporary project to permanent organizations. Therefore, both literature on Project Governance and Organization Management were used. Research on PSCs adds to the four research strands discussed in section 2.1 (Sankaran et al., 2025). Representation of several stakeholder groups in the PSC can help mitigate tensions among them, according to the strand *Organization*. The studies included cases of *Public Projects*, even some where there were several funders who could not overrule each other. PSCs can offer solutions from outside the project manager's perspective, thereby supporting *Innovation*. The functional diversity of members can help information processing and transformation, thereby improving the *Resilience* of the project. Literature on project governance and organizational management helped formulate research questions and interpret the data. In turn, this research contributes to the literature on project governance by providing insights into the internal workings of a commonly used body for project oversight.

7.6.1. Definition of a PSC

The research provided a refined definition of a PSC, as described in section 7.1. A PSC is "A boundary-spanning group that governs and supports a project at a strategic level and is accountable for reaching project success." Existing literature tends to conflate temporary and permanent bodies for governance (e.g., McGrath & Whitty, 2018b); future literature can use this definition to clarify which type of governance body is being studied.

7.6.2. The project owner as one of the key players

Project owners (also referred to as project sponsors) are well-studied (e.g., Breese et al., 2020; Bucero, 2024; Louw et al., 2022; Meredith & Zwikael, 2020). These studies tend to oversimplify reality by assuming that the owner has full authority over the project (e.g., Walker, 2012). My research indicates that the project owner may have limited authority and, consequently, limited accountability. One reason is that there may be multiple funding and ownership organizations. Additionally, the project owner often lacks the authority to overrule other senior managers within the permanent organization. However, a PSC can help bring authorities and access to resources together. Literature (e.g., Breese et al., 2020) should not assume the project owner is the only key player in project governance, since the owner can be part of a team, namely the PSC.

7.6.3. View accountability as relational, besides objective

Existing project governance literature tends to focus on an objectivist view of accountability (Stewart et al., 2023). My research indicates that the accountability of those who govern a project is not fixed. The formal authority may be more or less stable, primarily deriving from the functions the members hold in their permanent organization. However, the emerging feeling of group accountability is as important. If the group takes collective ownership of the project, it will be seen as having authority that surpasses that of its members. Therefore, this research highlights the significance of the feeling of group accountability. Adding accountability from a relational perspective can help studies on governmentality (Müller et al., 2017) in the field of project governance and project management.

7.6.4. Definition of standard PSC roles

Besides the project owner, we found no literature on the roles of PSC members. The second study, as described in Chapter 4, adds to literature by defining five standard roles for PSC members. These are the representation of the funder(s), the representation of the user group(s), the representation of the supplier(s) of project resources, the representation of the support organization(s) for project deliverables, and quality assurance. The roles can be used for selection and as a starting point to determine the individual accountabilities of PSC members. The expert session on the QRC confirms the definition and the relevance of these roles. The roles can inform other studies on project governance, as they may affect project success in different

ways. The roles can enrich studies of project owners because, in practice, project owners (in the sense of a person) hold other roles beyond solely representing the funder(s); thus, they should take into account other stakeholders' needs.

7.6.5. Relevance of working from individual responsibilities to project success

The research indicates that members who understand their individual accountability and act on it are more likely to contribute to project success. This is expected based on governance literature, which emphasizes clarifying rules, roles, rights, and responsibilities (Müller et al., 2017; OECD, 2004). My research demonstrates the quantitative impact of clear individual accountabilities on project success. This may seem obvious, but it was clearly demonstrated in the quantitative study and thus contributes to the existing literature. PSC members should also work on acquiring shared goals and mutual trust. If members act on individual accountabilities without mutual trust and shared goals, this can lead to relationship conflict rather than the beneficial task conflict. While relationship conflict is detrimental for group performance (Tidd et al., 2007).

7.7. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

This PhD research started based on an experience in practice. Therefore, the aim has been to add knowledge that can be applied by practitioners. This dissertation can be used to expand project management methods, enhance corporate standards for projects, improve training for project managers, develop training for PSC members, and support the coaching of PSCs.

7.7.1. PSCs should not just start, but take time for team development

The data show that typically, PSCs begin with a presentation by the project manager about the project plan. The task of the PSC as a whole and the accountabilities of the members are then covered only briefly. The members' competences for project governance are assumed to be adequate because they are senior managers. This research shows that at the start, PSC should take time for team development and understanding the project's products and dynamics. At the beginning and during the execution of the project, the members and the project manager should discuss and ascertain the overall goals, the interests of stakeholders, and the impact of goals and the intended products on specific stakeholder groups. The dual responsibility of each PSC member for their own stakeholder group and the project must be made clear. This process should lead to shared accountabilities on the group level, clear individual accountabilities of members, and mutual trust. In line with the recommendations of Loch (2017), PSCs should undertake this process before difficult decisions need to be made. The data show that this is easier said than done: only in the case of severe performance issues on the project do members take time for training and team building. Therefore, a process for starting up a PSC should be

part of corporate standards and project methodologies, with the QRC (Chapter 6) facilitating learning and discussion. It could involve a team-building activity, combined with a structured process to deepen mutual understanding of the project's goals, the decision-making process, group accountability, and individual accountability.

7.7.2. Members' roles and the importance of individual accountabilities

The five standard roles are not only relevant to theory, but also to practice. They can be incorporated into project management methodologies. They add to the three roles mentioned in PRINCE2 (Axelos, 2009), on which no studies were found. Practitioners should use the roles for selection and as a starting point to determine the individual accountabilities of PSC members. In practice, the first four roles, each representing stakeholder groups, will be applied. One member can have several roles, adding to having multiple interests at the member level. Having members with the sole role of quality assurance for the PSC should be used carefully, since it can lead to "free riding," as one of the participants in the expert session put it. Therefore, I recommend only adding members with the sole role of Quality Assurance if they have unique knowledge or a network necessary for decision-making (Karlsen, 2010) or access to other vital and scarce resources.

7.7.3. Being a governor is more than being a supervisor

The personal experiences of people I spoke with about PSC's performance varied widely. The research data indicate that a PSC can help the project progress. However, there are also PSCs with a laid-back attitude, where members see themselves primarily as supervisors. They await reports from the project manager, lack engagement to understand the relevant project dynamics and their impact on their stakeholder group, and do not contribute insights from those groups. In a practitioner-oriented book, this is referred to pejoratively as *spectators* (Penders et al., 2016), in contrast to the *engaged* PSC (Murphy, 2016). As discussed in Section 7.2.3, PSC members, as governors, must gain an understanding of the relevant issues. Besides, they must take action to ensure project success.

7.7.4. Quick Reference Card PSCs

As provided in section 6.8, the research delivered a Quick Reference Card (QRC) to be used by PSC members, funders, and project managers. Experts indicate that the content is concise and well-organized, with practical applications in a wide range of projects. It is currently already in use in industry and governments to help PSCs start, and for training project owners (in project-based organizations) and project managers.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion and recommendations

This concluding chapter addresses the research questions and demonstrates the contribution of my research to the fields of project management and project governance. The research aimed at answering the following main research question: *How can project governance by a project steering committee influence project success?* This led to a mixed approach, gathering views from experienced Project Steering Committee (PSC) members and project managers. This chapter also answers the underlying key questions of the main question as defined in section 1.5. It provides an outlook for future research and reflects on how my views on PSCs as a *curious practitioner* changed.

8.1. ANSWERS TO THE KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: What is the current practice in the formation and functioning of project steering committees? The data show that PSCs are used in practice for project governance, confirmed by previous case studies on PSCs and the mention of this body as a sidenote in literature. PSCs are initiated either due to corporate rules or because of the project's characteristics. If stakeholder groups heavily influence the project's success, having representatives from those stakeholder groups in a collaborative entity, such as a PSC, can help support the project through shared decision-making and action within the stakeholder groups. Projects with high impact on the funding or owning organizations require governance to mitigate risks and optimize the business case. The governance has to be executed by a functionally diverse team of senior managers. The stakeholders represented in the PSC can be invested stakeholders, such as organizations that will use the end products. The project owner (in the sense of a person) chairs the committee on behalf of the funder as one of the invested stakeholders. Alternatively, members can be from contributing stakeholders with access to scarce capacity or who are needed to enforce change in their own organization. A PSC should feel accountable for the project and publicly champion it, especially in cases of conflicts of interest between affected stakeholders or when the project poses a high risk to the funding or owning organizations in the event of failure. In practice, members are aware of their governance duty to provide direction, including providing support. They seem less aware of their other governance duty to hold the project manager accountable for performance and conduct, such as by challenging progress reports.

Members are typically selected based on their position in the permanent organization. The data show that selection based on competencies and attitude towards the project is a secondary priority. In practice, competencies needed for project oversight can be lacking. PSCs tend to start without taking the time for team processes and building competencies, which can jeopardize project success since accountabilities and decision-making processes remain unclear. PSCs are linking pins between permanent and temporary organizations. Therefore, the members must balance their accountabilities for the project with those of their permanent organization.

Decision-making is an essential activity in a PSC. It involves data sharing, data processing,

and balancing the responsibilities of individuals and groups. No literature has been found on decision-making in practice in PSCs. Project methodologies (Axelos, 2009) and literature (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b) suggest that a single person should be accountable for project success, and that other PSC members merely advise this project owner. However, our data indicate that group decision-making is a common practice. Reasons are that the resulting commitment from the members appears to outweigh the potential for ambiguous accountability, and that decision-making authority is primarily based on the members' authority within their permanent organization.

Q2: How are roles and responsibilities within project steering committees defined and applied, and what is their relation to project success?

Data from interviews with PSC members and project managers, combined with stakeholder theory, led to the definition of the five roles of members. The roles can be used as a starting point for selecting members and determining their individual responsibilities. These are *representing funders*, *representing users*, *representing suppliers*, *representing the support organization of project deliverables*, and *quality assurance towards the PSC*. These roles were confirmed via a survey with PSC members and project managers as participants. Utilizing these roles and the need for stakeholder representation results in a functionally diverse team. Literature shows that functional diversity enhances decision-making quality (Minichilli et al., 2009), which in turn can help project success, provided that relationship conflicts are avoided. The likelihood of relationship conflict occurring can be reduced by clearly articulating individual responsibilities and interests, fostering mutual trust, and establishing shared goals. The data indicate that, in practice, individual responsibilities are rarely made explicit, and members can have multiple roles. This leads to forgetting tasks and an increased likelihood of relationship conflict because members lack understanding of why other members behave as they do. Therefore, more active alignment between members is necessary to enhance mutual understanding and facilitate collaboration towards a shared goal.

Q3: What is the relationship between individual responsibilities of PSC members and project success?

