The relevance of trait theory for the professionalisation of the new corporate professions: a case study of project management.

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The Relevance of Trait Theory for the Professionalisation of the New Corporate Professions:

A Case Study of Project Management

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The Relevance of Trait Theory for the Professionalisation of the New Corporate Professions:

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the extent to which trait theory is relevant to the new corporate professions through a case study of project management. The award of a Royal Charter to the UK-based professional body, Association for Project Management (APM) in 2017 was seen as the culmination of significant efforts to raise the profile of project management and to recognise the profession and its contribution to society. It is a complex field with a population of practitioners as diverse as the projects they deliver. Whilst there has been extensive research into the professions, the challenge remains as to what we recognise as a profession, particularly the newly emergent corporate professions such as project management.

Project management is often viewed as an 'accidental' profession due to the diverse backgrounds of practitioners, and this has implications in terms of respect and recognition. The literature has sought to consider the professionalisation of project management, but this has largely been through the prism of the professional bodies and the institutional setting with limited focus on the practitioner perspective.

This research is influenced by an interpretivist philosophical approach employing a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews to undertake an in-depth exploration of practitioner views, experiences and expectations of the professionalisation of project management.

The findings paint a complex picture that illustrates wide ranging and often polarised views from within a profession seemingly comprised of a somewhat non-homogenous group of practitioners, with differing priorities, and disciplinary backgrounds. Contradictions are revealed in relation to the importance of certification and competency; and a desire to be seen as an inclusive profession whilst sceptical of informal entrants. The study exposes practitioner frustrations at the absence of recognition of the skills required to successfully deliver project objectives, by other professionals and senior management within organisations but also uncovers an overriding concern over the lack of respect. The research reveals that despite being a discarded field of inquiry, trait theory should be considered a relevant approach to the profiling of new corporate professions. A revised trait model is offered that reflects such professions operating within the organisational settings of the twenty first century.

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

Overview

This research will examine the relevance of trait theory to the professionalisation of project management from a practitioner perspective. The background serves to contextualise the study and explain the origin of the idea. This first chapter sets out what is meant by a profession and the professionalisation process to aid understanding. A clear rationale for the research is established together with the research problem and the overarching aim and research questions. The chapter further explains the approach taken to the development of theory and the contribution being made. Finally, the structure of the thesis is summarised.

Project management is crucial to the delivery of change and strategic objectives within organisations. Indeed, such is its importance that the recent 'Golden Thread' report from the APM (2020) estimated that project management added £156billion to the UK economy. Modern project management, from its early origins within the US Military and NASA during the 1950's, has grown to become the discipline that we know today with almost every industry and sector adopting a formalised approach to deliver a diverse spectrum of projects in terms of technical requirements and complexity – from major infrastructure mega projects to integrated systems and network projects.

Early practitioners developed their expertise, largely through experience, with many becoming project managers by 'accident' as their careers took unexpected turns. But the advent of professional associations, Project Management Institute (PMI) and Association for Project Management (APM) around the 1970's saw the development of a more cohesive approach to the delivery of projects and the establishment of communities of practice. With the creation of certifications in the 1980's increasing efforts were made towards professionalisation.

Over recent years there has been an acceleration in the dialogue surrounding project management as a profession, with the professional bodies actively positioning it as such. Indeed, the acquisition of a Royal Charter by the Association of Project Management (APM) in 2017, seems to have successfully spring-boarded

the concept to the fore. But this raises questions around the legitimacy of the status and what it means for practitioners. Despite the professional bodies positioning it as such, for many, project management is often seen to be secondary to their original discipline such as is the case for engineering or information technology, and this presents something of a conflict in terms of practitioner identity.

Both major professional bodies, APM and PMI, have been active in the pursuit of professionalisation over recent years, with the former acquiring Chartered status in 2017. However, a key question remains in terms of how we measure achievement of this goal of professionalisation – at what point can we adjudicate that an occupational group has secured this valued status? Trait theory (see for example, Parsons, 1939; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933) was proffered as a means of classifying a profession, seeking to identify the important characteristics that must be present to distinguish it from an occupation. But this was subject to decades of discussion that continued into the 1970's before academic interest in the problem dissipated as the search for a definitive truth as to the nature of a profession lost momentum.

Whilst an underpinning premise for this research is the legitimacy of the status in so far as whether project management is or can be seen as a profession, the research will also examine what this means for the individual practitioner. It also seeks to understand the attitudes at practitioner level towards professionalisation and how these have been influenced by their experiences working in this field.

The focus for this study has been influenced by personal experience within the financial sector and witnessing both positive and negative impacts of its professionalisation project. Much attention in the literature is often paid to the corporate actors and professional bodies, and in the case of Financial Advisors, the regulator. However, this serves to take an externally driven perspective with limited concern for the perspective of the individual practitioner.

The professionalisation process itself can extend over many years and progress is often both slow and costly to the professional associations. Further scrutiny of the end goal, the potential benefits to be gained at an individual practitioner level, as well as the inherent risks, is therefore warranted in order to justify such an investment, given that this cost is usually ultimately passed on to the practitioner in the form of membership fees.

Other groups have embarked on similar professionalisation projects with varying degrees of success, and it is useful to consider whether lessons may be learned from these. An attempt to professionalise by Management Consultants, for example, struggled to gain traction (Kipping, 2011), and while Financial Advisers have achieved a greater level of success there remain challenges from a reputational perspective (Ring, 2016; Llewellyn, 2005).

This thesis will contribute to knowledge around professionalisation by considering the practitioner perspective of the characteristics of a profession and whether professional status adds value for the individual practitioners. It will re-examine trait theory and seek to theorise its relevance to the new corporate professions such as project management.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

Project management is a relatively new discipline (Hodgson and Muzio, 2010), borne out of the organisational landscape rather than individual specialists that we might see in the case of the old "true" professions such as law and medicine, for example.

Over recent years there has been a real push by the professional bodies, particularly the Association for Project Management (APM), to position project management as a profession, validated by the acquisition of a Royal Charter which has paved the way for individual Chartership. This has been positively received by many however the narrative amongst practitioners varies. That said, the move represents a significant step in the professionalisation process, and it is argued that against this backdrop this research provides timely insight.

Much of the existing literature, in terms of the professionalisation of project management, considers the steps taken in the process, as well as the role of particular stakeholder groups such as corporate entities and the professional associations (see for example, Sabini and Muzio, 2017). However, whilst Hodgson and Muzio (2012) suggest that there seems to be "significant demand on the part of practitioners seeking more secure and transferable credentials to act as guarantees of competence", there is very limited consideration of the practitioner perspective within the literature.

1.2 Impact

It is anticipated that this research will be of interest to those currently working within the field of project management who are looking to build a career and interested in becoming Chartered Project Professionals. The specific focus on the practitioner perspective will serve to highlight key issues for consideration by the professional associations in their push to professionalise, in particular the diverse nature of project management across all industries and sectors and raising awareness of the potential benefits and risks in achieving that goal.

The provision of a revised trait model for the new corporate professions, such as project management, represents an important theoretical development which will support professionalisation projects amongst these emergent professions.

It is hoped that it will also prove thought-provoking to those individuals who may be considering entering the occupation by providing insight as to the relative positioning of project management and the value that chartered status attaches to practitioners working in the field.

1.3 Contribution to Theory

The concept of theory has long been subject to debate amongst sociologists, compounded by what is understood by the term itself. Acknowledged as being an umbrella concept (Suddaby, 2014, p 4), Merton (1967) cautioned that "like so many words that are bandied around, the word 'theory' threatens to become meaningless. Because its referents are so diverse – including everything from minor working hypotheses, through comprehensive but vague and unordered speculations to axiomatic systems of thought – use of the word often obscures rather than creates understanding" (p. 39). This lack of an explicit, singularly accepted 'thing' that can be attributed to the word presents a semantic issue.

When seeking to make a theoretical contribution this presents a challenge. Corley and Gioia (2011) identify two important dimensions of theory – originality and utility, but they also call for prescience when theorising, pointing to "the process of discerning or anticipating what we need to know and, equally important, of influencing the intellectual framing and dialogue about what we need to know" (p 13). Debate also surrounds

the nature of theoretical contributions with Ferris, Hochwater and Buckley (2011) lamenting the "preoccupation with revelatory contributions to theory.....(that) seriously marginalises the nature of incremental contributions, which are very important to theory development" (p 97).

There are arguably a number of facets to theory, and it might be fair to say that understanding is often dependent upon interpretation of the intended meaning behind the term (Abend, 2008). Therein lies the problem according to Abend (2008), who argues that the word 'theory' is a prime example of a polyseme, where meanings are "etymologically and therefore semantically related, and typically originate from metaphorical usage" (Ravin and Leacock, 2000, p.2).

But whilst there is frustration amongst researchers, particularly in the field of management and organisational studies, at the ambiguity around the term 'theory' (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021; Tourish, 2019; Nicklin and Spector, 2016; Shapira, 2011; Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007) the many varied definitions do seem to ultimately centre around "conceptual knowledge that aims to explain phenomena" (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021, p. 488), at the "highest form" (Liedman, 2013, p. 41).

A helpful clarification from Cornelissen et al. (2021) suggests that theory "refers to the scholarly work that researchers do in pursuit of making informed knowledge claims" (p.3), further qualified by citing such examples as "defining concepts or constructs; or developing a coherent set of explanations; or by offering a compelling point of critique that counters past thinking on a topic" (p.3).

It is also useful to consider what constitutes good theory. Shalley (2012) argues that it is one which "challenges, changes, or fundamentally alters knowledge of a research domain" (p 261), suggesting that it is usually judged to be "novel, useful, and interesting work". This reinforces Davis' (1971) assertion that good theory is less about its truth and more about the degree to which it is considered to be interesting. Indeed, he argued that "an interesting proposition is one which denies some aspect of the assumption-ground of its audience" (Davis, 1971, p 327), which, in the case of this research, is the assumption that trait theory is no longer relevant when evaluating the professions.

The core aspect of theory in the academic realm is that it represents an intellectual interest rather than that

which might be formed by practitioners or business journalists (Cornelissen et al., 2021; Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021). Makadok, Burton and Barney (2018) position this as "academics are focusing on the 'forest', whereas practitioners and journalists are understandably more focused on the 'trees'" (p.3).

Whilst traditionally, the conventionalist approach to theory was typified by providing causal explanations (see for example, Sutton and Straw, 1995; Bacharach, 1989) others offer a more nuanced approach to reflect the complexity of perceptions (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2021; Abend, 2008).

In an attempt to determine 'what theory means' and 'what it should mean', Abend (2008) proffered a classification of seven different senses of theory within academic research, each representing subtle differences, highlighting the nuanced perspectives in the understanding of theory.

Theory①	A logically connected system that suggests a relationship between two or more variables
Theory②	An explanation of a particular social phenomenon
Theory③	Seeks to 'shed light on' or 'make sense of' a given phenomenon
Theory④	Used to refer to the study of such authors as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Bourdieu etc to determine the complexity of their meaning
Theory⑤	Concerned with our conceptual and linguistic choices and how we view, and represent the social world
Theory⑥	Used to refer to a normative account of a phenomenon
Theory⑦	Refers to discussions about the ways in which reality of socially constructed

Table 1.1 - Seven Senses of the word Theory Abend (2008)

Using Abend's model, this study adopts an approach to theory construction using a combination of theory types, something which he acknowledges and indeed advises may be appropriate. In the case of this research, the use of theory③ and theory⑦ is considered to be most suitable given the focus on project management as a new corporate profession and how perceptions are shaped by recognisable traits or characteristics. Other theory types have been discounted, for example, such as theory① on the basis that the study does not seek to make a causal connection between variables; or theory②, as it is not focused on explaining why practitioners

engage with a profession in a certain way.

In providing a theoretical contribution through a theory③, the research seeks to make sense of the project management profession through the lens of key traits. Abend (2008) readily acknowledges that this type of theory is not without its critics who suggest that it may be considered "conceptually vague, methodologically problematic or just unscientific" (p.179). However, he also points to the prevalence of such theories within European sociological traditions (Abend, 2006). The fact that theory③ seeks to offer a better understanding of the topic speaks to its relative value. This research also considers the extent to which our perceptions of all professions are socially constructed within culture, and this sits within the realm of a theory⑦.

Sandberg and Alvesson (2021) offer a slightly different, but perhaps clearer approach whereby they typify theory into five categories: explaining, comprehending, ordering, enacting, and provoking.

Theory Type	**Conceptual Mechanism**	**Relevance**	**Intellectual Insight**
Explaining	Logically related variables	What, how, why, who, when, where. Empirical accuracy and testable	Causally related variables
Comprehending	Systems of meaning, in-depth interpretation	Comprehensive accounts of how people make sense of their reality and themselves. Moving beyond these and pointing to some unrecognised key aspect or quality	The meaning(s) of phenomena
Ordering	Typification	Theoretically helpful typification of phenomena	Typology of how phenomena hang together
Enacting	Dynamic ordering of the (re)productive processes of phenomena	Clearly illuminate the logic of key processes through which phenomena are (re)produced	The processual logic of the (re)production of phenomena
Provoking	Provocative and eye-opening framing of phenomena	Reframing phenomena to provoke, open up new questions and ways of thinking	Challenging perspective

Table 1.2 - Typology of theory types Adapted from Sandberg & Alvesson (2021)

Using this approach, this research contributes by way of a comprehending type of theory as it seeks to explore the phenomenon of professionalisation in respect of the new corporate professions in the context of their characteristics. The often-dominant explanatory theory (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2020; Reed, 2011; Herrnstein-Smith, 2005; Whetten, 1989) is not appropriate in this instance as whilst there are indeed variables – professionalisation, trait theory and project management - its purpose is not to provide an explanation of causality.

1.3.1 Theorising

Theorising, or the act of creating a theory appears equally to be the cause of confusion in the literature. However, Hammond (2018) simply suggests that "it is in part a matter of hunch" (p 6). Delving behind this 'hunch' helps to understand what prompts or drives a researcher to the resultant theory, as Cornelissen et al (2021) argue, it is this articulation that allows others to follow.

There are different forms of theorising that enrich our understanding of concepts. Cornelissen et al (2021) proffer three core forms: explanatory, interpretive and emancipatory. Explanatory theorising broadly serves to achieve explanations for a phenomenon, for example, how things are currently, whilst interpretive theorising seeks to provide a deep understanding with layers of meaning. Emancipatory theorising challenges existing beliefs and assumptions and in the context of this study, this serves to highlight that trait theory is far more important to the professionalisation of project management than has recently been acknowledged.

It is certainly possible to see a degree of overlap with Sandberg and Alvesson's (2021) typology here. The explanatory approach is evident in both models and the comprehending element is closely aligned to Cornelissen et al's (2021) interpretive form of theorising. The challenging of existing assumptions mirrors the 'provoking' type proffered by Sandberg and Alvesson (2021).

1.3.2 The Role of Problematisation

In order to achieve a good theoretical contribution through interesting research, Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) propose the use of problematisation as a methodology. They argue that in "identifying and challenging assumptions that underpin existing theory researchers can develop influential theories" (p.247).

This approach of problematising the literature to explain why existing knowledge is incomplete or inadequate (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997) supports the development of research questions. Although there has been criticism of incremental contributions to theory, particularly within the management field, there is a growing argument that value can be gained through the development of "new theories and ways of thinking about organisations, coupled with a plausible methodology that grounds the theory" (Daft and Lewin, 2008, p 182).

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) suggest five assumptions along a continuum that can be considered for problematisation. The in-house assumptions (those within a given school of thought), they argue, are a "minor form of problematisation" (p 255) with those to the right-hand side of this continuum deemed more fundamental. Indeed, this is reminiscent of Davis' (1971) criteria for an interesting theory by challenging often long-held assumptions.

Figure 1.1 - Continuum of assumptions for problematization Alvesson and Sandberg (2011)

Their typology goes further than Davis' (1971) earlier 'index of the interesting' which sought to identify twelve ways to challenge assumptions, albeit these would be broadly sectioned into two categories - characterisation of a single phenomenon and relationships between multiple phenomena.

This study has developed from field assumptions, focusing on an area not currently being debated but one which has been discussed in the past. It is also cross-boundary and cross disciplinary in nature.

1.4 The Research Problem

The professionalisation of project management is underpinned by assumptions around what we understand a profession to be. Indeed, the origins of this research first lay within the question "is project management a profession"? The fact that there remains no confirmed definition of the anatomy of a profession raised an interesting conundrum in the context of the professionalisation project.

Examination of the literature relating to trait theory revealed numerous attempts over many years to identify the characteristics of a profession, largely based on the more traditional professions of such as medicine and law. As the debate faltered, and with the advent of the study of the corporate professions, the focus switched to jurisdictional claims (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986). As theorists struggled with the lack of consensus around the characteristics of a profession, it led to the premature abandonment of trait theory in the latter part of the twentieth century effectively leaving a theoretical dead-end (Nolin, 2018). But this has left a key question unanswered: without clarity as to the destination, how can we judge the professionalisation project a success? The use of a comprehending approach to theory development in this dissertation seeks to address this question.

1.5 The research aim:

To explore the extent to which trait theory is relevant to the new corporate professions: A case study of project management.

1.6 The research questions

- What is the value and relevance to the practitioner of professional status?
- Does trait theory aid understanding of professions amongst practitioners?
- What are the perceived benefits and risks to the practitioner of professionalisation?

1.7 Definition of Terms

Professionalisation is the process by which occupational groups seek to move from being non-professional to professional, however, as Freidson (1986) states, “without some definition of profession the concept of professionalisation is virtually meaningless”.

1.7.1 What is a profession?

It is perhaps useful, therefore, to consider what is meant by this term. We often see terminology used interchangeably: profession and professionalism. The Encyclopedia Britannica offers that “In early British and

American analyses, professionalism was identified as an occupational value that was important for the stability and civility of social systems. In those interpretations, professional relations were characterized as collegial, cooperative, and mutually supportive. Relations of trust characterized practitioner-client and practitioner-management interactions, as competence was assumed to be guaranteed by education, by training, and sometimes by licensing".

Burrage (1990) suggests that historically, it was in the late seventeenth century that "a few elite occupations which thought themselves more learned, more honourable, more independent" (p 151) than others differentiated themselves as professions, as a kind of distinctive sub-set of occupations. Even at this earliest point there would still be disagreement in terms of which occupation had the greater status. Since then, larger numbers of occupations have sought the status with varying degrees of success, with some securing the prestigious recognition and others still challenging perceptions.

Professions were seen to wield significant power whilst operating for the good of society and therefore key institutions for the modernization of society (Nolin, 2018), indeed Parsons (1954), acknowledged as being particularly influential in the study of the professions, argued they were the "bearers of rational values and the type of knowledge that would serve as economic drivers" (Brante, 1988, p 120). It was arguably this high status that spurred many occupations to seek to position themselves as a profession, encouraged perhaps by Greenwood's (1957) suggestion that rather than there being a salient demarcation between occupation and profession, instead these groups were part of a spectrum that Nolin (2018) argues indicated "it was possible to strengthen already existing features in order to be qualified as a profession" (p, 18).

Over time, consideration was also given to the so-called 'semi-professions' (Goode, 1969; Simpson and Simpson, 1969). A contentious concept that seemingly delineated along gendered lines between those that were deemed to be true professions, largely male dominant, and those typically female dominated fields such as teaching, nurses and librarians. A key criticism of these semi-professions according to Nolin (2018) was suggested to be that they lacked autonomous expertise with Simpson and Simpson (1969) proffering that the nature of their specialist knowledge was theoretically weak.

1.7.2 Professionalisation

Understanding what is meant by professionalisation is not aided by the fact that terms such as professionalisation and professionalism often used interchangeably. However, this study considers professionalism as relating to behaviours of the individual such that they perform in a way expected of someone belonging to a profession. Visano in Jacobs and Bosanac (2006) describes it as "the attributes and images that confer essentialized master identities based on credentials, and the appropriation of technical knowledge and experiences" (pp. xviii). Professionalisation, on the other hand, is deemed to be the process through which an occupation transitions to a profession. Whilst there is broad agreement within the literature that there are steps within this process beyond that, there does not seem to be any real consensus as to the exact nature of these steps and the order in which they are achieved (Zwerman et al., 2004).

The process to professionalise should be viewed as a long-term endeavor and as Woods (2014) suggests, "it is not for the faint hearted" (pp. 202). In acknowledging that professions are not immediately born, Zwerman et al. (2004) cite Ritzer and Walczak (1986) in their attempt to proffer a six-step process drawing on the early works of Caplow (1954) and Wilensky (1964). These steps comprise the creation, or ring-fencing of activities to constitute a full-time occupation, establishing a domain name and a national association, developing training certification, establishing a code of ethics to govern activity and seeking to secure popular and legal support. These would seem logical given the previously noted characteristics of a profession, but it is less clear on the order in which these should be pursued.

There are a number of acknowledged challenges in relation to the process of professionalisation that have been experienced by occupations and this will be explored further in the Literature Review in Chapter Two.

1.8 Philosophical Stance

The philosophical assumptions of the researcher are acknowledged to influence the way in which a study is designed and conducted (Creswell and Poth, 2018). As an interpretivist, I take the view that reality is socially constructed based on "how individuals' subjective interpretations of reality affect the formation of their reality" (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015, p. 11).

The nature of this study is an exploration of practitioner beliefs, perceptions and understanding of

developments within the domain of project management in relation to professionalisation. This is reflective of an interpretivist philosophy in seeking to examine attitudes and experiences in complex organizational settings with a multitude of social actors (Saunders and Lewis, 2012).

A more detailed discussion around the philosophical stance and the research approach to this study is presented in Chapter Three.

1.9 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by providing insight from the practitioner perspective which has been neglected to date. Whilst much of the literature in this area focuses on the process of professionalisation and the corporate organisations and professional associations, there is no real consideration of how this process affects those most closely involved i.e., the practitioners themselves.

It reveals that far from being an outdated approach, trait theory does still have relevance to the classification of professions. In fact, how we define a profession is deeply entrenched at a cultural level of society.

The research determines that there is an appetite for the formalising of boundary claims and the associated requirements such as certification and/or licensing, whilst presenting a complex picture.

It also highlights the contradictions that emerge from an occupational group that is not as homogenous as the professional bodies seem to suggest. Yet, there is consensus around the desire for greater respect to be afforded to project professionals in recognition of their key skills in successfully delivering project objectives.

1.10 The structure of the thesis

The initial chapter presents an introduction to the focus of study with some background as to what is understood by the terms, “profession” and “professionalisation”. It defines the research problem and establishes the rationale for the research and its contribution to the knowledge in this area.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of the literature, considering the logic of the professions and how this relates to the modern emerging professions. It examines the institutionalist nature of project management and the impact of this particular environment on the professionalisation journey within this

discipline. Consideration is also given to the role of a Royal Charter in formalizing, and legitimizing project management in the context of the practitioner.

Chapter Three provides the research design and the supporting justification for the choices made. The study adopted an exploratory approach with a qualitative emphasis to examine the perspectives of 30 participants currently working within project management as either project or programme managers. This was achieved through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants from a breadth of industries and sectors, and career stages. By soliciting the practitioner views on the professionalisation project, this research offers original insight where other studies have tended to focus on corporate entities and professional associations.

Chapter Four presents the findings from this study taking a thematic approach across the rich data and these are then subject to critical evaluation in Chapter Five, Discussion, and synthesized with the extant literature.

Finally, Chapter Six, draws upon this Discussion to present conclusions that demonstrate the achievement of the study's objectives and how consideration of the research questions has contributed to this.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to provide some clarity around the terms, "profession" and "professionalisation" to provide a fundamental basis for the study, and these will be further examined within Chapter Two. The aim and objectives of this study have been clearly established together with a comprehensive set of supporting research questions, and the chapter has also presented a rationale for the research, outlining its contribution and originality.

The researcher's stance of interpretivism has influenced the design of the study in order to explore the perspectives of practitioners on the professionalisation of project management.

The relevance of the research at this time is heightened by the award of the Royal Charter to the UK-based professional body, the Association for Project Management which has opened up the opportunity for practitioners to become individually chartered, and potentially highly sought-after in the corporate world of projects.

Chapter 2 : The Literature Review

Overview

Overall, the literature review is arranged into key themes central to the research questions, paying particular attention to key elements from trait theory as it relates to the professions. The chapter includes an evaluation of certification and qualifications, licensing, registration and regulation, and chartership; as well as the benefits and risks of professionalisation. The critical evaluation provides an evidence base for the study and informs the research design of this thesis. Due to the nature of the topic area, the literature examined crossed disciplinary boundaries and resulted in a multi-faceted interrogation of the resources.

The summary draws together an overview of the themes explored and serves to demonstrate the gap that exists in support of this study.

The Literature Search

In order to fully investigate the research topic, a critical review of the literature was conducted. This sought to examine the many facets relevant to the research questions and overall objectives for the study (Booth et al, 2016).

Underpinning this research is the notion of how we define a profession and there is a wealth of literature in this field however it is important to state that this is not meant to represent an exhaustive examination of the history of the study in this particular area. Instead, it provides relevant context as it relates to the focus of this research study.

The nature of the study of professions and professionalisation is cross-disciplinary and therefore literature was sourced through a variety of subject areas beyond the expected field of management and organisational studies. The research included elements of sociology, education and the human resources literature.

Much of the extant literature around the study of the professions resides within the sociological field of research and considers the sociology of work and labour, and the roles that individuals play within this context,

whilst there are also numerous accounts of the development of individual professions, often with origins in the Medieval Guilds, in the historical literature.

Education literature provided insight into credentialing and certification, and the attitudes towards these. As a relatively new discipline, project management is still subject to ongoing development in this particular area with a noticeable disconnect between education and profession. Alongside certification, licensing and regulation can be seen within both the education and human resources fields.

The development of a conceptual map for the literature search facilitated a systematic approach to the scoping of the search.

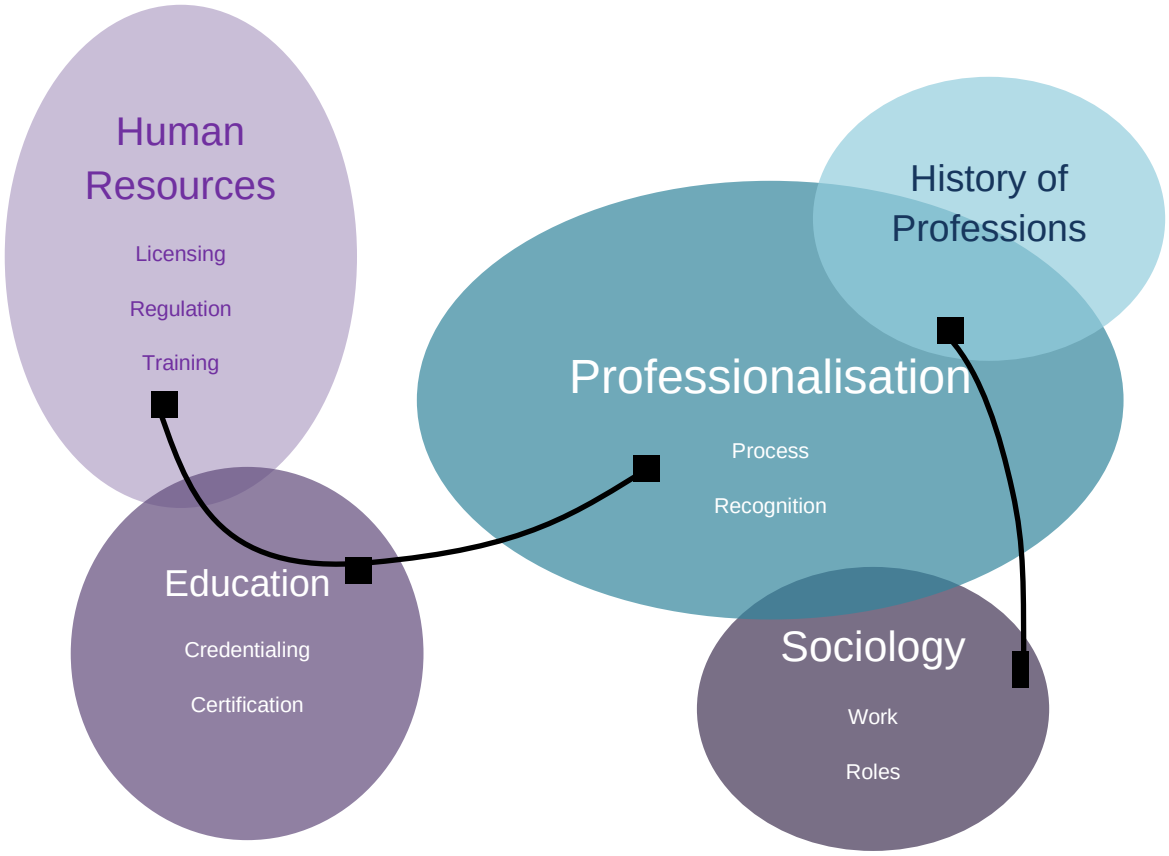

Figure 2.1 - Conceptual map for literature search

The purpose of the literature review is to explore the elements identified within this conceptual map to develop an understanding of the existing contributions to these areas and their relevance to the research questions of this study. This provides a themed framework that will later inform the research design (Sekaran

and Bougie, 2013) which seeks to examine the practitioner perspective of the professionalisation of project management.

A process of search approaches was adopted to explore the literature within the key themed areas identified within the conceptual map (Figure 2.1) and included the following:

Approach	Examples
Initial scoping search	Search of selected databases Identification of key search terms "Pearl-growing"
Main search	Free text searching inc. truncation and wildcards. Grey literature searching
Bibliography search	Citation searching Author searching

Table 2.1 - Process for literature search based on Booth et al. (2016)

The initial scoping search focused primarily on just two databases, Business Source Complete and Sage Business Management. This facilitated the collation of a number of key terms and aspects of terminology that would be required for the full literature search. The search then expanded to a wider selection of electronic databases deemed appropriate based on the conceptual map for the literature outlined earlier.

Given the cross disciplinary aspects underpinning this study, it was necessary to explore a varied range of databases to identify relevant literature for consideration and inclusion within this review. This was achieved through a purposive sampling of the databases (Booth et al., 2016).

The list of databases utilised within this study is detailed in Table 2.2 and the rationale for using a multitude of databases was to ensure comprehensive coverage as some may be limited in scope and the objective was to gain a full insight into the key themes identified. It is important to acknowledge that simply searching a selection of databases alone will not reveal all literature in the specific research area (Jesson et al. 2011)

Database	Coverage
Business Source Complete	Business and management
Cambridge University Press Journals	Sciences and social sciences
EbscoHost eBook Collection	eBooks on a wide range of subjects
Emerald	Wide range of subjects including business and management, industry and training
Google Scholar	Wide range of subjects
Sage Business Management	Business and management, industrial relations and labour
Sage Education	Education and educational research
Sage Journals Online	Business, humanities, social sciences and sciences
Sage Knowledge	Business, education, sociology, psychology and health
Science Direct	Wide range of subjects including life and physical sciences, and business
Scopus	Wide range of subjects including social sciences, psychology and economics
SpringerLink	Sciences and social sciences
Taylor and Francis Online	Wide range of subjects including business, humanities, social sciences
Wiley Online Library	Life, health, physical and social sciences

Table 2.2 - Catalogue of Databases

and so additional approaches were employed to supplement this and to maximise the extent to which the relevant literature was captured.

Adopting the “pearl-growing” technique is a useful mechanism to support the development of a list of terms by

identifying a key article considered to be central to the research questions which then facilitates further searches radiating from this (Booth et al., 2016). In this study, there were a handful of articles that were identified at an early stage as being particularly pertinent to the research questions.

As part of the free text searching of databases, the use of Boolean indicators was employed to further develop the search of appropriate terms. According to Boolean logic, it is possible to incorporate the words AND, OR, NOT to expand, reduce or exclude terms when searching databases. Many databases allow for the use of a wild card (?) or truncation (*) which allow for alternate spellings or versions of words, such as for example 'professionalisation/professionalization'. In addition to these, adjacency and proximity operators are recommended as they indicate that terms should be near to or next to each other to retrieve records (Booth et al., 2016; Jesson et al., 2013; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013), which was necessary for the phrase 'project management'.

Consideration was given to some important factors such as:

- It was necessary to be selective with the articles retrieved to ensure relevance and this was particularly so where terminology is frequently used interchangeably such as professional / professionalism / professionalisation.
- The notion of professional identity represents a significant field of research that falls outside of the core scope of this study. Therefore, beyond an acknowledgement of this element to individual practitioners, it will not be addressed.
- The use of synonyms aided in the selection of search terms particularly where the origins of the literature lay outside of the UK.

A variety of data sources was explored and these included books, journals, conference proceedings, reports and unpublished manuscripts as well as content from the grey literature. Books offer more in-depth coverage on a subject, for example such as the development of professions, although a criticism often directed towards such resources is that they soon become out of date (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Journal articles, however, are valuable in presenting more recent developments and advances in knowledge and have the benefit of being peer-reviewed. Conference proceedings similarly provide a source of new work, as yet, unpublished.

Searches of the grey literature, for example the websites of the professional bodies and the Privy Council, provided factual information regarding the awarding of a Royal Charter, and the Higher Education Academy as a source of educational research.

In a similar vein to the use of pearl-growing, citation and author searching was found to be invaluable in tracing further relevant literature by exploring the resources utilised by authors in the field of inquiry as well as investigating studies by a given author(s). This was particularly helpful in the search for professionalisation in the context of project management in identifying key authors.

2.1 Professions and Professionalisation

The concept of a profession has been subject to substantial research since the early work of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939), and through a number of perspectives. Erault (1994) suggests that a profession addresses "social control of expertise" (p.2) and he points to a description by Rueschemeyer (1983) which he argues is central to the functionalist paradigm:

> "Individually and, in association, collectively, the professions 'strike a bargain with society' in which they exchange competence and integrity against the trust of client and community, relative freedom from lay supervision and interference, protection against unqualified competition as we all as substantial remuneration and higher social status" (ibid, p. 41)

However, within the sociology of the professions, the dominant paradigms of functionalist and power have long been criticized for failing to take into account the wider institutional context and the shift in professional activity in the latter part of the twentieth century (Muzio et al., 2013; Leicht and Fennell, 2008; Brock et al., 2007). Indeed, Oppenheimer (1973) cautioned that operating within the limitations of the corporate organisation the professions would suffer an inexorable erosion of their autonomy succumbing to "managerial pressures and proletarianisation" (p 213). Although, this argument has been refuted by Muzio et al. (2013) who challenge Friedson's (2001) view that professionalism, managerialism and entrepreneurship are "opposing and mutually exclusive logics". Instead, they support others (Goodrick and Reay, 2011; Pinnington and Morris, 2003; Leicht and Fennell, 2001) who proffer that far from being disjoint these logics can coexist in a kind of hybridization and that there can be many different forms of professionalism.

With so many occupational groups seeking to achieve the status of a profession, the challenge they face centres around the criteria they must meet in order to be recognised and accepted as such. But another criticism that is raised by Dingwall (2008) is political. He argues that "the notion of profession is a concept that is used solely to achieve the successful mystification of a class interest" (2008, p 13). This might seem to reflect the traditional professions and their role in society although Dingwall (2008) challenges why "one observer's imposition of class cohesion should have priority over any other's" (p 13).

2.2 Trait Theory

Since the early traditional professions of medicine and law, the nature of a profession has evolved over time, with scholars seeking to classify the key characteristics in an attempt to determine the distinguishing elements that sets professions apart from other occupations (Parsons, 1939; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933).

The taxonomic approach to how we define a profession became popular during the 1950's and 1960's when theorists enthusiastically set about trying to determine the central characteristics or traits of a profession (trait theory), building on the discussion which originally began with Flexner (1915) and developed by Parsons (1939) and Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) two decades later. It resulted in a multitude of lists that varied from high level characteristics to the more obscure and granular features.

Central to this taxonomic approach was believed to be knowledge and expertise, a proposition presented by many theorists including Friedson (1970), Wilensky (1964), Kornhauser (1962), and Greenwood (1957). It was felt that this was a particularly important trait and some suggest the more complex and esoteric the body of knowledge or theory, the more venerated the profession was viewed (Saks, 2012). Friedson's (1986) view that "recognised professions often had a strong formal knowledge and higher educational base than other occupations" (p 2) supports Greenwood's assertion that preparation for practice in the professions is intellectual.