I conducted a quantitative survey with responses from PSC members and project managers. The survey revealed that knowing the degree to which PSC members act according to individual responsibilities predicts 48% of project success. I posed the hypothesis that *shared goals* among members and *mutual trust* moderate the relationship between *acting according to individual responsibilities* and *project success*. Based on previous exploratory studies, it was expected that a threshold of mutual trust and shared goals would be necessary before acting from individual responsibilities positively affects project success. However, the moderating role of mutual trust and shared goals was not supported by the survey data, and the hypothesis was rejected. The data show that acting from individual responsibilities, having shared goals among PSC members, and having mutual trust within the PSC always positively affect project success. Based on the explorative studies and opinions of respondents in the survey, members

should prioritize and actively work toward achieving shared goals and mutual trust to establish common ground for the temporary organization. Once this common ground on the project is reached, an adjacent step in team formation should be to determine and communicate the PSC members' responsibilities.

Q4: What support can be given to PSC members to govern a project via a PSC?

PSC members have a time-limited focus on project governance and tend to just start. Therefore, a support tool for members should be brief and comprehensive. A Quick Reference Card (QRC) can help PSC members by providing an overview of their responsibilities and working methods. Since the characteristics of the project, corporate standards and culture, and the need for governance vary, the QRC is a starting point for discussion. The QRC was developed for both the formation and execution phases of a PSC. The QRC applies to various project types, such as engineering, construction, innovation, and ICT. It is applicable both in governmental and non-governmental settings. The QRC provides a comprehensive overview in the space of one A4 paper. The sections are on goals, formation, who should be the members, what their responsibilities are, do's for members, and don'ts for members. Seasoned practitioners in project governance acknowledged the value of the QRC, and it is being used in practice.

8.2. ANSWER TO THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION ABOUT GOVERNANCE

The main research question for the PhD is as follows:

How can project governance by a project steering committee influence project success?

The interviews, the survey, and the expert session on the QRC indicate that an engaged PSC can help the project move forward when the project manager and the project team are stuck and need support to succeed. The combined action of senior managers then influences stakeholders' perceptions, ensures compliance with decisions, or motivates the project team. A PSC can also incorporate views from a range of stakeholders into the decision-making process, thereby improving decision quality and, in turn, the success for the project owner and the project funder. The same, different views, combined with the members being senior managers, can provide an understanding of the project's real progress and thus hold the project manager accountable for ensuring project success and for making adjustments when needed.

Members have dual accountability: to the temporary organization and to the permanent organization. They should balance these and help other members cope when decisions negatively impact their permanent organization. The members should seek help when they lack competencies and balance governance with supporting the project. Providing direction and holding the project manager accountable enable the adaptation of the project strategy in a changing project environment, thereby limiting risks for funding and owning organizations and identifying opportunities to enhance the business case. Providing direction is achieved through

decision-making with authority and unified support from stakeholder groups.

Governance by committee can add value compared to governance by a single person with the project owner role. First, members represent stakeholder groups. This provides direct access to information and other resources from these stakeholder groups. Second, members are functionally diverse, improving decision-making quality if relationship conflict is avoided. Third, members bring authority based on their permanent position, thus adding decision-making authority to the group. Fourth and last, data show that when members work as a group on common goals and champion the project, the sum of the combined authority and information processing capacity is more than that of the sum of the individual members.

A PSC is a decision-making entity. Depending on the contracts behind the project, there may be several organizations with formal decision-making authority, each sending a representative. Such as when there are several funding organizations or the owning organization differs from the funding organization. This results in members that can not overrule each other, and thus the need for group decision-making. But even when there is a clear hierarchy in the PSC (often derived from the functions members hold in the permanent organization), group decision-making is the preferred method: First, it is the duty of PSC members to align the permanent and temporary organization. That means accountabilities that members have in the permanent organization must give them a say in the PSC, and a decision must be made that balances interests with the common goal. For example, the director responsible for maintenance of a production plant needs a say in decisions that impact maintenance, even if the CEO of the owning company chairs the PSC. Together, they should balance interests and help each other cope with adverse effects on their own stakeholder group. Second, group decision-making improves decision quality, as found in the organizational management literature. Third, and last, group decision-making helps secure members' commitment to implementing the decisions. Members who are the most affected should decide by consent. The chair ensures stalemates are resolved.

Role theory, organizational management theories, and our data show that members should align individual responsibilities to prevent task conflict from turning into relationship conflict. This can be supported by taking time for team development activities to share goals and build mutual trust. Since members only tend to recognize the need after project success is in jeopardy, team development activities for a PSC should be incorporated into corporate guidelines on project governance. As the data indicate that senior project managers also influence the organization of project governance, guidelines on the formation of PSCs should be added to project management methodologies. In practice, members may have limited competencies and experience in their temporary accountabilities related to project oversight. Therefore, a Quick Reference Card (QRC) was developed to support practitioners in forming and executing a PSC.

8.3. AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the effect a PSC can have on project success and the time members spend, the PSC justifies further study. This section provides starting points.

Both stewardship theory and agency theory point to separating the roles of the project owner and the project manager (Zwikael & Meredith, 2018). This leaves open the question of whether the project owner role should be fulfilled by one person, a permanent governance body, or a temporary governance body dedicated to a specific project (a PSC). The PSC takes time with senior managers for team processes and shared decision-making. Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) theory emphasizes that the additional time that managers spend in a PSC, compared to other project governance options, must be worth the effort (Williamson, 1979). Therefore, it is beneficial for theory building to compare types of project governance structures (a single project owner, portfolio board, or PSC) and examine how they affect project success through a contingency lens. It can help practice by guiding when to use which governance body.

My quantitative study (Chapter 5) and previous case studies (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013; Karlsen, 2020) tend to focus on projects that at least delivered some of the deliverables. In the interviews in the qualitative studies (Chapters 3 and 4), I discussed PSCs that were struggling to reach project success. For example, the metro line project in the first study had low project management success (tripled cost), leading to the appointment of an influential independent advisor to the funding organization. In the second study, the PSC of the ERP implementation was not in control, leading to restructuring by the shareholders after the interviews. In both cases, data were gathered at a single point in time: one after restructuring and one before. Longitudinal studies of PSCs that were restructured due to low performance might reveal additional insights into the information-gathering, processing, and decision-making that led governors to act to turn the tide. Also, in cases of low project success probability, project funders could shift their governmentality from a trust-based to a control-based model, altering the team's identity from collectivistic to individualistic (Toivonen & Toivonen, 2014; Turner, 2020b). The experts in the session on the QRC agree that the shift to a governmentality of control occurs in practice, by coining the "*control paradox*": a tendency for principals to request more information when goals are not met, which leads to further analysis and new requests for information. PSC members then tend to prioritize their accountability to the permanent organization. Moreover, crises can elicit the worst possible responses from stakeholders (Pinto et al., 2024). So, future case studies of (almost) cancelled projects can be critical cases (Bent Flyvbjerg, 2006) that provide new insights, using agency, stewardship, and role theory as a lens.

My study identified five standard roles that PSC members can use as a starting point for individual responsibilities. The interactionist perspective in role theory (Bechky, 2006) predicts that PSC members will continuously shape their roles through interactions with others. Empirical data on the types of interaction, the resulting role shaping, and the consequences for project

success factors can yield insights into how these factors influences project success. The work by Breese et al. (2020) on project owners' role-taking can serve as inspiration. Role-taking, interactions between people, and actions required for project success will evolve over time. This makes longitudinal case studies a fitting method.

Data show that not all affected stakeholder groups have direct representation in a PSC. A reason mentioned by respondents and literature is to limit conflict of interest among PSC members (Zwikael et al., 2019) and to limit the size of the PSC. The first reason is debatable: all PSCs face conflicts of interest arising from members' accountabilities within permanent organizations. Whether external suppliers should be part of a PSC sparked heated debate among respondents. An underlying reason might be differing views on how to regard the PSC; either from a stewardship or an agency perspective. Or it might depend on the type of project or on the availability of resources. Therefore, it deserves further research using stakeholder theory.

The qualitative data in this research primarily derive from respondents in the Netherlands. The quantitative data are mainly from Western Europe. Other studies on PSCs have been conducted in the Nordics (Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013; Karlsen, 2020) and the USA (Murphy, 2016). Decision-making is a vital activity in PSCs, and this process is influenced by culture (Müller et al., 2009; Toivonen & Toivonen, 2014). Interviews by McGrath & Whitty (2018b) suggest that voting is common in Australia, whereas I found that consensus or consent was prevalent in the Netherlands. Also, a follow-up study can check the robustness of the QRC using the culture construct in governmentality as defined by Turner (2020b). Therefore, studies on the inner workings of PSCs in various national and corporate cultures are advisable.

8.4. REFLECTIONS OF A CURIOUS PRACTITIONER

I started this journey out of curiosity about the PSC as an interface between permanent and temporary organizations, where people struggle and try to do their best for both worlds. This curiosity remains, but insights have emerged and the PSC is less mysterious to me. First, I noticed that contrasting views on PSCs stem from whether to favor an agency or a stewardship view, in line with what Müller (2017) calls governmentality. An agency view leads to a focus on control-based governance. This leads to clear accountability but risks creativity. It can also lead the project manager to withhold information as a form of normalization of deviance (Pinto, 2014). A stewardship view that emphasizes trust seems more productive, given the unpredictable nature of many projects, where the project manager needs leeway. However, it can lead to unclear accountabilities. Also, bounded rationality holds that individual PSC members do not fully understand the interests of all stakeholders. My current view is that both the agency and stewardship views have value, but they should fit the project's dynamics, the maturity of the project team, and the stakeholder organizations. Second, formal rules on project governance at funding and owning organizations tend to be lacking, leaving the process of setting up a PSC

to “this is what we always do” or to the experiences of leading actors. And even if there are formal rules, PSC members tend to develop their own informal rules based on interactions with one another, interactions with the project manager, perceived project performance, and personal preferences. My research and literature show the importance of project oversight for project success. Therefore, learning should not be at the individual level only, but also at the level of permanent organizations. Thus assisting learning across PSCs and projects. Resulting in guidelines on oversight within a governmentality of trust, and a medium amount of sovereignty (Müller et al., 2017). Third, I noticed that PSC members were eager to share with me their struggle to balance accountability for both the permanent and temporary organizations. It is their job to combine both, but denying the struggle risks project success. A constructive way to address the struggle is a team effort to determine and communicate individual accountabilities, including identifying where they match and where there are frictions. Fourth and finally, I observed that, from the project managers’ perspective, it makes sense for them to manage the PSC. This may be acceptable if the project manager acts from a stewardship perspective, but the PSC’s duty to hold the project manager to account might still be neglected. In summary, funders and owners should define their expectations, and PSCs should take time to build the team and understand the project’s key characteristics. If this effort is deemed not worthwhile, one may question the decision to install a PSC in the first place rather than governance by a single project owner or a permanent governance body.

People often ask me whether PSCs differ across project types, such as Engineering and ICT. I found no fundamental differences among those PSCs; all can provide governance and support, link permanent and temporary organizations, and serve as a coordinating mechanism for stakeholders. However, the challenges faced by PSC members vary. Engineering projects produce a tangible product, providing members with a sense of the end product they need, unlike some ICT and innovation projects. On the other hand, in large public engineering projects, affected stakeholders are not part of the funding, owning, and sourcing organizations, while they typically are in ICT projects. Additionally, in public projects, PSC members representing the funders may be unable to overrule representatives of other stakeholders, resulting in complex, consent-based decision-making within the PSC. In all PSCs, members are typically selected on the basis of their positions within the permanent organization. Members of project-based organizations, such as construction companies and ICT providers, tend to have relevant competencies and interests. By contrast, in public works, members are elected officials who may lack experience in project oversight and the products to be delivered.

We should recognize that PSC members are not functionaries but real people with interests and unique competencies. Consistent with Breese et al. (2020) on project owners, PSC members have an additional role beyond their substantive managerial roles. In the Introduction section of this dissertation, I described how, as a project manager, I managed the PSC and its members. Given my new understanding, I will change to coaching the members. To help them add value via effective governance and support that benefits all stakeholders,

including their own. Ultimately, recognizing and supporting the human dimension of PSC membership is key to unlocking its full potential.

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APPENDIX A: LITERATURE ADDRESSING PSCS

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Studies on PSCs				
A Socio-Technical Model for Project-Based Executive IT Governance	(Murphy et al., 2018)	Mixed method, on ERP implementations	PSCs should be dynamic and agile, rather than procedural. Coining the "engaged steering committee" as a change agent, besides providing direction and monitoring. Definition of PSC: "an ephemeral, autonomous boundary-spanning governance body consisting of senior-level executives or boards who must possess dynamic capabilities in the form of decision-making, absorptive capacity (information processing), IS competence, and change leadership that are formed for a specific project"	It focuses on the unique nature of the project and, therefore, its oversight. It highlights the support function. The definition includes the required competencies of the members, which include management skills and knowledge of the project's products.
How Can Steering Committees Manage Change Through Dynamic Capabilities to Increase System Satisfaction?	(Murphy et al., 2017)	Quantitative survey with PSC members as respondents, on ERP implementations	Companies typically use PSCs to govern IT projects. To control the project and involve stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement is necessary to transform organizational processes across functions by cultivating an innovative culture. For project success, PSC members need to be capable champions with capabilities in IT and a focus on innovation.	It provides insight into three key characteristics of PSC members: championing change, fostering an innovative culture, and possessing knowledge of the project's products and business drivers. The paper suggests that the PSC is a collaborative tool to drive change within the permanent organization. A weakness of the paper is mixing permanent coordination groups and temporary governance bodies (McGrath & Whitty, 2018b).
A Theory of Steering Committee Capabilities for Implementing Enterprise-Wide Information Systems	(Murphy, 2016)	Dissertation, mixed method, on ERP implementations	PSCs struggle. Conclusions based on studies from an information processing perspective: • Decision authority and autonomy facilitate effective decision-making processes. • Member selection needs to be a well-thought-out process. • PSCs must be agile and only meet when critical decisions are required. • PSCs are different from a project team team, and the division needs to be clearly denoted. • PSCs that do not have the necessary skills (e.g., business domain competencies) and prerequisites are prone to project failure. • PSCs do not incorporate enough risk management into their structures.	One of the few studies focusing on the internal dynamics of a PSC. Decisions by the PSC should be made at various levels. For quality decision-making, a group facilitates the gathering and transformation of diverse information. PSC members need the competence to capitalize on information. Being too agile may also carry the risk of just starting, so skipping the forming phase in the PSC before things get rough (Loch et al., 2017).

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Do steering committees and boards constitute good project governance?	(Mcgrath & Whitty, 2013)	Opinion paper based on literature	The paper challenges the perception that Steering Committees (SC, not just **P**SCs) constitute good project governance. The reason for an SC is to get senior management involved. Influencing the authoritarian power structure of an organization and getting collaboration between stakeholders. Steering implies decision-making authority. They have a strict definition of an SC: it should not be possible for the decisions to be overruled.	This paper is refreshing in challenging practice and focusing on the influence of SCs on power. It helps define that a PSC must have decision-making authority. The authors do not split temporary and permanent committees. They assume one owning and funding organization with a clear power structure. However, the paper is limited by using only one case study for the negative effect of a PSC on decision-making (Reimers, 2002).
Do steering committees really steer?	(McGrath & Whitty, 2018b)	Qualitative: interviews. About several types of coordination groups, not just PSCs	A real steering committee should be able to decide and not just advise. It is a democratic device that enables coordination. The steering committee should be based on the need for coordination with and between stakeholders. Definition as "a group of people appointed to control the actions of an entity." Success factors are members having a genuine interest, understanding their roles, having a shared vision, clarity on the committee's nature, and top management's support. They concluded that most committees called "steering" can be overruled and are actually an advisory body.	Has merits in splitting PSCs from sounding boards and coordination groups without authority. The authors mix temporary and permanent coordination groups. My study shows that there can't always be one defined decision maker, and the benefits of group decision-making. The study is strong in splitting responsibility and accountability, implicitly following the view of objective accountability. Their conclusion is too strict; even if a PSC can be overruled, it does not mean they will be in practice, and that their shared decision will have substantial influence.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Supervising Projects You Don't (Fully) Understand: Lessons for Effective Project Governance by Steering Committees	(Loch et al., 2017)	Qualitative: interviews about several PSCs. Focus in strategic (non-repeated) projects	Describes the struggle of PSC members and provides advice. Definition: "a temporary group of senior executives charged with a joint project ownership role, on top of their regular tasks, roles, and responsibilities." For support and governance. Advice toward PSC members: - Invest in focused understanding of the project based on the member's role; - Get truthful information; - Get outside information; - Foresee solution procedures at the outside; - Get informed quickly; - Understand the reasons for and the consequences of the event; - Use the project team's expertise in getting solutions on the table; - Use experiments.	Limited use of theory and addition to theory. Paper with the most practical application for PSC members found, and thus informing the QRC on PSCs. The member's role drives the execution of the recommendation, but the roles are not described. The focus on information gathering and transformation is in line with Murphy's work, which makes sense since they both study the governance of strategic one-of projects.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
The project steering committee, project governance and trust: insights from a practical case study	(Karlsen, 2020)	Qualitative: Single case study in engineering	PSCs provide strategic direction and governance for projects and support the project manager. They also represent the project owner, specifically in large projects and when several organizations are involved. The PSC has decision-making authority. The study measures the trust stakeholders have in the PSC, which the paper calls trust in the management. PSC members were selected based on functional experience, e.g., legal. Mechanisms in the PSC found: control and performance measurement, support, decision-making, relationship management, reporting, resource management, risk management, and strategic focus. Advise to include members from outside the owning and funding organization. The PSC is essential in removing obstacles and solving conflicts, by members using their network and seniority to contact stakeholders.	This is one of the few case studies on PSCs. The paper splits governance and support. The use of "management" is not concise or defined, since the paper suggests that the PSC manages the project. The "project owner" refers to a person outside the PSC, not the chair. The PSC studied has characteristics of a project management team, though it includes accountability for achieving the business case. This PSC helps trust by providing transparency and accountability (including authority) at the link between the permanent and temporary organizations.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Interaction patterns in a steering group: Power and action outcome	(Arnesson & Albinsson, 2013)	Qualitative: Single longitudinal case study on a PSC in healthcare	About interaction patterns within a PSC, including power relations. Social relations create power. The exercise of this power affects outcomes: both the results of actions and future actions. PSC members need a positive approach to the goals, knowledge about the assignment, authority within the permanent organization for decision-making, and the ability to make time. Trust and shared goals are essential to balance power-based outcomes and ensure project success. The authors link the need for a PSC to project size. The PSC should provide direction via decision-making that impacts activities in the permanent organization.	The paper indirectly points to the PSC as a link between the permanent and temporary organization. The PSC member derives authority from the permanent organization to influence the permanent organization via the temporary project. It reminds of the type II project owner from Olsson (2018): doing more than the daily job. The data is recognizable from the data in my own two qualitative studies (chapters 3 and 4), such as role unclarity of the members. The roles are shaped based on interaction, reminding of the interactionist perspective or role theory (which was not mentioned in the paper). The PSC, as an arena to exercise power, resonates with a project manager in my interviews, who sees the PSC as "a place to keep all the frogs in the wheelbarrow."
Studies touching PSCs				
Governance and Support in the Sponsoring of Projects and Programs	(Crawford et al., 2008)	Qualitative: interviews about several projects. Focus on strategic (non-repeated) projects	About the sponsorship role, which a PSC can fulfil. Projects are temporary within the framework of the permanent organization. Sponsorship may need a governance and/or support perspective. For example, provide support if the permanent organization does not provide the decisions the project needs. The sponsor/funder as the link between corporate and project governance.	Stresses the importance of senior manager support as part of project ownership, in addition to governance. The definition of sponsorship combines providing financial resources and ensuring that the goals are reached. Zwikael & Meredith (2018) would separate this into the funder and owner roles. All reasons for governance and support mentioned might lead to the need for an engaged PSC where stakeholders cooperate. The paper mixes the sponsor as a person and as a function that a group can fulfil.
The responsibilities of the project owner in benefits realization	(Zwikael et al., 2019)	Qualitative: interviews and longitudinal case study	The PSC is a cross-functional team. Respondents feel the PSC is accountable for benefits. The authors conclude that there should be one single project owner (preferably an operations manager).	Touches on the distinction between group accountability and objective accountability. Emphasizes the PSC and the owner as the link between the permanent organization (where the benefits must be reaped) and the project (delivering capabilities).