But despite decades of discussion there is still no definitive truth as to the nature of a profession, perhaps further compounded by the notion that all occupations and professions are suggested to be in the process of professionalisation (Olesen and Whilttaker,1970), that is to say, in an ongoing state of evolution. It is argued that far from being clearly delineated, even the old professions "splinter, extend their domains and take into

themselves new attributes which only they possess" (Hughes, 1961). These shifting sands present a key challenge in how we define a profession. Indeed, Nolin (2008) points to what he views as the abandonment of the study of the concept of profession post-1970's which saw the focus shift towards professionalism leaving what he describes as a "theoretical dead end" (2008, p10).

Between the 1930's and the 1970's many researchers had attempted to offer their criteria or traits of a profession in a bid to provide some kind of definition. Greenwood (1957), for example, suggested five elements that he believed represented "the distinguishing attributes of a profession" (p 45) – systematic theory or a body of knowledge, professional authority and credibility, community sanction or regulation of entry, a code of ethics and a culture of values. In proffering this model, however, he acknowledges that it is "much sharper and clearer than the actuality that confronts us" (p 54).

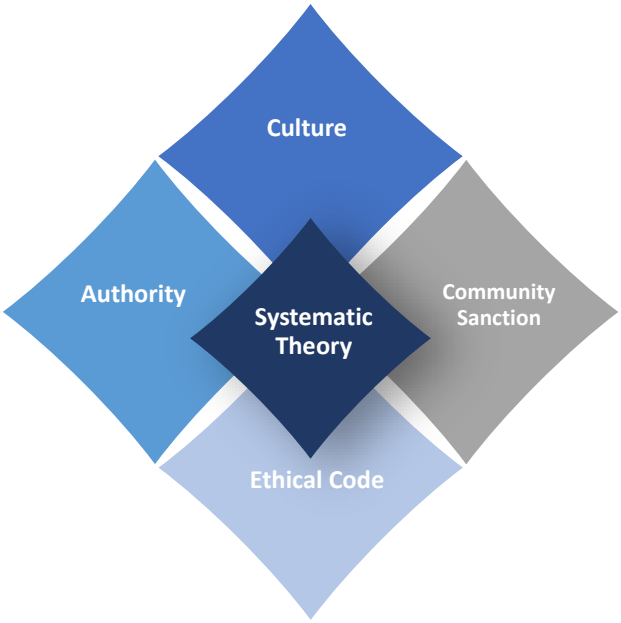

Figure 2.2 - Attributes of a Profession Greenwood (1957)

The body of knowledge element of Greenwood's model sparks debate however, Freidson (1970) argues that "if there is no systematic body of theory, it is created for the purpose of being able to say there is" (p 79), perhaps as some form of box ticking exercise. Roth (1974) concurs suggesting that perhaps this leads to the deliberate creation of lengthy training in order to be seen as a profession. One of the criticisms directed towards trait theory is that it lacks clarity as to whether the attributes represent an ideal type that should serve as a

template for all professions, or whether "it describes presumed features of professional groups" (Saks, 2012 p 2)

But it is perhaps in the area of authority that Roth's criticism has particular resonance for the field of project management. He suggests that far from "being forced to accede to professional judgement" (Greenwood, 1957, p 48) potential clients are often in a stronger position and have choices available to them in terms of the professional services they engage. Roth (1974) points to the extent to which "professional practitioners are often engaged in sharp competition to get or keep clients …. and are captives of one (or a few) very powerful clients" (p 8).

Parsons (1954) took a slightly different approach and suggested that the characteristics of a profession were "emotional neutrality, a symmetrical relationship toward clients, loyalty among the professional group, specialists in their field, and attaining status for performance not from heritage" (Nolin, 2008, p 17). It could be argued that there are some synergetic relationships between some of Parsons' and Greenwood's characteristics – systematic theory/specialists in their field, for example. Interestingly, however is the view regarding the relationship with clients. Whilst Greenwood points to professional authority, Parsons' symmetrical relationship toward clients seems to suggest something more evenly matched.

Others have also contributed to the debate by proffering lists of the traits they felt characterized a profession. However, some of these seem to have been taken to a far deeper, granular level and it might be argued that these can also be seen in non-professions. For example, Perrucci and Gerstl's (1969) suggest that a differentiator is 'challenging work'. A labourer engaged in particularly arduous physical activity might argue their work is challenging but society does not view this as a profession. Similarly, Gross (1958) propose a 'degree of personality involvement', which again could be argued is subject to conjecture.

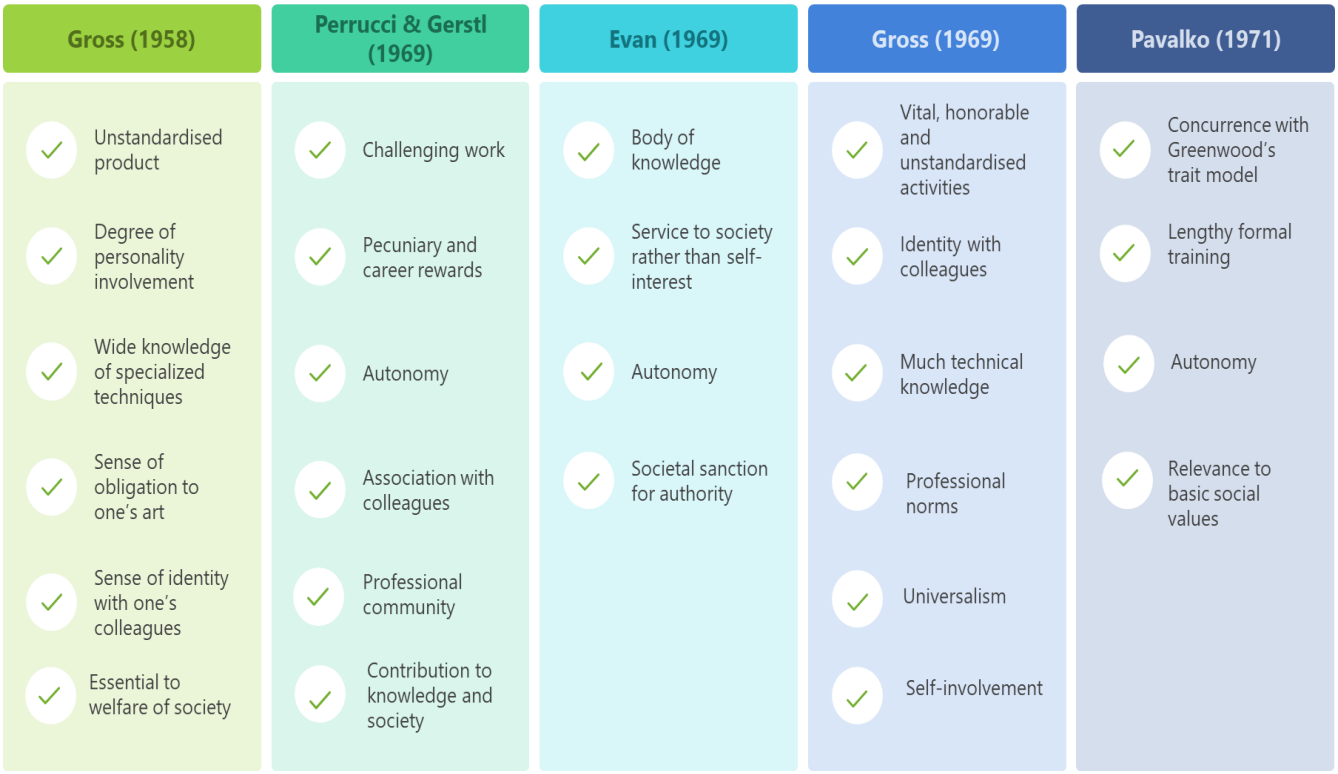

Figure 2.3 - Selected Trait Lists

However, those that challenge trait theory often direct their criticism towards individual criteria within these lists. Klegon (1978) questions whether it is possible "to apply the lists of criteria to concrete situations" (p 262). The presence of a body of knowledge is cited as an example by Wilensky (1964) who acknowledged that whilst this is often viewed as a core trait or attribute of a profession, the nature of this knowledge must be carefully considered. If it is too narrow and technical, it risks being "learned by a set of rules by most people, and then the occupation will have difficulty claiming a monopoly of skill" (1964, p 148). Jamous and Peloille (1970) argue that the nature of the body of knowledge is far from static and can be subject to manipulation to serve the needs of the practitioners themselves. This presents a challenge, Klegon (1978) suggests, when comparing professions. He points to Hall (1975) who differentiated between professions and crafts (occupations) whereby the "professions are based on theoretical knowledge, whereas crafts are based on technique" (p 263). Using Hall's notion, Klegon (1978) questions is it therefore possible to contend that surgery is a craft due to the manual dexterity required, and arguably is no different to a mechanic seeking to diagnose a fault and repair it?

Where this knowledge is gained is also highlighted as a differentiator with some (Friedson, 1973; Rueschemeyer, 1964) suggesting that the "contemporary professions are usually based on formal higher

education rather than on trade school or long apprenticeship in practising some manual skill said to require complex judgement" (Friedson, 1973, p 22). The implications of this could arguably be seen to point towards a wider class issue within society and the perceptions of the role of professions (Klegon, 1978).

More recently, Nolin (2008) suggests a simple set of three criteria: minimum of three-year academic degree programme, existence of a professional association and lifelong vocational training or continual professional development, perhaps offering a more pragmatic approach more reflective of professions such as engineering.

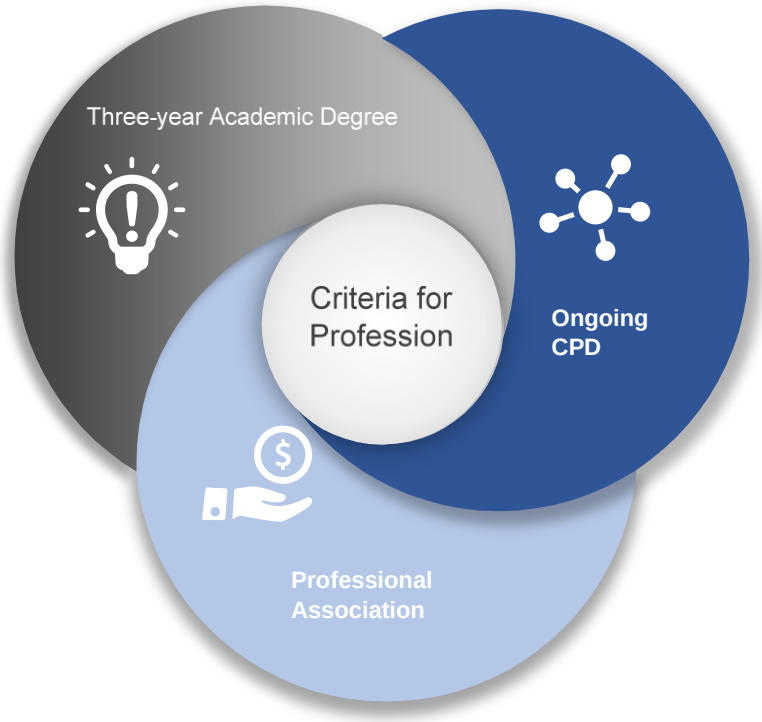

Figure 2.4 - Criteria for Profession Nolin (2008)

Interestingly, even those that have sought to take an alternative approach to the professions (see for example Friedson, 1986) have been criticised for, arguably, still adopting "a similar operation as the attribute theorists" (Dingwall, 2008, p 13) whether those attributes be requirement-based or behavioural. Indeed, the move towards a greater focus on professionalism in the literature fails to explicitly acknowledge the nexus with trait theory.

Perhaps fundamental to the definition of a profession is the division of expert labour and in particular, their jurisdictional claims (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986). But it is the focus on specialist knowledge as a key differentiator, however, that does seem to elicit some consensus in the literature (Bosanac and Jacobs, 2006).

Over two decades' ago, Reed (1996) produced his taxonomy of the expert occupations, in a similar vein to Greenwood's efforts almost 40 years earlier, in which he sought to categorize the emerging professions however, this still relied on the traditional traits model and there has been some question as to the relevance of this in the modern world. However, as the discussion continued, the notion of "free" and "institution bound" professions emerged (Hughes, 1958) and this separation arguably became the genesis of the ongoing debate surrounding the so-called corporate professions.

Nolin (2008) acknowledges a "complicated research field dominated by sociology" (p. 10) and the characteristics illustrated in Figure 2.4, have been drawn together by the researcher from a review of the extensive literature on the professions in an attempt to explore the perceptions of the nature of a profession in the twenty-first century. These characteristics have been utilized in the design of the interviews conducted within this study.

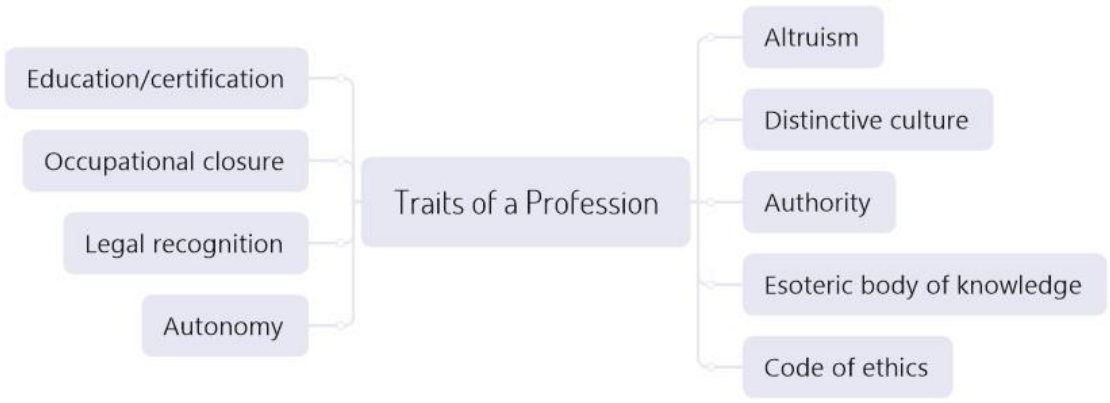

Figure 2.5 - Traits of a Profession

From the 1990's onwards, much of the focus of the literature moved away from providing a definitive delineation and towards an exploration of the process of professionalisation itself. As the functionalist approach seemed to "fall out of fashion" and the problem appeared unsolvable (Nolin, 2008, p. 10), this resulted in a stalled pursuit of a clear map of what differentiates a profession from an occupation. Friedson

(2001), an influential researcher in this field, even suggested efforts be redirected away from this essentialism towards professionalism.

And whilst this has proven to be a popular field of inquiry (see for example, Evetts, 2003) it can be criticised for dancing around the edges without defining what a profession is. Indeed, this raises questions as to how it can be possible to professionalise if the end result is still as yet undefined.

It is clear from the substantial work in this field that a number of the emergent professions do share commonality of some of these traits and characteristics of a profession but few, if any, manage to achieve all. Indeed, Beckman in Burrage and Torstendahl (1990) argues that this Aristotelian pursuit of the essence of a profession is akin to chasing shadows.

Whilst the landscape in which many aspirational professions operate has changed since the early traditional professions, many theorists mark the presence of certain traits/characteristics/attributes as differentiators. Greenwood (1957), who contributed his own model to the argument, contends that far from there being a simple clear-cut delineation, professions and occupations should be seen as being distributed along a continuum. But he argues that the presence of these attributes is not necessarily exclusionary to the professions, perhaps further clouding the issue. Rather, Greenwood suggests that there are commonalities across occupations and professions, but it is the degree to which they possess the various attributes that determines their location on the continuum.

Many varied traits have been proffered by the numerous theorists over the years (see figure 2.4) seeking to identify the characteristics of a profession. Of these, there are some elements that appear to be more prominent and have been central to the professionalisation efforts of the professional bodies. They are therefore worthy of closer examination:

- Education/Certification
- Licensing/Occupational Closure
- Formalised Professional Associations

2.3 Certification by Qualification

The traditional characteristics of a profession, according to trait theory, are suggested to include such aspects as exclusive control of a body of knowledge, education, monopoly of title and legal recognition (Zwerman et al., 2004; Wilensky, 1964). The education or certification element is mandatory for the more established professions, such as law and medicine however in the newer professions such as "project management, purchasing and logistics, IT management, and human resource management" (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas, 2018, p498) it is voluntary certification that is commonplace. Unlike traditional professions where certification is akin to licensing and a legal requirement in order to practise (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas, 2018; Morris et al., 2006; Wiley, 1995) voluntary certification is pursued as a form of professional development where individuals consider the perceived cost to benefit (Lipner et al., 2006). Whether the certification is mandatory or voluntary, it is used to demonstrate mastery of a body of knowledge (Lengnick-Hall and Aguinis, 2012).

As well as being a recognised step towards professionalisation (Wilensky, 1964) certification is used for impression management, the acquisition of legitimacy and improving reputational capital (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas, 2018). Indeed, de los Rios, Puente and Almela (2011) found that 75% of practitioners of different levels of seniority, viewed IPMA (International Project Management Association) certifications to have a positive impact on their employability. Certification arguably affords the holder status and recognition (Morris et al., 2006) but one of the challenges when professionalising, of course, is "deciding who to certify, at what levels and then who to license" (Morris et al., 2006, p 714).

2.3.1 Motivation for Voluntary Certification

In the field of project management professional certification has been actively embraced, with significant numbers of practitioners investing in the various qualifications offered by the two main professional associations (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas 2018) as well as certifications in relation to specific methodologies, such as PRINCE2, Managing Successful Programmes (MSP) and Management of Risk (MoR). Over recent years, the motivations behind pursuit of certification have been extensively researched through the lens of behavioural theory, including self-determination theory (SDT) which holds that to understand

human motivation “requires consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness” (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p227). Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas (2018) point to both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that may come into play for those engaging in voluntary certification. For some, the enjoyment or personal satisfaction derived from the activity (intrinsically motivated behaviour) (Fertig, 2011) is the primary driver whilst for others, it is the extrinsic, tangible benefits such as individual or organisational reward and reputational enhancement that is uppermost behind the goal-driven behaviour (Lee et al., 2015).

It is suggested that there are three types of motivation (Figure 2.4) when it comes to certification (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas 2018). The first of which is borne out of the desire to “be good” at the work and to improve competency. The second is to “look good” and be able to evidence this level of capability (Lester and Dwyer, 2015) but Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas (2018) sought to take this a step further and identify “feel good”, arguing that whilst looking and being good are extrinsically aligned, this additional motivator sits firmly within the intrinsic motivation zone.

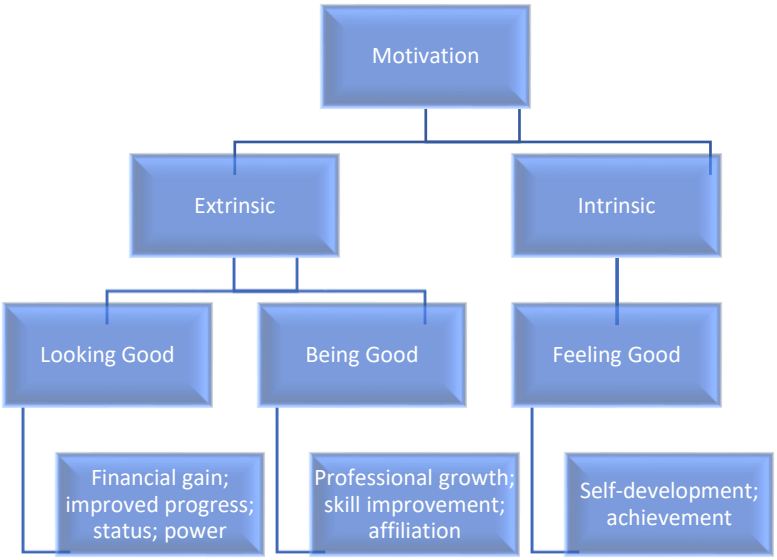

Figure 2.6 - Motivation for project management certification based on Blomquist et al. (2018)

2.3.2 Value of Certification

The value of certification depends upon the viewpoint with some suggesting it has a “double-edged character” (Fertig et al., 2009; Kleiner, 2006). From an individual standpoint, it comes down to the perceived benefits in

terms of extrinsic gains such as financial reward, improved career progression as well as internal or autonomous self-development (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009), as in the earlier discussion on motivation.

For organisations, it provides an attestation to an individual's competency which in turn, is often used as an indicator of improved performance (Kleiner, 2006). By providing a degree of standardisation of skills and competencies, certifications contribute to recruitment processes. They signal a benchmark competency (Aguinis, Michaelis and Jones, 2005) and for hiring organisations, this can reduce the transaction costs when recruiting staff (Wiley, 1992), saving time on multiple interviews and assessment centre screening.

The achievement of certifications can be found to contribute to employee development with the individual gaining skills and building confidence (Ryan and Deci, 2000) however, this relies upon learning actually taking place which then leads to the requisite level of competence. It is therefore the underlying motivation that is crucial here in that where the individual feels external pressure to gain certification the effort tends to be more perfunctory and focused on securing a pass rather than necessarily acquiring competence (Rigby et al., 2002; Gioia and Corley, 2002). This superficial learning often results in a reluctance to pursue long term commitment to ongoing learning (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993).

Many organisations are increasingly subjected to external pressure from clients and other key stakeholders to ensure their staff are certified (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009) and in particular, stipulations in relation to the project manager's credentials. Employing organisations will often demand certifications such as APMQ or PMP when advertising positions whilst others look for competency through PRINCE2. Certifications are therefore playing an increasing role in the recruitment and selection process which in turn feeds demand for professional certification. Part of this is driven by the individual taking ownership of their career which Sullivan and Baruch (2009) argue, advocates a stronger commitment to their profession over their employing organisation.

However, critics point to the dark side of certification (Fertig, 2011; Wright, Holloway and Rolloff, 2007) where individuals seek badges merely to 'look good' and employ such impression management tactics as 'intimidation' to exert influence within the organisation by presenting a 'trump card' (Varma, Toh and Pichler, 2006).

At an organisational level, certifications are often adopted with little regard as to whether there is a proven link to improved performance but rather for image building and as "symbols of legitimacy to external stakeholders" (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Whilst many individuals seek to gain the requisite certifications to further their careers and secure the prestige and power, as well as monetary rewards that may follow, it is suggested that, theoretically, those who have acquired the certification through genuinely intrinsic motivations should prove to be the more competent (Gioia and Corley, 2002). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009) which serves to question the real value of the "piece of paper". Many practising project professionals have no formal certification or qualification in this field (Todhunter, 2010) but still deliver projects to their client's satisfaction. That said, some argue that those individuals who possess a certification tend to exhibit professional tendencies which are closely associated with project management self-efficacy (Farashah, Thomas and Blomquist, 2019).

The purpose of certification is to provide a widely acknowledged, and respected, indicator of competence as well as offering a predictor of future performance (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009). However, with the growing numbers of certifications across occupations and professions (Carter, 2005), this raises other concerns as Fertig (2011) suggests, "if enough individuals follow this path, it can produce an 'inflated credential'" (p120) whereby there are so many holders that the market value is diminished.

There are two key objectives of certification, the first is to differentiate between "the marginal practitioners and the superior ones" (Fertig, 2011, p 120) although where the certifications offer a mere pass or fail outcome this can obfuscate the real picture. Secondly, it serves to demonstrate a minimum benchmark of proficiency, demonstrating to stakeholders that the holder meets specific standards and is capable of high levels of performance (McKillip and Owens, 2000).

The value of certifications to practitioners may seem obvious in as much as their 'marketability' increases and their 'personal capital' holds appeal in the knowledge-based economy (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). But there is anecdotal evidence that some organisations can be reluctant to sponsor employee certification as this often serves to accredit the experience gained which can then be ported to competitor firms. Indeed, Robson,

Wholey and Barefield (1996) identified a noticeable spike in staff turnover in the 'Big Five' accounting firms as employees acquired their Certified Public Accountant (CPA) qualification.

Research into the relative value of project management certification compared to other core competencies in the IT Industry, however, suggests that it falls way behind other requirements such as leadership skills, communication, experience, technical expertise and cultural fit (Starkweather and Stevenson, 2010). In fact, their findings indicated that it was the least important of 15 different competencies to corporate IT executives.

2.3.3 Effectiveness of Certification

Ultimately, however, it is the perception of stakeholders that drives the value of certifications. Crucial to this, of course, is the question of effectiveness. Fertig, Zeitz and Blau (2009) draw on others (Livingood and Auld, 2001; Naquin and Wilson, 2002; Yamnill and McLean, 2001) to point to five key requirements for a certification scheme:

- Identification of the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Accurate measurement of these key elements.
- Provision of appropriate training and development practices to underpin these.
- Assurance that these can be evidenced and applied.
- Transparency in terms of what is required to be successful.

The effectiveness and reliability of the certification in assessing an individual's competence is important if it is to secure credibility in the eyes of stakeholders and therefore offer any meaningful contribution. The method of assessment must also be relevant and appropriate. Many contest that the ability to merely regurgitate a learned body of knowledge in an exam is not a sufficient measure of aptitude whilst some argue that written tests themselves are not an appropriate measure for the more intangible elements such as "the tacit knowledge usually important to effective practice" (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau, 2009, p203).

Whilst certifications can provide a sound baseline from which to build knowledge, their predictive validity in terms of performance is still subject to debate (Kane, 2004). Empirical research does not yet provide the support for the claim of 'being good' (Fertig, Zeitz and Blau 2009) rather that certifications offer a badge to

'look good'. Having said that, there is an increased recognition of the benefits to be derived for the individual (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas 2018) which may be due to the development of the field of project management over the last decade.

Catanio, Armstrong and Tucker (2013) suggest that the issue of standardisation of certification is key to the professionalisation of project management. There have been attempts to achieve this through the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) which provides assurance of quality through its ISO 9001 standard.

Whilst strides have been taken towards a degree of standardisation, driven by the PMI, (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2007) it is worth considering whether this may represent a constraint that limits the necessary adaptability and flexibility required to deliver challenging project objectives given notably prescriptive nature of their PMBoK (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011). Hodgson and Cicmil (2007) argue that the so-called 'blackboxing' of knowledge "implies a loss of a reflexive and embodied rationality in favour of abstract principles and blind faith in universal techniques" (p 145). This would be fine if all practitioners were willing to accept the PMI's vision and conception of a project however, given the universal message that projects are unique, transient endeavours it would be difficult to see how one prescriptive approach could be suitable for every one of them. There is certainly an argument in favour of a universal lexicon to support multi-national project management (Hodgson, 2002), indeed there is some degree of common terminology already in use (Morris, Patel and Wearne, 2000) however, the reality is that in order to achieve standardisation, the central body of knowledge would need to provide a level of ambiguity to accommodate the disparate "communities, organisations, sectors and nations" (Hodgson and Cicmil, 2007, p 444).

Such standardisation, of course, potentially comes at a cost to the practitioner whose resultant diminished autonomy and creativity can the source of tension as they negotiate between dictated frameworks and processes, and the context specific issues of their projects (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000).

There remains confusion as to the requisite education and training for a project manager. Whilst certifications provide a knowledge-based approach and test understanding of a body of knowledge, there needs to be a more holistic approach to ensure that both skills and behaviours are also examined. There have been calls that

any education and training should therefore be developed in conjunction with industry, encompassing both theoretical and practical elements to satisfy the needs and expectations of organisations (Friedman et al., 2003). Certainly, there appears to be consensus in the literature (Catanio, Armstrong and Tucker 2013; Paxton, 2012; Thomas and Mengel, 2008) that "improved project management performance requires capabilities beyond knowledge-based certification" (Farashah, Thomas and Blomquist, 2019, p 22) so it may be that there are natural limitations to the value of certifications in that they can only go so far in signalling competence.

Knowledge is a cornerstone for professional practice and Weber (1978) defined this as being "that which is certified and credentialled". These credentials can take the form of certification from professional associations, and degrees or diplomas from universities (Macdonald, 1995).

2.3.4 Professional Body Certification

The professional bodies in the UK, both APM and PMI, have developed clearly delineated certifications which provide a degree of stratification for those wishing to evidence theoretical competence in project management. Underpinning these is the respective 'Body of Knowledge' – APM Body of Knowledge (7th Edn) and PMBoK (6th Edn). These are documents which set out the key elements with which practitioners are expected to be familiar (Morris et al., 2006). There is a plethora of certifications now available relevant to the field of project management and a key consideration for practitioners within the UK is which certifications to pursue. Some are methodology-specific such as PRINCE2 and ScrumMaster whilst the APM and PMI certifications offer a more general coverage of knowledge.

Certification achieved through a professional association is seen to be attractive for those without a university degree in project management, which accounts for most of the membership (Morris et al, 2006). From the perspective of the associations, it represents a means to charge not insignificant membership fees whilst helping to further their influence across the field.

Body of Knowledge

The early editions of the 'Body of Knowledge' that emerged from each of the professional associations were written by practitioners with the objective of sharing recognised practice (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011). However, they were often criticised for a lack of academic research or rigour and given that these were

deemed to be pivotal in relation to the certification process (Morris et al., 2006) this was a notable weakness.

Unlike the traditional professions such as medicine, where the body of knowledge is a far broader concept and includes for example, “medical libraries, research papers and textbooks” (Shepherd and Johns, 2006) the project management Bodies of Knowledge are demonstrably more limited, and at most constitute only 594 pages.

They have arguably also been somewhat limited in the scope of coverage even against a backdrop of wider independent academic research (Morris et al., 2006). It would take until the 4th edition of the APM Body of Knowledge for an extensive review of the academic literature to be conducted and for this to underpin the revision (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011).

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to diversify the focus to include topics such as alternative methodologies, hybrid lifecycles, diversity and inclusion, and workplace stress, recognising perhaps that managing projects requires flexibility and emotional intelligence. These later additions have gone some way to addressing criticism by Shepherd and Atkinson (2011) that the Bodies of Knowledge (of both APM and PMI) failed to consider multiple lifecycles but there is still conjecture that in themselves, they provide a rather narrow and shallow approach (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006).

The effectiveness of the certifications offered by the professional associations relies on robust curriculum parameters and therefore these must reflect not just the Body of Knowledge document in isolation, but also the tacit knowledge as well as the wider academic research papers, in line with the established professions (Shepherd and Bower, 2010).

The traditional approach to a professional body of knowledge is diverse, extensive and perhaps crucially, not owned by one organisation or institution (Shepherd and Bower, 2010) but rather the profession as a whole. However, in the field of project management, the professional associations have sought to lay claim to this resulting in competing Bodies of Knowledge further adding to practitioner confusion as to which one to follow. It is also a somewhat crowded field particularly in the UK (Morris, Jamieson and Shepherd, 2006) with competition from the Office of Government Commerce in respect of its PRINCE2 and Managing Successful

Programmes certifications.

With more and more projects and programmes presenting ever increasing levels of complexity, it is argued that the Bodies of Knowledge are trailing behind industry requirements (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011) in so far as much of the focus of the content is towards the more straightforward, linear approach to delivery and no longer effective in practice (Crawford, Pollack and England, 2006).

There is a case to suggest that whilst the PMI still adheres largely to its core focus and rather prescriptive approach to project execution, the APM has demonstrated a greater willingness to adopt a more comprehensive view of the management of projects reflecting the multi-faceted skills required to successfully deliver project objectives (Morris, Jamieson and Shepherd, 2006).

To support the revision of the 4th edition of their Body of Knowledge, the APM sought input from experts and practitioners across industry to examine the scope and relevance of the topics for inclusion (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011) and this exercise has continued through to the current 7th edition. Further iterations of the Bodies of Knowledge have been released which evidence small steps towards advancing the knowledge but, as suggested by Morris, Jamieson and Shepherd (2006) they have not undertaken the radical overhaul that some would have wished and are still playing catch up with developments in practice.

The APM and PMI have, however, moved forward with strong research agendas, with the APM actively encouraging research through initiatives and provision of funding as well as its own peer reviewed academic publication, the International Journal of Project Management (in conjunction with the IPMA), and the PMI producing its own Project Management Journal, also peer reviewed. It is therefore perhaps surprising that the respective Bodies of Knowledge are still framed as such, given the relatively brief information contained within them.

The added challenge for a 'Body of Knowledge' is to ensure relevance to all industries and sectors, operating widely diverse projects requiring differing approaches but Morris, Jamieson and Shepherd (2006) suggest that the knowledge is situated and therefore subject to significant variances, raising the question of the validity of one single Body of Knowledge, a kind of one size fits all. They go on to argue that there is also a potential

disconnect between providing a text intended to feed the needs of certification, and the need to develop effective practitioners.

APM Qualifications

Following achievement of their Royal Charter in 2017, the APM updated their portfolio of qualifications to provide a route towards individual Chartership. Table 2.3 identifies the 3 core certifications available, although there are a number of other more subject specific such as the Project Risk Management Certificate, Project Planning and Control™ and the Earned Value Management Certificate.

The qualifications offered (Table 2.3) have been designed to provide a career path for new entrants (APM, 2020) who can begin with the Project Fundamentals qualification (PFQ) before progressing on to the Project Management qualification (PMQ) and Project Professional qualification (PPQ).

Qualification	**Target**	**Format**
APM Fundamentals (PFQ)	Tailored to those looking for a fundamental understanding of project management	Multiple choice exam over 1 hour 60 questions
APM Qualification (PMQ)	For those with some pre-existing project management knowledge	Essay style over 3 hours 10 questions from 16
APM Project Professional Qualification (PPQ)	Experienced individuals working in project management. No minimum experience requirements or pre-requisite educational credits	Case Study over 3 hours for each: 3 core modules plus 1 elective module

Table 2.3 - APM Qualifications

As of August 2020, there are 81,010 holders of APMQ (including its predecessor APMP) (source: APM). With the recently launched Chartership programme, the professional association has seen a rise in the number of applications with over 1200 Chartered Project Professionals (ChPP) now listed on its register, indicating the popularity of this new status in the first 12 months.

PMI Qualifications

The PMI first launched their PMP certification in 1984, following original developmental work in 1979. Similarly, the PMI offer additional certifications such as Program Management Professional (PgMP®), Portfolio Management Professional (PfMP®) and various subject specific certifications relating to risk, scheduling and business analysis.

However, the main qualifications offered by the PMI (Table 2.4), have remained broadly the same for several years. The Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM®) is open to new entrants and there are no pre-requisites for this multiple-choice exam. Their Project Management Practitioner qualification, by contrast, is subject to restrictions (unlike its equivalent APM qualification, the APMQ which is available to all). This exam has remained largely unchanged and is widely popular amongst practitioners.

Qualification	Target	Format
Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM®)	For those wishing to develop project management skills.	Multiple choice over 3 hours 150 questions
Project Management Professional (PMP®) *must be maintained through CPD activity	For those with demonstrable 3-5 years' project experience and who can evidence a minimum of 35 hours of project management training.	Multiple choice over 3 hours 200 questions

Table 2.4 - PMI Qualifications

As of June 2019, there were a recorded 932,720 active holders of the PMP certification. Membership of the Project Management Institute (PMI) at that same point, however, was 575,995 (Tharp, 2019), suggesting perhaps that whilst the certification is in demand, the benefits of membership are not as clearly demonstrated. Interestingly, holders of the CAPM certification amounted to only 39,120.

2.3.5 Academic degrees

Many argue that for project management to successfully professionalise, there is a need for the discipline to be theoretically underpinned through rigorous empirical research (Catanio, Armstrong and Tucker, 2013). Over recent years, as with the professional certifications, there has also been a significant rise in the number of

university degree programmes dedicated to project management, at both undergraduate (24) and postgraduate levels (105) (source: UCAS, 2020).

The development of academic programmes saw the appearance first of postgraduate degrees, perhaps reflecting the unique nature of this discipline area and the so-called 'accidental profession' whereby practitioners most often found themselves moving into a project management role from a technical one rather than a traditional route via undergraduate bachelor's degrees.

Erault (1994) points to notable differences in the education of the professions between the American and British systems. In the former, the establishment of 'professional schools' within universities began long before the development of the professional associations (see for example, Wilensky, 1964), whilst in Britain the opposite has been true.

Academic education in this field faces the same challenges as the professional certification providers – how to contribute to the development of effective practitioners. Bredillet et al. (2013) argue that there needs to be greater collaborative efforts between industry and academe in order to meet the requirements of organisations and to produce competent practitioners. They also make a case for enhancement of course content through the outcomes of doctoral theses, although this may prove somewhat limiting in scope.