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Project governance: Balancing control and trust in dealing with risk	(Zwikael & Smyrk, 2015)	Quantitative: Survey towards project managers and supervisors of project managers (not to project owners)	The project owner is the single point of accountability and chairs the PSC. The PSC is a group of influential project supporters that supports the project owner in his/her accountability to the funder by overseeing the project's execution and benefit realization. A governmentality of trust is preferable in a turbulent environment, and control is necessary in a stable project setting.	Implies that the project owner has the authority, derived from the funder. Accountability needs authority, so why should the other members be "powerful"? The paper provides no guidance on the governmentality of PSC members other than the project owner.
Exploring project managers' accountability	(Rezania et al., 2019)	Qualitative: interviews with project managers	The PSC acts as a principal towards the project manager, the agent. It is comprised of the project owner, sponsor, and other stakeholders. The project manager reports to the PSC, which oversees project progress. Risks are managed through direct, discourse-based engagement. Accountability can be for processes and outcomes and is shaped by negotiation and interdependencies.	The distinction between the project owner and sponsor is not clear. Interpreting the citations, the sponsor might be the person providing the budget, and the owner might be the person representing future users. Implicitly, the conclusions suggest a relational definition of accountability.
Top management support-almost always necessary and sometimes sufficient for success: Findings from a fuzzy set analysis	(Young & Poon, 2013)	Qualitative analysis of multiple case studies on IT projects	Top management support is vital for project success, but it is not the only Critical Success Factor in most projects. In one case, the PSC failed to perform, taking no ownership of the matter. This resulted in the absence of a memorandum of understanding outlining how the parties would collaborate, a lack of control over the project, and inadequate risk management by the PSC and top management. This project was cancelled.	It remains unclear if and how the PSC can provide top management support. It is unclear if the failing PSC led to a failed project, or another factor influenced both.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
The Strategic Management of Large Engineering Projects: Shaping Institutions, Risks, and Governance	(Miller & Lessard, 2000)	Book aimed at practitioners based on mixed-method research	The book is about the management (including governance) of megaprojects in engineering. A reason for project failure is that sponsors (funders) cannot cope with unforeseen turbulence. Successful projects are not selected; they are shaped. Sponsors build governance structures to build partnerships with the owners. Turbulence can lead to the need for ad hoc alliances, including the establishment of an appropriate governance structure. When tasks cannot be specified in advance, governance structures must be more complex. Consent by affected parties is needed for legitimacy.	Governance entities are a means for contributing and affected stakeholders to collaborate and manage uncertainty. Several changing governance entities may be needed over time. Funders and owners should deliberately shape the project, including the governance structure. The degree to which tasks are known in advance influences the governance structure needed. It points to the multi-faceted governance structures that can be.
An Alternative Taxonomy of Project Management Structures: Linking Project Management Structures and Project Success	(Lechler & Dvir, 2010)	Quantitative: survey with mainly project managers and project team members as respondents	The paper is primarily about project management, not the oversight of the project manager. It touches Steering Committees, though combining permanent Portfolio Boards and temporary PSCs. Steering committees help integrate the project organization into the functional organization by coordinating the involvement of senior managers in project implementation. Management involvement through steering committees can compensate for low project management authority and act as a balancing power between the project and the functional organization.	It points out that a PSC provides authority in the permanent organization to make decisions that a project needs, for which the project manager lacks authority.
The need for a project governance body	(Hjelmbrekke et al., 2014)	Qualitative: interviews and surveys with functional managers and project managers in the construction industry	The project's output must be linked to the strategy of the owning organization. The paper focuses on projects delivered by a contractor. The link between the owner and the project manager should be a "sponsor," who links the strategic objectives to the necessary deliverables. A PSC is one of the possible governance bodies; as such, it should monitor and supervise the project, make decisions, and answer questions. The "sponsor" acts in accordance with project goals, while the governance body monitors and can adjust course.	Terms are not clearly defined. Given that the project sponsor reports to a PSC, this seems to be the internal project manager, next to a project manager from the contractor. The PSC is viewed from an agency perspective, highlighting the monitoring responsibility. A governance body is also needed to provide direction based on the business drivers from the owning organization.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Configuration of project steering committees and their role in project implementation insights from case study data	(Lechler & Cohen, 2007)	Qualitative: Two case studies on a steering committee	The study concerns two permanent committees that approve project proposals. These committees are located away from the project and do not challenge the project manager's authority. They can also play a role in stage gate approvals.	This study is referenced in papers on PSCs, but it actually pertains to portfolio boards. There may be a bias towards successful projects, while less successful projects may require more governance.
Exploring the Role of Steering Committees in Realizing Value from Project Management	(Lechler & Cohen, 2009)	Qualitative: interviews with project managers and managers in the permanent organization	The study concerns permanent Steering Committees (SCs) that approve project proposals. They coordinate and monitor multiple projects, set priorities, and allocate resources. SCs are involved based on project budget, duration, risk, number of competencies (technologies), and visibility. The SCs typically make go / no-go decisions. They coordinate multiple stakeholder perspectives and help enforce project management standards.	This study is referenced in papers on PSCs, but it actually pertains to portfolio boards. Since the SCs studied are permanent and govern several projects, the conclusion that they help project management capability in the organization seems logical. However, it remains unclear whether a temporary PSC can have the same impact.
The Impact of Critical Success Factors across the Stages of Enterprise Resource Planning Implementations	(Somers & Nelson, 2001)	Quantitative by a questionnaire on CSFs in ERP implementations	Organizations need to employ an executive-level champion of the project who has the authority to enforce changes in the permanent organization. The ERP software vendor should be a partner. The PSC, in itself, is a Critical Success Factor (CSF), consisting of boundary-spanning senior managers representing user groups. The PSC helps monitor the project.	The study does not discuss how a PSC influences the other CSFs, such as top management support and vendor partnership.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Project Governance and Governance of Interorganizational Project Networks: Toward Understanding Their Relationships and Future Research Agenda	(Wang et al., 2024)	Discussing theory to be used for future research, based on previous research	The design of the governance structure determines project success, especially for large-scale projects. Authors link project governance to inter organization project networks. And thus touch the tension between temporary organizing and permanent governance. Project governance is the PSCs governance to a single project. PSCs are accountable for conduct & performance, should "supervise the accountability of the project manager," and provide resources. When several organizations are involved, typically there is no hierarchical relationship between participants. They claim that when multiple organizations are involved in governance, theories transaction-cost economics and relational-exchange must be applied to this network-governance.	A PSC is a link between the governance of the temporary project and governance in permanent organizations. Focus of the paper is on projects spanning multiple organizations, which also occurs in my data. They include support in governance, different from the work of Crawford. Authors assume a multi-organizational project always has a PSC. They imply group accountability of a PSC. They are vague on the PSC: it should "supervise the accountability of the project manager to the project sponsor," what does this mean? In my data, also for large multi-organizational projects, the project manager reports to the PSC. And the PSC is accountable to the funders and owners. Too bad the paper does not explain what the lack of hierarchy between participating organizations means for the PSC and its members.
Understanding the interacting layers of multi-level governance in Quebec's public infrastructure projects	(Harvey et al., 2025)	Action research and intervention research for the performance indicator	Analyzes the interactions between governance layers. Reviews a performance indicator on collaboration between and in projects, which is mandatory for large public infrastructure projects in a Canada. PSCs are taken for granted. They regard a PSC as a catalyst of collaboration. A PSC engages stakeholders. No discussion about how the PSC should facilitate collaboration beyond the mandatory meetings about collaboration and using a tool.	Points to the PSC as a collaborating device for stakeholders. The empirical data focuses on workshops about collaboration; the study does not address implications for the internal working of the PSC. Implies that in case of different governance layers, the PSC should collaborate as a group with other governance entities also. If the PSC is that important for collaboration among stakeholders and project, this justifies more research on how they do that.
Alternative Approaches to Innovation Project Portfolio Governance	(Tuominen & Martinsuo, 2024)	Multiple case study on innovation projects	The paper is about portfolio boards, not PSC. In one of the cases, the organization has a combination of portfolio boards and PSCs for projects with more than five project members. In this case, the PSC is the more powerful.	The case of a combination of portfolio board and PSC is interesting because authority and accountability are not clear-cut, and negotiation between senior members is needed. Indication that learnings from portfolio boards cannot be directly applied to PSCs, as portfolio boards have gathering status reports on projects (consolidating & communicating) as one of their three main tasks.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Practitioner-oriented, founded on research				
Project Management: A Benefit Realization Approach	(Zwikael & Smyrk, 2019)	Book	Each project requires a unique governance structure that is connected to the governance structures of the participating organizations. Assignment of accountabilities is necessary to align expectations and ensure the effective execution of roles. The size and complexity of the project influence the need for formal governance. PSCs are part of Project Governance. The PSC is a small group of influential project supporters who oversee the project's execution and, eventually, the realization of outcomes. All projects have a steering committee, even if only a committee of one (the project owner). The project owner and other members of the PSC are the most significant organizational connections. Each participant in governance must have a clear and formally defined role. In case of multiple funders, the PSC must resolve resulting conflicts. The project manager is accountable for the project's output. The PSC supports the project owner and, at the same time, serves as the ultimate authority, deciding on courses of action. A supplier cannot be part of the PSC to prevent a conflict of interest.	The book highlights the PSC as a link between temporary and permanent organizations, and as a mechanism for conflict resolution. Each governor should have clear accountabilities. The book is unclear about the decision-making authority of the PSC, as the PSC has the authority, but the project owner is accountable to the funder. If PSC members are chosen because they support the project, does that mean excluding stakeholders who do not fully support the project? It is debatable whether a supplier can be a PSC member, as they are contributing and to some degree invested stakeholders with unique knowledge that may be needed for informed decision-making and transforming options. Besides, more PSC members will have conflicting interests.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Project Governance	(Müller, 2016b)	Book	For an individual project, the sponsor (meaning both the funder and the owner) or the PSC sets the business objectives, determines the deliverables, provides the means, and determines how to control progress. Governance can focus on outcomes or behavior. The PSC is the principal institution for project governance and owns the business case. PSCs link the temporary and permanent organization and coordinate project and corporate governance. PSCs are ultimately responsible for project success. It provides advice and guidance to the project. PSCs can consist of the sponsor, managers representing the users of the project outcome, executive management, major suppliers, and stakeholder groups [sic]. Subject matter experts can temporarily join as needed. PSC members must have managerial authority to make decisions. Project Managers tend to manage the PSC, thereby creating agency issues.	There is no advice to separate the project owner from the funder. PSCs seem to be taken for granted. The book implicitly follows PRINCE2 for the roles of PSC members. It focuses on the governance task, but also mentions the support tasks. The book promotes training for PMO members and Project Managers, but ignores training for PSC members.

Title	Reference	Method and scope	Content	Reflection
Research Handbook on the Governance of Projects: Steering committees as governance entities	(Crawford, 2023)	Book chapter	The governor of a project can be an individual or a group, such as a PSC. The executive sponsor (meaning: project owner) is ultimately accountable. A PSC is effective if multiple organizational units or organizations are involved in ownership, provision of resources, operation, and realization of benefits over time. The PSC may act as a sponsoring group. The majority of projects are likely to have a PSC. A PSC that steers should have decision-making authority. The Steering Committee (whether permanent or a portfolio board) is at the link between permanent and temporary organization and must therefore look after the interests of the owning organization and support the project. It should be tailored to the owning organization and the task at hand. Smaller projects with a limited number of stakeholders might not need a PSC. The PSC should strive for consensus-based decision-making. It should refrain from interference in project management.	The chapter highlights the PSC as a collaborative tool for stakeholders, which should provide governance (primarily in the interest of the funder) and support. The reference to a study on the occurrence of PSCs is debatable, as it was not peer-reviewed. In the other references, project management standards are frequently cited, suggesting a lack of empirical data based on research. The chapter mixes temporary PSCs and permanent portfolio boards.