The content and syllabus of university degrees varies hugely, where some offer more generalist management and project management is an add-on, whilst others are very tailored to a specific sector such as construction.

In the UK, universities are accredited by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to ensure quality of the programme provision, and there are also internal validation processes which assure standards. The availability of accreditation by the professional associations has proven popular with universities, and many have opted to secure APM accreditation as well as PMI accreditation through their Global Accreditation Centre (GAC). However, whilst it is clear that university programmes should work in harmony with the professional associations to the benefit of practitioners, there is concern over the how closely some courses are based on the Bodies of Knowledge (Shepherd and Bower, 2010; Winter et al., 2006).

The role of universities in the development of a profession has long been acknowledged (Warschauer, 2002;

Wilensky, 1964). Traditionally, universities were the seat of learning and served to legitimise authority and competence over a field (Jackson, 1970). Indeed, Jackson (1970) argues that they have "gained a legitimation of a utilitarian kind by the demonstrable needs which are met by those it certifies as competent" (p5). But the tension between the practical and the theoretical has also been a feature of the professions, with both law and medicine the sites of conflict between the rigidity of abstract intellectual thought and the apprenticeship training favoured by those defining the standards required of those seeking to join the profession (Jackson, 1970). This serves to highlight, perhaps, the 'what' and the 'how to' of the work.

Macdonald (1995) argues that the knowledge underpinning any claim to professionalisation must be credentialled by a "relatively high-ranking qualification, typically a degree, or by a relatively high-ranking establishment" (p161). There appears to be an uneasy relationship between universities and professional associations. On one hand many degree programmes are framed around the Bodies of Knowledge and often seek the approval via accreditation of the professional associations, whilst on the other there is concern that the 'tail is wagging the dog'. Zwerman et al. (2004) caution against a dominance of professional associations in dictating to trainers and academics which it is felt would not be good for the field of project management. Similarly, the commercial activities around project management education sits uncomfortably with the core values of a profession (Morris et al. 2006).

2.4 Licensing for closure

Occupational licensing is used as a means to limit the flow of entrants into a profession (Kleiner, 2006), differing from certification which usually serves only to indicate attainment of a level of knowledge. There are a number of types of regulation and Gross (1984) suggests that licensing is "a form of input regulation, which seeks to regulate by controlling who may carry on an activity" (p 9). Initially, research into the impact of licensing focused primarily on the restrictive practices it served. Kleiner (2006) refers to the work by Friedman and Kuznets (1945) who examined the experiences of doctors and dentists, and how their earnings differed, which they suggested could be attributed to the former group's success with licensing.

Licensing dates back to the era of the Medieval Guilds when merchants were restricted to employing only those from within the guild (Kleiner, 2006). Although, there are suggestions that the essence of licensing can be

traced back further still to the Roman Empire where there were minimum qualification requirements for physicians and those found to be practising without such were subject to penalties including confiscation of equipment and prison (Gross, 1984).

The universities also played a role in so far as they, together with the guilds, strengthened the link between education and licensing (Kleiner, 2006). Indeed, "the medieval universities both trained and licensed. In reality, a degree was a certificate of competence which in the cases of law and medicine usually conveyed certain exclusive right of practice to its holder" (Carman, 1958, p 269)

Morris et al. (2006) point to licensure as a "legal regulation recognising the importance of controlling admission to the practice of the profession for the good of society" (p 714) although some contend, perhaps more cynically, that rather it seeks to protect the self-interests of those practitioners in terms of income, status and privilege (Gross, 1984). Certification can be considered to be the precursor to licensing by identifying those who may be eligible for membership of a prestigious group (Morris et al., 2006). By effectively securing occupational closure, licensing is recognised as an important step in the professionalisation of an occupation (Wilensky, 1964) by limiting the number of entrants, and increasing the earnings of its members. It does so by either increasing the cost of requisite training or by establishing minimum benchmark certification standards (Kleiner, 2006) and provides the legal recognition that few professions enjoy but many seek to obtain.

Another emergent profession, financial advice, has successfully achieved this milestone through the Retail Distribution Review in 2012 which resulted in the introduction of a barrier to entry in the form of minimum qualifications (Ring, 2016). A major reform, the RDR was designed to overhaul advisor remuneration for their services, to provide clarity as to who the advisor represented and, significantly, the necessity to pass a series of exams equivalent to the first year of a university degree in order to practice (Ring, 2016; FSA, 2009). This had dramatic ramifications for many practitioners resulting in a 20% reduction in the number of practising advisers (Holt, 2013) which in turn led to an advice gap crisis with many consumers no longer able to afford their expert advice (Ring, 2016). Forth et al. (2011) argue that imposing a skills related licensing framework results in a short-term reduction to employment numbers as lower-skilled individuals are forced out of the occupation by way of collateral damage however this serves, ultimately, to drive up the quality of the service, which was

evidenced within the financial advice profession.

2.4.1 Impact on Quality

As well as restricting competition, licensing can provide testament to the quality of the service being provided and this is arguably driven by consumers seeking credible data to inform their decision making (Kleiner, 2006). This crucial validation was a key factor behind the RDR reforms in the financial advice profession (Ring, 2016) which afforded confidence in the services of the practitioners. Some argue that the matter of quality becomes an issue where there is a lack of relevant information, or an asymmetry between those providing services and their consumers, but that this can be addressed by licensing (Kleiner, 2006; Benham, 1980).

The effects of licensing are closely linked to economic theory. The benefits to be gained by the practitioner come not just from the controlled labour pool, but the inelasticity of the consumer demand (Stigler, 1971) – the more stable the demand the greater the benefit of regulation, as services cannot be sourced elsewhere. In doing so it offers protection and 'regulation' of their income.

However, it is less clear as to the benefit of licensing in terms of quality of the outcome for end consumers. There are two theories with regards to regulation (Zhang, 2009): public interest theory which holds that regulation is there to protect the public from market malfunctions, and to ensure efficient use of resources, whilst in consideration of social welfare. The second is a rather more cynical "capture theory" whereby the occupation seeks out regulation to meet its own needs hence it captures the legislators. The premise may be for the public good, but this latter theory contends that any resultant benefit may be purely accidental as Stigler (1971) argues, "the regulation is acquired by the industry and is designed and operated primarily for its benefits" (p 3).

Research into the effects of licensing reveal mixed results. A number of studies into teacher quality were unable to find demonstrable improvements in student achievement scores between those taught by licensed, unlicensed or alternative certified teachers (Staiger and Rockoff, 2010; Kane and Staiger, 2005; Kleiner and Petree, 1988). However, Carroll and Gaston (1981) examined a number of occupations, including electricians, dentists, plumbers, real estate agents, optometrists and veterinarians, and found that licensing had a positive impact on the quality at an individual level, although the extent of this quality was diminished by the fact that

licensing reduced the number of available practitioners, reflective perhaps of the situation faced by the financial advice profession three decades later.

2.4.2 Prevalence of licensing

The extent of licensing over the last sixty years has increased significantly with many occupations now requiring employees to hold a licence in order to practice (Kleiner, 2006) In fact, Kleiner and Krueger (2010) suggest up to one in four individuals in the United States (US) now needs a licence to perform their job. However, licensing can vary from occupation to occupation. For example, the US requires that all barbers be licensed in order to practice with entrants needing to pass practical and written examinations through barber school or alternatively undertake a two-year apprenticeship with an approved Master Barber (Timmons and Thornton, 2010). However, there does not appear to be any substantive evidence that licensing has impacted on the number of entrants to this occupation or indeed their average earnings (Kleiner, 2000). Barbering is one of the earliest occupations to be licensed in the US, with a history intertwined with unionism which sought to reform the unsanitary shops and poor training (Timmons and Thornton, 2010). Whilst it may seem an usual occupation to be so closely associated with regulation, it belies its early origins in the 15th century where barbers were also known "to perform surgery, dentistry and bloodletting" (ibid, p 741).

In the UK, Forth et al. (2011) estimate that at least 14% of jobs are subject to licensing, which is less common than that reported in the US although they point to the fact that the true figure may be somewhat higher due to the vagaries of licensing requirements for some activities within a role. Notably, in the UK the professions are most likely to be regulated but with a less restrictive approach than their counterparts in EU nations. (Forth et al., 2011). However, the opposite may be true for low-skilled occupations, evidenced by the training requirements imposed on care workers, for example (ibid, p 124). But there does seem to be broad commonality in terms of the nature of the occupations subject to the demands of licensing.

The legitimacy afforded by licensing might go some way to explain, and justify increased earnings (Timmons and Thornton, 2010) for some occupations however, as Shapiro (1986) cautions, the income segments of the consumer market can often be a factor resulting in the wealthier being better placed to gain benefits whilst those on lower incomes become marginalised with limited access to services, as seen following the reforms

within financial advice (Ring, 2016).

Unlike certification, the port of entry to licensed occupations is via the Higher Education Institutes (HEI) or universities (Kleiner, 2006) as opposed to the passing of licensing exams. This rigorous screening of individuals often requires many years of study followed by post entry restrictions (Kleiner, 2006). Such restrictions take the form of fees, organisational forms and conduct constraints (Paterson, Fink and Ogus, 2003).

2.4.3 Occupational Closure

Macdonald (1995) points to Weber's theory that it is the credentialled knowledge which underpins a bid to secure occupational closure and enhance its social status, suggesting that "members of such groups carry the means of production for their line of business in their heads" (p162).

But Damelang, Stops and Abraham, 2018) clarify and suggest that closure is secured when access to the occupation is subject to specific credentials. This can either be through licensing, which usually has a legal underpinning, or through employer-driven requirements. To date, project management has not embraced the restrictive licensing step and there are no formal barriers in place to prevent anyone practising as a project manager, thereby arguably diminishing its market currency (Thomas and Zwerman, 2006). Instead, the profession relies on self-regulation and market forces in so far as organisations dictate minimum requirements for practitioners. In fact, with so many individuals now holding the PMP and PMQ certifications this may already be creating a natural barrier to entry and representing a minimum benchmark.

Exclusivity is a key aspect of the professionalisation of an occupation (Macdonald, 1995) and this requires not just restricted entry but also securing jurisdictional claims (Bresnen, 2013) which set the boundaries and provide monopoly over the field (Brockman, 2008). Macdonald (1995) argues that this exclusivity sits not just within the realms of knowledge but also protects practitioners against other occupations or professions from, "poaching parts of the market that they believe can be supplied with services based on their knowledge" (p 184). The requisite acknowledgement in many sectors, of project management as a discrete discipline has been slow to materialise (Hodgson, 2007) and the challenge for project management is that it encompasses many aspects from other areas of management (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011) raising the question as to whether control may be secured with such intersection.

Friedman (1962) questioned the independence of the licensing process, arguing that the state and professional associations were unlikely to be the unbiased gatekeepers' enforcers they were presented as being, rather "their vested interests lead them to not only create monopoly rents through restrictions but also to limit complaints and disciplinary procedures against most incumbents" (Kleiner and Krueger, 2010, p 677). A view seemingly supported by Edlin and Haw (2014) who posture those licensed occupations have for too long behaved as cartels. Whilst gatekeeping may be intended to establish competency standards, the quality of the profession may not be improved (Palomba, 1981) yet this 'cartelizing' activity seeks to create a more monopolistic market (Wiley, 1995).

2.4.4 Regulation

Legal regulation of occupations is achieved through four mechanisms, certification, licensing, registration, and accreditation (Forth et al., 2011). However, the terminology is often confusing and used interchangeably.

Regulation		**Tenet**	**Examples**
Certification	Voluntary	No restrictions to the right to practise.	Fitness instructors, hairdressers
Licensing	Compulsory	Unlawful to practise without a licence.	Doctors, solicitors, veterinary nurses, private security guards, gas installers, taxi drivers, HGV drivers
Registration	Compulsory	Unlawful to practise without providing name and address with appropriate regulatory body. Does not stipulate explicit skill standard.	Estate agent registration with Office of Fair Trading (as part of Money Laundering regulations)
Accreditation	Voluntary	No restrictions to the right to practise but can apply for accreditation by a professional body, which is responsible for criteria and their enforcement. No state involvement.	Accountants

Table 2.5 - Mechanisms for Regulation Forth et al. (2011)

The certification schemes are often run by state bodies but they do not represent a barrier to entry, instead provide a means by which individuals can obtain an attestation to their skills level. Alongside accreditation schemes, these are voluntary based systems. The licensing and registration schemes by contrast are mandatory in nature and have a legal footing which mandates that only those with the requisite licence may practice (Forth et al., 2011).

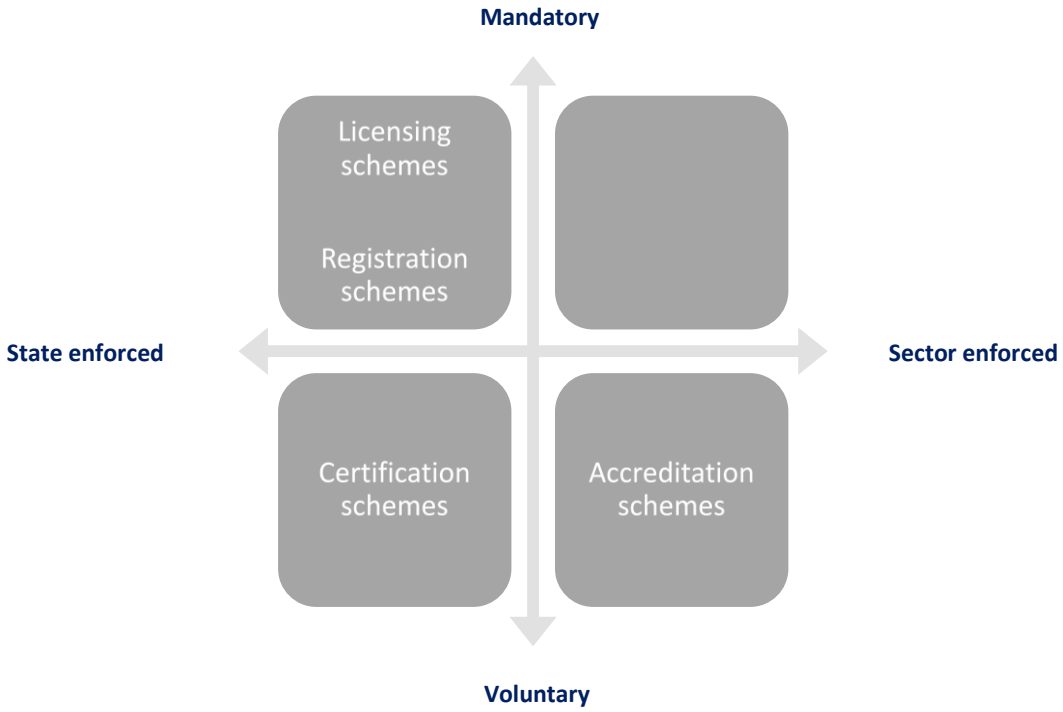

Figure 2.7 - Typology of Regulations Forth et al. (2011).

2.4.5 Regulatory Bodies

Edlin and Haw (2014) quote the playwright, George Bernard Shaw who suggested that "all professions are conspiracies against the laity", perhaps belying how the public view them.

Whilst many occupations are subject to licensing or certification requirements, there are also those which are accountable to regulatory bodies. These serve to enforce the requirements mandated by the licensing and registration schemes and "protect and benefit people, businesses, and the environment, and support economic growth" (National Audit Office, 2017, p 6).

There are three core approaches to regulation: restriction to entry, reaction to complaints, and enforcing compliance (Wilkie and Tzountzouris, 2017) whilst the National Audit Office (2017) suggests a more interventionist approach that it is "primarily used to address market failures. The characteristics of some markets mean that, left to their own devices, they risk failing to produce behaviour or results in accordance with public interest" (p 6).

Some sectors are heavily regulated, such as health, where there are 10 regulatory bodies (Professional Standards Authority, 2020) whilst others focus on consumer protections in respect of utility providers. Brooke (2003) proffers a taxonomy of regulators (Table 2.6).

Public protection agencies	**Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); Ofsted; Audit Commission**
Economic regulators	OFGEEM; OFCOM; OFWAT; Office of Fair Trading (OFT)
Regulators of organisations	Financial Conduct Authority (FCA); Press Complaints Council (PCC); Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
Ethical regulators of science and medicine	National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE); Commission for the Retention of Organs
Regulators of people	General Medical Council (GMC); General Dental Council (GDC); The Law Society
Regulators of regulators	Commission for the Regulation of Healthcare Workers; The Accountancy Foundation

Table 2.6 - Taxonomy of Regulators Brookes (2003)

In 2017 the Nataional Audit Office reported 90 regulatory bodies in the UK, the largest of which is the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The growth in regulatory bodies, and increases in their powers over the years has often come in response to a number of crises in various sectors, for example, the pensions mis-selling scandal of the 1980's; the dot.com bubble in the early 2000's; the Enron financial reporting scandal in 2001 (van Driel, 2018). Each of these events resulted in tightened regulations and/or introduction of a new regulator to provide independent oversight to ensure such aspects as efficient use of resources, transparency and accountability (Benedetto, Smith and Nash, 2017; Bartle and Vass, 2007). However, as these, and other scandals, have

damaged public trust in the professions (Carter, Spence and Muzio, 2015; Brookes, 2003) there is a level of cynicism as to the effectiveness of any gatekeeper activity whether this is through self-regulation or the perceived lack of independence of the regulator. This raises questions of who regulates the regulator (Brookes, 2003). Certainly, regulation provides both reassurace to the public and consumer confidence, however as Brookes (2003) suggests, "over-regulation can create a spiral of mistrust, undermining ethical behaviour" (p 7) and with regulation comes increased costs. The Better Regulation Task Force estimated the cost of regulation to the UK economy in 2005 was £100 billion each year (National Audit Office, 2017)

2.5 Professional Associations

With their origins rooted in the system of the Guilds, the professional associations have traditionally been established by practitioners as a means to further the aims of the profession and, as Wang and Stewart (2018) suggest, "they are usually regarded as a fundamental part of the development of a profession" (2018, p55).

The Association for Project Management (APM) is arguably the most popular professional association in the UK (Paton et al., 2013) but it is also now breaking into new territories overseas. It was founded in 1972 by a handful of businessmen interested in applying Critical Path or Network Analysis to project planning (APM, 2010). It began as the British arm of INTERNET, which would later go on to become the IPMA (International Project Management Association), now a global federation of leading project management associations, including the APM.

Individual membership of the APM is now in excess of 30,000 and growing at a consistent rate, with international membership in excess of 2,000 (APM, 2020). It also has more than 500 corporate affiliates indicating a recognition of the importance of project management to organisations. However, Paton et al, (2013) argue that with the increasing corporate memberships of the professional body this serves to weaken the position of the practitioners that they are meant to serve.

The APM declares its mission to be "inspiring communities to deliver meaningful change for societal benefit by advancing the art, science, theory and practice of project management" (APM, 2020, para 2).

Whilst the Project Management Institute (PMI) now has an established global base of more than 600,000

members (PMI, 2020). Its origins were also modest, formed in 1969 by five practitioners who were keen to share information and explore common problems.

The PMI position themselves as supporting practitioners "through global advocacy, collaboration, education and research, we work to prepare more than three million professionals around the world for the Project Economy: the coming economy in which work, and individuals, are organised around projects" (PMI, 2020, para 2).

One of the most important developments seen in recent years is the launch of research programmes to underpin the Body of Knowledge for each professional association. They had been criticised for a lack of academic rigour and conscious steps were made to address this. This has resulted in solid peer-reviewed academic underpinning to the research that is conducted which is significant in advancing the field of project management.

2.5.1 Value of Membership

The existence of a professional body relies on a willing membership (Knoke, 1981) and the subject of fees is often a contentious one (Shoffman and White, 2012) particularly where membership is mandatory (Dunbar, 2009) such as is the case within the financial advisor profession. Indeed, the Financial Services Authority (FSA), latterly the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), came under increased pressure to review the value of the professional bodies in that field. With memberships ranging between £165-£200 per annum, practitioners demanded an increase in professionalism in return, to drive credibility and reputation (Dunbar, 2009).

Kennedy (2000) observed that between 40-50% of members of healthcare professional bodies allowed their memberships to lapse at some point, citing cost as the primary reason for doing so, whilst others have suggested that cost actively discourages new membership (Alotaibi, 2007; DeLeskey, 2003).

But the value of membership is not just linked to membership dues (Ki, 2017; Markova et al, 2013). Drawing on Lawler's (1971) Discrepancy Theory, Markova et al. (2013) suggest that much lies with the attitude of the individual member. They argue that member attitudes are formed according to expectations, and it is whether these are met, or exceeded, that will often determine renewal of their membership.

Research points to tangible benefits for members, such as access to knowledge through publications and conferences to support professional development (APM, 2020) as well as networking and career advancement opportunities (Myers, 1994). The effectiveness of the customer service received from the professional body has a direct impact on member satisfaction and the perception of other benefits (Markova et al. (2013). There are also differences in attitudes between the age groups of members, with older members more focused on securing tangible benefits for the membership fee, perhaps suggesting a more cynical approach to the positioning of professional association membership.

Similarly, the benefits of membership of an accounting professional body were reputation, acknowledged qualifications and career opportunities (Inglis et al. (2011).

Markova et al. (2013) suggest that there are also symbolic benefits, pointing to social identity theory whereby practitioners self-classify with a "perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989 p21). Interestingly, Markova et al. (2013) also point to professional involvement as a value to membership suggesting that those individuals who actively engage and participate in social and professional activities, gain most.

The relatively recent acquisition of a Royal Charter by the Association of Project Management (APM) is seen by many as a key development towards statutory closure, though as Muzio et al. (2011) identify, this is aligned to the more traditional model of professionalisation rather than the pattern of the new corporate professionalisation.

2.5.2 Royal Charter

The Privy Council describes a Royal Charter as "an instrument, granted by the Queen, which confers independent legal personality on an organisation, and defines its objectives, constitution and powers to govern its own affairs". It is a prestigious award which denotes the high status of the organisation. Any company or body in receipt of a Royal Charter is subject to "general law, generally self-regulating and not answerable to the Privy Council or the Privy Council Office in relation to the conduct of its internal affairs" (Privy Council, 2020).

The history of the Royal Charter can be traced back beyond the thirteenth century when they were used to

promulgate laws and perhaps the most well-known example of this is the Magna Carta in 1215 (British Library, 2019). Charters were widely used to incorporate towns and cities, bestowing privileges, and defining their purpose. A common form of these was the Borough Charter which established the general laws applicable within its boundaries, particularly in relation to trading, and would often stipulate exclusions in order to protect the activities of burgesses, for example the Charter for Swansea specifically excluded ""foreign" traders or non-burgesses from pursuing the trades of tanners, dyers, cloth-cutters, butchers, fishmongers and the like within the liberties of the town, or buying and selling therein" (Ballard and Tait, 1923, p.lxxxvii).

The Guilds also sought to solidify their power through a Royal Charter. The Taylors' Company, for example, was one of the first liveries to be awarded a Royal Charter in 1327 -it would later go on to become the Merchant Taylors' Company receiving another Royal Charter in 1505 (Davies and Saunders, 2004).

However, it would not be until more than a hundred years later that we would see the origins of a medicine-related Royal Charter, with the award to trade guild, The Barbers Company of London in 1462. It would later, following a series of further charters, see the Company of Barber-Surgeons separate in 1745, at the request of the surgeons who were keen to establish a more senior identity. The Royal College of Surgeons was formally incorporated in 1800 (RCS, 2020).

However, Royal Charters are not unique to the United Kingdom, indeed they were common across Europe during the Medieval period and were awarded by the ruling Monarch. Many early European universities were also incorporated either through Imperial or Royal Charter, the earliest example of which is the Portugese University of Coimbra in 1290. Alternatively, they were established through Papal Bull (Pace, 1912) issued by the Catholic Church, such as in the case of the University of Cambridge in 1307 (Heywood, 1840) followed by the three Medieval Scottish universities of St Andrews (1411); Glasgow (1450) and Kings College, which could later become the University of Aberdeen (1494) (Horner, 1993).

It is perhaps not surprising, that British interests in America and Canada resulted in many old universities that pre-date the American Revolution, such as Princeton University (Maclean, 1877), which were incorporated by a Royal Charter (Feingold, 2002). This would also be the case in other countries where Britain exercised a governance role such as Australia, India, and South Africa.

The significance for the universities was the international recognition of their degrees beyond the country where they were gained (Pace, 1912). This was seen to be particularly important “so that graduates did not miss out on the advantages of the Empire” (Horne, 2017, p124).

Until the nineteenth century a Royal Charter was the most common means of incorporation for companies with shareholders and it would often assure trade monopolies, as was notably the case of the East India Company (Bohun, 1993). However, this changed with the advent of the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1844 (French, 2019) which facilitated incorporation through a different process and a system or registration.

Since then, the award of a Royal Charter has largely been reserved for professional associations, charities and other bodies working in the public interest. Given that the Privy Council acknowledges that “Charters are granted rarely these days, and a body applying for a Charter would normally be expected to meet a number of criteria”, it would point to a highly valued award which recognizes pre-eminence, stability and permanence in a given field (Paines, 2016). Indeed, the APM (2019) argue that being “chartered is seen by professionals and the public alike as a hallmark of trust and quality” (2019, p 7).

The Association for Project Management now joins other emergent professional bodies such as Chartered Management Institute, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Chartered Insurance Institute and City & Guilds of London Institute.

Legal Challenge

However, the road to Chartership has not been without issue. The original petition for a Royal Charter had been submitted by the APM in 2008 and according to background history presented in the Court of Appeal decision report (EWCA, 2016), objections were expressed by the other major professional association within the UK, the Project Management Institute (PMI) and an early decision in 2010 saw the application rejected. This would prove to be the start of a long running dispute between the two bodies. Recommendation that the Royal Charter be conferred on the APM in 2013 did nothing to settle the matter.

The PMI, with its far number of members, in excess of 500,000 worldwide (PMI, 2020), responded to the issue of notice of Order of Grant to the APM by launching a High Court challenge (Paines, 2016), arguing that “as a

competitor it would be adversely affected by the decision" (2016, para 6).

The High Court would dismiss the claim, however an appeal was allowed on the grounds of precedence, as this was the first time any challenge to a Royal Charter had ever been submitted. The PMI's persistence in the matter is perhaps an indication that this was perceived by them to be a high-stakes battle. Ultimately, the Court of Appeal agreed with the original ruling and this 'David and Goliath' encounter came to a close. Within its ruling the Court of Appeal indicated that the Privy Council was permitted to take into account the public interest. One of the key PMI concerns (EWCA, 2016) was that only those members of the APM could become individually chartered, although this issue was eventually resolved, and no such limitations apply. Whilst the PMI announced its intention to work closely with the APM, there has been no evidence to support this.

It is worth highlighting that project management is not unique in having more than one professional body. The accountancy profession, for example, is serviced by several professional bodies: ICAEW (Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales); ICAS (Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland); ICAI (Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland); ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy) (ICAEW, 2017). This would suggest that singular control of a professional field is not necessarily required and could indicate that there is room for both project management professional bodies as key players in the professionalisation process albeit with clear territory markers.

2.5.3 Chartership

Nonetheless, there is now a concerted attempt at occupational control being seen with the recently structured professional qualification frameworks being introduced. These offer a clear route to individual chartered status, particularly relevant in the United Kingdom where professions such as Mechanical Engineers, (IMECHE), Accountants (ACCA), and Financial Advisers (CII) enjoy a somewhat elevated status if they are accredited by a Chartered professional body. What this means for the project management practitioner is worthy of further examination going forward. Within this framework, the APM has signaled that it is keen to recognize the varying career routes of practitioners (APM, 2018) in its efforts to secure closure, perhaps to avoid the loss of human capital as seen in the professionalisation of financial advisers, for example.

The APM (2019) have argued that the benefit of Chartered status for project management include “a recognisable mark of quality, setting standards of professionalism and performance; the development of a cadre of assured professionals who can lead the delivery of projects; and the opportunity to attract and retain the best project management talent” (2019, p10).

Certainly, a Royal Charter has inherent prestige and perhaps its rarity (Privy Council, 2020) underpins this, and as the APM (2019) suggest, chartered status offers practitioners the opportunity to gain public recognition of excellence. Laybats (2018) agrees, citing her experience of chartership of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), being able to demonstrate qualifications and professionalism, not just within the profession but also externally.

2.6 Corporate Professions

Many of the new professional occupations were originally borne out of organizational settings (Muzio et al., 2013) and there is certainly discourse in the literature on the corporate capture of project management (Paton et al., 2013) which seems to point to the marginalization of the individual practitioner and the interests of the corporate organisations arguably best served by this professionalisation. Dacin et al. (2002) argue that these ‘aspirational’ professions have proactively “structured themselves to accommodate corporate patterns” (p 49) and that by understanding their origins there needs to be a greater symbiosis in the study of the professions and of organisations (Suddaby, et al. 2007).

Indeed, since the late 1990s there has been widespread recognition in the literature of the professions adjusting to institutional settings (Suddaby et al., 2009; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Reed, 1996; Ackroyd, 1996; Wallace, 1995) indicating that the professions have increasingly been viewed through a different prism than that of traditional trait theory. There is also acknowledgement of the changing landscape of the corporate organisations, reflecting the globalization of the last two decades which has given rise to the multidisciplinary firm.

One result of which is the challenge of jurisdictional claims. Bresnen (2013) considers the neo-institutional perspective and argues that there needs to be a greater level of understanding of the role played by

"professionals as institutional agents" (p 737). This notion suggests that the professionals themselves manipulate the organizational frameworks from within, creating "structures and practices in their favour" (Muzio et al., 2013, p707). They argue that the jostling for position amongst the various professional agents results in a dynamic environment whereby they "re-draw the boundaries and rules governing contiguous fields". With increasing numbers of occupations seeking to establish themselves as professions (Neal and Morgan, 2000) the organizations are becoming a key battle ground for professionalisation, adding another level of complexity to the study of professions.

So, whilst, on the face of it, the organizational boundaries and structures may seem to diminish the autonomy previously afforded to the traditional professions, there is growing evidence to suggest that through the institutionalist lens some professions have actually been able to thrive in large bureaucracies, with examples cited in respect of museum curators (Di Maggio, 1991) and accountants (Armstrong, 1985). Indeed, Suddaby and Viale (2011) contend that far from being constrained by the employing organisations they have instead taken advantage of the accessibility of these resources and power in a bid to initiate change. This would seem to indicate that the ability to control these spaces is crucial to the successful professionalisation project. However, as Paton et al. (2013) argue, for project management there appear to be further challenges. Increasing numbers of organisations taking up corporate membership of the professional body is resulting in these associations becoming complicit in the diminishing autonomy for the individual practitioner.

2.7 Evolution of the Professionalisation Project

Some argue that professionalisation has much to do with the control, or evasion of control by others (Collins, 1990), and whilst this might be partly true it is not clear who is driving this quest for project management. Early aspirations in this regard became increasingly evident at the turn of the 21st century (Greewood et al., 2002) as project management started to attempt a degree of self-regulation. Many authors (Hodgson et al. 2015; Muzio et al, 2013; Paton et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2006;) have since suggested that it may have achieved a kind of professional status although there has been no real definitive judgement; rather a case of it being held as true.

Whilst there is a certain level of agreement in the literature regarding the steps required in the professionalisation process (Zwerman et al, 2004; Ritzer and Walczak, 1986; Wilensky, 1964; Caplow, 1954) the discussion still continues as to their sequence, although, this assumes comparable steps to those for the traditional liberal professions.

Figure 2.8 - Professionalisation Process based on Thomas and Zwerman (2010)

Project management is still considered to be a relatively young occupation originally emerging in the 1950's as part of the work by NASA (Hodgson and Muzio, 2010). However, during the last decade significant strides have been taken towards professionalisation and as momentum gains there is discourse in the literature through a variety of lenses. Sabini (2014) considers the various actors involved in the process, in particular the professional associations, suggesting key differences exist between the Italian context and the Anglo-Saxon, but building further on the work by Morris et al. (2006), whilst perspectives such as identity (de la Campa Ahedo and Schwenke, 2014) and the corporate capture (Paton et al., 2013) have also come under scrutiny.

One of the accepted traits for the liberal professions is the codifying of a specialized body of knowledge and progress has been made in this regard. Each of the major professional bodies, (APM and PMI) have produced their own "Body of Knowledge"; indeed, seventh editions are now available from each association, indicating a

strong commitment to ongoing development over recent years. However, these have often been criticized for their lack of underpinning empirical research (Morris et al., 2006). Sold as 'best practice', however, many challenge whether there can ever be one "unified theory on projects" (Blomquist et al, 2010, Sauer and Reich, 2007) and that these bodies of knowledge fail to recognize the more generalized management skills required to successfully deliver projects. This is borne out in research by Starkweather and Stevenson (2011) which concluded that mastery of a prescriptive body of knowledge alone was not sufficient. This lends support to the case for professionalisation in that practitioners require additional skills and judgement in interpreting any core codified knowledge.

As increasing numbers of aspirational professions have sought to achieve the perceived cornerstones of monopoly (closure) and legitimacy these projects have been undertaken with varying degrees of success. Management consultancy attempted a professionalisation project but failed to gain any real traction (Kipping, 2011). A reluctance to formally structure a professional body may have been a contributory factor; only doing so when there was a threat of state intervention amid concerns over the quality of practice and lack of self-regulation (Kipping and Saint-Martin, 2005). This may have been a missed opportunity to secure occupational closure.

By contrast the professionalisation of financial advisers achieved field closure in 2012 but at what cost? From implementation of minimum qualification rules in 2011, the sector lost 25% of practitioners overnight (Clare et al., 2013) and numbers continued to fall until in 2014 less than 50% of pre-closure levels were still active (Cawdell, 2015; FTAdviser, 2014). However, increasing state control and regulation persists, and there is still concern that this provides for conflict with the professionalisation project (Gaskell, 2008). Whilst occupational closure has sought to improve adviser competency levels, there is also much criticism of this professionalisation project, and conjecture that far from commitment to an altruistic agenda, it is the client who has been negatively impacted with expert advice now priced out of reach for many (Clare et al., 2013).

2.8 Theoretical Literature Gap

The review of the literature has revealed a complex and emergent picture regarding professions and professionalisation.

There remains disparity over what constitutes a profession, and the use of trait theory, a popular approach during the mid-twentieth century failed to reach consensus. Many attributes were suggested by the numerous theorists, but these were often disputed or challenged and it is perhaps easy to see how this approach has been abandoned out of frustration. However, this may be considered premature.

From the 1970's, theorists moved away from the classic trait theory discussed in the 1930's by Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939), based on such traits as discrete body of knowledge, autonomy, authority, subject to a code of ethics, certification, occupational closure and legal recognition.

This focus of the literature later switched to the process of professionalisation, but the issue still remains as to the nature of the end goal and therefore, how will we know when we have achieved it. Indeed, many occupational groups continue to pursue a professionalisation project, but this process is arguably flawed without accepted, and acknowledged, success criteria.

This is further complicated by the growth in corporate professions where the organisational settings become battle grounds for the jurisdictional claims, which provides particular resonance for project management.

Observations of the particular strategies employed in the professionalisation of project management point to the marginalization of practitioners (Paton et al, 2013) as the professional associations and the corporate organisations have stealthily eroded the autonomy of the individual practitioners.

The literature review explores key attributes central to trait theory: certification and licensing, and the roles these play within a profession, in the context of both traditional and emergent professions. Certification provides evidentiary support to those practising in their chosen field and this may be mandated, as in the case of the Legal and Medical professions for example, or developmental in the context of many of the corporate professions such as Human Resources and Management, which in turn, determines the individual's motivation.

Licensing is a means to regulate practitioners entering into a profession, or occupation to ensure quality and standards, and is often combined with certification. Increasing numbers of occupations and professions are now subject to some degree of licensure from a variety of regulators although this is not yet a requirement for project practitioners.

The study of the professions is a rich, well-established field extending over many decades as academics have sought to understand the nature of a profession through various prisms, and the focus on the professionalisation process has developed to consider the newly emergent professions of the 20th century. The professional associations have sought to drive forward their agenda to raise the profile of project management and position it as a profession and whilst there is a wealth of literature from the perspective of the professional bodies and the corporate organisations, there is very little that considers the practitioner perspective. Of course, central to professionalisation is the notion of widespread recognition and legitimacy. This, arguably, can only be achieved with an accepted definition or clear anatomy of a profession.