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECTS IN THE RESEARCH DATA

Interviews, to explore current practice (Chapter 3)

Participant Code	Role and background participant	Projects discussed	Organizations involved
P1	Project manager on behalf of IT supplier	*A.* Development and implementation of an E-commerce platform: the PSC members were directors (Sales, Marketing, Business Units), though not really interested in the project. It was founded at the request of the ICT contractor and because all larger projects of the owning/funding organization had a PSC. PSC as a political setting, and with limited individual accountability of the members. Leading to a laid-back attitude, with little project progress.	Heavy Truck manufacturer, one of the leading companies in Europe
	Project manager on behalve of owning organization	*B.* Custom software development and implementation: An internal IT project strategic for the owning/funding organization. The project was in trouble due to cost and planning overruns. Several departments are involved. PSC helped get resources, including internal employees. Finance director and project manager shaping the PSC.	National government, customs department
P2	Project manager: Contract manager on behalf of owning organization	*A.* Car-tunnel renovations: this is a standardized process, with several projects in various phases at the same time. There is an impact on stakeholders outside the organization because roads will be closed, with a nationwide effect. Governance issues arise if there are additional goals to the renovation itself, such as attempts to standardize security and IT systems across tunnels. Focus on stage gates.	National government, Department of Public Works: This is a project-based organization with a strict process for procurement and governance of suppliers.
	Project manager on behalf of owning organization	*B.* Custom software development and implementation: Development and implementation for internal IT, together with contractors. PSC membership is based on PRINCE2 roles. Focus on decision-making.	National government, department of public works
P3	Quality Assurance for projects	*A.* Portfolio of IT projects: Several projects were discussed. These were internal to the owning organization, which is also the funding organization. The corporate standard is to use PSCs primarily as decision-making entities. The most difficult decisions, including implementing them, are where the interests of the Development Division, the Production Division, and the Maintenance Division conflict. The PSC should work towards what aligns with the organization's overall goal and be creative, rather than following the most powerful division. Most projects have high complexity IT aspects. For business development projects, shortening the implementation time is leading.	High-tech company, a global leader

Participant Code	Role and background participant	Projects discussed	Organizations involved
P4	Project manager on behalf of the owning organization	*A.* European ERP implementation for automotive wholesale: this project is strategic with high investment. Distributed teams. For several countries in Europe, with headquarters in the USA. So it means aligning interests among countries within the capabilities of the ERP system (Oracle). The main reason for the PSC for the founders, CEO Europe, and CIO Europe, is to obtain commitment from the country directors. PSC is large, 20 members: Country directors and directors of Europe-wide functional departments (e.g., finance and IT).	Wholesale company for car parts, multinational
	Project manager on behalf of the owning organization	*B.* Implementation of a "Manufacturing Execution System" at production plants: using PSCs for oversight is a de facto standard for IT projects at this owning/ funding organization. Department heads and managers from IT suppliers as PSC members. The main goal is group decision-making, based on shared understanding, leading to compliance with the decisions. Large programs can have PSC at different management levels.	Food company, multinational
P5	Project manager on behalf of the combined owning and funding organizations	*A.* New public transport infrastructure, costing €130mil. It affects five municipalities. The funding organization is mainly the province. The Aldermen of municipalities can not be overruled by the province or other municipalities. High impact on local citizens, during and after the project. The PSC is mainly a collaborating device. The competence of PSC members in project governance and public civil works varies widely.	Local governments: five municipalities, a province. And the organization that maintains and owns railroad infrastructure.
P6	Project manager for a brownfield engineering project on behalf of the funding organization.	*A.* Renovation of a gas terminal in the UK. Owning and funding is a combined effort of two companies. Restructuring after conflicts between parties involved, such as between contractors and plant management. One of the changes was to make representatives of the main suppliers PSC members helping information processing and commitment. PSC for shared decision making based on information transformation and understanding of each other's different interests. Changes in the way of working were driven by the plant manager, the main contractor's manager, and the project manager.	Oil & Gas company, a joint venture of two multinationals
	Project manager	*B.* Portfolio management of production plant projects: not responsible for one project, but the portfolio of projects to upgrade, create, or shut down production plants with an investment above €1,5 mil. Using PSCs was the de facto standard at the organization. PSCs should make complex decisions in order to help the project team. In the PSCs, the representation of disciplines must be balanced.	Food company, multinational

Participant Code	Role and background participant	Projects discussed	Organizations involved
P7	Project manager on behalf of the combined owning en funding organizations	*A.* Megaproject, new metro line in a major city. So, engineering has a high impact on the residents and thus on politics. There were PSCs at three levels. Governance bodies and the project approach were restructured after major issues with cost and time overruns and public complaints. There are several organizations that own and fund. The PSC is a device for shared decision-making to provide unified direction. Where members have individual accountability within their own organization, but also share a goal.	Local government
	Project manager on behalf of the main owning organization	*B.* Update of metro safety systems in a major city. This includes integrating technical systems and operations of various organizations.	Local government
P8	Project manager on behalf of the owning/ funding organization	*A.* New Student Information System, including redesign of processes. This changes the process in the educational institution; the project has the characteristics of an ERP implementation. The PSC has heads of functional departments (IT, Finance, Finals exams) and directors of the semi-independent schools. The PSC is a mechanism that enables departments to work together to achieve a common goal. The CEO will make the final decision, in line with his/her management style.	Vocational education institution with about 2,500 students.
P9	Project manager on behalf of the contractor	*A.* Implementation of an ERP System for a mid-sized organization. This project manager works together with another project manager on behalf of the customer. ERP implementation is strategic for the owning organization. The PSC is founded at the request of the contractor to enable unified direction and to make decisions that are implemented in the departments.	Retail company
S1	Senior user	*A.* Implementation of new software (custom-made and some off-the-shelf) for a business process, in this case to support interpreters in a national judicial system. Focus on IT development and implementation, limited business change. The PSC is a functionally diverse team that supports information processing and gathering.	National government
S2	Senior user	*A.* Upgrading a production plant for a new startup business in the process industry, investment €35 mil. The project is in a high-safety, high-security setting and requires approvals for design and implementation from various departments. The project is about civil engineering, designing and building the production line, and the corresponding facilities and IT. The PSC is to align the actions of directors, to help the project move forward in an organization where new business processes and new customers are the exception.	High-tech company

Participant Code	Role and background participant	Projects discussed	Organizations involved
S3	Project owner, CFO	*A.* New Student Information System, including redesign of processes. For the owning/funding organization, a strategic project. The project has an impact on the business process (e.g., harmonization, legal requirements), the employees, and the students. The PSC consists of members who are directors of semi-independent colleges and of staff departments. The main purpose of the PSC is to link the educational process to the project at the director level. So the project aligns with the goals of the permanent organization, and what is built in the project will be implemented within the permanent organization.	Vocational education institution with 20.000 students
S4	Process owner, in the permanent organization, responsible for finance processes (reports to the CFO)	*A.* Implementation of a new ERP system, including the redesign of business processes. Investment above €1 billion. It includes changing how development, production, and maintenance cooperate. Reimplementation of various IT systems, including SAP. We mainly discussed the PSC at the program level, with directors of the main business units as members. There are also PSCs at the underlying project level. The PSC is a means for functionally diverse information processing and transformation to shape business processes to fit the organization's overall goal, leveraging the capabilities of the main IT systems.	High-tech company, a global leader (Same as P3)

Interviews to determine roles and responsibilities (Chapter 4)

Participant Code	Type of Project	Complexity and dynamics of stakeholders	Industry	Involvement of the Respondent in PSC	Line Management Position (Permanent Organization)
A1	ERP implementation. Redesign of HR and payroll processes including ERP software and custom programming for 27.000 employees	Divisions with own responsibility, processes, and IT systems plus changing role of staff/ department. ERP implementations are one off and risky for the owning organization. They impact processes and accountabilities of departments and divisions. The owning organization has limited experience in large internal projects. For the supplier of the ERP system, this is the largest project to date.	Services: building maintenance, cleaning, security, social services	Project manager	HR manager and process owner
A2				Senior user	HR director
A3				Executive	Board member

Participant Code	Type of Project	Complexity and dynamics of stakeholders	Industry	Involvement of the Respondent in PSC	Line Management Position (Permanent Organization)
B1	Business process redesign for product configuration management; Is the largest part of a multibillion-dollar program; includes changing processes and IT systems	Involves coordination between development, production, and maintenance divisions	High-tech	Project manager	Project cluster manager
B2				Global business process lead	Global business process lead
B3				Executive + Representative R&D department	Director material development
C1	New production facility for testing of a high-tech product	Requirements from the production and development departments change during the construction phase	High Tech	Project manager	Project manager
C2				Budget owner/ Executive	Director of real estate, development and strategy
C3				Internal supplier	Manager of the project managers for real estate
D1	Large engineering project to improve protection against flooding and expand nature reserves	External stakeholder groups and nine funders with own authority (municipalities, provinces, central government, water authorities)	Government	Project manager	Project manager
D2				Representative is one of the funders and users	Provincial executive
D3				Representative is one of the funders and users	Alderman
E1	Upgrade of a production plant to improve product specifications	Production process must continue uninterrupted, and all budget overruns must be approved by the mother organization	Heavy industry	Project manager	Project manager
E2				Senior supplier	General manager of projects and consultancy
E3				Executive/ sponsor	Plant manager

Participant Code	Type of Project	Complexity and dynamics of stakeholders	Industry	Involvement of the Respondent in PSC	Line Management Position (Permanent Organization)
F1	IT and physical security infrastructure	Includes both technology and changing behavior of the employees	Research	Project manager	Project manager
F2				IT representative/ supplier	Director of information services
F3				User representative	Director of operations of one the largest division

Survey, on individual responsibilities (Chapter 5)

Figure 5: Respondents' and projects' demographics, in chapter 5, provides a pie chart with the type of project and the project size (in euros). Below are additional figures to characterize the types of respondents and projects.