This research seeks to address this gap by examining the practitioner perspective of what a profession means to them, as well as exploring their view of the professionalisation of project management and how this impacts their career. It will reexamine the role of trait theory in the context of a new corporate profession, project management, in a bid to aid understanding and contribute to the wider professionalisation effort. The themes examined within the literature review inform the research design that is considered in detail in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3 : The Research Methodology

Overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology, beginning with a critical discussion of the philosophical stance of the researcher and how this has influenced the approach taken in the study. It establishes the appropriateness of the choices in relation to achieving the overall research aim.

The research design is presented which proposes a mono-method qualitative study. The sampling approach to participant recruitment is discussed and combines both purposive and snowballing techniques. The data collection method is outlined together with the supporting rationale for the tool adopted before an examination of the approach taken to data analysis is presented.

Ethical considerations that have been taken into account are summarised and the issue of data quality is discussed in the context of a qualitative study. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the research methodology are examined.

3.1 Philosophical Orientation

The researcher world view and beliefs play a significant role in guiding research and underpinning the choices made. O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) point to Kuhn's (1962) assertion that these beliefs form "a paradigm which defines the nature of the world and the place of individuals within it" (2015, p. 3) and in acknowledging these basic philosophical assumptions, it is possible to understand their impact on the research (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Central to this is the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of reality (ontology). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that the ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological questions are all interconnected.

Visualised using Easterby et al.'s (2015) four rings model (Figure 3.1), the relationship between these questions is clearly evident and illustrates that the methods and techniques, such as interviews, rely on the underpinning

decisions and assumptions, with the researcher's ontological stance at the central core. This is consistent with Morgan's (2007) tripartite elements of ontology, epistemology and methodology which he refers to as the 'metaphysical paradigm'.

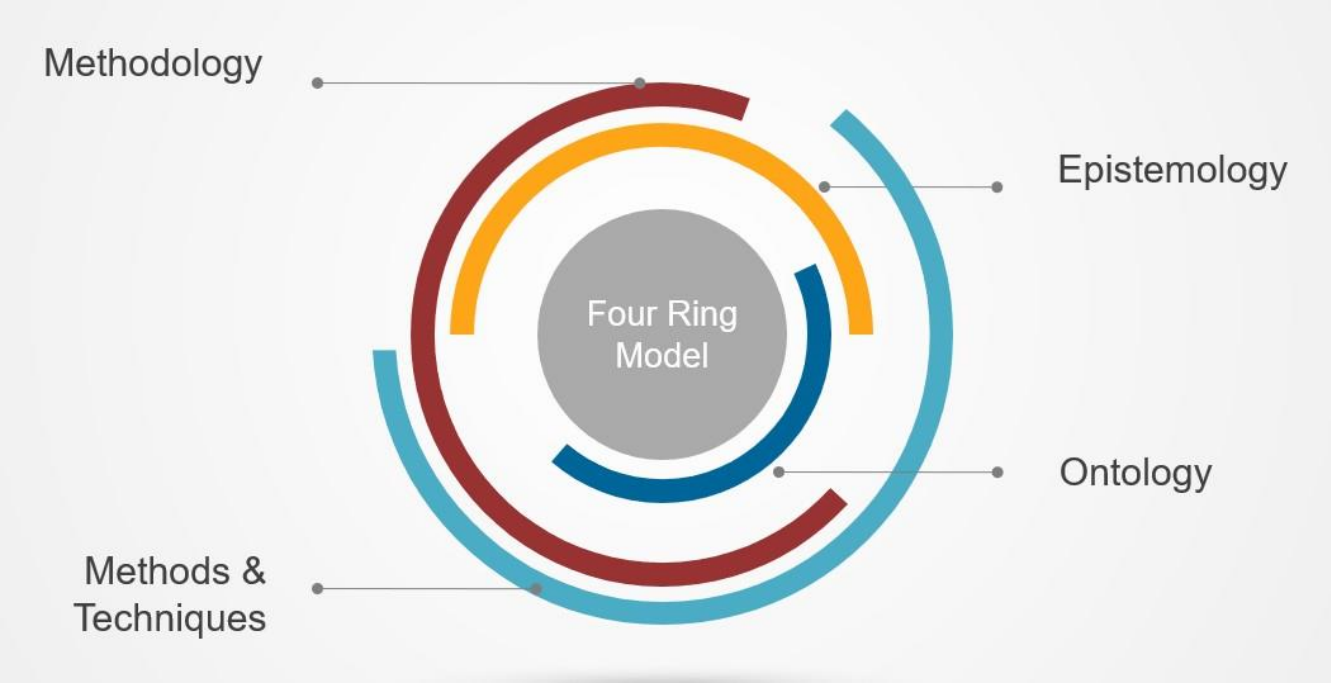

Figure 3.1 - Four Ring Model Easterby et al. (2015)

However, there appears to be a kind of 'chicken and egg' type debate around what O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) suggest is the contradiction around the choice of methods. They point to those (Ormston et al., 2014) who argue that a variety of methods should be considered before determining the most appropriate to address the aims and research questions of the relevant study. However, O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) contend that it is the reverse that should be the case, in that the aims and research questions are driven by the researcher's position and view of the world. This would appear to be a logical stance and I would suggest that the nature of this study has certainly been motivated by my interpretivist approach to research.

There is, however, considerable debate surrounding not just the various frameworks and paradigms but also the terminology that is used (Staller, 2013) and this can prove to be quite challenging to unpick. For example, there is disagreement regarding the boundaries between what constitutes an epistemology and a paradigm - Crotty (2003) suggests interpretivism and phenomenology are epistemologies however Padgett (2008) points to them as being examples of paradigms. Indeed, even Kuhn (1962) who first coined the term paradigm to

describe a researcher's beliefs around the creation of knowledge would later admit the term was perhaps misleading (Morgan, 2007).

But what seems to be clear is that the philosophical field is subject to nuances as different scholars have sought to diverge from traditions.

By breaking down the dual aspects of ontology and epistemology it is possible to understanding the philosophical orientation underpinning this research. In the context of the social sciences O' Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) argue that the primary debate centres around two ontological positions – those of realism and relativism. Others agree but suggest that there are actually four (Table 3.1), (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) and these sit along a continuum from what Tebes (2005) refers to as 'mind independent truth' or realism, at one end, to relativism at the other.

Ontology	Realism	Internal Realism	Relativism	Nominalism
Truth	Single truth	Truth exists but is obscure	There are many 'truths'	There is no truth
Facts	Facts exist and can be revealed	Facts are concrete but cannot be accessed directly	Facts depend on viewpoint of observer	Facts are all human creations

Table 3.1 - Four different ontologies Easterby-Smith et al. (2015)

Realists believe that there is a single independent reality regardless of beliefs or interpretation by individuals (Bryman, 2016) whilst relativists suggest that the reality exists within the mind, as Smith (1983) argues, it is socially constructed and does not exist independently. This study is concerned with the perceptions of the practitioners and their lived experiences, which by their very nature, are subjective and therefore it is the meaning attached to those that constructs reality.

Indeed, from the examination of the nature of a profession in the literature review in the last chapter, it is evident that this is a social construct that relies on the perceptions of others to afford the authority and status that many occupations seek to secure. This, therefore, points to there being multiple 'truths' that are dependent upon the individuals concerned and is consistent with a relativism perspective.

The nature of this knowledge (epistemology) and its relationship with what we can know (Guba and Lincoln, 2004) is an important element to the philosophical stance of the researcher. It is argued to relate not just to the theory of knowledge but also its production (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015; Soini and Kronqvist, 2011; Harding, 1987). Diesing (1965) provides a clear distinction between two key epistemological approaches suggesting that objectivists focus on impartiality, a position most often associated with positivism, whilst subjectivists tend to recognise that which has a uniqueness to humans, and common to interpretivist studies. However, Moon and Blackman (2014) position constructionism between these poles arguing that this mid-ground provides for a meaning to be created by the individual about the object. In the context of determining what we believe to be a profession, and whether the presence of key traits is central to this, it can be argued that there is merit to such a position.

3.2 Interpretive Framework

The theoretical perspective for the study sits within the interpretivist framework, and particularly in what Creswell and Poth (2018) call social constructivism, which aims to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals in order to provide an explanation of social reality (Chen et al., 2011). The interpretivist tradition encompasses a number of variants including postpositivism, social constructivism, pragmatism and transformative/postmodern, amongst numerous others (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

A number of theorists (see Creswell and Poth, 2018; Moon and Blackman, 2014) have attempted to map the various frameworks in an attempt to provide clarity however, these serve only to highlight the disparity and lack of consistent approach within this field. Such is the disagreement that whilst Creswell and Poth (2018), place pragmatism as a form of interpretivism, Moon and Blackman (2014) point to it being a distinct perspective deemed to be suitable for 'any or all' research.

Moon and Blackman's (2014) 'Three branches of philosophy' map (Figure 3.2) does, however, provide a helpful visualisation of the spectrum of these elements and is structured in such a way as to indicate relevant leanings. This in itself recognises the blurring of boundaries that exist and accommodates views that there is no definitive set of assumptions and approaches.

This study leans towards the righthand side of their spectrum, underpinned by relativism and

subjectivism/constructionism, adopting an interpretivist approach through phenomenology in order to address the research questions which are perception driven and consider the relevance of trait theory to the professionalisation of project management from the practitioner viewpoint and experience.

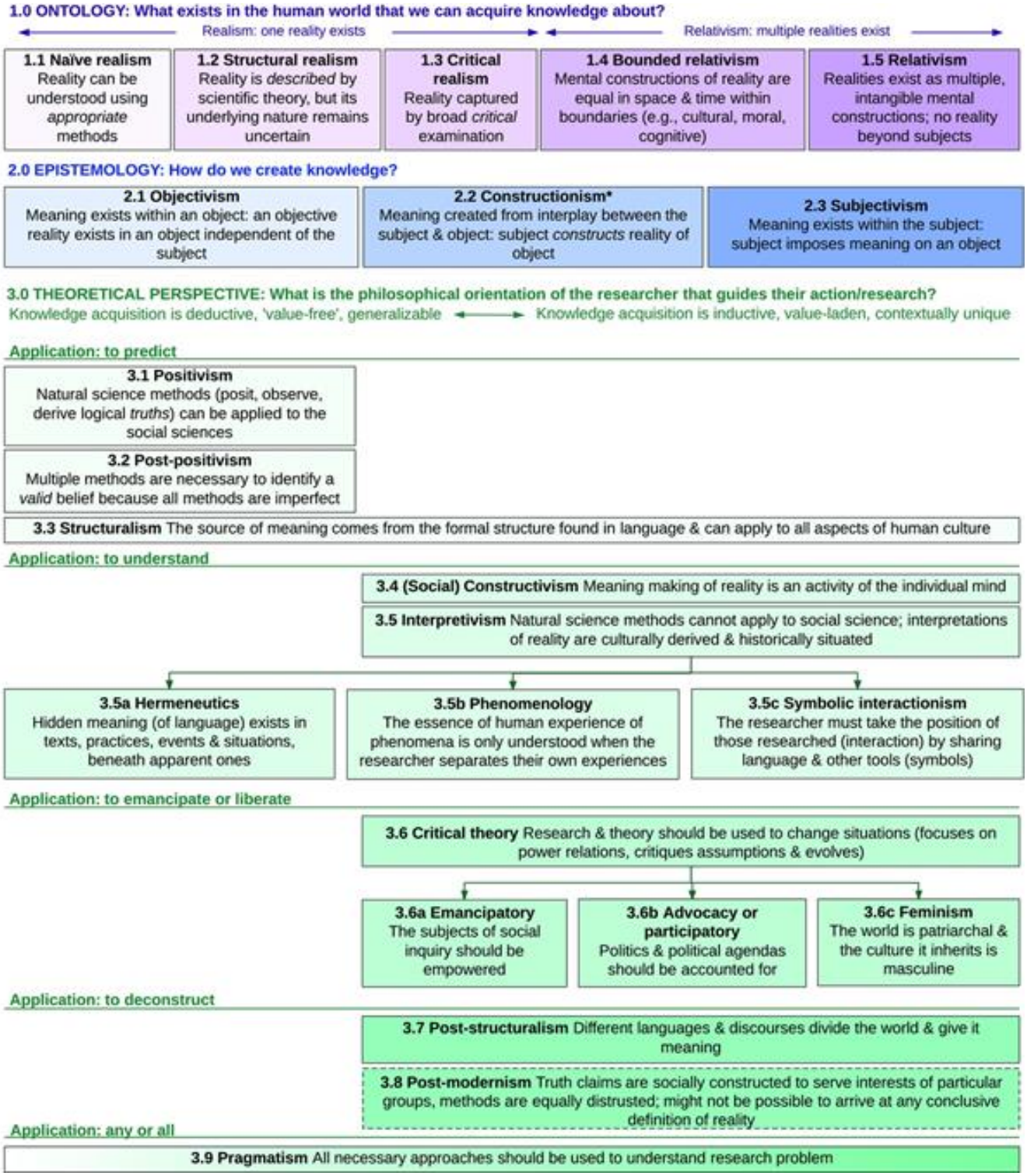

Figure 3.2 - Three branches of Philosophy Moon and Blackman (2014)

Interpretivism has long been seen as the opposite position to positivism however, there is an increasing

interest in pragmatism as a third paradigm, one which underpins mixed methods studies as it is deemed to offer an alternative stance that facilitates the use of seemingly otherwise incompatible research approaches (Bryman, 2008; Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

Whilst there are similarities and overlaps between pragmatism and interpretivism (Table 3.2) interpretivism is more consistent with my world view and my ontological stance that points to multiple realities that are socially constructed and vary according to the individuals.

Paradigm	Pragmatism	Interpretivism
Epistemology	Objective or subjective	Subjective
Ontology	Single and multiple	Multiple realities Socially constructed
Axiology	Biased / unbiased	Biased
Methodology	Qualitative / quantitative	Inductive / qualitative

Table 3.2 - Pragmatism vs Interpretivism

As a researcher I lean towards qualitative research as well as in the use of a qualitative methodology. The term 'qualitative' is used interchangeably to mean the nature of the research as well as referring to the specific tools and techniques employed to capture data. Braun and Clarke (2013) point to Kidder and Fine's (1987) distinction between "Big Q qualitative research and small q qualitative research" (ibid, p 4), highlighting that the latter relates to the qualitative tools that are used but not necessarily within a qualitative study, for example as part of a mixed methods approach (Morgan, 2007). Indeed, the term 'qualitative' has often been used as a synonym for interpretative research (Myers and Avison, 2002) and whilst these two elements are commonly aligned it is not necessarily always so (Goldkuhl, 2012).

Qualitative Research

The essence of qualitative research lies in its use of words as data rather than numbers. It seeks to explore meaning through the words of the participants. Hence in this study, I have opted to take a qualitative approach, seeking to understand practitioner views and perceptions of project management as a profession, its

key traits and characteristics, and what that means for them.

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Words used as data	Numbers used as data.
Seeks to understand and interpret more local meanings, recognises data as gathered in a context, sometimes produces knowledge that contributes to more general understandings.	Seeks to identify relationships between variables to explain or predict – with the aim of generalising the findings to the wider population.
Generates 'narrow' but rich data, 'thick descriptions' – detailed and complex accounts from each participant. Not many take part.	Generates 'shallow' but broad data – not a lot of complex detail obtained from each participant, but lots of participants take part (to generate the necessary statistical power).
Tends to seek patterns but accommodates and explores difference and divergence within data.	Seeks consensus, norms or general patterns; often aims to reduce diversity of responses to an average response.
Tends to be theory generating, and inductive (working up from the data).	Tends to be theory-testing, and deductive.
Values personal involvement and partiality (subjectivity and reflexivity).	Values detachment and impartiality (objectivity).
Method is less fixed (can accommodate a shift in focus in the same study).	Has a fixed method (harder to change focus once data collection has begun)?
Tends to take longer to complete because it is interpretative and there is no formula.	Can be completed quickly.

Table 3.3 - Qualitative vs quantitative research Braun and Clarke, adapted from Tolich and Davidson (2003)

As the literature review has highlighted, there remains no real consensus as to the nature of a profession and therefore the research methodology is wholly suited to an exploration of a phenomena upon which the perceptions of practitioners will be constructed internally and based on experiences within differing contexts.

3.3 Research Method

The nature of this research is exploratory in that it seeks to establish the perceptions and experiences of current project practitioners in relation to the professionalisation of project management. The extant literature addresses the progress made towards professionalisation as well as the role of corporate entities and professional bodies but there is little consideration given to the practitioner perspective.

An exploratory study is acknowledged as a valuable means of determining "what is happening; to seek new insight; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Robson, 2002, in Saunders et al., 2009, p139). There are likely to be different lived experiences within the practitioner community and there may be benefits and risks involved in the professionalisation however it is not clear what these may be perceived to be and therefore the use of an exploratory study is considered to be highly appropriate to uncover these opinions.

3.3.1 Research Questions

- What is the value and relevance to the practitioner of professional status?
- Does trait theory aid understanding of professions amongst practitioners?
- What are the perceived benefits and risks to the practitioner of professionalisation?

3.3.2 Time Horizon

The study represents a cross-sectional (or one-shot) examination (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013) of the experiences up to a certain point in the professionalisation process. Efforts to formally professionalise project management began in 2008 when the APM sought to apply for a Royal Charter (Figure 3.3). It would take almost a decade and be subject to costly court battles with the American-based Project Management Institute (PMI) before it was finally secured in April 2017. At this point the Association for Project Management (APM) had not made clear how individual practitioners would be able to apply for Chartership, only publishing the Chartered Standard on 30th November 2017 (APM, 2020).

The publication of the "Road to Chartered" series, paper 10: Supporting the Journey of Project Professionals on

16th May 2018 set out progress made since the award of the Royal Charter the previous year and identified three potential routes to individual Chartership, “in recognition of the diverse paths individuals may take to achieving the standard” (APM, 2018, p7) and allowed for a purely experiential route to acknowledge the competence of highly experienced and perhaps long-serving project practitioners.

The timing of this research, within a few months of this crucial development in professionalisation, serves to shine a light on how well received this news has been from those likely to be affected.

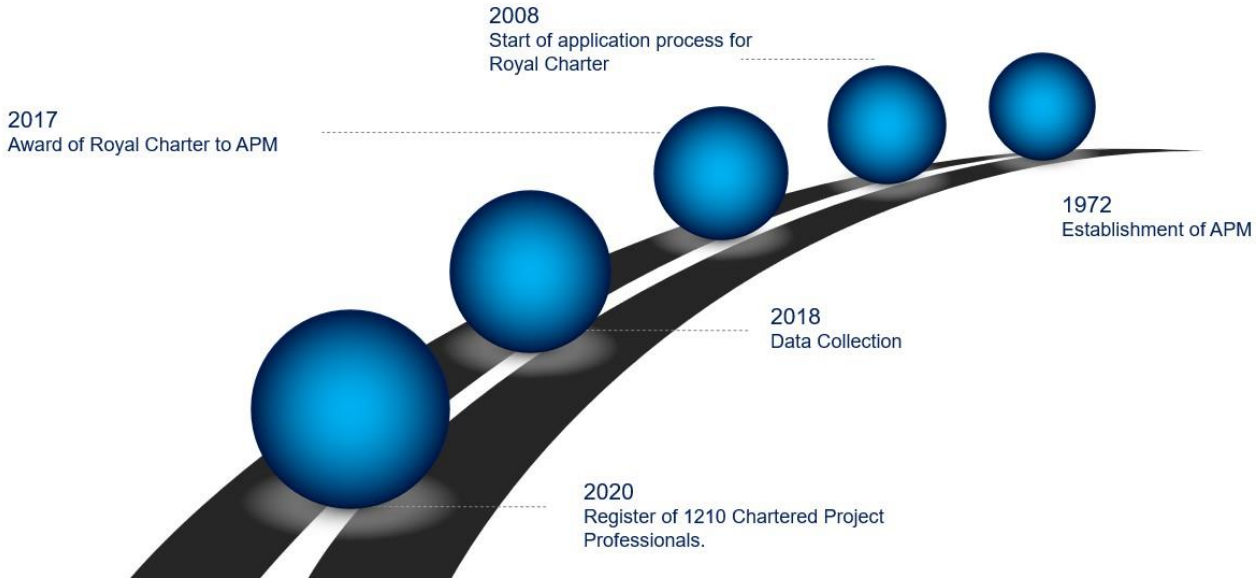

Figure 3.3 - Relative Timeline of Study

3.4 Sampling

The rationale behind research sampling is that it is rarely practicable to collect data from an entire population (Saunders et al., 2009). When we refer to the term ‘population’ in this context it relates to an entire group of individuals of interest to the researcher (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). However, a population may not necessarily be people – it can relate to almost anything and therefore the term ‘universe of units’ is often used (Bryman and Bell, 2003) from which the sample will be taken. Whilst some studies may lend themselves to whole population participation, for the most part this is usually costly in terms of both resource and time (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). In the case of this study, it would be impossible to capture the opinions and perceptions of all project practitioners as Miles and Huberman (1994) attest, “You cannot study everyone

everywhere doing everything" (p, 27). Indeed, the combined individual membership of the two main professional bodies, PMI and APM, alone is estimated to be over 530,000. However, as membership is not mandatory, this is likely to represent only a small percentage of the total number of practitioners globally.

Adopting a sampling approach should not be seen as any less effective than collecting data from the entire population in the form of a census (Saunders and Lewis, 2012), in fact, it is likely to "produce more reliable results, mostly because fatigue and errors are reduced" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p243). It, therefore, provides a manageable approach and can facilitate the gathering of more detailed data (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4.1 Sampling Strategy

It is important to establish the sampling strategy that best suits the nature of the study rather than becoming an afterthought once the research is underway (Punch, 2014).

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that there are three key decisions to involved in the sampling strategy: the first is "whom to select as a participant, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied" (2018, p157).

Of the two different main categories of sampling: probability and non-probability, the most relevant for this study was that of non-probability. A probability-based (representative) sample holds that each subject or unit within the sample "has an equal probability of inclusion within the sample" (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p 96) but to do this requires that the entire population is known, and the sample can be selected at random (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). It is commonly used within quantitative studies and therefore lends itself to generalization of the findings. There are a number of different types of probability sample including: simple random, systematic, stratified, and multi-stage cluster however, given the qualitative nature of this study, and the need to reach participants within a reasonable geographic location this type of sampling approach was not suitable.

By contrast, non-probability sampling is a more subjective method used where a full list of the total population is not available and there is a degree of conscious selection of the sample. This can be in line with specific criteria to explore phenomena and identify variances as well as similarities. This type of strategy will lead to the generation of hypotheses but is unlikely to result in generalizable findings. Examples of the many typologies in

this category include maximum variance, critical case, snowball, purposive, criterion, and convenience (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The strategy adopted here was predominantly one of non-random purposive judgement (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013) as the study sought to elicit opinions and perceptions of project practitioners in relation to their experiences of professionalisation of project management. Purposive sampling is recognized as being one of the most frequently used method of the non-probability methods (King et al., 2019; Creswell, 2014; Gorard, 2013; Saunders and Lewis, 2012). Within this type of sampling, Saunders and Lewis (2012) suggest subtle varieties which can offer a nuanced approach shown in Table 3.4.

Sample Variety	Application	Underlying Premise
Typical Case	Illustrative sample	Typical of the population
Critical Case	Dramatic points crucial to the study aim	Focus on a topic of interest
Extreme Case	Unusual sample	Extreme findings relevant in explaining typical cases
Heterogeneous	Diverse sample	Emergent patterns likely to be of notable interest
Homogeneous	Minimum variation	Explore findings to a greater depth

Table 3.4 - Varieties of purposive sampling Adapted from Saunders and Lewis (2012)

Given the focus of this research in seeking to explore the experiences of practitioners in relation to the professionalisation of project management and the relevance of trait theory, it was felt that the typical case approach was most suitable. This sample variety is broadly illustrative and deemed to be 'typical' of the population (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). Whilst the other variants represent interesting approaches, some are predicated on an understanding of what the experiences may prove to reveal and so, as an early examination of this phenomenon, it was not appropriate or indeed practical, to attempt to identify and select participants who may offer 'extreme' or unusual findings.

The nature of the research also allowed for the use of a combined sampling strategy to include that of

snowballing - another commonly used technique for social researchers (Geddes et al., 2017) undertaking qualitative studies. Its value comes where it is not always easy to identify members of the population or where it may be difficult to access them (Saunders and Lewis, 2012).

A form of convenience sampling (Geddes et al., 2017; Bryman and Bell, 2003), snowballing relies on a few initial contacts providing leads (or referrals) for other individuals deemed to meet the criteria for participation in the research, as such it is seen as a deep networking tool (Geddes et al., 2017)). Often linear, the referral system works in that "one contact helps you to recruit another contact, who in turn can put you in touch with someone else" (Valentine, 2005, p117). The snowballing approach to participant selection in this study proved to be helpful particularly at the beginning of the process where in one instance, one individual provided the contact details of four others.

Whilst it can be very effective in gaining traction in developing a sample from a small number of initial contacts, snowballing can also stall. There often comes a natural end point where the number of relevant networked contacts is exhausted or a saturation point has been reached (Waters, 2015). As Geddes et al. (2017) highlight, this form of sampling usual exploits vertical networking, but it is also possible to "move horizontally" capitalizing on links to build new social networks. This proved to be the case during this research as momentum built and relationships were developed in different spheres.

Initially, participants were identified from my own existing network of business contacts, built from engaging with industry over a number of years, to support student placement activities within my employing University. Contacts within the local Chapter for both professional bodies, APM and PMI, were also particularly supportive of efforts to secure participation through their memberships. Connections available via LinkedIn were also exploited to identify potential subjects and, an appeal to the 'Scottish Programme and Project Management Group' (SPPMG) realized a substantial number of willing subjects.

It is acknowledged that the sampling methodology adopted does limit the possibility of wider generalization of the findings (Geddes at al., 2017; Bryman, 2016) however, it was considered to be the most appropriate to satisfy the overall aim of the research.

3.4.2 Sample Frame

Project practitioners were the target population for this research. The participants were current, practising project professionals, either project managers or programme managers, across a range of sectors, although not every sector was represented.

The recent award of a Royal Charter to the UK-based professional body, APM, has resulted in a notable increase in the narrative surrounding the professionalisation project and has informed the geographical scope of this study to consider the experiences and perceptions of those practitioners within the United Kingdom.

Participants were practising project managers or programme managers and the sample frame was determined according to the following criteria:

- level of project experience
- membership of a professional body (APM/PMI)
- other professional body membership
- non-members of any professional body

The use of a participant sample matrix (Figure 3.4) helped to visualize the target sample of individuals across selection criteria. This was to ensure that at least some participants were recruited for each characteristic, although this was not necessarily evenly reflected across each of the industries or sectors.

It was not the intention of this research that there should be any emphasis on a specific industry or sector, indeed the aim was to explore perceptions from a broad range of industries in order to provide interesting insight across the project landscape. For some participants there were multiple disciplines in play, for example some individuals were IT professionals working within the engineering sector, undertaking a project management role. This provided potential for interesting results laying bare conflicting priorities.

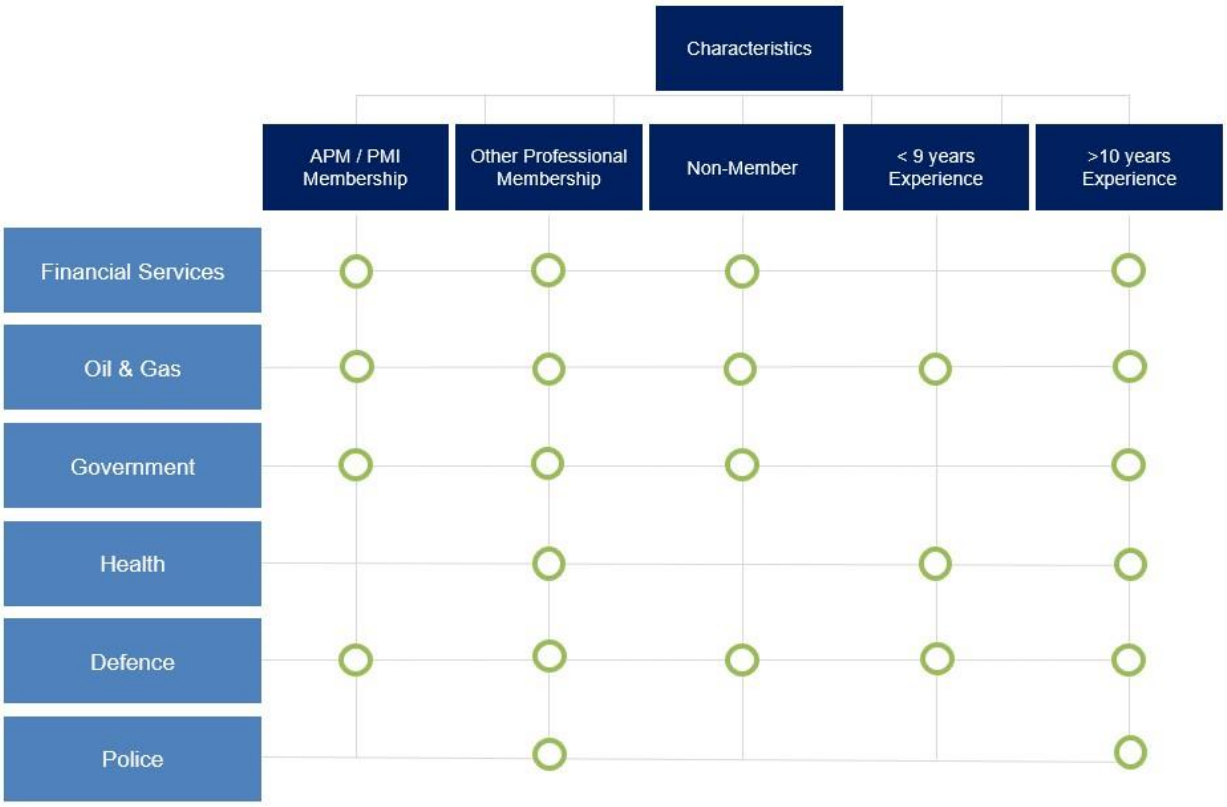

Figure 3.4 - Participant Sample Matrix

The resultant sample frame can be illustrated through a Sankey diagram (Figure 3.5) which illustrates the core criteria or experience and professional membership and the industry sectors within which the practitioners were currently working. As the recruitment process continued additional participants came forward from rail and transport industries. This represents the actual distribution of the interviewees.

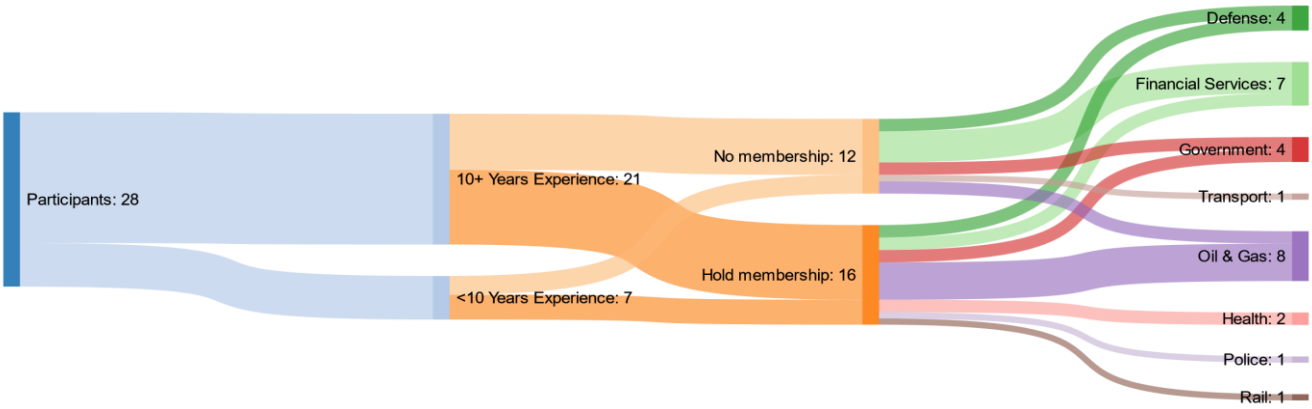

Figure 3.5 - Sankey diagram of sample frame

The diversity of the emerging sample was particularly satisfying because of the range of experience levels, the varied backgrounds and the multi-disciplinary nature of the individuals. There are no indicative figures available for the number of practising project managers within the UK, possibly hampered by the fact that there is no central register or requirement for membership of a professional body, so it is not possible to give a reasonable estimate of the study population.

There have been attempts to do so over recent years however these have been criticised for being wildly inaccurate. However, in 2009 the recruiter, Arras People, who conduct annual surveys of practitioners, suggested that there were between 69,000 and 77,000. These figures, they added, were determined from extrapolations based on indications of APM and PMI membership within their data. Given the growth in project management over the last decade, and the recent 'Golden Thread' report from the APM in 2020 which stated that project management added £156billion to the UK economy, it is likely that the total population is now significantly higher than these figures.

There were a number of IT professionals working across a range of sectors which provided a varied insight into their experiences. It would have been good to access very early career practitioners or new entrants, however, the nature of project management is such that most individuals follow an indirect route into the profession and so this is not all that unexpected. Whilst the researcher was based in the North East of Scotland and there were a number of local participants, it was also possible to secure at least 8 participants from across counties in England, with further participants from other locations within Scotland. There was also a mix of individuals working within the private and public sector which again contributed to the diversity of the sample.

It is worth noting that there were 8 female practitioners within the sample and whilst this was not part of the primary focus of the research, it was good to include a degree of gender representation. Interestingly, accordingly to the Arras People[1] (2020), the ratio of male to female project managers has consistently been 72%:27% since 2006. So, the sample of this study does seem to reflect the disparity in gender representation in this field.

[1] Arras People 'Project Management Benchmark Report, 2020

3.4.3 Sample Size

When taking a saturation approach to sample size it is important to be clear as to the means by which this will be achieved (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Unfortunately, as Fusch and Ness (2015) argue, "the field of data saturation is a neglected one. The reason for this is because it is a concept that is hard to define", (2015, p. 1408).

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) offer some key suggestions when it comes to determining an appropriate sample size including such aspects as precision and confidence level, however these are more relevant to quantitative research. In the case of qualitative studies, the approach is often underpinned by theoretical sampling, borne out of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work on grounded theory. This premise allows for the fact that the researcher continues to collect data until such time as no new information is identified.

There appears, however, to be a degree of agreement in the literature, that saturation is "the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 194). But there seem to be variations here too. Others (Given, 2016; Olshanky, 2015) suggest it hinges on the emergence of no new themes. These come very much from the grounded theory which is a notably debated field.

An alternative perspective is presented in the form of data saturation (Hennink et al., 2017; Fusch and Ness, 2015; O'Reilly and Parker, 2013; Sandelowski, 2008) whereby the sample size is driven by the data collection and nothing new emerges, known as 'informational redundancy' (Sandelowski, 2008). The information (data) is deemed to be redundant in so far as no one reveals anything new in response to the questions. The use of a standardised set of open-ended interview questions assists with this.

With this in mind, this study adopted the data saturation perspective, with the intention for data capture to continue until saturation was achieved (Creswell, 2014; Charmaz, 2006). The anticipation at the outset was that this might be achieved at around 20, however, in the end a total of 28 participants contributed to the study.

As a qualitative study, which tend to adopt smaller sample sizes than those in quantitative research, this represents a robust sample and therefore offers a good level of confidence (Punch, 2014).

3.5 Data Collection

In a qualitative study, the use of interviews rather than surveys is usually the most appropriate instrument (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The type of interview that can be adopted ranges from the structured at one end of the scale, where the researcher has a very clearly defined and rigid framework of questions, to the unstructured at the opposite end, which allows for an almost free-flowing discussion. Ultimately, the choice is determined by "which mode is practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to answer the research questions" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p165).

The interview itself seeks to "attempt to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p3) and it is acknowledged as offering a potential source of rich data if conducted well (Gray,2004).