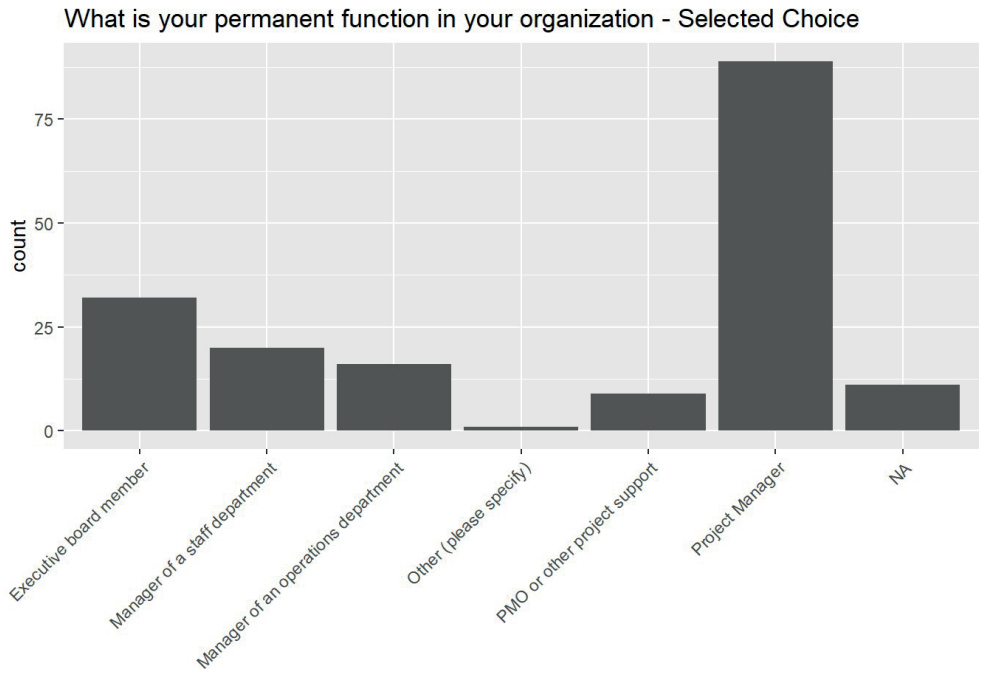

Figure A1: Function of the respondents

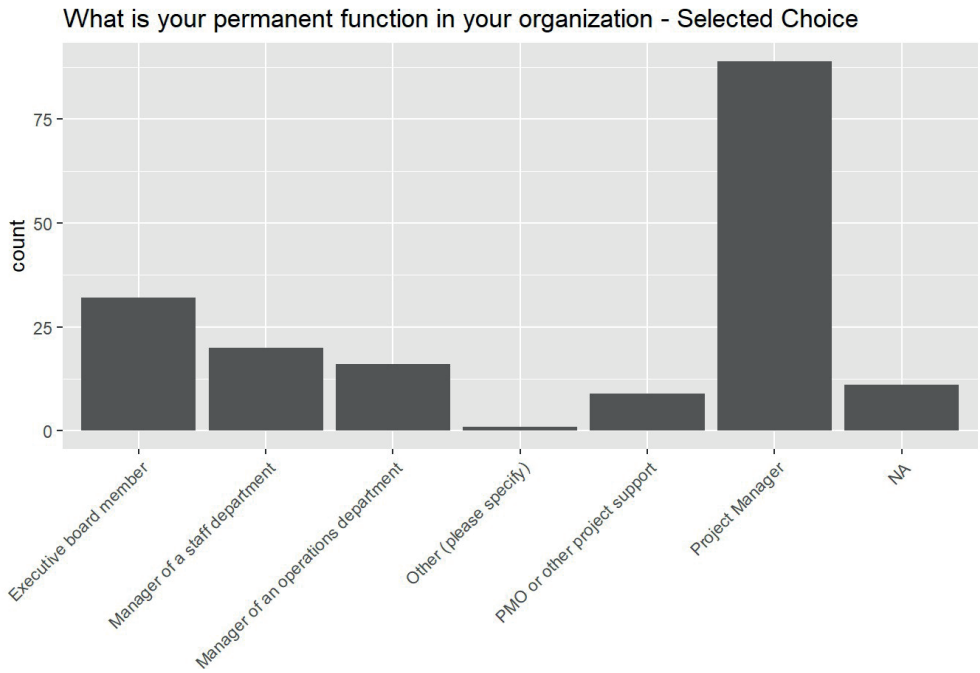

Figure A2: Type of project

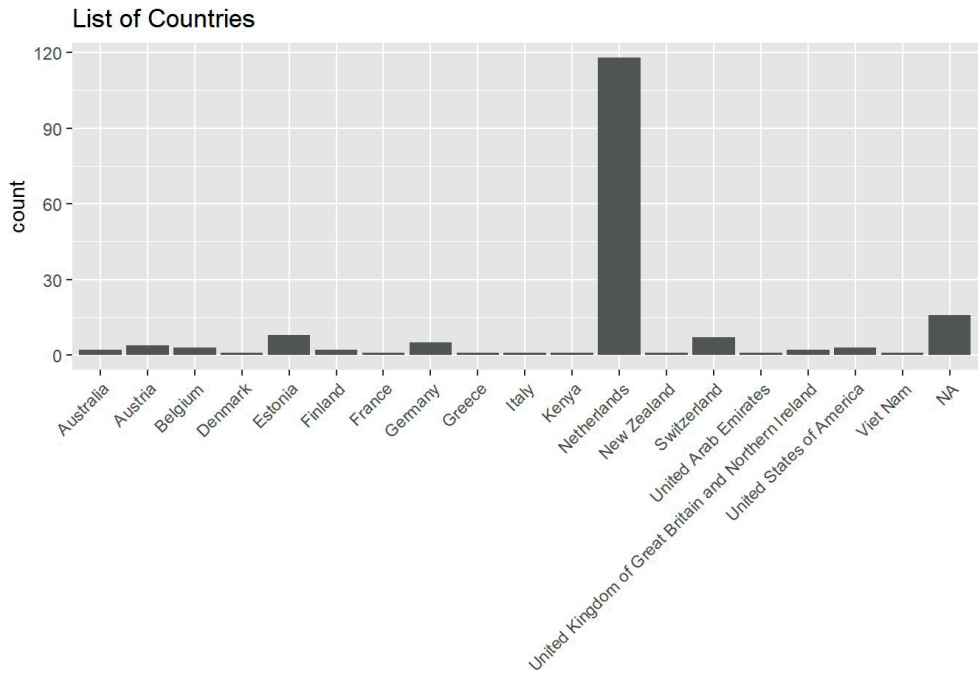

Figure A3: Country where the project predominantly took place

APPENDIX C: THEMES AND AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS WHEN EXPLORING PSCS (CHAPTER 3)

2nd-order theme	Aggregate dimension
- Achieving commitment via shared decision making	Relevance and goals
- Securing oversight	
- Using a SC is obligatory at the organization	
- Achieving commitment from major stakeholders	
- Achieving high quality decision making	
- Achieving trust to and from suppliers	
- Avoiding being an interest group	
- Communicating downwards and sidewards	
- Communicating sideward and upwards	
- Communicating sidewards	
- Decision making with authority	
- Directing the project by the group as a whole	
- Finding solutions for escalations raised by the project manager	
- Having accountability by the group as a whole	
- Identifying and communication project dependencies	
- Knowledge building of stakeholders and shareholders	
- Making sure project results are met	
- Making timely decisions	
- Organizing decision making process	
- Preparing shared advice for decisions by top management	
- Providing discharge	
- Providing information to members	
- Providing resources	
- Providing structure and clarity	
- Taking interests from major stakeholders into account	
- Working together to reach the project goals	
- Being a champion	
- Directing the project by the group as a whole	
- Making timely decisions	
- Directing the project by the group as a whole	
- Achieving commitment from major stakeholders	

2nd-order theme	Aggregate dimension
- Basing structure on corporate rules	Formation process
- Choosing members based on priority they personally give to the project	
- Choosing members based on availability	
- Choosing members based on competences	
- Choosing members based on line management function	
- Choosing members based on position power and personal power	
- Choosing members based on resources needed to achieve project goals	
- Choosing members from major stakeholders	
- Clarifying roles, tasks and responsibilities to new members	
- Designing structure by Owner	
- Designing structure by project owner and project manager together	
- Designing structure by project manager	
- Having governing bodies on several levels	
- Having inexperienced SC members	
- Having to admit members without direct contribution to the project	
- Knowing interests of members	
- Making vital suppliers member	
- PM supporting SC members in their role 1 on 1	
- Potential members choosing to become a member based on time wanting to spend	
- Selecting members on knowledge	
- Setting up induction	
- Structuring steering committee via process owners	
- Taking into account existing structures	
- Having governing bodies on several levels	
- Designing structure by project manager	
- Structuring steering committee via process owners	
- Selecting members on knowledge	
- Designing structure by project manager	
- Choosing members based on line management function	
- Choosing members based on resources needed to achieve project goals	
- Board outside the SC advising the SC	Decision-making
- Chairing by project manager	
- Chairing by project manager (happens, to be avoided)	
- Chairing by staff manager	
- Chairing should be by project owner	
- Conflicting line and project management hierarchy	
- Corporate culture influencing steering committee	
- Decision making by project owner has boundaries	
- Decision making by consensus	
- Decision making by steering committee as a whole	
- Decision making by the project owner	
- Having imbalance by focus on quality and buy in at the expense of cost and timing due to consensus based decision making	
- Needing approval from mother organizations members	
- Project manager having role as moderator	
- Project manager supporting SC members in their role 1 on 1	
- Project manager heavily influencing what is on the table	
- Providing project manager space to maneuver	
- SC in itself having no authority, members do	
- Separate team influencing what is on the table	
- Decision making by consensus	
- Project manager heavily influencing what is on the table	
- Decision making by steering committee as a whole	
- Decision making by consensus	

2nd-order theme	Aggregate dimension
- Acquiring budget by the project owner	Roles and responsibilities of the members
- Business Sponsor delegating project ownership	
- Contract Manager being as proxy for suppliers	
- Deriving roles from corporate rules	
- Having a project owner	
- Having a quality assurance / auditor role	
- Having external project manager reporting in SC directly	
- Having senior suppliers	
- Having senior users	
- Having several project owners	
- Knowing SC role and acting to the role	
- Owner being accountable for the business case	
- Owner being accountable for the project	
- Owner being needed for decision making power	
- Owner chairing the committee	
- Project managers present at meetings	
- Providing a clear setting	
- Relations in standing organization shaping relations in SC	
- Second shareholder being member of SC	
- Senior supplier actively managing the change	
- Senior supplier providing resources	
- Senior suppliers being accountable for delivery	
- Senior supplies represented indirectly	
- Senior users managing compliance	
- Senior users providing information for controlling business case	
- Senior users specifying and controlling user needs	
- Setting up roles based on PRINCE2	
- Some members participating based on agenda	
- Training & instructing SC members	
- Working together has preference to focusing on own role	
- Senior users specifying and controlling user needs	

2nd-order theme	Aggregate dimension
- Acting in the interest of the project - As a project manager having to deal with members with lack of personal interest or competences for their role in the SC - As an owner being accountable for project results - Assuming members with senior line management function have competences needed for being SC member - Being able to mobilize forces - Being an ambassador - Being honest - Being involved - Being prepared for meetings - Being realistic - Being undisputed in the organization - Daring to implement decisions - Doing what you promise - Focusing on main line of the project and issues - Having a focus on learning in the project - Having access to resources - Having authority - Having communication skills - Having experience in directing projects - Having experience in handling sensitive issues with conflicts of interest - Having perseverance - Knowing the own business - Knowing the SC goals - Knowing their role in the SC and acting to the role - Organizing trusted advisers - Taking action - Taking responsibility - Understanding characteristics of working with projects - Understanding deliverables of the project - Willing to accept help in business change management - Willing to communicate an unpopular decision - Willing to represent groups or users - Having ability to challenge others - Knowing the own business - Having various types of people in the team - Having communication skills	Ideal characteristics of the members

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (CHAPTER 4)

- What are your responsibilities. How does that work in practice.
- What authorities do you have. How does that work in practice.
- How do your responsibilities, authorities and activities affect project performance.
- To what degree is achieving project performance useful for you personally.
- How were team members selected based on which criteria. To what degree were roles considered.
- What roles do you see in the PSC.
- For each role you might see in the PSC:
  - What are the main responsibilities, authorities, and activities.
  - How does this show in practice / what are the consequences.
  - How does this help project performance.
- If you compare the roles used in the selection process, how did this work out later in the PSC.
- How is information shared between members.
- To what degree do members have the same or different interests. How does that show.
- How are decisions made. Please provide an example of a recent difficult decision.
- To what degree is achieving project performance useful for the PSC members personally.
- What is the effect of your contribution and your role on project performance. Why.
- What is your view on the relevance of roles in the selection process. Why.
- What is your view on the relevance of roles during the execution phase. Why.

APPENDIX E: FULFILLMENT OF ROLES PER PSC (CHAPTER 4)

Project	Repr. funder	Repr. User	Repr. supplier	Repr. support organization of project deliverables	Quality Advisor
A. ERP	- One TMT member accountable for budget and benefits	- Four senior managers of divisions, two also responsible for companywide HR - No representative of central staff	- Two managers of external suppliers - IT director as internal supplier - Representatives from division deliver project members	- One manager from future supplier - IT director accountable to arrange support	- Advisor to the board: Checks project products, heavily influences decision-making based on personal authority, hardly accountable
B. Business Process Redesign	- The department director from the heaviest impacted user group. - Project manager also must ask for additional funds to the program manager	- Three senior department managers / directors	- Three senior department managers deliver project members - Two internal representatives from IT to deliver resources	- Two internal representatives from IT to prepare support	- "Global Process Lead" to align processes
C. New production facility	- Manager of the Real Estate department, accountable for investment and delivery	- Manager from the production department that will use the factory - "Business partner" from the Real Estate department representing users	- Procurement officer, managing suppliers	- Manager from the Real Estate department who will maintain the facility	- Manager of the project managers at Real Estate for quality control
D. Large engineering project	- The dike warden of the heaviest impacted water board chairs - Eight other elected representatives of government who also fund, they are accountable to their own constituencies	- Nine elected representatives (dike warden, aldermen, provincial executives) represent their constituencies. - The dike warden represents central government	- All PSC members deliver capacity, mainly civil servants - Project manager manages contractors	- Nine elected representatives are responsible for maintenance of a part of the product - Representative of the organization maintaining the nature reserve	

Project	Repr. funder	Repr. User	Repr. supplier	Repr. support organization of project deliverables	Quality Advisor
E. Upgrade of a production plant	- The director of the production plant as executive, accountable for the business case - Corporate TMT holds both director of production and the manager of Project Management department accountable	- The manager of operations represents the users	- The manager of the Project Management & Consultancy department delivers resources - All representatives of users also deliver project resources - Procurement officer, representing and managing suppliers	- The manager of maintenance is responsible for future maintenance	
F. IT and physical infrastructure	- Chair by the director of staff departments, accountable for the business case	- Manager Corporate Security, approves designs - A senior manager of the division most impacted represents all users	- IT director delivers resources - Facilities director delivers resources	- IT director is accountable for maintenance - Facilities director is accountable for maintenance	

APPENDIX F: SURVEY ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (CHAPTER 5)

Question	Options
Have you been involved in or at a steering committee in the last three years (no matter the role)	Yes/No
The steering committee you have in mind is dedicated to a project	Yes/No (please explain)
The project manager reports to the steering committee	Yes/No (please explain)
How long ago was the first (partial) delivery of the projects end-deliverables	No deliverables yet 0-6 months 6-12 months Longer than 12 months
In the steering committee...	Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat Disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
... the members have distinct responsibilities	
... the roles of the members have been defined	
... the individual responsibilities of each member have been defined	
... members know their responsibilities as a steering committee member	
... members take actions based on their individual responsibilities	
... members act according to different roles	
... members provide information based on their individual responsibilities	
... viewpoints of members are determined by their individual responsibilities	
... the committee only decides when all members agree on the best option	
... when a decision is made, not all members have to agree on the best option	
... the members have sufficient competences for their responsibilities in the committee	
... the members keep their word	
... the members share the available relevant information	
... the personal relationships are generally excellent	
... the tension between some team members is sometimes painful	
... some team members do not get on personally	
... the atmosphere is generally very companionable	
... some team members visibly dislike each other	
... the members know the goals of the project	
... the members communicate their interpretation of the goals of the project	

Question	Options
… the members agree on the business case	
… the members agree on the overall goals of the project	
… the members agree on the ambitions of the project	
… the members work towards the overall goals	
… the members communicate the same overall goals	
… the members are enthusiastic about the overall goals	
… the members decide in line with the overall goals	
The project which the steering committee oversees was successful in terms of …	Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat Disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
… the activities were carried out as scheduled	
… finishing within budget	
… cost effectiveness of work	
… safety performance	
… meeting planned quality standards	
… minimum number of agreed scope changes	
… compliance with environmental regulations	
… finishing on-time	
… satisfying the need of the users	
… end product/service being used as planned	
… adhering to defined procedures	
… gaining new understanding/knowledge	
… learning from the project	
… end-User satisfaction	
… project's impact on beneficiaries are visible	
… the project having a good reputation	
… project achieving its purpose	
… enabling of other project work in future	
… mobilizing and using resources as planned	
… improving of organizational capability	
… motivating future projects	
… meeting client's requirements	
… satisfying the steering committee	
… meeting organizational objectives	
… satisfying the sponsor	
What is your permanent function in your organization	Manager of a staff department Manager of an operations department Project Manager Executive board member PMO or other project support Other (please specify)

Question	Options
Indicate to what extent you agree with the following...	Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat Disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
… I have experience in managing projects	
… I have experience in being a member of steering committee	
… I have experience in reporting to a steering committee	
… My responsibilities in the steering committee are clear to me	
… The responsibilities of the other steering committee members are clear to me	
… When making decisions in the steering committee, my responsibilities in the permanent organization prevail	
… I make decisions in the steering committee, which are against my interests in the permanent organization	
What is your role towards the steering committee	Member Project Manager Delivery of funds, though not a member PMO Other (please specify)
If you are a member of the steering committee, name the groups you represent (multiple answers possible)	The funder(s) of the project User groups of the end product Suppliers of project resources Groups maintaining the project products after go live No representation, I advise or add skills not present at other members No representation, I check quality on behalf of the steering committee I am not a member (e.g., a project manager)
The project predominantly involved the following	Research & Development Engineering/construction Information Technology/Telecom Media/Arts Government Relief Aid Other (please specify)
The country in which the steering committee is based is predominantly	List of countries
The total duration of the project was or is estimated at	Under 6 months 6 months to less than 1 year 1 to 2 years 2 to 4 years Over 4 years

Question	Options
The estimated investment of the project is	Under € 500,000 € 500,000 to € 1.000.000 € 1,000,000 to € 5.000.000 € 5.000.000 to € 25.000.000 € 25,000,000 to € 50,000,000 Over €50,000,000
Indicate to what extent you agree with the following...	Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat Disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
… There are conflicts of interests between stakeholder groups about which a steering committee has to decide	
… In case the project fails, the owning organization is at risk	
… This project needs a steering committee to obtain stakeholder commitment	
… Some steering committee members are forced by people in their own organization to prioritize the own organization above project goals	
… This project needs a steering committee to succeed	
Indicate if at least one steering committee member has the following roles (multiple answers are possible) ...	Representation of the funder(s) Representation of a user group of the project's products Representation of a supplier (internal or external) towards the project Representation of a group maintaining the projects' products after usage starts No representation, but a role to deliver advice or add skills not present at the other members No representation, but a role to check quality on behalf of the steering committee
Indicate to what extent you agree with the following...	Strongly disagree (1) Somewhat Disagree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3) Somewhat agree (4) Strongly agree (5)
… The steering committee needs member(s) who represent the funder(s)	
… The steering committee needs member(s) who represent a user group of the project's products	
… The steering committee needs member(s) who represent a supplier (internal or external) towards the project	
… The steering committee needs member(s) who represent a group maintaining the projects' products after usage starts	
… The steering committee needs member(s) who's only role is to deliver advise or add skills not available at the other members	

Question	Options
… The steering committee needs member(s) who's only role is to check quality on behalf of the steering committee	
… If members act according to agreed upon personal responsibilities, this improves project success	
… Having shared goals are a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities	
… Mutual trust among members is a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities	
The steering committee you are involved in at your organization is called	Free text (optional)
If you have any remarks on roles and responsibilities of members in project steering committees and the effect on project success, please let me know below.	Free text (optional)
I might have clarifying questions regarding your answers. If I may approach you for clarification, please leave your e-mail address below.	Free text (optional)

APPENDIX G: CHANGES MADE TO THE QRC (CHAPTER 6)