The data collection strategy for this research required the use of semi-structured interviews which allows for a "degree of structure and standardization" (Punch, 2014) whilst also affording flexibility where it is not known what the participant might reveal (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). A guided open interview facilitates questioning in line with key themes previously identified through a review of extant literature and whilst this instrument can be criticized for being time-consuming (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), it is considered to be particularly suited to elicit opinions from the subjects whilst also allowing for further exploration during the interview (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this approach is appropriate for research seeking to understand the perceived benefits and risks of the professionalisation of project management and why achievement of this status is so important to practitioners, if indeed it is.

3.5.1 Interview Schedule Design

The design of the interview schedule was informed by the key themes drawn from the review of the literature. A simple set of demographic-based questions identified age group, gender, years of experience in project management and the highest level of academic and/or professional qualifications.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were invited to provide a brief overview of their career history to date and outline the types of projects on which they have gained their experience. This served to provide

valuable background data as to how they had come to work in the field of project management, notoriously referred to as the "accidental profession" (Hodgson et al., 2011; Paton & Hodgson, 2016). The full interview schedule is provided in Appendix 1.

There were broadly five key themes that were explored during the interviews (see table 3.5). The first theme examined their perceptions of professions, generally and asked individuals to consider the "Traits of a Profession" (sent to participants ahead of the interview for consideration) and whether these were still relevant given the increasing number of emerging professions such as financial advisors and management consultants, for example.

Recognition is a crucial test of the progress of the professionalisation process (Neal and Morgan, 2000) and the questions around this theme were designed to establish its importance to practitioners and any perceived barriers to securing this. In the study of the professions several authors have proffered steps in the professionalisation process (Caplow, 1956; Wilensky, 1954; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933). One such step is occupational closure whereby entry to the profession is restricted and the questions on this theme explore the appetite for qualification-based control of the title.

The recent acquisition of the Royal Charter by the APM is an important development in the professionalisation process, lauded by many as significant, however the questions around this are designed to determine whether the charter and its associated benefits are valued by current project practitioners.

	Theme	Interview Questions
1.	Profession / Professionalisation	How would you define a profession? What would you suggest are some key traits of a profession? Are these relevant to project management? Do you think project management is a profession?
2.	Recognition	How important is it to you that project management be recognised as a profession? Do you think the wider populous view it as a profession? What barriers do you see to achieving this recognition? Who does it matter to most – practitioners / organisations / professional bodies? Who is driving the professionalisation? With increasing numbers of occupations seeking to secure profession status, how does this impact the value of the status?
3.	Qualifications and closure	How important is it that project managers are subject to registration/regulation? Should there be a minimum qualification for practitioners? Would this be a good thing? If a minimum compulsory benchmark qualification were introduced, how would this affect you? Should qualification be through degree or professional body certification?
4.	Chartership	How important is membership of a professional body to you? How important is it that the body is chartered? Should only project managers be able to attain chartership? What does the Royal Charter mean outside of the UK?
5.	Benefits & risks	What do you perceive to be the benefits of professionalisation of project management? What are the risks to the practitioner?

Table 3.5 - Interview Themes

Finally, the potential benefits and risks of the professionalisation project are explored from the perspective of the individual practitioners.

3.5.2 Piloting the Interview

A pilot study was undertaken in order to test appropriateness of the interview schedule (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Punch, 2014) in addressing the research questions and objectives of the study. The themes for investigation were based upon the emergent themes from the literature. Two interviews were conducted as part of the pilot study and these allowed for further refinement based on the responses to the questions, and to accommodate aspects that had not been considered previously.

These provided valuable insight into the most appropriate flow for the questioning for example, re-ordering questions relating to the nature of a profession prior to asking them to consider whether they felt project management was a profession.

Responses from the two individuals in the pilot study, indicated areas of potential interest that could be explored in support of the study objectives such as the relevance of the Royal Charter outside of the UK.

The benefit of conducting pilot interviews is that it also serves to provide a 'practice-run' for the researcher (Berg, 2009) and also informs the expected duration of the interview which is helpful when recruiting participants to the main study.

3.5.3 Interview Process

Individuals were contacted by email with details of the study and were furnished with a participant information sheet about the research, together with a copy of the "Traits of a Profession" characteristic map, referred to in Chapter 1, which provided background to one aspect of the study.

Consent was secured prior to participation and each individual made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were provided with a consent form for them to confirm their understanding of the process and the implications of their participation. As part of the process of engaging participants to the study, I adhered to the RGU guidance on research ethics as well as seeking additional information from the UK Data Service (UKDS)[2] in relation to researcher obligations. Example participant information sheet and consent

[2] https://www.ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical/consent-data-sharing/consent-forms

form is available in Appendix 2.

The use of semi-structured interview as a survey instrument allowed for key themes to be explored however it also afforded important flexibility to elicit the opinions and perceptions formed from experiences. All participants had taken an indirect route into the profession and therefore there was potential for very different experiences.

From a practical perspective, whilst some interviews were conducted in face-to-face settings, either based in a meeting room on the University campus or at the work location of the participant, most were conducted over the telephone or via Skype. This was due to travel limitations but primarily, convenience for the participants. It also allowed for inclusion of more geographically disperse individuals. The use of video calling software such as Skype can provide the benefits of the face-to-face interview with the accessibility of a telephone call. Creswell (1998) points to 'respondent reluctance' as an issue in studies that adopt interview methods and therefore, this represents an opportune alternative.

It is widely acknowledged that face-to-face interviews have the benefit of allowing the researcher to observe non-verbal cues which can contribute to the data being collected (Sekaran and Bougie, 2012). Facial expressions or body language can provide a sub-text which is only available in such a format and help to inform interpretation of the information being provided (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). However, it has been suggested that some participants might feel uneasy speaking openly in a face-to-face situation, particularly with regard to anonymity of responses (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

The use of telephone interviews has generally been unpopular with some researchers due to such concerns as to whether the participant may become distracted or decide to prematurely end the call, and so have tended to be recommended only in limited circumstances and for short interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 1994; Harvey, 1988). However, they are increasingly adopted as a means of collecting data as the benefits have become more widely acknowledged (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). It is argued that there is a perception amongst participants that telephone interviews afford a greater degree of anonymity (Greenfield et al., 2000) which perhaps facilitates an ease to the discussion, and this becomes notably so when the subject matter is sensitive (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004).

One unexpected benefit of conducting a telephone interview is that the researcher can focus on listening and taking notes without appearing rude to the participant in not maintaining eye contact. It also allowed the participants to engage in a more relaxed discussion without being distracted by the sight of a recording device (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Where a telephone interview was conducted, participants had made prior arrangements to book a meeting room for privacy and to avoid any distractions or interruptions.

Interviews with participants were arranged at their convenience at specific times where they could allocate maximum focus and attention. Many booked meetings rooms in their workplace, and often this was during around lunchtime. All participants were offered the opportunity to conduct the interview out of hours, however only two individuals chose to do so.

The interviews varied in length, dependent on the individual, however the durations ranged between 40 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average of around one hour for most. Whilst additional questions were asked of some participants as the discussion required, the interview schedule provided the guide for every interview session. The flexibility of a semi-structured interview approach allows for a degree of latitude in responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview (Creswell and Poth, 2018) particularly where this relates to experiences.

The execution of the interviews went very smoothly with participants keen to engage with the research. Indeed, a number commented on how much they had enjoyed the conversation and that they had found some of the questions particularly interesting, prompting further reflection.

Whilst most participants were generous with their responses to the questions, a couple of individuals were a little more reserved and provided more succinct answers. A key skill when conducting interviews is to develop a rapport with the participants (Kvale, 1996) which serves to help them to feel at ease and therefore facilitate a more open dialogue. Indeed, Ryan et al. (2009) argue that “the one-to-one interview is a social interaction, and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is of paramount importance in ensuring the process is successful” (p. 311).

Following initial introductory questions regarding their level of experience and certification in project management, participants were invited to discuss their project experience and this for many, was an opportunity to reflect on their achievements in the field. It was important for me, as the interviewer, to adopt an active listening position to allow the participants to speak uninterrupted. Kvale (1996) also argues that the power of silence is very important in this regard and can be used carefully to passively encourage participants to continue speaking.

Whilst on occasion there was a need for some prompting of participants to provide a little more depth to their response, for the most part, the interview conversations flowed freely, with periodic pauses when participants sought to consider the question a little further.

3.5.4 Interview Recordings

A key challenge when capturing data during an interview is listening to the participant whilst also taking notes, therefore the use of a recording device can be hugely beneficial and frees up the researcher to pay closer attention to the discussion. Understanding and interpreting the information being provided is essential in order to accurately capture the opinions and perceptions of the practitioners.

Recording the interviews is beneficial in that it allows the researcher to examine more closely what each participant discusses and to explore responses for clarification where required (Heritage, 1984) as well as prompting and probing (Bryman and Bell, 2003). It also, perhaps more importantly, facilitates the capture of everything that is said so that the researcher is not solely reliant on their memory and the speed with which they can take notes. As non-verbal cues can provide useful inferences to the data collection, so too can the way a participant speaks (Bryman and Bell, 2003). This can contribute to the analysis of the data and therefore the use of a recording provides a full and detailed account.

When adopting the use of a recording device, whilst common practice, it is essential to ensure participant consent and to advise the form it will take and how the subsequent audio recording will be managed afterwards. During arrangements for the interview, each participant was asked whether they would consent to their interview being recorded. This was confirmed in writing ahead of the scheduled interview session and

reaffirmed at the start of the interview. Only one participant declined to be recorded and the interview proceeded on a note-taking basis only.

A digital recording device was purchased specifically for the task and was further supported by a secondary device as a back-up in case of failure, although this proved not to be needed as the primary one was very reliable.

In addition to the recording of interviews, it is always good practice to use an interview protocol to assist with notetaking (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this case it took the form of an adapted interview schedule with additional prompts for the researcher to ensure points were covered at the beginning, such as reiterating anonymity, confidentiality, withdrawal from the interview and to reaffirm consent to record. Additional space was included between the questions to allow for unexpected comments or indirect answers to questions to be noted (Creswell and Poth, 2018). It also facilitated the capture of highlighted notes or informal "jottings" as Emerson et al. (2011) recommend. These served to provide headline prompts and reflections to assist with the analysis phase later on.

3.5.5 Transcription

The transcription of the recordings is ideally conducted a short time after each of the interviews taking place so that any follow-up could be made with the participant (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The aim was to do so within two weeks however, with several interviews scheduled very closely together this extended that duration for some. After initially trying to transcribe the interview recordings manually, this proved to be a particularly time-consuming process. Whilst this is a widely recognised criticism of interviews and transcriptions (Saunders and Lewis, 2012; Creswell and Poth, 2018) it was felt that the adoption of a specialized transcription software tool would reduce the lengthy process from six hours per recording to a far more manageable one to two hours. The use of a professional transcriber was explored however the quoted cost of around £60 per hour of recording, whilst a fair rate given the work involved, was not a viable option. Whilst professional transcribers can offer experience in research interview transcriptions there is still room for error that can change the meaning of the data (Poland, 1995). Instead, the researcher utilized online transcription software from "Trint" which offered a variety of packages, the most competitive of which equated to £10 per hour of recording.

The process requires the uploading of the mp3 recording and the software then undertakes the transcription, which itself takes around 10-15 minutes dependent on the length of the recording. The resultant file still required a degree of manual editing, particularly if the participant had a strong regional accent, however, the whole process was significantly more time effective than a wholly manual transcription. The added benefit of using the software and then undertaking a subsequent manual edit was that it aided with the analysis of the data as it served to highlight emerging themes and commonalities within the transcripts on an ongoing basis, which would otherwise not have been possible with the use of a professional transcriber (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Using the software also allowed for a full transcription of the interviews to be conducted including any hesitations or evidence of the participant thinking through their answer or self-questioning. This further contributed to the process of data analysis.

3.5.6 Data Storage and Security

The security of data being stored was of paramount importance and complied with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016. The electronic copy of the transcription was held in a password protected file on the hard drive of the researcher's computer, together with a scanned copy of the handwritten notes from each of the interviews, marked only with the participant's initials. Back-up copies of these files were also stored on an external hard-drive and subject to the same levels of security in line with Davidson's (1996) recommendation. A master list of participants was also held in a separate password protected file.

The recording device containing the audio files from the interviews was kept locked in a secure lockable box. Only once the audio recordings were transcribed and had been subject to accuracy check, were the files then deleted.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Data Coding

The process of data analysis in a qualitative study begins with the coding of the collected data which serves to break it down into categorizable units (Dey, 1993) although some would argue that early analysis often takes place by the researcher as the data is gathered (Basit, 2003). In fact, it would be fair to say that during the process of data collection within this study, I started to evaluate early findings and made slight adjustments to my questioning, particularly in light of data from the pilot interviews.

The data were reviewed using a manual coding scheme which allowed for categorization of the information gathered. The use of a suitable computer assisted qualitative data analysis software package (CAQDAS), such as Nvivo, was considered but discounted, as Zamawe (2015) states "the key message is that unlike statistical software, the main function of CAQDAS is to not analyse data but rather to aid the analysis process, which the researcher must always remain in control of." (p. 143), further reinforcing Denzin and Lincoln (2005) who assert that the researcher is central to the process of analysis.

In consideration of the benefits of CAQDAS, Creswell and Poth (2018) point to such features as "storing and organizing diverse forms of qualitative data" and "locating and sorting text" for example. Whilst this is helpful in searching and retrieving information it does not of itself conduct any form of analysis and does not assist with the intellectual process of so doing, a criticism that is often levelled at such packages (Gibbs, 2014). Easterby et al., (2015), however, make the case for the importance of becoming familiar with coding techniques before employing one of many software options. By carefully and manually sifting through the transcriptions I believe this facilitates a more immersive examination of the data and the development of a deeper understanding, often serving as a trigger for initial thought processes. However, given the relatively small numbers of interviews involved in this study, a manual approach was justified, but for larger scale studies it would obviously be prudent to make use of one of the many software packages available to assist with such a time-consuming and onerous task (Basit, 2003).

The coding of the data adopted a simple thematic approach driven by the content of the data after collection rather than adhering to a pre-determined scheme. In doing so this allowed for greater flexibility and was felt to

be appropriate given the uncertainty as to how participants might respond to questioning within the interview.

3.6.2 Analysis Strategy

Initially, the intent was to adopt an approach underpinned by grounded theory which is widely used in sociological studies (Punch, 2014). This is an approach, though, that has been subject to considerable debate in the literature since it was first formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) particularly given the complexities and variants that have since evolved. Indeed, since their early work Glaser and Strauss later came to disagree, with Strauss suggesting a more "systemic and reductionist approach to the data analysis" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), picking through the data line by line.

This study, however, leans towards a more constructionist perspective later proposed by Charmaz (2006) which allows for a more holistic approach to be taken by analysing data in its entirety and building theory as the study progresses, but using thematic analysis as the primary method. This was also combined with an element of comparative analysis across the data as each interview was conducted and in doing so, data continued to be collected until such time as no new themes emerged from the interviews.

Thematic analysis of the participant responses was conducted through an inductive process (Seale, 2012) as the study progressed. Whilst the use of thematic analysis is subject to a degree of conjecture with Ryan and Bernard (2000) supporting Boyatzis' (1998) argument that it should be considered as a tool to be used in other methods rather than as a standalone method itself. However, others (Nowell et al., 2017; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006) refute this suggestion citing its flexibility as one of its key benefits.

It is, of course, judicious to be aware of the potential disadvantages of using such a method and take steps to address or mitigate any concerns. The relative lack of literature around thematic analysis is argued to support reservations as to its rigour (Nowell, 2017) however, Holloway and Todres (2003) contend that criticisms of its potential lack of consistency can be addressed with the application of a clear epistemological stance which in this case is that of interpretivism.

It was anticipated that there would be a range of different views expressed by the study sample, given the diverse sample frame and for this reason the data were scrutinized for distinctions and consensus. By using

thematic analysis, this allowed for theoretical freedom in considering the data and resulted in “a rich and detailed, yet complex account” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p78).

In acknowledging its criticisms, and it does appear to be neglected as a method in part because there has been a lack of clarity around the specifics of how to conduct such analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001, Boyatzis, 1998), it is important, however, to emphasise the benefit to be gained in using the approach.

Thematic analysis is sufficiently flexible to be suitable within a number of different theoretical frameworks including constructionist-based studies which are focused on an exploration of “the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun and Clarke, 206, p81). It was felt to be a particularly suitable choice for this study as it facilitates an open approach to the evaluation of the data and as Nowell et al. (2017) state, pointing to arguments offered by Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004), thematic analysis is helpful to the “examination of perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences and generating unanticipated insights” (2017, p2).

3.6.3 Process of Data Analysis

The process of analysis took a number of steps and actually began during the transcription phase as is often argued should be the case (Gibson and Brown, 2009; Bird, 2005; Reissman, 1993). This facilitated an immersion into the interview discussion at a minutiae level and follows the phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) in Table 3.6, although they themselves acknowledge that these are common across the many other qualitative methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994) including that of grounded theory (see Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Even within thematic analysis there are variations on a similar theme such as those proffered by Vaismoradi et al. (2016), who suggest initialisation, construction, rectification and finalization. The terms differ, but the essence remains the same. The approach used in this study was also influenced, to a degree, by the use of thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) as a way to visualize the themes at the different levels.

Phase		Description of the process
1.	Familiarising with the data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas.
2.	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3.	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme.
4.	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5.	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions for these.
6.	Producing the report	Final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research questions and literature.

Table 3.6 - Phases of thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006)

A verbatim transcription for each interview was conducted by the researcher and meant that there was no loss of meaning through omission or unconscious altering of the data affording substantive rigour prior to the main thematic analysis. Whilst transcription is a labour-intensive process, the benefit for the researcher in doing this themselves is that it serves to re-familiarise with the conversation from each of the interviews (Riessman, 1993).

This initial scanning of the data served as an 'aide memoire' to the views raised within the interview and allows for certain patterns to become evident or points of interest to be noted. A key aspect of thematic analysis requires that it should be an iterative process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2006) that revisits the entire data set numerous times in order to identify emergent themes and to consolidate the meaning being derived. Indeed, Vaismoradi et al. (2016) recommend that the researcher take time, at intervals, to step back from the data in order to "reappraise the analysis process and distance themselves so as to increase their sensitivity and reduce any premature and incomplete data analysis" (2016, p106).

The generation of initial codes was achieved following a systematic and detailed review of all of the data before bringing these together to gather into themes. There was then a second level to the analysis across the entire data set which served to identify macro themes for evaluation.

For many of the themes identified, there were logical synergies such as for example, recognisable entry route and certification, and characteristics of a profession and wider recognition, which were drawn through into the second phase of the analysis.

When identifying themes King (2004) argues that it can be tempting to keep doing so whilst mining the rich data however, it is important for the researcher to satisfy themselves that a point of saturation has been reached in relation to those themes relevant to the research questions.

In total, the distillation of the data resulted in seven categories, aligned to those identified within the literature review. From the data, twenty-seven themes were collated from which eight macro themes emerged, although care was taken not to allow 'priori theorizing' based on knowledge gained through the literature as Vaismoradi et al. (2016) caution. These are presented and examined in the following chapters.

3.7 Issue of Quality

It is important to ensure that any research provides a credible contribution to knowledge and therefore consideration has been given to potential quality issues in the context of a qualitative study. Unlike quantitative research which tends to be viewed as being more readily assessed in terms of its credibility and reliability, qualitative studies have long been subject to criticism around rigour and seen as somehow inferior (Noble and Smith, 2015). However, there have been increasing calls (see Creswell, 2014; Winter, 2000; Howe and Eisenhart, 1990) for the two approaches not to be pitched against each other in terms of quality but instead a wider acknowledgement that they are very different and therefore the measurement and assessment of quality will naturally require different mechanisms.

The main cornerstones for quality are traditionally considered to be validity (accuracy), reliability (consistent approach) and objectivity (unbiased) (Flick, 2007) although Nowell et al. (2017) join others who have argued for alternate terminology, such as for example trustworthiness. They point to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestion

that this incorporates 'credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability'. Whilst some (Guest et al., 2012; Morse et al., 2002) resist the use of such new terminology on the grounds that it "risks marginalising the field from mainstream science and the legitimacy with which it is associated" (2012, p 6) - perhaps failing to acknowledge the need for different approach to the assessment of qualitative research. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) suggest an eight-point quality assessment check list for qualitative research, as in Table 3.7:

Criterion	**Questions to consider**	**Assessment**
Worthy topic	Is it relevant, original, timely, significant / interesting?	With the increasing narrative around the profession of project management and the securing of a Royal Charter for the APM, this study is particularly relevant and timely. The focus specifically on the practitioner perspective has been neglected.
Rigour	Use of appropriate data, concepts and methods?	The use of a qualitative, phenomenological approach is eminently appropriate in the context of the research aims.
Sincerity	Is it characterised by transparency? Does it provide sufficient information to evaluate it?	Detailed explanation of the approach to the research is provided in this chapter.
Credibility	Is it marked by detailed descriptions?	The data is presented through rich descriptions supported by verbatim quotes from participants to provide depth to their voice
Resonance	Does it affect readers through evocative representations, appropriate generalisations and transferable findings?	The perceptions, opinions and comments will resonate with the wider practitioner population and whilst statistical generalisations are not possible, this does provide universal themes applicable within this field and potentially other professions.
Contribution	Does it make a significant contribution in terms of theory, methodology or practical impact?	The contribution to knowledge is presented in Chapter 6.
Ethics	Does it consider ethical issues?	A range of ethical issues have been considered and are detailed in section 3.8.
Meaningful	Does it fulfil its aims? Are the methods appropriate? Is there a connection between	The study provides valuable insight into the practitioner

coherence	literature, research questions and findings?	experience of the professionalisation of project management using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, drawing on extant theory on professionalisation.

Table 3.7 - Assessment of Qualitative Research Adapted from Easterby et al. (2015)

Whilst, adopting the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), endorsed by Nowell et al., (2017), the analysis of this study can be evidenced against the Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases:

Phase		Means of establishing trustworthiness
1.	Familiarising with the data	Extensive engagement with data Careful storage of data. Kept records of interview notes and full transcriptions.
2.	Generating initial codes	Audit trail of code generation.
3.	Searching for themes	Creation of thematic networks / mind maps to understand connections and synergies.
4.	Reviewing themes	Cross referencing of themes against raw data.
5.	Defining and naming themes	Documenting of themes.
6.	Producing the report	Description of coding and analysis process adopted. Explicit epistemological choices throughout the study. Use of participant quotes to provide voice to the data. Rich, thick descriptions.

Table 3.8 - Trustworthiness of Research Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

A substantial amount of time was set aside to devote to the analysis of the data to facilitate a detailed, deep dive into the findings to capture the full extent of the semantic content in the language of the responses as well affording consideration of the latent content (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Transcription of the data was undertaken by the researcher, rather than outsourced, and used a two-phased approach. First, using the software, Trint, followed by a detailed cross-referencing of the digital recording against the output, and any requisite editing due to accent peculiarities or unknown terms. This provides consistency assurance. Verbatim transcription was undertaken to ensure rigour and avoid any loss of meaning through omission. All data were included within the analysis, regardless of discrepancy with anticipated findings. Indeed, the very nature of this study sought to examine the potentially disparate views and perceptions, therefore any contradictory data is included within the analysis and discussion.

The epistemological choices have been detailed within this chapter to provide transparency of the methodological approach taken, presenting a clear framework against which the robustness of the study may be judged.

3.7.1 Generalisability

The limitations in terms of generalisability of qualitative studies are widely acknowledged (see for example Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Creswell, 2014) however it is worth noting that that is not their intent, as Greene and Caracelli (1997) argue, it is about particularity. Indeed, Janesick (2003) contends that "the contribution of qualitative research often lies in its uniqueness". The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of project practitioners across a range of project types and sectors, and this in itself naturally points to the potential for disparate voices which are not readily replicated due to the unique setting and context of the sample frame. Whilst it is accepted that the findings of this study will not be statistically generalisable, there have been universal themes that have emerged from which it is possible to draw inferences regarding the existence of diverse set of views amongst the practitioner population within project management and potentially other professions. This, it is argued, addresses Galdas' (2017) concern that the findings cannot be transferable beyond this particular sample.

3.7.2 Bias

As with any research, there is a likelihood that the researcher introduces a degree of bias into the process, even with measures in place to avoid doing so, such as for example during the interviews. Creswell (2014) suggests that this often occurs during the interpretation stage of the research as "we are shaped by our

backgrounds, gender, culture, history and socioeconomic origin", (2014, p 202). It would be sensible to acknowledge this and consider to what extent this may have occurred during this study.

Care was taken to ensure that the questions within the interviews were framed without prejudice and were in no way leading to the participants, therefore the risk of bias being introduced at this level was felt to be minimised. There can also be the potential for bias in the study sample, particularly where the strategy for recruitment is purposive however, this was mitigated through the employment of snowball sampling from an initial small cluster of individuals who then aided with referrals to their own networks. Whilst at the time of the interviews the researcher was based in Aberdeen, there was a conscious decision for this study not to be become biased towards the oil and gas industry, which is dominant in the area. It was therefore important to actively reach out to secure a balance of participants across a range of different industries and sectors.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical considerations were addressed during the course of the study, and these included the confidentiality afforded to the participants and the information supplied. All participant identity was anonymised with the sample frame classified only at a very high level based on the industry or sector within which they currently worked. The participants' right to privacy was maintained at all times and steps taken to ensure that they were not identifiable from the data used.

All participants were supplied with a participant information sheet which outlined the purpose of the study and their role within it, facilitating informed consent to be given. This also clearly established the right to withdraw at any time.

Assurances were provided that any recordings and transcriptions of such would be destroyed upon completion of the study, and this would be done so in a diligent manner.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Robert Gordon University Research Ethics Policy with consideration given to ethical procedures, research quality, integrity, and relationships. There were no ethical issues encountered throughout the duration of the research study.

3.9 Strengths and Limitations

The methodological approach that has been adopted to address the research objectives provides an appropriate degree of rigour and confidence in the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The study was designed to explore the practitioner experience, and this therefore dictates the use of a qualitative approach.

In seeking to explore the beliefs and perceptions of the practitioners, data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews which are best suited to elicit these subjective observations and views whilst also providing an overarching framework to guide the direction of questioning. Participants were encouraged to speak candidly about their own experiences, perceptions and beliefs in relation to the categories within the interview schedule, and the questions asked were open-ended to facilitate this and allow for a flow of dialogue.

Whilst qualitative research is concerned with the quality rather than quantity of data collected, the study recruited 28 participants which it was felt offered a particularly robust sample size. The sample frame provided a diverse set of voices and offered insight from practitioners within a variety of industries and sectors, as well as offering a degree of representation from a range of different experience levels and age groups. This diversity was further strengthened by the wide range of entry routes from numerous underpinning disciplines. This is a notable strength of the study however, if I were to revisit this, I would have liked to have included participants from some of the industries and sectors less associated with project management, such as pharmaceuticals, third sector and education.

It is acknowledged that by their very nature the findings from qualitative studies are not generalizable in a statistical sense rather, as Creswell (2014) points to Greene and Caracellie's (1997) assertion, the intent is particularity. The strength of the design of this study is that it provides for an in-depth exploration of the practitioner experience or professionalisation as it relates to project management, a hitherto neglected area of research.

This study was designed as a cross-sectional examination of the professionalisation project up to a given point in time, conducted shortly after the award of a Royal Charter to the Association for Project Management (APM), and is therefore subject to the characteristics prevalent at that juncture. Whilst it is acknowledged that a longitudinal study provides an opportunity to examine the development of phenomena over an extended

period of time (Saunders et al., 2009), this can be considered as future potential research.

It is notable that I have found myself to have really engaged in the methodological debate later in the process and it would have been advantageous to have had this enhanced knowledge at an earlier stage. The extent to which there is such counter argument within the literature into qualitative research may prove to be a barrier for novice researchers.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the approach taken to the study and clarified the philosophical underpinning that has guided the various research choices.

As an interpretivist researcher I lean towards Qualitative research and the use of qualitative methods which seeks to capture data through words rather than numbers to explore meaning. The nature of such a study means that the findings are not generalizable but instead serve to provide an in-depth insight into the perceptions and experiences of the practitioners of the professionalisation of project management.

The use of a combined purposive and snowballing sampling strategy facilitated the recruitment of a diverse range of participants from numerous industries and sectors, with varying levels of experience in project management. The sample size was determined by the data saturation perspective whereby recruitment ceased once the point of 'informational redundancy' was reached i.e., nothing new emerged during the interviews. The resultant sample comprised 28 participants.

An approach using semi-structured interviews was adopted and the interview schedule was designed based on themes drawn from the literature review. A pilot interview served to trial the proposed questions and facilitated some adjustments to be made prior to the full roll-out of the data collection phase. Each interview, bar one, was recorded and later transcribed. Verbatim transcription was undertaken by the researcher to capture all data and facilitate robust analysis. A manual coding scheme supported thematic analysis of the resultant data. Consideration was given to quality, issues of bias and ethical concerns, and appropriate steps taken to address and/or mitigate these.

Chapter 4 : Findings

Overview

This chapter presents the findings from data gathered through qualitative semi-structured interviews of 28 project professionals currently working on projects or programmes within the United Kingdom in a range of sectors. The findings serve to illustrate the perceptions of experienced practitioners as project management has moved forwards with its professionalisation project. An outline of the participant demographic is provided in order to establish the context of the study, taking into account the industry sectors, experience levels and qualifications. Participant perceptions are explored regarding the nature of a profession and its recognition as such, the importance and impact of certification and the implications of the award of a Royal Charter to the UK professional body, Association for Project Management.

The study participants were practising project professionals currently managing either projects or programmes in different sectors. All those individuals invited to take part in the study did so and responded to all questions within the semi-structured interview. The interviews were conducted either in a face-to-face setting or via telephone or Skype channels. Each gave their consent for the session to be recorded, with the exception of only one participant who requested that only notes be taken.

The interviews were conducted over a 3-month period from June 2018 to August 2018., with the average interview duration being 50 minutes.

The exploratory nature of this study sought to determine the perceptions and experiences of practitioners in relation to the professionalisation of project management. This was against a backdrop of the recent acquisition of a Royal Charter for the Association for Project Management (APM) the largely UK-based professional body. This significant development occurred in April 2017 and for the next 12 months the APM worked to establish a framework to enable practitioners to work towards individual Chartership.

4.1 Participant Demographic

The sample frame (Table 4.1) comprised 28 individuals drawn from a range of sectors including financial services, oil and gas, Government, and health. Each had direct experience of managing projects or programmes of varying complexity and type. The depth of experience ranged from 4 years up to 33 years. Participants were both male and female and whilst the sampling strategy was purposive, this was not enacted specifically along the lines of gender. The sample frame provided 8 female participants compared to 20 males. The sampling approach sought to obtain participants across a number of age group categories in order to capture new entrants as well as more established practitioners. The categories were determined as: under 25, 26-35, 36-45 and over 46.

As is common with many project practitioners, most had 'fallen' into project management whilst working with their employer at the time and having been asked to oversee a project. A number of participants had substantive roles, for example in engineering, computer science and banking prior to their involvement in projects. Only one individual moved into project management as a graduate, and they pointed to this being accidental in so far as they were offered a place on a graduate scheme in this area with a major employer.

Over half of those sampled had between 10- and 20-years' experience working in project management whilst 7 practitioners had less than 10 years' experience. Notably, 3 individuals had worked in project management for over 28 years and reported significant change in this field over that time period. Overall, the sample provided insight from practitioners with experience ranging from 4 years at the lower end of the scale up to 33 years.

#	Age Group	Gender	Years' Experience	Sector	Nature of Project
1	36-45	Male	10 years	Financial Services	IT
2	26-35	Male	5 years	Rail	
3	46+	Male	29 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
4	36-45	Female	10 years	Financial Services	IT
5	36-45	Male	10 years	Oil & Gas	IT
6	36-45	Male	10 years	Transport	IT
7	36-45	Female	10 years	Financial Services	IT
8	46 +	Male	16 years	Health	IT
9	46+	Male	26 years	Government	IT
10	46+	Male	20 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
11	26-35	Female	4 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
12	36-45	Male	17 years	Financial Services	IT
13	46+	Male	22 years	Government	
14	36-45	Male	11 years	Government	
15	46+	Male	33 years	Health	IT
16	36-45	Male	14 years	Financial Services	IT
17	46+	Female	19 years	Defence	
18	46+	Male	15 years	Defence	
19	36-45	Female	6 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
20	36-45	Female	10 years	Government	
21	46+	Male	28 years	Police	
22	36-45	Female	11 years	Defence	
23	36-45	Male	15 years	Financial Services	
24	36-45	Male	4 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
25	36-45	Male	9 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering
26	46+	Female	15 years	Financial Services	IT
27	36-45	Male	5 years	Defence	
28	36-45	Male	6 years	Oil & Gas	Engineering

Table 4.1 - Participant demographics

It is worth highlighting that of the 8 sectors represented in this study, the nature of projects varied. The resultant study sample frame provided a real cross-sectional demographic with representation of the genders, industry sectors, age group and level of experience in years. For some there were secondary elements to their environments. For example, whilst all were practising project or programme professionals, some were working in the field of IT within a specific sector such as financial services, oil and gas or health.

A simple visual breakdown of the key demographic can be seen in Figure 4.1.

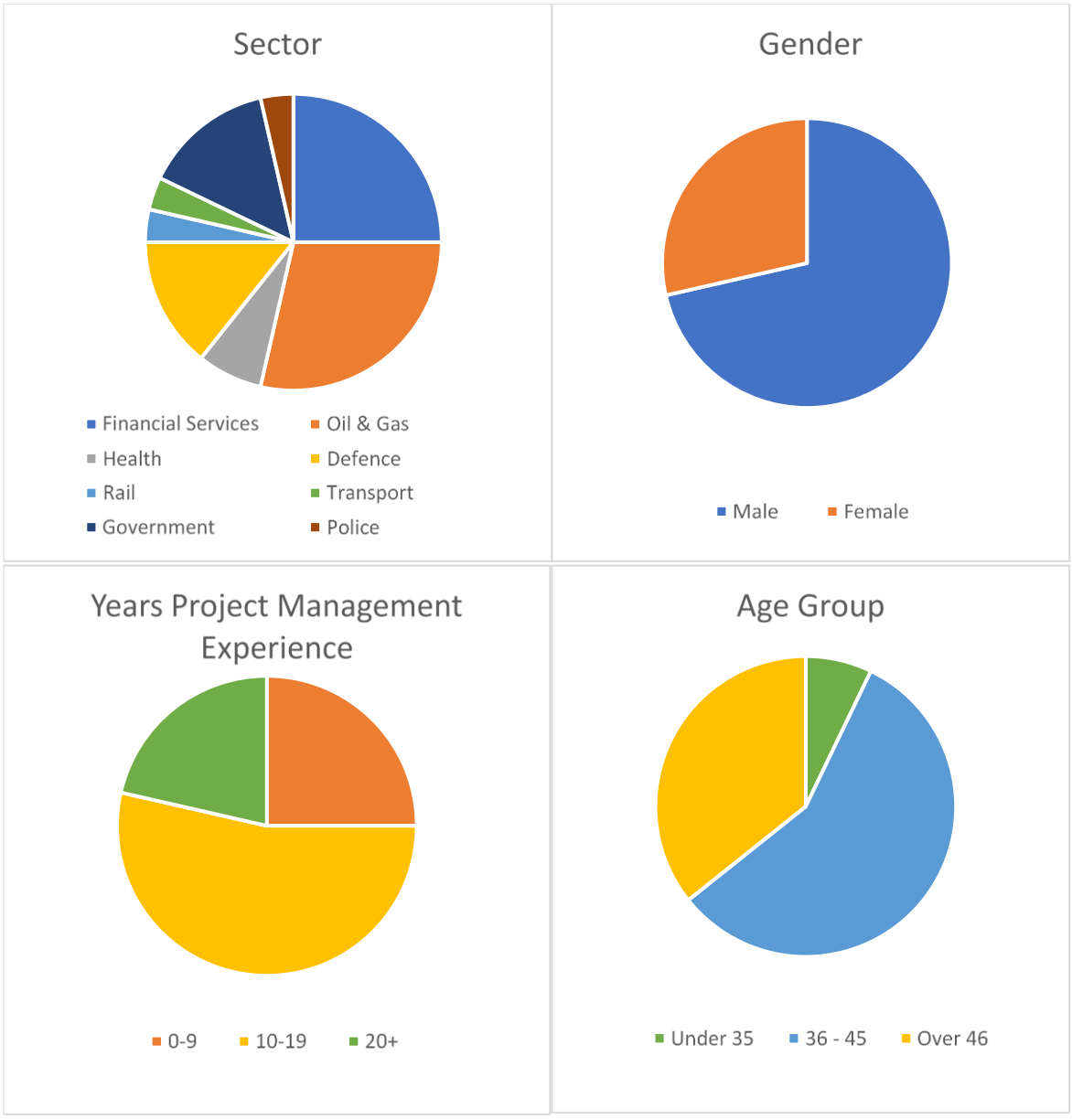

Figure 4.1 - Key Participant Demographics

4.1.1 Experience

Reflecting the cross-disciplinary nature of project management, the participants described very different routes into their current role. A series of pen portraits are presented periodically throughout the chapter to shine a light on some of the practitioners and to provide a 3-dimensional view of the individuals who engaged with this study.