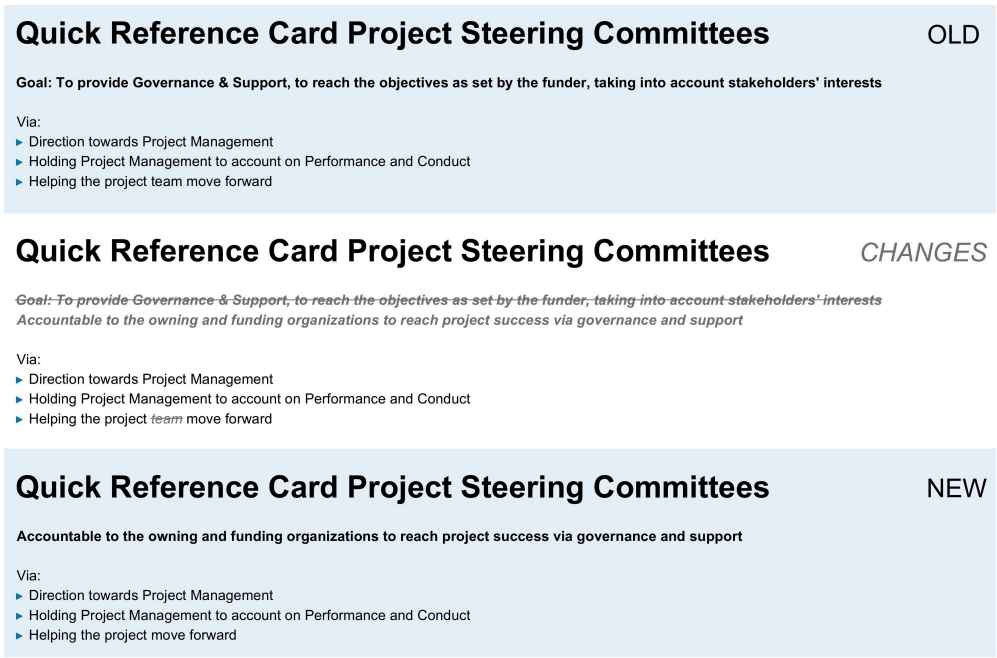

Figure A4: Quick Reference Card changes in the Goal

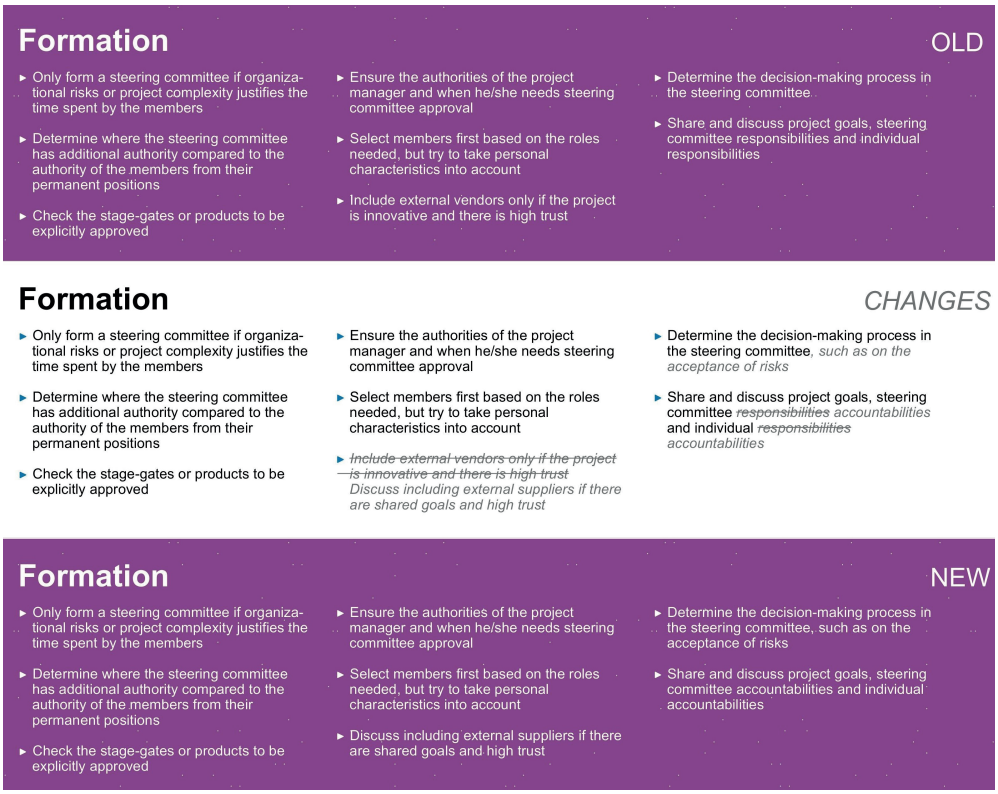

Figure A5: Quick Reference Card changes in the Formation

Figure A6: Quick Reference Card changes in the Members

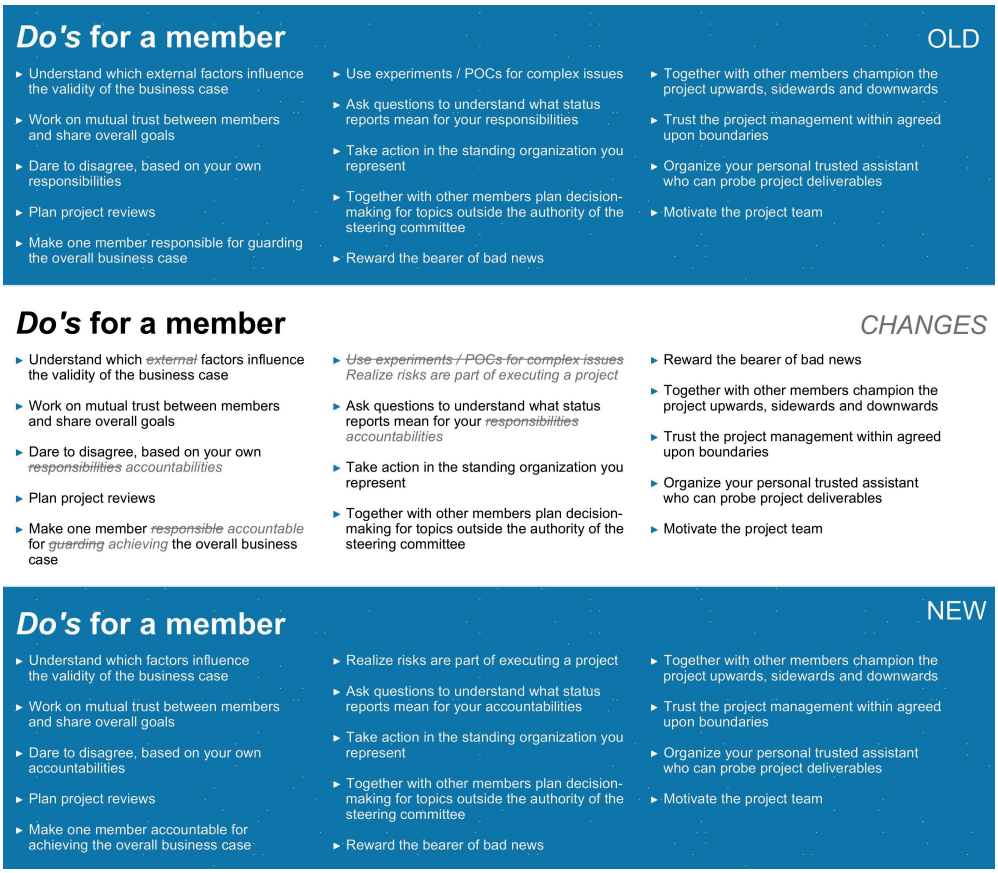

Figure A7: Quick Reference Card changes in Do's

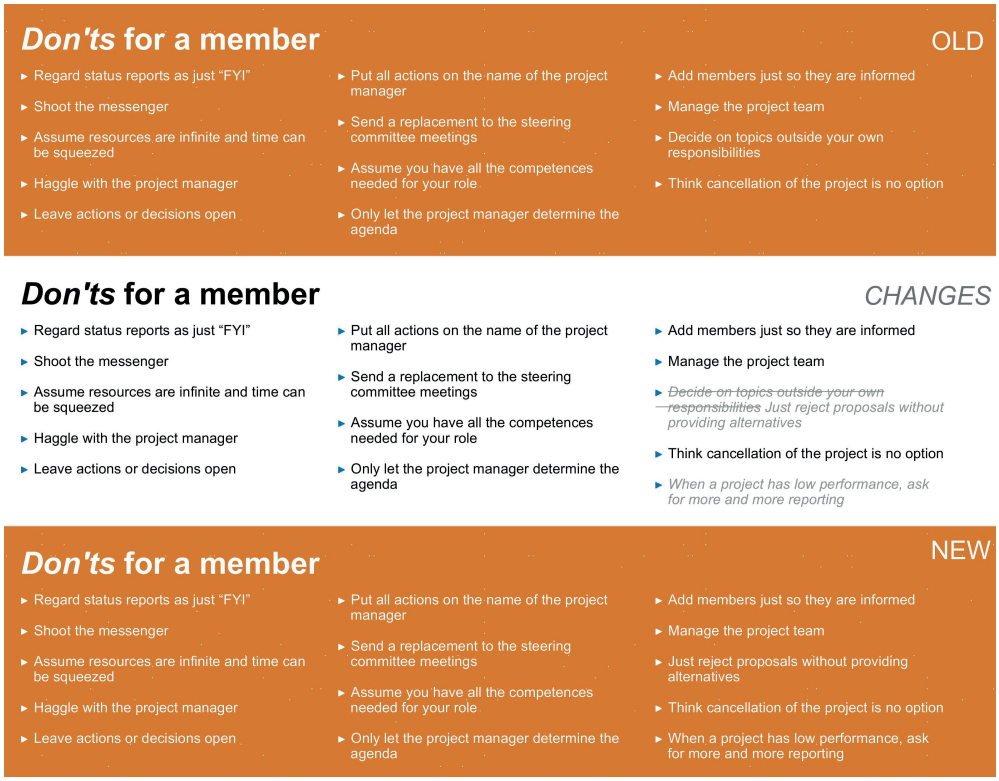

Figure A8: Quick Reference Card changes in Don'ts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When my employers asked me to consider pursuing a PhD in the field of project management, I discussed the implications with several PhDs and PhD candidates. Their main advice: "don't do it," as the research process generally does not align with the interests and competencies of a project manager. Still, I started, because I saw an opportunity to learn new skills and cooperate with new people. Looking back, both the advice and my own expectations were true. Being a researcher on project governance has little to do with being a project manager. However, I learned a great deal from literature, the writing and reviewing process, my colleagues at TU Delft, and from other scholars.

Therefore, I begin with a "thank you" to the colleagues who asked me to consider the PhD, mainly Arjan Jonker, Luuk Ketel, Ronald Kappert, and Gerard Meijer from project management firm KWD. Also, a thank you the colleagues at TU Delft. Of the scholars, I would like to mention Maedeh Molaei and Alexis Derumigny. Of the staff, I acknowledge the support of Sandra Schuchmann. I also appreciate the help of numerous researchers who provided professional and emotional support, such as the reviewers of the papers. Jan Postema helped me get started with literature, Rolf van den Berg with ideal roles of PSC members, and Likitha Balaji with decision-making in PSCs.

The respondents who shared their informed insights about project steering committees were vital to my research: about 50 interviewees, 200 questionnaire respondents, and numerous professionals who provided feedback on my ideas. Thanks to the professional organizations that provided support, such as BPUG, IPMA, PMI, APM Austria/Germany, KWD, NETLIPSE, and NAPNetwerk.

And then an appreciation for my family. It would be incorrect to state that they were enthusiastic when I began this research. However, my wife (Sandra) and children (Linde and Wilger) always supported my decision. I am confident my father will be pleased that I will become a Doctor of Philosophy. When I started my Master's studies in the 90's, he gave me a print of his own dissertation, including the handwritten text "Hopefully he [Jaap] will remain interested in natural sciences for other reasons than the technical–economic application." I think I always did, though my research would not be complete without valorization.

To finalize. I could not have completed my PhD without my supervisors. First, Professor Hans Bakker, who asked me what topics wonder me in project management, which led to this research on project steering committees. Second, Marian Bosch, my "daily" supervisor, who provided insights into research methodology and assisted with writing. Third, Herman Mooi: for his ongoing encouragement and as a massive help in getting knowledgeable respondents.

And now: Hora est.

LIST OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

- Stoppels, J., Bosch-Rekveldt, M., Mooi, H., & Bakker, H. L. M. (2023). Exploring current practice in the formation and functioning of Project Steering Committees. The Journal of Modern Project Management, 11(2), 59-77. https://doi.org/10.19255/JMPM03205
- Stoppels, J., Bosch-Rekveldt, M., Mooi, H., & Bakker, H. L. M. (2025). Roles and Responsibilities in Project Steering Committees. Project Management Journal, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/87569728251406593
- Stoppels, J., Bosch-Rekveldt, M., Derumigny, A., Mooi, H., & Bakker, H. L. M. (2026). Project Steering Committee Members and Project Success: A Quantitative Study on Individual Responsibilities, Shared Goals, and Mutual Trust. International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 19(8), 78-98. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-07-2025-0262

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Jaap Stoppels is a project and program manager for ICT implementations, business change, and innovation. Currently, he is responsible for improving digital data exchange between organizations in logistics on behalf of the Dutch government and the EU. Previous responsibilities included project management of ERP implementations, management of operations departments, and business development in corporate learning. In 1996, he obtained his Master's Degree in Industrial Engineering from the Eindhoven University of Technology.

He began his PhD at Delft University of Technology in 2018, driven by curiosity about how project steering committees function. Jaap applies insights from research on coaching project steering committees and public speaking. Furthermore, he applies insights into project governance in his roles as project owner and project manager. If you would like to discuss project governance, please contact him at jaap@jadra.nl.


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