"The Wise Sage"

A highly experienced participant first began managing projects almost 30 years' ago, he remembers the discipline had very little visibility and many were unaware of project management. Indeed, when asked to head a small team of software engineers working in the water industry, he referred to his local library for books that might assist in his new role. This led him to chance upon a publication from the APM and the discovery that he would be delivering a project. With experience running IT-based projects within a range of sectors including engineering, financial and production, he has found working in project management particularly fulfilling which he feels has given him the opportunity to take a discrete piece of work and deliver for the client. He enjoys working with teams of different people and the social interaction that brings whilst building relationships. He now runs a consultancy firm.

Whilst another began her career initially as a Mechanical Engineer and then moved into a Project Engineer role focused on technical aspects. She then sought out more responsibility and became involved in the commercial and contractual elements of a project. In less than 4 years she is now managing multiple contracts and running a small portfolio of projects, as well as undertaking proposal management.

4.1.2 Academic Qualifications

The participants had varying levels of qualifications, both academic and professional but only 4 individuals had academic degrees specifically in the field of project management.

When asked for their highest academic qualifications 10 participants reported an undergraduate degree. These were in such diverse subject areas as: Business, Marine Biology, Applied Social Studies, Engineering, English, Physics, Economics, and Chemical Engineering. Another 4 participants declared a further education qualification such as a Higher National Certificate (HNC) whilst 13 participants reported a postgraduate master's as being their highest academic award. Again, subject areas ranged from Information Technology / Computer Science, Engineering, Maths, Aeronautics, Project Management, and Business Administration (MBA).

One individual completed professional qualifications gained through the Chartered Banker Institute (CBI) previously, the Institute of Bankers (IOB).

4.1.3 Professional Project Management Certifications

There is a plethora of project management certifications available to those practitioners seeking to demonstrate their knowledge and these were popular amongst the sample frame. Indeed, only 5 participants reported that they did not hold such a certification, although 2 of these did hold an academic qualification in the field of project management.

Nine individuals confirmed that they held the APMQ (or its predecessor, the APMP) through the Association for Project Management (APM), whilst only 2 held the PMP through the Project Management Institute (PMI). PRINCE2 Practitioner was also a popular certification with 9 individuals reporting that they held this. Managing Successful Projects (MSP) was cited by 4, whilst only 2 individuals mentioned Agile certifications such as Professional Scrum Master and Agile PM Practitioner.

Of the sampled practitioners, 10 held more than one professional certification and these were often from different sources, for example, those with an APMQ also held PRINCE2 Practitioner, whilst others reported multiple certifications from the Office of Government Commerce, such as PRINCE2, Managing Successful

Projects (MSP) and Management of Portfolios (MoP).

Only 3 individuals held no qualification in the field of project management at all, either academic or professional.

4.1.4 Chartership

Reflective of the different discipline areas of the participants, some reported working towards individual chartered status within different fields, whilst one very experienced practitioner had already secured Chartered Project Professional status. An early career entrant was working towards Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Chartership having graduated with a postgraduate degree in project management within the last 5 years.

Some participants reported having had aspirations to achieve chartership in the field of engineering, but their careers had taken an unexpected change of direction having fallen into managing projects.

4.2 Nature of a Profession

As an occupation seeks to secure the status of a profession, it journeys through the process of professionalisation, often typified by achieving key milestones or demonstrating certain traits or characteristics. A range of themes were explored in order to examine the core characteristics that appeared most prevalent from the review of the literature around trait theory.

- Education/Certification
- Licensing/Occupational Closure
- Formalised Professional Associations

4.2.1 Perception of a Profession

On this theme, the participants were asked to consider how they would define a profession and what it meant to them. The purpose of this was to explore their perceptions and to understand whether they felt that a profession was characterized by any given attributes. The responses revealed a variety of aspects but those regarded as most significant were considered to be the requirement for robust certifications or qualifications, a

specific set of skills, expertise based on a body of knowledge, adherence to standards, the presence of a professional association or body, and ongoing professional development.

By far the most commonly cited characteristic of a profession amongst the participants was the requirement of a qualification and/or certification in order to demonstrate the acquisition of key knowledge, often as a result of a substantial investment of time. Views varied in terms of the nature of the qualification, but many pointed to this being degree-level.

> *"I think for me, a profession is something that you need a qualification to progress in it really, so either a degree or a certification – something that you probably need to study longer for and is more brain-based." (PMF3)*

> *"It's an element of there's actually a qualification that needs to go into having that profession. There are qualifications that you need to gain to be able to demonstrate your expertise that's been developed over time and specific to that role." (PMF6)*

> *"I tend to think of a professional as someone who has gone to university." (PMOG5)*

In a similar vein, a number of individuals pointed to mastery of a body of knowledge through demonstrating not just knowledge and understanding but also application, for example:

> *"Well, it's a body of knowledge that you have to prove that you have, so there's some element of assessment in there somewhere." (PMH2)*

Although, this was tempered by the view that any qualification should be subject to sufficient rigour and not a case of passing exams by merely regurgitating text to get through the assessment. But whilst the acquisition of qualifications or certifications was central to a profession, the participants felt it to be only part of the picture, pointing to a requirement for ongoing commitment to professional development:

> *"Most people these days commit to CPD and things like that which organisations themselves might not be that bothered about, but the profession does." (PMG2)*

> *"There is an ability to have lifelong study and continual professional development within that area".*

(PMP1)

In seeking to differentiate a profession from an occupation, one individual ruminated that the nature of the work may be a factor, in particular the extent to which this might be physical, suggesting that the more manual the work, the less likely they would be to view it as a profession.

Another aspect that was identified was the view that a profession generally afforded an individual greater potential for career development, in contrast to the limitations of an occupation in this regard. But fundamental to a profession, it was felt, was being held to high standards, and the importance of these being carefully monitored and maintained to provide valuable assurance:

"It's the profession itself having standards, monitoring those standards, and being committed." (PMG2)

"A profession to me is based on 'values, disciplines, and principles. It's more than just doing a job. It's about doing it to a standard set by the world at large or some professional body." (PMD2)

Indeed, it was suggested that a profession is often personified by the presence of a professional body, that not only establishes a set of standards but also plays an important role representing the interests of the practitioners as well as being a central hub for sharing of best practice:

"A profession for me is where you've got a body and organisation who advise the people who are members of their organisation to say these are examples of best practices and so we share information and this is how we build a network and strengthen our profession and we have an image. We have a brand, and we present ourselves in this way. People take pride in it and gives them extracurricular interest and network of like-minded colleagues." (PMD3)

For some, a profession had a sufficiently narrow focus or expertise, although this in itself added to the complexity, as one participant pointed to the many specialisms within the IT industry, by way of example and the challenge of being able to underpin these with one qualification or entry restrictions. There was a sense also that the nature of the resultant output from the work was central to this question:

"I guess if you are talking about a profession you need to be able to narrow that down to a particular

type or category that is the output of those professionals, whether that is a law service, a project management enabling service, or medical service. For me it's all about the output if you are part of a professional grouping, that you ultimately provide for the wider world." (PMR1)

The presence of a specific set of skills and, often, a level of technical expertise was also felt to be characteristic of a profession, both of which, it was argued, needed to be developed over time.

In the context of conduct, one participant suggested that assumptions are often made regarding behaviours that correlate with an individual's role, particularly when they belong to a profession:

"If someone is behaving professionally then they are acting in the capacity of a particular role. So, it's almost as though not knowing what that person is like privately, never having met them, you can make statements that will be reasonably accurate as to how they will behave." (PMOG6)

Some participants suggested that control of the title is an important factor for a profession in that only those who meet key requirements are permitted to practise. However, citing engineering as an example, they acknowledged that this is not always protected, with greater restrictions in place in different countries.

"To me an engineer should be a professional person. An engineer should be considered on the same level as a medical professional. In the UK, it is not a protected term but in America to call yourself an engineer you've got to be professionally registered and yet in the UK you don't have to be – it dilutes things." (PMOG8)

But whilst engineering was still subject to these contradictions, for the more established profession of medicine, it is a different story with a deeply embedded understanding in the public consciousness as to its status based on an appreciation of what is required:

"If you said you were a doctor, people would naturally have some level of respect for what you do, they would know the hard work to get there and that you're adding something back to society." (PMF4)

For some, however, there was concern regarding the exclusionary nature of professions, in so far as there are

barriers to entry, suggesting that the restricted access provided a prestigious group, although not elitist, that set it apart, adding:

> *"Something around the kind of effort and the hard work that it takes to become one and the commitment and the time it takes to able to do that. I think there is something around how those professions kind of sell themselves and position themselves. Certainly, in medicine and law, there's ethics and legal status around them." (PMF4)*

But it was argued, the professions were not without a potentially darker side, of protectionism and self-serving behaviour, not always focused on the greater good:

> *"One of the things that struck me about professions was that they stick together, and I think there's some really high-profile examples of that where, you know, public interest hasn't been served by professional collusion. The professionalisation of society makes it harder for lay people to be elected representatives when they are faced with a professionalised society – so that only professions are those informed enough to make decisions." (PMG3)*

This provided a thought-provoking topic and in seeking to provide a definition, many found it challenging to articulate what a profession meant to them, indeed a few participants commented that the question was a 'tricky one', whilst one joked:

> *"I'm glad this isn't a job interview – I wouldn't want to answer this one!" (PMT1)*

4.2.2 Key Traits of a Profession

Having offered their thoughts on how they would define a profession, participants were then invited to examine a number of characteristics, drawn from the literature on trait theory, discussed in more depth in the earlier Literature Review in Chapter Two. It was interesting to note that there were some notable similarities with the participants' own definitions during their initial musings on what a profession looked like to them, such as for example, education/certification, body of knowledge, and legal recognition.

In considering each of the characteristics and whether they are relevant in the 21st century, in particular for the new and emerging corporate professions such as project management, most participants took a systematic

approach to reviewing each of the characteristics in turn, agreeing or disagreeing, whilst some offered their priorities from within those listed.

Figure 4.2 - Traits of a Profession

The more contentious characteristics included altruism, authority over clients, autonomy and distinctive culture. Whilst common ground was found in respect of body of knowledge, code of ethics and education/certification.

Indeed, one of the traits subject to immediate focus by many participants was that of altruism, with a number seeking clarity as to the meaning or context of the term. When furnished with that information a common response was one of scepticism that this applied to many professions, for example:

> *"The one that stands out initially is altruism. I'm not sure – if you are in a profession that only exists within say a commercial organisation. Would that not be a conflict of interest?... not sure." (PMG3)*

> *"I would suggest that most project managers wouldn't think altruism is highly ranking." (PMD2)*

By contrast, education/certification was considered to be very important trait of a profession and there was a broad consensus amongst the participants on this, with reference being made to the underpinning study that is required and the resultant confidence this brings.

"I think it's one of those things that's implicitly quite important – it shows that you've not just got the job title, but you've also done the theory behind it. The academic side of it – it gives it a bit more confidence around it." (PMF7)

"So, it's almost like because of these things that they've gone through a particular training set because not everyone can be a lawyer. It sort of defines a base level of expectation as to what you can expect from them." (PMF3)

When considering 'authority over clients', many participants were skeptical and doubted that it applied to all professions. There were differing interpretations of what this might mean in practice with some considering it in literal terms whilst others viewed it as having some level of authority to get the job done. Although, none discussed authority in the context of expertise or in any correlation with respect.

"I'm not sure I have authority over anyone." (PMG3)

"Authority over clients. That one sits a bit funny especially in the engineering world where normally we just have to kind of bow to them. I'm not sure about that one." (PMOG4)

Autonomy was considered both from the perspective of the profession as a whole and also of the individual professional. Some expressed the view that there was no longer the necessity for a profession to be "*standing by itself anymore" (PMOG4)* in a way associated with the traditional professions of law and medicine, perhaps in recognition of the newer management professions. Whilst from an individual practitioner perspective, it was felt that a project manager works as part of a wider team:

"But you don't live in isolation. So, the last thing you want is a project manager who makes all the decisions on stuff he really doesn't understand." (PMD2)

In a rare consensus, each of the participants agreed that a body of knowledge was an important characteristic underpinning a profession by providing a valuable source of core information to support practise. However, there was also acknowledgement of the challenge that differing approaches can present, as in the case of project management where there are two major professional bodies, each with their own 'Body of Knowledge'.

"I suppose… because it does seem like there's a few different ways you could do this, it might be an obstacle for developing a professional identity. I think, in a way, it kind of muddies the water for a profession and probably people wanting to use the services of that profession. Although, probably a diversity of schools of thought is probably a strength as well." (PMG3)

"When I started my journey, I went away and looked at what the APM were suggesting, which is the British approach, and then I looked at what the Americans were doing because I thought if I ever did want to go away and contract or whatever and did have to work with an American third-party supplier, I'd need to understand what they were talking about. Quite often they're different languages." (PMH1)

4.2.3 Relevance in the 21st Century

When asked to consider the relevance of these traits and whether they should still be used to measure professions in the 21st century, there was a sense that many of these original traits actually held true, such as for example, education/certification; body of knowledge; code of ethics/conduct.

"Just looking through each of the criteria, I think, I would certainly like to think that a lot of those are very much applicable to professions today as they would have been right at the start when these early professions began so people began to want to call themselves or align themselves with a certain type of profession to distinguish themselves from the broader offerings." (PMR1)

Indeed, from some participants there was a strength of feeling that all of the traits were still valid and relevant, arguing that they should still be used as they are, for the purposes of consistency.

"They are, and certainly if you are outlining those as consistent markers at the moment, I don't see any need to deviate from those which I think are enough of a benchmark." (PMT1)

"Well, I think they all should apply to project management." (PMG2)

"I totally agree with all of these. I would agree that project management should be following these." (PMOG8)

But others were a little more cautious, proffering that, perhaps, some were no longer as relevant to the emerging corporate or management professions such as project management, and perhaps could be updated to better reflect these newer professions.

> *"I would say some of these are valid, but if the question is 'are all of these valid or should we use an evolved model', then I would say the evolved model. I'm not sure all of these are even relevant for project management." (PMF1)*

> *"Yes, I think they are relevant for some professions but I'm not sure that I've really come across them in project management." (PMF3)*

> *"I think they still have value, but I wonder whether if a lot of these could be seen as very traditional and 'old hat' – and whether they still have relevance going forward." (PMF6)*

Altruism, in particular, was singled out as a prime example of such a trait that was felt to lack relevance and considered to be largely inconsistent with the world today compared to 150 years ago.

> "*I'm not sure about altruism if that is really still relevant to all professions, I mean I could certainly see where it applies to something like medicine but I'm not sure we would necessarily see it within a lot of other professions." (PMF6)*

Legal recognition or control over the title, however, was highlighted by a number of participants as being a crucial characteristic of a profession, affording a degree of protection to practitioners from those not equipped to undertake the role.

> *"I mean controlling the title so that people understand what it is internationally I think that is good." (PMG3)*

> *"Control of title and things like that, are all very much important and are almost critical to be able to call yourself a qualified project manager, or a chartered engineer or whatever the case may be and align yourself with that particular profession you are working within. There is such of a degree of access to information these days and people can cover things from such different angles and still offer a service*

that delivers what clients might be looking for that you might find that difficult to totally justify your existence as a professional organisation. Certainly, the control of title and the education are really important." (PMR1)

4.2.4 Perceptions of Organisation-bound Professions

Many of the new or emergent management professions, such as project management, HR practitioners and management consultants are located within the confines of the organisational setting, where they serve organisations rather than the general public or wider society, directly. The participants were asked to consider their perceptions of such organisation-bound or corporate professions and whether these were deemed to be of equal standing to the more traditional professions of medicine and law, or whether they were of lower status.

Some participants suggested that in their view, these corporate professions were viewed differently and not seen in the same light as medicine and law.

"There's a sense that in the wider world they are maybe sort of viewed differently…. I am aware that others may perceive there to be a pecking order of professions, but I'm not saying I think that's valid." (PMG3)

"I don't think they've got the same status as obviously doctors and lawyers …. I think someone who says they are a doctor, or a surgeon will be seen differently from someone who is a management consultant." (PMP1)

"Corporate professions are important, but I don't see them on the same level as medicine and law." (PMF1)

Project management, in particular, participants suggested, is not viewed in the same way as the traditional professions which are considered to be essential within society, although they conceded that this was probably not unreasonable given the nature of project work.

"I do see the traditional professions as being more difficult to get there. I remember someone saying to me once, there are some jobs that are fundamental to society such as doctors, nurses, and lawyers.

Things like organisational project managers – is the world going to end if we don't have them, I don't think so." (PMOG5)

"I suppose the difference is that medicine and law are almost seen for being as for the greater good of society and the economy etc – I don't think project management is seen in the same way as that, and I don't think it ever will be, to be honest. The benefit of medicine and law is evident but with project management, whilst it delivers benefit to society, I just don't think people see it that way or fully appreciate someone's had to manage the delivery of that change." (PMF6)

Indeed, some reported that far from being respected, project management was often viewed merely as a function within an organisation.

An interesting observation from one participant pointed to the influence of culture and in particular, the portrayal on-screen (either small screen or films) of certain roles, suggesting that it was more likely that a lawyer would be represented in a programme or film than a project manager. This is a perception that might result from a lack of understanding or awareness of lesser-known professions compared to those of law and medicine.

"I suppose that from a public perspective, from the outside world, if someone says they are a lawyer, people have a clear idea of what a lawyer is or does, but if they turn round and say they are a project manager they might not be able to grasp exactly what they do day to day, so I do think that is a difference between them." (PMOG4)

A view reiterated by another individual who admitted to themselves having a less than positive perception of corporate professions, such as project management and management consultancy until gaining experience in that arena.

"I used to view them poorly but probably in the same way that I didn't want to be a project manager because I thought, you know, 'what do you guys actually do?' But I would probably view them differently now. It's fair to say that I have more respect for that type of industry (management consultants) now than I did, say 8 or 9 years ago." (PMOG6)

This lack of awareness was cited by another participant who pointed to his father's response to his choice of university degree, marine biology when compared to studies of other family members:

> *"His response was along the lines of 'what do you want a degree in surfing for?' There was no real credibility despite the fact that it's a well-regarded degree course and there's lots that can be taken elsewhere, a little like project management. It was a case of 'what's this and how does it compare with some of the more traditional professions?' Having medic and lawyers in the family as well – Christmas dinners are always fun!" (PMG1)*

Others, however, suggested that there was no difference in status between the professions in terms of a tiered structure, rather that they shared similar characteristics.

> *"No, it's just a different job. They all need the same soft skills generally. So, no, I don't see any difference. I don't see a hierarchy or sort of rating or ranking between those professions." (PMD2)*

> *"I hadn't thought of them as being different in that way if I'm being honest." (PMG2)*

Whilst one likened the difference between the traditional and the emergent corporate professions to the perception of traditional universities versus new universities in terms of having established status and credibility.

> *"You know the traditional professions have the advantage of years of kudos behind them – everybody knows what they are but that often makes them a little hidebound – I don't know it's too soon to tell." (PMOG1)*

There was also recognition of the educational investment required by the traditional professions, particularly in terms of the time required to gain the necessary academic credentials which resulted in a greater level of respect being afforded to law and medicine than the newer corporate professions:

> *"When you think of medicine and law you instantly think of long, hard graft in terms of your academic requirements to even get into any of these positions, I think they always hold a certain degree of gravitas and weight if you are in them, although when speaking to my general demographic, 20's to*

mid-30's, I think there is a growing respect for roles such as management consultants and project management." (PMR1)

"People will be doing their A-levels and then going off to university attracted to do medicine or law, but I don't think project management has that cache to attract the best of the best – the best A-levels, or the best universities – partly because, and it comes back to the question earlier about routes in. There's a clear route into medicine and law but I don't see what the route into project management is." (PMF4)

One participant felt that the landscape of the professions was changing and that the organisational setting was actually becoming more relevant.

"Even the older professions are beginning to find it difficult to operate the way that they have for the last 200 years. The idea of medical partnerships and legal partnerships are gradually being overtaken by the need to be first and foremost a professional business organisation." (PMH2)

4.2.5 Tier Structure to the Professions

To further explore perceptions of corporate professions, the participants were asked to consider the presence of an existing tiered structure across the professions, or indeed whether there was a case to argue for there being such a stratified approach.

Again, there was a split between those who felt that there was a tiered structure already in place and those who did not. Of the participants, almost a third agreed that there was a tier structure to the professions whilst others were a little more hesitant in their response, seeking to clarify their reasoning. One individual proposed a possible 3-tiered approach whereby the corporate professions sitting in the lower category:

"I think so, and I think most people would want to see a top tier of all those things like medicine and law, and perhaps a second tier including engineering and accountancy, and project management coming in that sort of third tier with things like perhaps HR and training maybe, some of the IT professionals as well." (PMF6)

"Yeah, I mean I do – I mean from a project management perspective you know it's not as clear cut as those you see in the traditional professions." (PMF2)

The relative value attached to certain professions was commented upon in the context of society's attitudes towards them, and a connection was drawn to the perceived level of influence they wield as a result.

> *"I guess society in general values some professions more than others so that's why they attract more prestige and money. I guess doctors, lawyer, finance to an extent, but less so these days." (PMOG2)*

> *"I guess, I think the only thing that defines them is probably the influence that they have. I don't think one profession is inherently more important than the other, but I think there's the established ones which, legally stand above because of the work they do and how they are recognised by government or something like that." (PMG2)*

There was also a sense that there was a relationship between the value of a profession and its endurance over many centuries, particularly for law and medicine whose origins are steeped in history.

> *"I think it's probably more to do with how long those professions have been around and how recognisable they are. They have more history." (PMF3)*

One aspect that was raised in support of the argument for a tiered structure was the route of entry. A participant suggested that for corporate professions there are often many different entry routes and in the case of project management these can be accidental in nature. This is unlike the traditional professions which require a very prescriptive programme of entry via university degree together with a defined number of years of training.

> *"It's a bit more ambiguous – there's different routes in, there's different ways to get the different levels of project management – quite a lot of it is experience-based as opposed to the qualification certificate." (PMF2)*

> *"To be a lawyer or to be a doctor, there's so much more studying than just go and get a degree, there's all the qualifications after that." (PMP1)*

Individuals also pointed to the barriers to entry, in particular the implications of cost and time required to complete the necessary qualifications and training.

"I think sometimes it's defined by what's perceived as barriers to entry whether that's the length of time or the cost that it is to qualify to do that or just the general level of hard work or the intelligence. I think there are some tiers in there." (PMF4)

"The amount of investment and time that has to go into qualifying and you're dealing with people's lives, so it's a bit more." (PMF1)

However, not all participants were supportive of a tiered or stratified approach, in fact many argued that each profession makes a valued contribution to society in their different fields of expertise. Attention was further drawn to the notion of interdependencies between professions, highlighting that there can often be a reliance on other skilled practitioners in order to perform their own work.

"No, I don't (think there should be a tiered structure) because they all have something to contribute within their area of expertise. If you end up not having them, you end up with generalisations and perhaps misapplication of practises. I don't think there should be stratification, but I do think the newer ones still have a lot to do to be recognised perhaps to identify what is best practice etc." (PMD1)

"So, I would see them as equal – they are all making a valuable contribution to society. "The medicals couldn't do their job without IT and HR. Same with the lawyers." *(PMH1)*

Indeed, this relationship amongst the professions was reiterated and a cautionary note offered against stratification which it was felt might result in an unhealthy distortion towards the STEM subject areas.

"They're all as valuable as each other. I don't think there should be a stratified layering of it because without those successful projects, you know, infrastructure, you wouldn't have hospitals in which doctors could practice, so I think they are just as important as the professions – they all connect." (PMOG4)

"I think they all bring different things and diversity to society. I do think that being a doctor or an engineer is certainly, for me, it has more kudos. If we have a tiered approach, we will focus on STEM and there would be a disconnect and as a society we would put those people on a pedestal." (PMOG5)

"No, I'm not really one for having exclusivity, to be honest. I'd rather not tier them off to be honest." (PMT1)

There were mixed views regarding stratification or the creation of a tiered system across the range of professions however, an interesting proposition was raised that there may be a case for hierarchy within an individual profession to reflect the number of years' experience or seniority.

"I think there's always room for a hierarchy in terms of your level of experience within any profession. There's no kind of getting away from that" (PMR1)

But others argued that attitudes towards the professions and the level of respect afforded to them may be changing, potentially affecting how they might be viewed going forward.

"On a kind of historical level, or perception level, people do have a grudging respect for the 7- or 8-year periods that you have to go through to become a qualified lawyer or medical professional." (PMR1)

"Nobody respects lawyers the way they used to. How many people, today, would respect a minister or priest, particularly given the various connotations, so theology wouldn't be respected. So, in that respect I don't think there's a hierarchy anymore." (PMD2)

4.2.6 Recognisable Entry Route

For those seeking a career in the more established professions of law, medicine, engineering, teaching and nursing, for example, there is a clear route of for individuals to pursue. This usually requires a university degree and some period of training post-graduation. Indeed, this formal education has been acknowledged as being a central characteristic for a profession according to the trait theorists. However, for many of the emergent professions, this presents a challenge.

Long acknowledged as an 'accidental' profession, entry routes into project management are diverse and this was reflected in the responses from the participants who were divided in their views with some suggesting that there was a recognizable route of entry. Others, however, disagreed and suggested that despite efforts by universities to provide graduate level qualifications, and organisations formulating entry positions, many expressed a sense that there remained no real clarity. Many practitioners argued that, like most people they

knew, it was still very much a case of 'falling into it'.

> *"No, I think, especially from my own experience, I fell into it and I think, speaking with other people who were in the kind of project engineering area, it's the same for them. I have yet to come across someone that's actually gone through a formalised project managing course." (PMOG4)*

This individual expanded further and observed that many people had transition away from engineering and into project management, having taken an informal route into the area. She commented that:

> *"They haven't come through a formalised route and then it's almost like catch up once you're in a role you start then looking to see what kind of qualification you can take to then demonstrate that you're qualified to do the job that you're doing." (PMOG4)*

This view was reinforced by another participant who agreed that there was not yet an acknowledged entry route and it was often the case that individuals would be promoted across into the field:

> *"What I see is if you are a good engineer then you get promoted and then you would get to be a construction manager and then you would move to be the project manager." (PMOG8)*

Whilst a number of individuals made reference to entry from an engineering background, there was a common theme that it was an 'accidental' move across, a view reiterated by others who had transitioned indirectly to the role of project manager. One, in particular, pointed to their entry 17 years ago, through secondment:

> *"Someone says can you come and do this for six months and see if we can do this, and then you kind of find your way into it. I haven't seen anywhere where there's been a kind of proper structured approach to it and there's even still a mystique about it for some reason." (PMF4)*

Some participants expressed concern that the lack of clarity and established requirements meant that individuals drafted in to run a project often stumbled as they made their way into project management.

> *"People come in and they don't necessarily have the background of knowing what they need to do – for example, I need a business case, Terms of Reference, I need a PID (Project Initiation Document) if you're running PRINCE. They don't know what they don't know, and it becomes a learning curve." (PMF7)*

However, there was also a sense that whilst the route was still unclear, they did feel that it was improving and that there was an emergent entry map. They cited an increased number of individuals studying project management at university and an improved profile of the availability of such courses. This may represent a route in, although not one that he personally had followed, reflecting:

> *"One of the reasons that I enjoy my role is because a lot of the problems that I encounter are familiar because I came across them when I was doing the engineering piece so that experiential route has benefited me." (PMOG6)*

Expanding further he mused that having knowledge of an underlying discipline was crucial to the effective execution of the role:

> *"I would find it difficult to assign a lot of credibility to someone who had trained to be a project manager and then you say to them a project manager in what and they say well any project. I would associate a better project manager being one with experience and some level of understanding of the disciplines they were trying to manage. (PMOG6)*

A project practitioner in the Health sector pointed to the supportive infrastructure when he entered the field which included appropriate training courses such as PRINCE2 and allocation of an experienced mentor however he observed that this was not the case for entrants that he now sees coming in:

> *"I work for the Health Service and they've come in as Junior PM's and they've not had that kind of support. Some of them have been stressed and had huge failures and not everybody is suited to doing that. In theory, you can but in reality, you're dealing with difficult people and timelines and pressure, when things go wrong, not everybody is equipped to deal with that." (PMH1)*

Another from the IT sector suggested that in that area it was less structured and that many people find themselves making an unplanned move into project management as part of a natural promotion:

> *"I think lots of people fall into project management as a routine out of being a developer or the next stage you can move up from being a programmer into a systems architect into maybe a consulting role and you end up managing projects. From my experience in working for SME's you almost end up falling*

into 'well, you developed it, you go and implement it' and you end up managing it as well." (PMP1)

This was mirrored again within the IT sector by an individual who explained that there had been a tendency, historically, for smaller projects to be managed by external consultants and only larger scale projects would be allocated to dedicated project managers. It was via this route as a consultant that he had gained experience and entered project management.

Many referenced the qualification, PRINCE2 as being a key requirement that was suggested to them by those advising how they could gain entry to project management.

"I wasn't sure how to start and PRINCE2 was lauded as the Holy Grail – 'oh, well you need PRINCE2 to start'. Well, you don't, it's certainly a qualification that has value." (PMT1)

However, as knowledge and experience within project management has increased, the participants commented that this is no longer viewed as an entry requirement.

"Towards the end of the 1990's and early 2000's qualifications were the big thing, and it was almost a sort of 'put another dollar in' kind of thing. What I've experienced in the last 10 years or so is that there are a lot of people turning up for work with PRINCE2, which doesn't actually make them a project manager. A lot of these people failed terribly in their roles. It's a good career path but for me, the emphasis is too much on a particular qualification without having the skills, the experience or true competence you would need to make best use out of the qualification." (PMG1)

There was a perception that there were very few undergraduate degree courses available which are dedicated to project management, rather it tended to be an add-on. This was felt to contribute to an overall lack of clarity in terms of entry to the field for those embarking on a career. While some suggested that they wished they had known more about project management earlier as their careers might have been further evolved by this point with that greater awareness.

Perceptions of entry routes were suggested to result from a business analyst role or a project support role within the Project Management Office (PMO) exemplified as a simple progression route:

"You became a project coordinator, then a junior project manager, project manager, senior project manager." (PMG1)

In a positive vein, some participants expressed an optimism about the direction of travel towards a defined entry route, with one individual commenting that new opportunities for associate project managers were now being seen for those from a wide variety of fields including finance and other disciplines, but with an emphasis on behaviours to support the importance of soft skills as well as technical knowledge.

4.2.7 Project Management as a profession – are we there yet?

Having explored practitioners' definitions of a profession and their reviews of the relevance of certain key traits, the study sought to examine their perceptions of project management as a profession. Whilst strong messaging from the professional bodies seems to suggest it is a profession, the opinions of the participants presented a far less convincing picture.

The responses were divided, broadly an even balance with 12 participants affirming that it was a profession whilst 11 suggested that it was still on a journey to that end. The remaining 5 individuals were undecided.

Those individuals who agreed that project management is a profession acknowledged its limited pedigree but pointed to the specific skillset required in order to deliver successful projects.

"I certainly think that it's an important profession and a profession in its own right, it requires a specific set of skills, whilst it may not have the rich history or the different traits, I do think it holds water in its own right." (PMR1)

And with increasing awareness of projects in the public consciousness, in both positive and negative terms, it was felt this had served to raise recognition levels of the important role played by project managers.

"There has been a lot of media attention on some larger projects especially in Scotland, for example the Aberdeen wind farm and so I think people are recognising these people are delivering and are important players." (PMOG4)

However, almost as many participants were unconvinced that it had yet achieved the status of a profession,

instead suggesting that it was still progressing in that direction. Whilst there was a sense of positivity in terms of the progress being made, there were a variety of reasons given to support the view of 'we're not there yet'. One of which comes back to the level of awareness as a contributory factor:

> *"I think it must be on its way but there hasn't been a sufficient visibility or draw for anyone to say it has. I only found the Association for Project Management online yesterday. It was the first time I even looked and that was probably only because we had arranged to speak, so maybe it has a bit more of a way to go." (PMG3)*

For the experienced practitioners, it came down to respect. They expressed frustration at perceptions in certain sectors where there remains an image issue for project management which is hampering progression.

> *"I think it's still on its journey. Having worked in project management for 15 years I have seen it changing and the Chartered status thing relatively recently I think will hopefully help. I don't think it's seen as a fully-fledged profession. There seems to be a bit of a stigma around project management, a bit like economics. There is a lot of ribbing, certainly in specific sectors." (PMF6)*

Similarly, perhaps, organizational attitudes were also suggested to be hindering any recognition of project management as a profession as it was often not as valued as it needed to be.

> *"I think we were on a journey then it kind of stalled a bit and kind of took a few knocks and the value of what we're trying to do kind of went back a few steps. But I don't think it's as valued in this organisation as it might be in others. At the moment, for people here it's more like it's good to put on your CV rather than the business valuing it." (PMD3)*

But it was also the accidental or obscure entry route that may be contributing to a stalled journey towards professionalisation and impeding progress.

> *"Hmm, interesting – but I think because project managers quite often come through other jobs, not always, I can't imagine that there are people who have thought 'I want to be a project manager' in the same way as they might have thought 'I want to be a teacher, or a lawyer', so I don't think it's achieved it yet." (PMOG5)*

Each of these constraints was felt to be tethered to the organisations who commissioned projects. Suggestions were proffered as to further work that may need to be done in order to progress towards project management being seen as a profession. Indeed, many were of the view that it relied upon organisational recognition and engagement to help push the professionalisation agenda, particularly in terms of standards and entry requirements.

> *"It has to come from industry bodies and actual companies. We want to see a standard being implemented. Most of my employers that didn't have their own internal systems just looked to PRINCE2. They weren't looking for individuals to have membership of a professional body or chartered status. So, I think there has to be a drive from industry to say we are going to work with the existing bodies out there to try and come to an agreed standard that everybody should try and achieve and that would drive improvement and change. (PMP1)*

> *"To get into project management it's probably quite easy to get into those entry levels whereas to get to entry level in a legal or medicine role, it isn't. I think it's got some way to go before it's ever seen as a proper profession in the same weightings of others personally." (PMF6)*

> *"It's ambiguous to a newcomer whether you need to go to college or university or whatever. There's not that clearly defined path, like you have for law, to get into project management." (PMF2)*

But some participants could not be drawn on whether they felt it was a profession. One spoke of their concern that there seemed to be a misplaced organisational focus on proprietary certifications such as PRINCE2, pointing to the fact that "it's a framework, not professional training" (PMF7), whilst another highlighted an internal challenge in the form of cynicism. They suggested they would feel "distrustful of someone whose only training had been in project management and did not have any technical knowledge" (PMOG6). This potentially has ramifications in the quest for professionalisation.

This was echoed in a comment by an IT project professional within financial services who disagreed when asked if project management is a profession, stating that "No, IT is the profession" (PMF5). This was a view supported by another participant:

"So, there's lots of options within a profession to do different disciplines. I think IT is a profession, but I would see project management as something within that profession rather than a profession in its own right." (PMP1)

4.3 Recognition

"The Eager Beaver"

A young mechanical engineering graduate who has 'fallen' into project management through becoming a project engineer within the oil and gas sector, in common with many people she worked with in her organisation. She feels that her engineering background has been particularly helpful in managing projects although she acknowledges that it was important to resist the temptation to slip back into a technical engineering mindset when running a project. Whilst only 4 years into her new career, for the most part she cannot imagine returning to her original discipline and is now managing multiple projects and thoroughly enjoying the challenging work. She is actively involved with the professional body and is keen to push for a change in perceptions and to promote project management as a profession.

As one of the new corporate professions, project management is perhaps less well understood by those not working within this field and this has implications in terms of recognition. Whilst legal recognition is acknowledged as being a key trait of a profession, it is perhaps useful to explore how recognition within the workplace, and also across the wider public domain, represents an important element to the professionalisation process.

4.3.1 Role of a Project Manager

The diverse nature of projects means that the role of a project manager can vary widely and as one participant suggested, there can be a disconnect between what the role is perceived to involve and the actual reality. The participants were asked how they defined the role and what it meant to them. Many participants were immediately drawn to the functional aspects of the role such as risk management, stakeholder engagement, scope management and delivery to the constraints of the iron triangle of cost, time and scope however, some suggested that it often involved conflict management and acting as peacemaker.

> *"When it's going well it's good but then you've got dealing with conflict when there are problems on projects, dealing with people who are late delivering their deliverables or producing poor quality so then you're into the reasons behind that." (PMF1)*

One of the key themes that emerged was that of responsibility. Many felt that this was an overriding element to the role, citing:

> *"Leading a project from start to finish and being responsible for coordinating and managing the resources, and budget around the project." (PMG3)*

> *"Well, the project manager has the responsibility and accountability for the overall aspects of the project – schedule, finance, resources, performance, deliverables to name but a few, but basically to do with the project and to make sure that you deliver on time and on budget." (PMD1)*

Others pointed to a project manager as being a change enabler, or someone leading change. They highlighted the oversight function to ensure that work was completed, and objectives met.

> *"Someone who is a change enabler and is able to see the big picture for what you have to deliver for a client or part of an internal team. Basically, someone who can cut through the noise and get the right things moving to deliver the objectives." (PMT1)*

Building on from this, some participants suggested that part of this oversight was having sufficient understanding of the technical aspects of the project to be able to identify any possible risks or problems.

"As an IT project manager, I can go across all sorts of different technical areas and I'm still expected to be able to understand what's going on, understand what to look for in terms of risks and issues even though it's not my subject matter area." (PMF3)

Communication was also cited as being crucial and it was felt that a project manager needed to be a skilled communicator not just with those working on the project team but also with clients and the wider stakeholder groups. Indeed, the participants felt that this skill is essential.

"Strong communication is needed if I'm trying to organise people and the work they're doing for me whilst at the same time siphoning off what's important from their outputs to communicate up the line to my management. (PMOG6)

Someone who is able to communicate on a level with a diverse spectrum of different people throughout the organisation and other stakeholders. That could be from people who are right at the top echelons of the organisation to people working on site with a shovel." (PMR1)

One individual recalled his experience working with a well-respected project manager when he first started his career and how this had influenced him when managing his own projects:

"You have to be level-headed and calm and be able to structure your day and those of others. But the advice I was given was that the top 3 most important things in project management are communication, communication and communication." (PMG1)

There was a degree of consensus around the practical elements of project management that were reported, but one experienced practitioner sought to summarise the role in the context of an orchestra:

"From my perspective a project manager is there to bring together all of the different parts of the orchestra and make sure they're all playing the same time and at the right quality to make the overall goal. Different people have different objectives and my job as conductor, is to bring them all together." (PMF2)

Although, it was also suggested that the role of project manager was probably more a case of being a 'jack of

all trades' and definitely master of none." (PMOG6)

4.3.2 Perceptions of Others

Whilst the participants seemed to have a clear sense of their role, one strand of this study sought to explore how they felt others perceived their role and skills. Many cast doubts on the wider public having any real concept of what was involved in the management of projects. Indeed, a number of participants suggested that their friends and family were perhaps equally lacking in understanding. One participant pointed to the irony of the job title in this respect:

> *"I don't think people always understand what you mean by project manager and this is kind of interesting because it's a job title that is fairly explanatory – it does what it says on the tin!" (PMF1)*

However, another suggested that they did not feel that the role of a project manager was widely understood and therefore *"not massively valued" (PMF4).* Although, they questioned whether this could partly be down to project managers not being able to adequately explain what they do. Indeed, it was felt that more *"work needed to be done on communicating what the actual role entails." (PMF2), with one* individual conceding that they *"struggled to find out what a project manager did before I became one, so I would expect that others are the same." (PMOG9)*

This was also felt to extend to public perception, particularly in the context of high-profile projects that were often subject to increased scrutiny due to delays and cost overruns.

> *"I would hope that some members of the public, if they read about a project failing, they would look to the management, the more senior management, the sponsoring people, the authorising environment to lay blame rather than necessarily consider what a project manager may or may not have done." (PMG1)*

Organisational Colleagues

The attitudes of colleagues and the level of understanding around the role of project manager and what it entails was also reported to be a variable. One participant reported a recent uptick in interest in project management within his organisation although he thought that there was a sense that *"there's a bit of the dark*

arts involved" (PMG2). But whilst some felt that their colleagues appreciated the role of a project manager, this was seemingly based on a misapprehension of what it actually involved, as one individual observed:

> *"I think they all believe they're experts in it – they think they can do better and most of them simplify it down, but you can't simplify it to a simple structure in a plan or else you're going to end up with a plan that doesn't mean anything." (PMD2)*

He went on to explain that the belief that anyone can manage a project can catch people out when the levels of complexity increase and the inexperienced 'pretenders' find that they can no longer "front it out".

Whilst another individual, within a large project-based engineering company, agreed that whilst many colleagues fully appreciated the importance of project management, he often felt that there was a contradictory perception that *"IT doesn't do proper projects – just tinkering with computers. It's not a big engineering project therefore it's not important." (PMOG2)*

But others reported being viewed with scepticism and resistance, particularly where the project was to deliver a change initiative.

> *"For some it can be perceived as someone sticking their nose into their business." (PMG3)*

> *"It can be seen as somebody who is just doing a bit of coordination and nagging people to get things done and update a plan." (PMG1)*

Again, the challenge of delivering projects with limited authority was highlighted by one participant who rather candidly commented that:

> *"someone might see me as quite pushy because if I'm given the goal to get somewhere, I will push my team there. So, I think that's me, but I need to work on my soft skills really else I'll push people there and push them off a cliff on the way!" (PMF7)*

For others, the timing of the question was a key factor, suggesting that how they are perceived can often depend on the relevant stage of the project. They observed that some people see the project manager as *"a facilitator, arbiter and someone who can get things done whilst, for others, it was as the bad guy who comes*

and shouts at them every so often." (PMP1)

However, it was not a wholly negative picture with some suggesting that there was a greater level of understanding amongst those who had some connection with the project whether that was by way of secondment or in a testing or business analysis context with colleagues expressing admiration for what they could see was a difficult job.

> *"I think they see it as quite professional, quite a well-respected career path that requires a high level of skill to operate in." (PMR1)*

> *"Some people often say, 'you know, I don't know if I could do that – it seems like a really demanding job'." (PMF6)*

Although, this was tempered by the perception that this view did not always ring true and the relationship with engineers seemed again to be centre stage.

> *"You can sometimes, not always, but in certain situations you can be kind of pegged as somebody who is not as highly skilled as someone who is an engineer in a particular field and have studied their entire academic and professional life. They kind of see that they have a right to be considered a more highly skilled professional than a project manager." (PMR1)*

The individual went on to explain that, for him, this attitude was often common amongst those engineers in the earlier stages of their careers whilst those with more experience had themselves moved between their original discipline and delivering projects and therefore had a greater understanding of the overarching pressure to deliver to cost and time constraints.

A similar story was conveyed by another participant, working within an engineering firm, and with an engineering background herself, who felt that project managers were regarded in a less favourable light, commenting that:

> *"Project managers were maybe regarded like, you know, the bean counters, the people who like to know 'where are our deliverables, we need it for such and such' but things do seem to have changed*

since I first started and there is a more collaborative tone now – a lot of effort has been put into that, people do see the value now." (PMOG4)

Different experiences were reported between projects within the private and public sectors, with one individual observing a greater level of respect within the private sector for the difficult and demanding job:

"In the private sector the role was held in high regard with the attitude of organisations being able to leave the competent people to get on with the job. They were relied upon to do the job – people were almost burnt out in doing that but nonetheless there was a respect for 'that person's a good project manager' – they'll solve that problem, let them go on and do it." (PMG1)

Which he contrasted with his experience in the public sector where he pointed to a lack of understanding about what project management involves and derogatory attitudes towards the role.

"In my experience in the last 10 years or so in the public sector, the attitude is very much that you are viewed as being 'adminy' type people. Sometimes they're just box checkers, you know, 'we need to have a risk log, get the project manager to do it'; we need to have a plan, get them to do a plan. I don't even mention the word programme because they just don't get it. (PMG1)

Valued Project Management Skills

When asked to consider the value they felt was attached to their project management skills, participants reported a range of perceptions, and many acknowledged that it often came down to the culture within the organisation. Some suggested that the priority for some organisations was merely to draft in someone to manage a project with little concern as to whether or not they had the relevant skills to deliver.

"If they wanted an initiative to be managed, they would assign someone to it from the business and call them a project manager. Then they wonder why they struggle with scheduling management and issue management and resource management, and the rest of it." (PMF1)

Another participant commented that they too felt that organisations did not always appreciate project management skills until they were not present:

"They're certainly valued when they're lacking! So quite often we have to say 'sorry, we haven't got the resources to be able to do that project', and it either doesn't get done, or it gets done badly. They will get someone to have a half-hearted attempt at doing it and it will either get done with no real documentation or control, or get done purely by chance, or it gets into such a mess and it will be all hands to the pump. Or it will die and be redefined and run again." (PMH2)

A sentiment echoed by another who affirmed that their organisation valued project management and skills required but didn't understand some of the complexities that are involved.

Others, however, felt that senior management often lacked an appreciation or respect for what could realistically be achieved and would push for impossible delivery dates, yet expect overruns:

"I think because if they agree to a later date, they think people would take the foot off the gas and it'll still run on." (PMF3)

But there was also a sense of positivity with some describing a belief that their employers largely held their skill set in high regard. They suggested that the standing of project management had improved over recent years, and this had impacted on the investment within the organisations.

"I think the organisations that I've worked at do recognise project management as an important role and are looking to sort of develop those roles and give it sort of the profile that it should have." (PMF6)

"It's certainly getting better. When I started here six years ago, I don't think we were valued as we are today. I think that's testament to how we are working closer alongside the business as one big team as opposed to when you used to go to meetings and talk about 'the project' – we are one team now." (PMF2)

Indeed, when asked if he felt his organisation valued his project management skills, one individual commented that:

"From the feedback that I've had very much so. In (the organisation) it's very results oriented obviously they actually want to see things being done. So, someone who can come in and get things done – that's

an asset." (PMP1)

The cyclical nature of the attitude towards project management was also observed with one person citing instances where it was in favour for a period of time and very much a core focus and then ceased to be of interest and became less of a priority.

> *"They've started to recognise it again and they are investing in it but it's all too little too late. They have said it is their number one priority this year, but they've said that before. Last time it fell out of favour and they invested a fortune in Lean Sigma. They value it then not, and then realise 'oh, we need to value it because look all our on-time delivery has gone to rack and we're not making enough money." (PMD3)*

4.3.3 Importance of Recognition

The study sought to explore the degree to which recognition of project management as a profession mattered to the practitioners. Many participants expressed that recognition was very important to them, particularly given the stage of their career, with some highlighting that the sector in which they are based is also a contributory factor in that position. Those working in engineering, particularly felt that this would be a welcome development as they reported being faced with challenges to their authority and an overall lack of respect for what they are trying to achieve.

> *"It's extremely important particularly when you are working with a profession like engineering where it is often spoken about as up there with medical and legal, project management is much farther behind so when you have to lead a team of professionally qualified engineers you know it could make things difficult. And it does. I see it here where some of the engineers look down on some of the PMs because they think 'how can you set my objectives – you don't even have a degree or you're not as qualified as I am, and this affects the confidence of the PM and makes them backtrack." (PMD3)*

The issue of lack of respect was further reiterated by others who pointed to the importance of effective project management in society, suggesting that organisations were also at fault for not backing project managers in the demanding role they play in delivering key objectives.

"Yeah, I think it's important to see it, because you couldn't deliver change and things like that without project managers. But they're the ones that kind of pull it together so to me, it's important to be seen a profession". (PMF3)

"I think it probably would help. It would give a better impression of project managers and what they are actually there to do and them more respect and backing by organisations that employ them. I do think quite often the project managers are seen as whipping boys at times – the person they are going to beat up and blame when it all goes wrong. So, I could see the value in the protection, that would be important." (PMP1)

But for some experienced practitioners the importance of recognition lay in the positive impact on newcomers into the discipline. They suggested that without an acknowledgement of its status it would be difficult to attract new talent who may not otherwise consider project management to be a worthy career.

"I'm now in my early 50's and have probably got 14 years' experience. I may not have this particular chartered status, but I do have experience behind me but for someone new coming in, how do we get those new people into the business – I think recognition is important for that. It's up to folks like myself who could move it forward – we have to do it for the greater good, for those people coming in." (PMF7)

"I think it's important for people to have options, in terms of what they can aspire to." (PMG3)

Indeed, this was reinforced by the comments of a young entrant into project management who expressed concerns for her future and felt that recognition was a major part of that:

"Yes, it's a very important thing as it's my job and my future as well. And I enjoy it and it's leading with my strengths; I do feel a tad nervous. Maybe it's my own experience and the fact that I'm young but I feel like I'm getting into something where you know it's not a real thing. When I went to university, no one suggested project management so I'm trying to get over that and realise that I can do it. It does dawn on me that I'm no longer an engineer and I'm a project manager – but is that enough?" (PMOG4)

However, for a number of individuals who were further into their careers, the viewpoint was starkly different, and less importance was attached to recognition of project management as a profession due, in part, to a lack

of personal interest as they approached retirement. Although for one practitioner, they suggested that they were perhaps "passing through".

> *"Personally, it no longer matters to me because I'm heading towards the end of my career and it's not a career that I want." (PMD2)*

> *"Well, given where I am in my career I don't really mind very much. How can I put this? – I'm beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and the faster it gets here the better as far as I'm concerned." (PMH2)*

> *"Personally, it's not something that is important. It is something that I have done for 6 years but it's not who I am and it's not what I'm going to do next." (PMOG5)*

Building further on the importance of professional recognition, the participants considered their professional identity and whether they considered themselves to be a project manager, first and foremost, or whether there was a competing, or preferred identity. Responses were varied and reflective perhaps of the diverse study sample and the backgrounds of the practitioners.

Whilst there were a variety of assertions by the participants, more than half immediately and emphatically indicated that they identified themselves as 'project manager'.

> *"I'm a project manager, and when people ask what I do that's what I tell them." (PMF5)*

> *"Oh, definitely a project manager. I've been away from engineering too long." (PMD1)*

> *"Project manager, first and foremost." (PMT1)*

Whilst others sought to qualify their approach to their professional identity by including the context of the project environment, suggesting that this was an important factor to them. But there was also recognition that their audience often lacked understanding of the term project manager, so this additional description sought to address that.

> *"I identify myself as a non-technical project manager. If asked what I do, I quite often say I'm a project manager. I work in organisational development – so I would call myself and organisational*

development project manager." (PMOG5)

"I do introduce myself as a project manager. I mean I might say to people 'oh I did an engineering degree' so they've got some idea of where I'm coming from but no, if someone asked me why I say I'm a project manager, depending on who it is I might add the IT bit and say IT Project Manager." (PMH2)

Some participants, however, had moved into project management from other substantive discipline areas, such as IT or engineering, and their responses reflected the relevant priority afforded to these:

"Sometimes, I say I'm a project manager and they yawn and think it's super boring but if I say I'm actually an engineer to trade that seems to prompt more questions…. what type of engineering? Can you explain that a bit more and that helps to put things into context? Whereas the project manager thing, people go 'oh right, I kind of know what that really means', but they don't." (PMD3)

"I think if I was to go and look at my LinkedIn account, I think I would consider myself as an IT/Project Management professional. I think the IT tends to come first because that's my background." (PMP1)

"I see myself as an engineer, and I think other people see me as an engineer. I mean engineers talk a certain way." (PMOG6)

One individual considered himself to be perhaps a 'special case' as he had moved between engineering and programme (project) management, before undertaking a company-specific role described as improvement management or continuous improvement initiatives. He explained how this complexity impacted on his self-identity.

"I left engineering for a long time to go to programme management, then I came back to engineering. Then I went into improvement, which is a company thing, went to France for a few years (Head Office) to do improvements across Europe. So, I've lost any feeling that I'm an engineer who is now doing project management. Even looking back when I was first in project management in engineering, I actually thought I was a project manager not a systems engineer…… Even today when I've got the two roles in my head, I swap between them. I don't consider myself to be an improvement guy doing a little bit of project management or a project manager doing a bit of improvement. I look at myself as a

project manager when I'm doing project management." (PMD2)

The diverse technical nature of projects was observed as being a noteworthy factor which many felt impacted on the ability of a project manager to transfer between different sectors. They suggested that whilst the skills themselves were arguably transferable, there were limitations in terms of the context within which the projects were delivered and the underpinning disciplines.

"I wouldn't attempt to do a civil engineering project or even apply for a civil engineering project because I wouldn't know the techniques that these guys use for quantity estimating and things like that. And equally, I wouldn't expect somebody from that background, although they may be a brilliant project manager in their own field, to be able to come in and run and IT project because the professional knowledge that is needed is essential", (PMH2)

"One thing I would like to do at some point is move out of the IT discipline and do something else managing projects but in the predominant local industry my lack of engineering knowledge is a barrier." (PMOG2)

4.3.4 Wider Recognition

Recognition for a profession comes at many different levels – by colleagues within organisations and amongst other professionals, but also within society as a whole. In considering whether they felt there was wider recognition of project management as a profession amongst the general public, there was broad agreement that this was limited and accredited this to a lack of understanding of the role and what it entails. Some observed a perception that project management was merely part of more general management, suggesting that it was in essence, the same activity.

"I don't know actually. When I speak to my friends, they don't know anything." (PMD3)

"No, I don't think the wider general population really understand or know what a project manager does. I mean, certainly speaking with my friends and I tell them what I do, and they go 'I didn't know that you had people doing that'. They don't see it as being separate from just being a manager and

trying to organise and get things done." (PMP1)

"I think if they knew what it was, then they probably would." (PMF3)

One individual argued that whilst there is awareness of high-profile projects amongst the wider public, such as for example, London Crossrail and HS2, this did not translate into an understanding of the skills required in order to successfully manage these to completion:

"When there are major construction projects and there are delays, they might blame the government, the unions or somebody else but I'm not sure they relate failure to project management even though it might be. Those who have worked for a project manager will recognise that it can be simply that they didn't have the skills, but the general public don't." (PMD2)

And it is this lack of understanding that was seen as representing a barrier to achieving recognition of project management as a profession. Some commented on the popularisation of the term 'project manager' on the reality television programme, The Apprentice, and felt that this actually served to hamper efforts for recognition, instead it portrayed an unhelpful image of people running around.

"It's presented as anybody can have a go at it, kind of thing and it's not obvious to people what the job actually entails. It comes down to communication and people being made aware of what it is be a project manager." (PMG2)

While others further supported the need for more communication to inform people of the role of project management in today's world. Another agreed and pointed to the limited promotion of it as a profession in the schooling system, something that was a recurring theme during other interviews. The participants felt that unlike the more traditional professions of medicine and law, there was no real discussion around project management and that children moving through their education are instead prepared for opportunities in those areas or the STEM subjects, recently the subject of numerous initiatives to spark interest.

"I think we're fairly old fashioned in that sense where we talk about wanting to be a lawyer, an engineer, a doctor, a surgeon or an air stewardess. Project management, I don't think, would figure in a 5- or 10-year old's mind. (PMD3)

One experienced practitioner again pointed to the lack of a definitive entry qualification that was potentially holding back progress in terms of recognition as a true profession. Where other more widely acknowledged professions, such as engineering, required a degree and offered a defined pathway to chartership, project management still had more to do.

> *"I just think there needs to be a coming together of the various bodies that already exist and some sort of consolidated standard – if you want to be a chartered project manager or a professional project manager, whatever you want to call it, here's the qualification to study and track record you'll need to do to bring to the table to achieve that. That would get it to the same sort of status as a chartered accountant or a chartered surveyor." (PMP1)*

The advent of chartership was hailed as a positive step, which it was suggested would result in project management being more likely to achieve the recognition as more practitioners progressed through the chartered process.

Another theme that emerged related to control of title, something which the more established professions have secured, for example engineering, whereby it is not possible to practice or even refer to oneself as an engineer without having reached a certain minimum level. One individual made reference to the requirements in America:

> *"To be a professional engineer you have to undertake a minimum number of hours of learning per year, demonstrate what you've done, keep a record of it and you can be audited any time." (PMOG5)*

By not securing control of the title, it was felt that project management continued to be open for anyone to present themselves as a project manager without sufficient credentials, competency or experience. The accidental nature of project management it was believed, would hinder recognition as a true profession.

> *"No one falls into medicine or law. I know people who have dipped into project management and out of it again. That tends to happen less in a profession – you tend to go into and stay in a profession all of your life." (PMF6)*

4.3.5 Driving Professionalisation

Given the importance attached to recognition, the question of who was driving the professionalisation project sought to explore whether this was the practitioners themselves. It was, therefore, interesting to note the range of views in this regard with eleven participants suggesting that it was the professional bodies who were the primary drivers of the move to secure the status of a profession. Some expanded further by suggesting that the professional bodies were doing so for the wider benefit of the practitioners and to raise the profile of project management. Whilst others felt that the professional bodies were driving an agenda on behalf of the corporate institutions to provide a greater degree of confidence in the performance and delivery of projects.

However, some admitted to cynicism with regards to their motives:

> *"Well, I would say the professional bodies because they're out there to sell something aren't they?" (PMH1)*

Many participants considered that it was actually the practitioners themselves who were behind the drive for formal professionalisation, not least because it was in their interests to do so.

> *"There's kudos and opportunities and protecting self-interest I guess for individuals around being a part of a profession." (PMG3)*

> *"Individuals because they will get recognition which means reward, or at least salary expectation that provides a better scope for more rewards." (PMD2)*

Drawing further on that view, another participant suggested that it affords better employment opportunities and that a chartered status would feel as though individuals were being taken more seriously.

Some sought to rank the different actors in the process although again there was no consensus here with most either suggesting practitioners first, followed by the professional bodies or vice versa. Only two individuals included the corporate institutions in this grading.

There was also a sense that professionalisation should matter to all stakeholders – the practitioners, professional bodies and the corporate institutions or clients employing project managers to successfully deliver

their projects - *"It's a bit like saying 'who does this benefit?*' (PMOG6)

Indeed, one individual also suggested that "*universities have an interest in elevating and advancing the professions to build academia around a specialism."* (PMG3)

4.3.6 Value of the Status

Professionalisation projects are becoming more commonplace amongst occupations seeking to elevate their status and benefit from the prestige that comes with it. However, with so many occupational groups attempting this, it raises the question as to whether the status of a profession is somehow diminished. Participants were asked if they felt this would be the case.

Many participants agreed that increased professionalisations would devalue the status and questioned whether all occupations could be considered a profession.

> *"I'm not sure anything's going to be seen up there with the sort of professions that we talk about or even the secondary tier ones like engineering or the military – they're the ones that people will always see, certainly in the foreseeable future as professions, the other stuff seems to be a Johnny come lately." (PMF6)*

Some commented, that for them, it comes down to how we define a profession as this should dictate which occupational groups qualify for the elevated status, however others proposed that *"those already in a recognised profession would see it as devaluing them." (PMP1).*

But caution was expressed against the growing trend of seeking to professionalise, arguing that it becomes meaningless.

> *"You end up with a lot of bodies chasing it for the sake of chasing it, and then what's the benefit of it? What does society, as a whole, get out of it?" (PMF4)*

> *"Where do you stop? – if every job became a profession, how does that work? (PMT1)*

An earlier point was reiterated regarding the various strands of engineering and the lack of restriction in the UK as to who can use that term. Reference was made to heating engineers and the very different role to a

mechanical engineer, for example. Some degree of frustration was expressed on this issue as it was felt that although heating engineers have a professional body this did not, in the view of two participants in this study, indicate that they belonged to a profession. There was a compelling argument, they suggested, that professions would need to be distinct.

However, others offered a different perspective, indicating that for them, the status had more to do with the formalised approach of a code of conduct and a body, such that hairdressing could be seen as a profession while some felt that a more egalitarian approach should be adopted:

> *"It's all about removing stigmas that people have isn't it? Why is a hairdresser any less important than a doctor because you still need people to cut hair? It probably would diminish professions in the eyes of some people but really, should it?" (PMF7)*

One individual pointed to the seemingly interchangeable use of the term 'profession' with others relating to the work or role of an individual. This, it was felt, may be down to a lack of understanding or a move into common usage that goes beyond the actual meaning.

> *"People do use profession interchangeably with an occupation or vocation and that does sort of reduce the merit of it. Perhaps the understanding of what a profession is, isn't always clear." (PMF6)*

Interchangeable terminology was again highlighted when another participant indicated that they had no problem with a plumber calling themselves a professional, arguing:

> *"They have a skill set, you know there is a body of knowledge they have to learn, they've had to display a degree of competence and they have to keep up to speed with what they're doing. I wouldn't be particularly perturbed if plumbers were calling themselves professionals – I think it was probably valid" (PMH2)*

4.4 Certification by Qualification

Certification has been acknowledged as being an important trait of a profession, not just within the literature but also by the participants themselves. This theme was examined in further detail in order to explore the

practitioner perceptions specifically in the context of project management. In particular, whether there should be a compulsory minimum certification and what impact that might have on the profession. Additionally, they were asked to consider where provision of any certification or qualification should reside – with the professional bodies or with the universities.

4.4.1 Compulsory Minimum Certification

Consideration of whether there should be a minimum qualification standard introduced, either at entry level or to be gained within a specified period of time revealed interesting responses, particularly in light of having previously suggested its importance to a profession.

"The Seasoned Pro"

An experienced practitioner in his mid-40's from a professional family, having originally trained as a marine biologist. He originally started his career as a computer programmer but moved into project management during the 1990's. He has some of the very early qualifications available within the field, such as PROMPT2, the forerunner of the popular PRINCE2 certification. He started his career as a project coordinator, before moving on to become a junior project manager, project manager and a senior project manager. He has a wealth of experience in a wide range of sectors including transport, public services, telecoms and has been delivering projects for over 26 years. He has enjoyed the unique nature of the job and the challenge of needing to approach each project in a slightly different way. He now works as a programme manager.

Of the 28 participants, only 8 emphatically agreed that there should be a minimum qualification, with some further qualifying their response by adding that this would serve to provide an indicator as to a given level of knowledge and that the 'badge' would prove beneficial to both the individual and the employing organisation.

> *"Yes, I think so, even though it's not standardised just now. I think in a sense it helps to reinforce if you want it to be seen as a distinct profession with a distinct skill set then yes it would be very helpful – you don't have amateur engineers so if the project manager is going to become recognised as a distinct profession then yes, it would be important." (PMOG6)*

This was a view reinforced by another participant who felt that it sets a benchmark to support a level of recognition for the role.

> *"By saying that not just anyone off the streets can become a project manager, you do need to have achieved this to become a project manager – that helps with pushing and advocating getting recognised as a proper profession." (PMF6)*

They continued, by explaining whilst they acknowledged that a qualification alone does not indicate quality, it does act as a means of screening and points to what standard can be expected of that project manager. A key concern for this participant was the accidental nature of entry into the role:

> *"I also think there is still this thing with project managers where people fall into the role so it makes it seem that anyone can become a project manager. By having a recognised qualification it's showing that actually, no, it's not that you can just fall into it, you really need to do it seriously and reach a required level of competence. (PMF6)*

It was felt to be an important aspect from both a practitioner and business perspective as it offers to provide a more consistent standard.

> *"It will be good for people to get more effective with managing projects and working from the same hymn sheet. It's just that it's potentially difficult to implement." (PMOG4)*

Others suggested that qualifications had a role to play but should not act as a barrier to entry. There was also a

concern that in making it an entry requirement it would disadvantage those who may not be in a position to afford to undertake the qualification.

> *"I don't think you need them when you start to be a project manager. It's important that you get the qualifications, but I think you could be doing the role for six months without the qualification. I don't think it's an entry criterion, but I think it's important that at some point within the first couple of years you gain that qualification." (PMF7)*

Whilst some commented that whilst they were useful in providing a standard, experience is equally as important if not more so.

> *"I think you could have minimum standards but I'm sure there must be people who, based on experience and portfolio can match someone with a qualification. I know people who have 20 years' experience having initially left school and not gone to university and now they're in a situation where some employers are just putting degrees as a minimum requirement. So, I have a sense that just the qualification element is a barrier." (PMG3)*

> *"If I had a guy with the APMQ and another who just had experience, I would pick the guy with experience." (PMT1)*

PRINCE2 was cited as an example of a qualification of choice in many instances, particularly on government projects, but its value was.

> *"When I started as a project manager, I didn't have APMP or PRINCE2…. I could do the job without them quite honestly. It doesn't make me any better or worse by having those qualifications. It's just a tick in the box that I've got them." (PMF7)*

> *"I don't like PRINCE2 that much – it's very bureaucratic. A lot of people do things that are not all that relevant." (PMF5)*

There was a sense too that this qualification was rather perfunctory, and it was felt to have too narrow a focus. Some participants expressed the view that it did not provide a suitable grounding suitable for all projects.

"There's people in my organisation who have gone and done PRINCE2 and got really good marks, but they don't have any common sense." (PMH1)

"Anybody can go and pass PRINCE2 and never have managed a project and they are going to be as useless as anybody else managing a project that hasn't got the experience." (PMP1)

"I've got to say I've gone off qualifications – I've seen no end of project managers go off and do PRINCE2 and don't understand anything. I worked with someone who was deployed to work on a project, and it became abundantly clear all that person knew was the PRINCE2 manual inside out but knew nothing about project management." (PMG1)

In a similar vein, one experienced project manager wondered whether, what he felt was the almost monopolistic influence of the APM with regards to certifications, was a good thing. This was a view supported by another participant who suggested that:

"Everybody passes it, so it becomes pointless from a kind of qualification point of view. It gives a kind of grounding, but I don't think a week long course – you can't train someone to be a project manager because it's like, you can't train a doctor in two weeks because you're going to encounter a million different things in a million different ways." (PMF4)

Whilst another individual expressed concern at the wide ranging and varied certifications available in the field of project management and that this potentially represented an issue:

"The education and certification is a bit splintered I would say – there are many different – even if you look at PMI abroad and APM over here, and you get things like PRINCE2 here and that kind of stuff, so it gets a bit split and I guess, I know there's attempts to bring them together but that's probably a problem area." (PMG2)

However, for three participants it was the appropriateness of certification that was called into question. They suggested that the current assessments perhaps did not meet the needs of project management:

"I don't think you always need a certificate at the end of it. If you've had the space and time and been

in the environment with like-minded people, and you've been able to get your questions answered and then fill your knowledge holes, you don't always need the badge or bit of paper." (PMH1)

"You could be the best project manager in the world, and you could have left school at 16, never been professionally qualified – and I've seen people like that – and they do a brilliant job. I worked with a guy here, left school at 16. He did his APMP and PRINCE2 with me 10 years ago, failed them both, never stopped him – he does the same job as me and he's brilliant." (PMF4)

Indeed, an experienced practitioner considered that the most important skill for a project manager was understanding people, arguing:

"If you can't understand people, you can't understand what you're trying to manage, and you can't be a great project manager. What you can do is use all the project management tools to help to monitor the project. So, my worry here is that… what would you be training somebody with this minimum qualification? Is it just about the tools and techniques or is it more than that?" (PMD2)

One participant understood the challenge in determining an appropriate certification route and suggested a pragmatic approach similar to that taken by management accounting as a potential model. She explained that certification can be achieved through equivalency recognition of experience by completion of logs and a CV-based approach.

"CIMA said, OK we know you know it all - there's no point in you sitting in a classroom for five days and then doing something at the end and there's no point in making you jump through these hoops. But we need to be able to see some kind of evidence." (PMF7)

By contrast, there were some equally emphatic views that certification should not become a requirement as it was not felt to be an essential measure of an individual's proficiency.

"No, I don't think it should be introduced because I know project managers that have no degrees, and they are good project managers – they've just got the skills a project manager needs." (PMF7)

"No – I wouldn't want it at any level. The only time it has any impact is on recruitment or maybe

promotion" (PMH2)

However, there was a view that the key stakeholders in the discourse around certification were actually the employers as they were essentially the ultimate consumers, and in a position of significant influence.

> *"Whether it becomes a minimum qualification or not is something for those who are the consumers of the people, if you like – they are the ones who should be looking at this. I think it's important there is a qualification scale so that the employer or consumer can judge the standard of the person they are getting when they interview. If you say, 'I have 15 years' experience' and you provide evidence that is great but if you can also point to an external standard against which that person has sat an exam, you can at least say that person can do this." (PMOG1)*

Impact of Introduction of Minimum Qualification

In the context of evaluating the need for a minimum qualification, some participants discussed the potential impact if mandatory certification were to be introduced. Some were open-minded, suggesting that it would not prove to be a deterrent, observing that there is probably already a move towards employers looking for certification when recruiting.

> *"I'd be interested in it – it certainly wouldn't force a career change, having said that, when I look at jobs advertising for project managers and program managers and there's a bit of me that sort of feels like, 'is it even worth applying for those jobs if someone has a qualification?' So, I would be pretty willing and open to the idea of qualifications." (PMG3)*

But others, voiced concern that it might result in a potential loss of valuable human capital.

> *"There is a risk that we lose good people. For example, somebody at the end of their career, who says I have a lot of experience to offer, and I've been doing it for 40 years, but I can't be bothered and it's just not worth it for the last 3 years of my career – you would be losing that experience." (PMOG3)*

> *"I've known project managers who are very good with no certification and I've known project managers with plenty of certification and they've been pretty average. I don't think certification itself guarantees that the person you have is going to be great. I think that's where the experience comes in. So, I would*

say that it is a risk, that if you raise that bar another step then there would be a risk that you lose some of the people you didn't want to lose. (PMF1)

Indeed, one commented that any minimum certification requirement might prove quite restrictive, particularly within an engineering environment where a number of project managers often come through from a technical role.

"I'm thinking about how many of my colleagues don't have APM qualifications and you know, they'd be perfectly capable and competent, it would make it quite difficult. But it's also costly and time critical so I'm not sure." (PMOG4)

In fact, there was a sense of unease around introducing minimum benchmark certification particularly in relation to the level at which it might be ranked. Concerns were expressed that if the level of certification were set too high it would serve to dissuade individuals from entering project management. However, it was suggested that a more appropriate approach might be through a combination of certification and a traineeship, similar to that within the teaching profession.

"You go and you do your work experience, you're not in the profession but once you have gained that level of experience and the qualifications to go with it, and the number of hours that you teach in a classroom etc. then you are a teacher. It would work the same way I would say for project management." (PMF2)

In establishing a minimum certification requirement, it was felt that this would likely place restrictions on practitioners something which resonated with some who pointed to their own experiences in other fields. One engineer recalled how he has not been able to become a chartered engineer because he does not hold a master's degree and feels that he has now "hit a brick wall".

"I think we're getting to the point where you won't be able to make that jump to project manager unless you have a master's degree, and I don't think that should be in place right now, but it will come over time – requirements will change as the recognition comes and the profession grows." (PMOG8)

This sentiment was echoed by another who had also hit a ceiling due to the lack of a qualification. However,

their frustration was exacerbated by the value attached to a certification that may not be an appropriate attestation of competency.

> *"If you're actually in the role in an organisation but you're being blocked because you've not got a piece of paper. I didn't get a job because I didn't have a degree and yet my boss, and my boss' boss argued that I should have got the job because I was actually doing it. They took someone else who did have the piece of paper, but they turned out to be useless." (PMH1)*

4.4.2 University or Professional Body?

The question as to who should provide the qualifications for project managers - the universities or the professional bodies - again drew mixed responses and there were many differing perspectives here.

Almost half declared that, for them, the certification should come from the professional bodies. Justification for this viewpoint was proffered by one individual, who observed other professions such as accountants.

> *"No, it has to be the professional body. Look at the finance side of things. Even if you have a finance degree you still have to do your accountancy exams, so I think if you can ally the two so you can have those professional exams lining up with your degree course, but you'd need the professional body" (PMF7)*

Whilst others suggested that certification would need to be through the professional body as "*a degree is too wide*" (PMF2).

However, sixteen of the study participants felt a more nuanced approach was needed, suggesting some level of collaboration between the universities and the professional bodies, working together to create an appropriate certification or qualification. Indeed, some participants questioned whether the onus for certification should even be an either/or choice with one pointing to the engineering profession and the requirement of engineers to work towards chartership.

> *"I'm thinking about people who deal with engineering professional bodies while working and submitting projects and doing presentations and exams, while dealing with all of that through the professional body." (PMG3)*

Indeed, it was argued that there was a similar precedent in other professions where the professional body approves or accredits university courses, for example, as is the case with the Law Society.

> *"Where someone does a law degree, there are certain courses that are stipulated by the Law Society. So, they say 'you must do this' to the university and they agree that they will embed it in the degree. If you then go on to be Chartered, it's only the professional body that can do that." (PMG2)*

The role of the professional bodies, it was felt, rightly or wrongly, seemed to exert a greater degree of influence over the universities in so far as they 'called the shots' particularly where they accredited courses. However, for some this was seen as a positive as it served to ensure an appropriate level and content.

> *"I think it should be professional bodies working with the universities to ensure the right level." (PMOG5)*

> *"You would start off the education in the higher education establishment and essentially I think the professional body should be responsible for that." (PMOG1)*

Although, many were keen to see professional certification in addition to an academic degree with practitioners building on technical knowledge with specialist project management knowledge.

> *"For me, I would say the certification should probably be seen as a step on from a degree. A degree is a starting level – the professional certification should be at least the same level and ideally a step higher." (PMF1)*

> *"I think the professional body at the end of the day, but you would start off in the higher education establishment." (PMD1)*

But it is also a complex picture as one individual pointed to the IT industry as an example of the many different roles within a field and how this presents a challenge for professionalisation.

> *"It's the proof of knowledge up to a particular standard although these things can be so broad. Prior to the 1980's to be an IT professional you had to have a computer science degree and nothing else would do. But it became obvious at that time that there were many other people working professionally in the*

IT industry who were not computer scientists – that was only one narrow specialism. There was an awful lot of other things that people were doing that were to do with research and development, and implementation of IT systems for which a computer science degree was not really a good foundation." (PMH2)

There was a recognition, too, that degrees in project management were beginning to be more popular, albeit predominantly at a postgraduate level.

"I know it's growing in terms of the option to take a master's in project management, so perhaps there is an opportunity there. I'm not sure whether that would become a standard level of certification" (PMF6)

But the issue of what constitutes an appropriate entry degree seemed to resonate with a number of participants with some questioning whether a degree in project management alone was sufficient. Many pointed to the underlying technical area of a project as being more important than the project management skills which were felt to be an addition to, rather than the main requirement.

"People want to see the qualifications and the experience, but they want to see it in that sector – it's the industry specific knowledge." (PMF2)

"We tend to prefer a technical background here – we tend to find that they are more effective as project managers. Engineers will often question a project manager as to how they can be telling them what to do – 'You don't have the same qualification as me or you've never done engineering, so you don't know what you're talking about' so it definitely matters." (PMD3)

The relevance of the academic degree was also commented upon by one individual who suggested that there may also be benefits to academic degrees in associated fields.

"I did a degree in Information Technology and Sociology, and whilst the IT is not really anything to do with project management, you could argue that the sociology is relevant because project management is to do with people and you know, the stakeholder side of things." (PMF2)

It was not just the relevance of the academic degrees that was subject to discussion but also, for some, the issue of credibility. Concerns were expressed in relation to the increasing numbers of first-class degrees being awarded and how that may be *"having a greater influence on people's perceived capability" PMH2)* and possibly proving to be misleading.

Many participants recognised the key objective of certification as being able to demonstrate some degree of competency but felt this could be better assessed to reflect actual demonstration of capability.

> *"I think the academic route has value, but I would value more, the people who can demonstrate they can get things done outside of an academic environment." (PMOG2)*

> *"What you're saying with certification is that you are an expert practitioner, and you cannot be that unless you have practitioned!" (PMF1)*

4.4.3 Licensing and Registration

One aspect of this study sought to determine attitudes in relation to licensing and registration, particularly in the context of occupational closure and establishing 'project manager' as a protected title.

Mandatory Registration

For some professions, such as Financial Advisers, there is a requirement for compulsory registration in order to practise, serving as a closure mechanism and to control the title. The participants were asked to consider the importance of compulsory registration for project managers. The results provided a mix of opinions however, ten out of 28 participants were very supportive of the concept, suggesting that it would be a positive thing for all parties, with some indicating its particular importance in the context of recruitment.

> *"I think it would be helpful, mostly because of my experience when we try and recruit project managers. You can read through some of the CVs we get, and their experience is pretty flaky at times whereas if there was a standard set of people you could have faith in or believe were up able to work to that standard and have sufficient experience and knowledge, then I'd be much more confident and not have to dig deeper into how people have presented themselves." (PMH2)*

Another participant agreed with these sentiments although he did not feel that registration should be

mandatory but rather an indication of a 'gold standard'. Whilst others pointed to its importance on larger scale projects, often in the public sector, where there was a sharp focus on competence and successful delivery.

> *"I think it's very important and given the type of projects undertaken in this country in both public and private sectors, knowing the competencies of project managers I think is very important as UK plc would benefit in the end." (PMOG7)*

It was also felt that by introducing a required registration this might result in greater personal investment by those directly affected. A practitioner explained that having previously not been interested in the acquisition of any certifications, he had since sat an exam which had convinced him the extent to which he did care. He likened certification and registration to obtaining a 'currency' which he felt would be beneficial to all practitioners in the market.

Others acknowledged the importance of registration in the context of protecting the use of the title 'project manager' suggesting that the ability to verify individuals against a central register would prove beneficial.

> *"I think there is some value in it. I'm thinking about possibly more medical occupations where to call yourself a certain job title you need to be registered as one. There's certainly value there, particularly working on the significant projects." (PMOG2)*

> *"I guess if you are going to protect the title 'project manager' for instance. There's probably some value in there being a worthwhile register so that you can go and check with the APM that this person is who they say they are, and they have the experience they say.*

This was further supported by an experienced practitioner who was keen that the title was protected from so-called 'chancers' misleading employers over their experience and felt that a register could prevent such a scenario.

It was also felt to be particularly important by one individual who suggested:

> *"I think it would do us good and it would help take us far in being recognised as a profession." (PMF2)*

However, there were those who disagreed with the notion of a register for project managers. Many of whom

felt that it was not necessary and questioned why it would matter. Some participants compared the requirement for practitioners to be registered with those working as medical practitioners and, interestingly, gas fitters. They indicated that they could see the rationale for these two groups on the grounds of public safety, however, they could not see such a justification or benefit in the case of project managers.

> *"I don't think it's as important because I think obviously something like a doctor or a gas engineer there's an element where society as a whole needs this, there's clearly an absolute obligation to society and to the economy to be able to have a certain standard because of dealing with people's health and safety." (PMF6)*

In much the same vein, another individual pointed to expectation for assurance:

> *"I think that the registered part to me relates to more providing assurances to the public that this person is going to keep you safe. It's like a health and safety thing. So, would you need that for a project manager? Probably not." PMD3)*

But others cautioned against adding addition layers of restrictions when there are often sufficient existing controls within the organizational setting.

> *"I think you need to have flexibility to try these people within the company to see what you can manage. There are enough controls in place within organisations anyway so I don't think having a register you would gain anything – I think it would just be quite restrictive." (PMOG4)*

Instead, an experienced practitioner, advocated an ongoing requirement for professional development was much more important than registration. They discussed accreditation by a professional body (in this context they meant certification) and the importance of ensuring that was maintained every 5 years as expected by the body.

> *"I'm not so sure my name being on a list of names to be able to do project management and I can't if I'm not on it, is that important. I think having the accreditation is more important. If I was a doctor who had gained their degree in the 1970's and hadn't bothered improving since, then that would be a doctor I wouldn't go to – and it's the same thing." (PMD2)*

Perhaps reasonably, a number of participants questioned how a process of registration might actually be managed and overseen. Even those who felt that it was a good idea and acknowledged the benefits, did ponder the practicalities of maintaining a register and at what level registration would be required.

Subject to Regulation

Whilst the views on registration were divided, so too were those on regulation. The participants considered whether they felt project managers should be subject to this additional measure in the same way as financial advisors or doctors, for example.

Eleven of the participants were united in their view that it would not be a positive move for project management at all. One was particularly concerned by the idea and pointed to the fact that delivery of a project is a team effort.

> *"Oh God, no. I think there is a level of due diligence you should be subject to before you are let loose to run something but when we hear horror stories of public sector projects where they have spent a hundred million pounds and nothing happens, like the aborted NHS computer system, that's not down to the project manager – the project manager can't spend £100m on their own. It's virtually impossible to regulate because you are not doing it on your own." (PMF4)*

Others were equally doubtful that it would be practicable to regulate individual project managers, and many questioned the need given the nature of the role.

> *"No – nobody dies because project management doesn't succeed. They die because of health and safety issues and other stuff. It's down to the criticality of the mistakes – a project manager's mistakes are not the same as a doctor's, for example. There is a key difference here. I don't think there is a need for regulation." PMD2)*

The degree of risk proved to be a common theme amongst those against regulation. Others reiterated that, to them, project management did not represent a high risk of personal harm or death to others and on those grounds, it was felt to be a rather heavy-handed approach. One participant pointed to accountancy as being a profession that should be regulated as the work undertaken was subject to legal requirement for payment of

taxes but indicated that they did not feel this applied to project management.

Whilst another considered regulation would represent an existential crisis for the smaller project organisations and consultancy firms in that it would introduce cost additional costs.

> *"That sounds a little bit scary, and I think it would kill off the small consultancies who can't afford dedicated project managers and you've got to leet some companies have that flexibility, especially in engineering. That's why it's good that the APM are opening up these qualifications so it's a way of demonstrating competence and I think that is sufficient." (PMOG4)*

Again, the practicalities were brought into question as to how it might be possible to regulate an individual's performance unless their projects were audited, which aligned with the concerns of another very experienced practitioner regarding the failure of projects.

> *"Sometimes, it's difficult to work out exactly what went wrong. When I look at the speed of how quickly some of these projects move and the authorising environment and how decisions or advice is overturned, you could have a competent individual and someone higher up doesn't want that, they want something else so there's something about the ability to understand what went wrong. I think regulation would be a step too far." (PMG1)*

Many felt that by operating ethically and professionally was sufficient and there was no need for formal regulation.

> *"If it did exist, I'd take notice, but I wouldn't want to impose it on people. I would like to think that I was operating ethically and professionally in all the work I do, and I'd expect everybody else to work in the same way." (PMH2)*

There were exceptions, however, as it was felt that certain sectors may require a different approach, such as the nuclear industry.

> *"I would maybe caveat that with someone who was working in a nuclear power plant, or if it was something that could potentially cause catastrophic effect on the country where the project was being*

developed, then maybe you would consider it but in general, no." (PMD3)

But others argued that there is often an element of regulation implicit within the project work being undertaken, citing financial services as an example in this instance.

> *"By virtue of the fact that I am working within financial services which is a sector that is regulated, there is an element of regulation on me as the project manager and certain things are expected of me as a result." (PMF6)*

Views varied widely and whilst some participants were unsure as to whether regulation should be introduced at all, a few were supportive although as one indicated, he was *"just not sure to what degree" (PMH1).* There was also disagreement as to where any regulatory oversight should sit – within the professional body or an independent regulator, to avoid any conflict of interest.

One participant suggested that there should be a relationship between registration and regulation.

> *"If you are going to have some kind of registration and set criteria for who should be registered then there should a regulator overseeing that." (PMG3)*

4.5 Chartership

The interviews for the study were conducted less than 12 months after the award of a Royal Charter to the Association for Project Management (APM) making it "the Chartered Body for the Project Profession". The award of a Royal Charter is seen as emblematic of the legal recognition or state legitimacy afforded to a profession.

The extent to which participants had knowledge and awareness of this development was explored and this revealed a limited degree of clarity and understanding. To examine what this might mean for practitioners, they were first asked to consider how important membership of a professional body was to them, particularly given the earlier acknowledgement of a professional body being a key characteristic of a profession.

4.5.1 Importance of Professional Body Membership

In considering attitudes towards professional body membership and its importance to practitioners in respect

of their careers there were a diverse range of opinions offered. Individuals pointed to factors including age, stage of career, primary discipline that influenced their thinking.

Only four practitioners were emphatic that membership of a project management professional body (either PMI or APM) was important.

> *"It absolutely is – yeah, I think so. I'm part of that body where we're trying to progress things forward and actually achieve a true profession and achieve that thing that it can be very successful that adds value to the organisations that wish to use it." (PMG1)*

"The Specialist"

A highly experienced practitioner having worked predominantly in the banking sector over the last 17 years with a particular specialism in data migration projects. He has also worked on projects designed to centralise banking operations offshore, many of which required process reengineering and internal structural change often resulting in reduction of head count. He does not consider himself to be an IT expert but views those in this area as his key stakeholders. An accidental project manager who 'fell' into the role and eventually progressed to managing a change team. He now works as a contract project manager who is focused less on career progression but prefers the flexibility of being able to 'pick and choose' interesting projects that suit his requirements in terms of location and income.

> *"It is important to have a professional body and I've done a lot of work with the APM for years and wouldn't have done so if I didn't think it was important. It is important because it brings a name, some recognition, set of practices and standards, a place you can go for networking support and advice and*

just a body of knowledge in the wider sense. So, it's important that it's there." (PMOG1)

Whilst others felt that it was useful to be a member of a professional body, as an individual progressed further with their career and particularly when looking to change jobs where recognition of membership was felt to play a role.

"You're recognised as in that area amongst your fellow colleagues and fellow project managers, but do you get anymore from it? Probably as you go further up you get the recognition, like Fellow of BCS, probably the same with the APM." (PMF3)

"I haven't moved around a lot, so it hasn't mattered in terms of the job market." (PMG2)

"It wasn't very important before, but I think realising that a lot of people that may be applying for jobs that I might think about going for it." (PMG3)

For many, however, it had not registered as being all that important in the context of their current situation, whilst others questioned the value based on previous experiences with professional bodies within their primary disciplines.

"It's on my radar that it's good for recognition of your experience and of the level where you work at but it's not in my immediate requirement to continue being a project manager." (PMOG4)

"I'm not interested. I'm a member of the British Computer Society (BCS). I'm not a member of the APM." (PMF6)

"I'm not a member – I may get round to it. I used to be a member of the British Computer Society, but I dropped that a few years ago because they're not doing anything particularly useful around you." (PMOG2)

Mature practitioners suggested that the value for them was not evident at this stage in their careers, pointing to the ease of connectivity with fellow practitioner across different platforms, such as LinkedIn:

"It used to be important but going forward it's not really all that important for me anymore. Again, my experience and the qualifications I've achieved are more than enough and it might sound like I'm

resting on my laurels, but I'm not." (PMT1)

"When I was younger I thought it was quite important but as I've got older I've got more cynical …..I think it's changed now with organisations where you can join a lot of these groups without paying fees and being in touch with lots of people around the world and fellow professionals – it makes it much harder to justify a couple of hundred pounds each to join these bodies, as good as the monthly magazine and some of these forums are, it's still quite a tough sell!" (PMP1)

The question of value for money was reiterated by fellow practitioners who questioned what benefits might be drawn from membership. One individual spoke to the conundrum of which professional body to choose, given the two active bodies within the UK, the PMI and the APM:

"Right now, I don't belong to any of them. So, membership is not that important to me on a day-to-day basis. I've looked at them and a lot of it is the 'what's in it for me?'. Particularly, when much of the stuff goes on in London that's not terribly helpful when you live up in Scotland. Here in Scotland the activity is fairly evenly split so it's not clearly one or the other, so you end up thinking I'll keep my options open, and you don't ally to either." (PMOG6)

Although, participants acknowledged they could see the potential benefits for early career practitioners, in providing a means of networking and gaining access to useful information.

"When I was starting out, the opportunity to learn more and join some of these bodies and get into that side of things that was very important" (PMP1)

However, some remained unconvinced of the value of membership and were somewhat dismissive of its importance, even with employer support:

"I don't think, even though the organisation would support a subscription to these two organisations, for me it doesn't matter – I don't need the badge." (PMH1)

"Well, if I say I've never actually had time to become member that shows how important it is." (PMD1)

4.5.2 Chartered Professional Body

When asked how important they felt it was that a professional body held chartered status, most of the participants conveyed little knowledge of the recent developments with regards to the APM, however, many felt that this was a positive step for project management. For some, comparisons were drawn with other disciplinary areas such as engineering and IT.

> *"I think that's important because then you're probably recognised as being good enough…. seen as good as them because you know why wouldn't project management have a chartered body if engineering's got one." (PMF3)*

> *"The professional body having chartered status, because the BCS for example, is chartered and now the APM is and I think it does add some weight because in people's minds, when they hear chartered, it does have a certain kudos – it adds weight to it because it gives it credibility." (PMF6)*

There was a sense that the professional body being chartered was preferable but not essential. One experienced practitioner felt that the Royal Charter *"enables aspiration but also means there is a recognised documented standard" (PMOG1)*, further suggesting that:

> *"It also means, paradoxically, that you can be held to account if something goes wrong and that the consumers of the project industry have some means of recourse. So, you can take a doctor to court and hold them to account if they indulge in malpractice and the same should be true of project management." (PMOG2)*

There was broad agreement amongst the participants who concurred with the perception that chartership provides a level of esteem and for some a matter of pride. One practitioner suggested that, for them, the ability to gain individual chartership as a result of the award of a Royal Charter to the APM would influence them to pursue this:

> *"if only because I would hope that that would translate into more relevance in the UK market and more." (PMF7)*

But it was the importance of establishing a key standard as disciplines moved from *"cottage industry, to regular*

discipline or profession" (PMD2), that was notable, with one adding that chartership provided an accreditation or benchmark that conveyed a quality standard instantly recognisable by organisations.

> *"Let's improve that benchmark – I think it's better that people have and if you can put letters after your name even better. Maybe that's the difference between a profession and an occupation". (PMD2)*

However, some expressed scepticism in terms of the need for chartership taking into consideration the motivation for it and the market requirements.

> *"The whole Royal Chartering stuff to me… my slightly cynical view, I think comes down to the professional body trying to attract, to make themselves stand out to be different from the next professional body to be honest rather than adding anything to me as a member or anything wider." (PMF4)*

> *"I'm not sure what the point of it is because if no one is asking for it in terms of roles. They ask for qualifications like PRINCE2, for example. I've got that because I know that unless I've got that on my CV people are not going to take me seriously. But it's not how good I am as a project manager or not, but they want the qualifications. I've never seen anyone ask for Chartered Project Manager." (PMF5)*

Amongst the practitioners interviewed, some viewed chartership as an extension of the certifications currently available through the professional body, although not necessarily in a positive way.

> *"To be Chartered is an extra layer on top that says you know what you're talking about and what the rules are and how you engage with people. I guess it's no different to being a member of any kind of certification scheme." (PMG2)*

> *"I'm less convinced about chartership if I'm being honest. I've never been drawn to any of the higher up APM qualifications – I can't even remember what they are called again." (PMG2)*

Indeed, it was suggested that chartership represented nothing more than ranking:

> *"To me, we're just here to do a job and do it well, and does it really matter? Why should engineering have one (Charter), why should anybody have one really? You know it doesn't mean you're any better*

than any other profession by having it. It's just about status and stigma again." (PMF3)

One experienced individual mused that the lack of mentoring at an early age could potentially inhibit many from pursuing careers in lesser-known professions. He pointed to his own experiences that no one had counselled him about opportunities, suggesting that the lack of signposting at school could be a contributory factor.

> *"The way that children of doctors would often become doctors, the children of lawyers might go into law, I think there are some aspects of professionalisation that are inadvertently, in effect, a closed door to people who don't necessarily have the mentoring or signposting from school." (PMG3)*

He went on to suggest that chartership would raise the profile of the profession and might encourage young people to consider it as a career option even if they had not previously heard of it.

Another individual highlighted the often-unpredictable route of a career path, citing their initial progress towards Chartered Engineer as a young graduate. However, he found he drifted into project management and his membership of the engineering professional body IMECHE (Institute of Mechanical Engineering) lapsed along with any possibility of gaining chartership in that area. This had influenced his lack of engagement in this development.

Whilst agreeing that a charter was very important, concerns were raised as to how individuals might gain this prestigious status, pointing to other disciplines where practice was the driver.

> *"What worries me is that they seem to be relying a lot on qualifications. When I did my chartership for surveying it was done very much on the basis of job experience. An experienced Chartered Surveyor would certify every week what you were doing and how you were meeting the criteria for all the different things and sign you off. This seems to be very much you've got to do it by qualification then go and have an interview." (PMG2)*

The issue of the high costs involved in achieving individual chartership was suggested to be a potential deterrent for practitioners:

"I guess I'm slightly suspicious about the amount of money they're charging to do that - I'm sure they would claim it's not all about the money. At the moment, I have no inclination to expend nearly £1,000 in becoming a Chartered Project Professional." (PMG2)

4.5.3 Royal Charter

The APM devoted many years to their efforts in securing a Royal Charter and fighting off a High Court challenge by their competitor professional body, the PMI. In light of this costly endeavour, the participants were asked their opinion, particularly in relation to its relevance beyond the UK and what it means to international audiences.

Of the twenty-eight participants, twelve immediately responded by saying that a Royal Charter held currency outside of the UK and was valued. Some pointed to the perceived quality of the UK education and professional systems, around the world with many countries looking to benchmark these standards.

Those with a background in engineering suggested that a Royal Charter was viewed positively overseas.

"I definitely think it has currency outside the UK – I can see no downside to being a Chartered Engineer." (PMOG6)

"Based on my involvement with my engineering professional body, who are a chartered organisation, it carries weight overseas because they have branches in Australia and Malaysia, so yes it does." (PMOG7)

Indeed, the fact that the PMI had gone to such great lengths to block the award of the Royal Charter to the APM, launching multiple legal challenges, in itself, it was argued indicated that "*maybe it does have some gravitas because they saw it as a threat" (PMF6).*

Others felt that even if overseas clients were unfamiliar with the term, the implication would be that it represented a higher status.

"They are looking for experience, so they see a person's work and that they are accredited to this, they can at least go away a 'Google it' so they have a reference point outside the organisation to give them

confidence." (PMD2)

There was also a sense that the use of the word 'Royal' in the United States, for example, was always appreciated. Individuals also cited experience working with companies in the Middle East and parts of the British Commonwealth where they felt the Royal Charter still retained a degree of cache.

"I think it can still be quite a big deal. I think there is still enough influence in the British Isles and will remain, and also its colonial heritage which will mean it still carries weight." (PMOG1)

One individual felt very strongly that the Royal Charter mattered a great deal, in fact suggesting that it did so more overseas than in the UK.

"It should matter more here – I don't think you should be able to call yourself an engineer unless you have a degree in engineering frankly – it's not so much the word 'charter' as what it conjures up as a professional." (PMOG5)

However, there was concern as to how this may be used by the professional body going forward and whether it would prove to be restrictive.

"I have my worries about how it will be used. I do have a worry that the APM may use it as a way of saying we are the only place you can come to and in some monopolise it on these shores, because everybody does value it here. It is a standard." (PMOG1)

For some participants, recognition of the Royal Charter was interpreted in the context of certification and their answers reflected their attitudes towards this.

"I don't think chartership is all that important. We review a number of invitation to tender's and RAQ's that we received from international customers – the States, Australia, the Middle East, Canada and so on, you never see anything that says 'this person must be accredited to IPMA level x or whatever. Just asks for suitably qualified and experienced personnel, and they ask for the CV's and a list of their experience which is more important than the badges." (PMD3)

Others also remained unconvinced as to the importance of the Charter and hence the ability for individuals to

become chartered themselves, arguing that from a certification perspective they were of the opinion that this was often dictated by the territory. Indeed, two participants suggested that whilst the term 'Royal' may be valued in the United States, the prevalence of the PMI professional body in that part of the world, most clients looked for certification through this association. Another practitioner pointed to his experiences when dealing with Norwegian clients:

> *"For the Norwegians it doesn't do anything for them, they don't care – it's been a constant battle. Even when I put it into context that the APM is part of the IPMA federation of project management associations. It's the same in France." (PMOG8)*

A point reiterated by another participant:

> *"They don't rely on the fact that you just got some chartered qualification or whatever – it might be interesting, but I don't think it would hold much sway." (PMF4)*

4.5.4 Chartership Accessibility

As a result of securing the Royal Charter, the APM announced that it would now be possible to apply to become a Chartered Project Professional (ChPP), however at the time of conducting the interviews for this study, very little detail was available as to the pathways to achieving this new status.

The participants were asked to consider whether individual chartership should be open to all those working within the field of project management, including amongst many others, project administrators, project coordinators, and planners or whether this should be restricted to only those managing projects or programmes.

There were mixed opinions on this point with some participants of the view that it should only be open to project managers at this stage. There was widespread recognition that individual chartership should reflect experience and for some meant that only project managers would be in a position to evidence this.

> *"I think it should be the project manager or programme manager to be honest – these two levels, not just anyone. They are the ones who have their heads on the block." (PMT1)*

"Otherwise, you don't know where they sit or what they do and what they are responsible for." (PMD1)

One participant, pragmatically, concluded that it would be illogical for someone to be able to become chartered without having demonstrated practical experience managing projects.

"I don't think you can become Chartered without experience – it defies logic. You should be able to walk up to something, know what you are doing, and do it. It would be difficult to not be a project manager or a programme manager and achieve it." (PMG2)

Whilst another suggested that it should perhaps be something that an individual would start to work towards once they reached 'Junior Project Manager' level, otherwise they felt it *"just widens it too much and I think you have to have the knowledge and the experience to back up being part of the Royal institute" (PMF2).*

A view echoed a number of times, and there was a feeling that chartership needed to convey that an individual had all the requisite knowledge.

"It could be utilised as an indication that you've not just been a project manager for two minutes, sat an exam and passed it, and that makes you a Chartered Project Manager. I think it needs to be a more meaningful indication of the type of project manager you are, and you are experienced." (PMD3)

Many participants, however, were conscious of the need to be inclusive and were keen that the opportunity be open to as wide a base as possible in recognition of the many diverse roles and contribution to the successful delivery of projects, with the added caveat that they should be relevant roles.

"It depends on your contribution but for example, the skills of a global controls lead are distinctive and would merit judgement against the chartered standard." (PMOG1)

"There could be other project roles where it would be useful to have the same kind of recognition, for example for project support or PMO type roles – not just looking at projects but programmes and portfolios. I would want to see the broad set." (PMF7)

It was also suggested that perhaps a multiple level approach might be taken in recognition of the many different roles involved with successful project delivery.

"I think with project management because it such a broad area, I think there could perhaps be different levels to it. Different levels of status maybe for different roles? I don't think this dilutes the status – there's a danger of it becoming too elitist if it's only open to project managers. I get that probably gives it a sense of importance, but it can be quite limiting for people who might want to go on to be project managers." (PMF6)

This was a concept reiterated by another very experienced practitioner who again, suggested that operating a tiered structure might be appropriate although it was suggested that the proposed title of 'Chartered Project Professional' lacked specifics and could potentially prove misleading.

Concern was also expressed as to what benchmarking might be in place to determine who should be awarded chartership, urging that there had to be a practical element to the assessment.

"I'm cautious here because I don't want to see a lot of benign benchmarking questions. So, for example, you couldn't become an accredited person if you had never done the job. Even if you pass an exam and you know the theory and everything else. I'm sorry, but if you've never done the job – that's not enough for me. (PMD2)

The assertion that for individuals to become chartered this process must include assessment of experience was a common theme amongst the participants and it was felt to be essential in order to provide the credibility necessary for the status to be meaningful.

"As long as you follow…. only if you meet the criteria and you follow the pathway in order to obtain that" (PMH1)

However, this participant added that they would caution against *"it is turning into some form of snobbery, which a lot of these things were, historically." (PMH1).*

4.6 Benefits of Professionalisation

Experiences of other occupational groups that have sought to professionalise have varied with some achieving greater success than others. Financial advisers have successfully achieved occupational closure and control of

title whilst management consultants have struggled to gain traction with their professionalisation project. However, any professionalisation process brings potential benefits and risks to practitioners.

As the professionalisation of project management continues, the participants were asked to consider what they felt might be the resultant benefits to them. Whilst a range of perceived possible benefits were expressed, there were some key themes that emerged where participants were in agreement such as recognition, career development and standardisation.

4.6.1 Recognition

The potential for greater recognition of the role of a project manager as highly skilled was a common theme that a number of participants were immediately drawn towards.

> *"For me, I think one important benefit would be recognition and it would be seen as a higher performing role." (PMF3)*

> *"I would say recognition of a specific skill set that I didn't really attribute much value to before, but I definitely do now." (PMOG6)*

Most participants felt that professionalisation *"elevates project management, in line with other more well-known professions such as law and accountancy" (PMF2),* and with this comes recognition that a project manager is a discrete role. One individual felt that at a corporate level this would lead to an increased appreciation and acknowledgement.

> *"People don't really understand what a project manager does and therefore 'Joe in Accounts' can go and do it for a few months." (PMF1)*

Another practitioner further reiterated this sentiment arguing that there should be a move away from casual project secondments.

> *"I think that it's a good thing for people and for employers and would mean that organisations would use people whose specialism is project management rather than using those within the organisation who may have dealings with the project." (PMG3)*

In raising the profile of project management, it was felt that the discipline would gain credibility, considered to be important for organisations when recruiting or working with project managers. One pointed to it providing assurance that those tasked with managing projects were competent to deliver.

> *"They've got the expertise to do the role and that also helps the organisation because it gives them the assurance that they're getting a quality person wo meets the right standards of competency which helps with the screening process." (PMF6)*

Others agreed that trust was a key element, suggesting that organisations would have greater confidence, whether directly employing or contracting professional project managers. However, some argued that whilst organisations might trust that they have the required competence, there was also an issue of a second tier of trust.

> *"One of the challenges I've always faced coming into a new organisation as a consultant, and despite paying me a massive daily rate, they are not always prepared to let go sometimes, and I guess having professional status or Chartered status would certainly assist with that. Nobody comes in and starts arguing with a Chartered Accountant – you just let them get on and do their job." (PMP1)*

One participant also pointed to concerns around those currently practising project practitioners who are less competent than they should be and felt that professionalisation would serve to filter out those who were not up to the job.

> *"I think, also, it would also potentially get rid of rogue elements. I've come across plenty of bad project managers in my time and it would help to eliminate these being able to take on projects." (PMP1)*

This was a view held by other participants, equally conscious of the need to ensure competence and capability were the main attributes of those leading projects.

> *"I've known interviews take place for projects in challenging environments where people have turned up having read a book or been on a five-day course or two-day course, or whatever. I want to get to the point where people start saying this is a professional profession, and there is a raising of standards." (PMF7)*

"It shows that you're serious about what you're doing, and you understand the consequences of not doing it properly. It's not a 'jack-the-lad' approach of 'yeah, we'll fix it tomorrow'." (PMT1)

4.6.2 Career Development

For some practitioners, they felt that a major benefit of professionalisation would be improved career development. They suggested that with a clear pathway, practitioners would find a greater degree of self-fulfilment and satisfaction. One individual pointed to career progression as an important motivational element:

"They should have a clear path of moving up that ladder of professionalism." (PMOG5)

Another participant agreed, adding:

"I guess having some kind of career structure that I can map myself against and aspire to climb up, demonstrating where I am as part of this." (PMOG2)

Many of the participants had fallen into project management and expressed that it was important that there were progression opportunities in this area to satisfy their career aspirations.

With professionalisation, a number of the participants felt that there would be a resultant interest in project management as a discrete profession. Again, many mentioned a raised profile of the discipline at school and university would see it feature more readily on the radar of young people who might be attracted into the profession.

"*If you are seen as a chartered professional then you may get more people into it. When I got into project management it had never been a career that I looked at whist at college. Maybe if I was starting out now and it was a chartered profession, I guess I would have been tempted in." (PMF1)*

This was further endorsed by another participant who felt that individuals would proactively join the profession rather than falling into it as many within the study sample had experienced.

It was also felt that professionalisation would serve to improve salaries as increased recognition of expertise and competence would allow practitioners to command higher levels of remuneration.

4.6.3 Standardisation

A theme that emerged from almost all participants was a standardised approach to project management. Many indicated that they felt it would be helpful if everyone worked to a particular standard which they felt could only come from demonstration of competency.

Some pointed to the need for qualifications in support of this in order to benchmark minimum standards.

> *"I think it would get some standardisation where you would maybe get some consistency across your pool of resource project managers that they are of a standard you could see, recognise and measure against a set benchmark." (PMD3)*

Others argued that professionalisation would provide *"a certain rigour around the role to ensure that the person is meeting the right standards and could actually do the job." (PMF6).* They went on to add that this supports organisations in securing a quality practitioner at the right level of competency.

This point was reiterated by another practitioner who felt that with standardisation the discipline would see *"a higher quality of project manager over time." (PMF4)*

Some of the participants suggested that with standardisation they felt there would be an improvement in project performance as a result, although it was acknowledged that this could take some time to manifest.

> *"The benefits to society should be better projects, and by implication better benefits realised from them." (PMOG1)*

For others, there was still more progress to be made on standardising the approach to managing projects and it was this aspect that they felt would improve as part of the professionalisation project.

> *"If everybody was qualified to the same or similar standard, you would all be using the same approach, you would all have the same understanding and be using the same terminology – no confusion. Then we would have recognition of achievement of what project management is capable of." (PMD1)*

4.7 Risks of Professionalisation

However, the participants also considered what they perceived to be the potential risks of the

professionalisation of project management with one individual questioning whether project management would be accepted as a profession.

> *"I don't know whether it's a risk as such, but I do wonder whether it will ever truly be accepted as a profession. Will it be recognised in the same way as other professions?" (PMF6)*

Four themes emerged although there were two predominant ones that were the focus of the discussions, the first of which was barriers to entry and the second was the issue of individuals being qualified but not competent.

4.7.1 Introduction of Barriers to Entry

Most of the participants reported that perhaps the biggest risk of professionalisation would be the introduction of barriers to entry. This was perceived to be a particularly negative outcome from the professionalisation project that would reduce the attractiveness of becoming a project manager.

Many pointed to the accidental nature of the profession and how they felt this was actually a benefit as it offered an alternative route in for the vast majority of individuals at the moment.

> *"You could miss out on some great project managers coming through the ranks in the organisation. You often have good people who stumble across it ten years into their working life and if you then had to go and get that qualification or that degree." (PMF3)*

> *"If you say 'you can't do this without a certification or a degree, and this amount of experience' you risk losing entrants. They will be offput by the fact that they have to do a 4-year degree and then get some experience." (PMF1)*

Other participants concurred, even going so far as to suggest it may prove to be discriminatory against those unable, or unwilling, to devote time to obtaining certification due to time pressures and demands of their job.

> *"I think you lose people who can't afford to do the certifications and can't then get that professional or chartered status. I think it would be deemed to be a semi-elitist work area potentially. It would certainly be a barrier to allowing good people to come and do a good job because they don't have a tick in the*

box." (PMT1)

However, one individual felt that barriers were necessary and the lack of such an inhibitor would itself represent a risk.

> *"If you don't put any minimum entry criteria it could become flooded. Anybody could kind of get into project management and it devalues what an actual project manager is. If it isn't taken seriously then people won't go into project management – they'll do other things which are well-known out there." (PMF2)*

4.7.2 Qualified but not Competent

The second significant theme that emerged was the concern there would be a focus on individuals gaining certification but that this would not translate into competency. One practitioner commented that this would not be unique to project management.

> *"I know people who are very good at passing exams and they can build up quite a suite of qualifications that would certainly be recognisable to someone and cause them to make assessments as to their capability. I think the risk is that someone could, on paper, look extremely competent but when it came to the real world, they would not be able to demonstrate capability. I think that is the case across a number of disciplines." (PMOG6)*

This viewpoint was supported by another highly experienced practitioner who had recently undertaken a master's degree in project management. He suggested that academic learning is only part of being an effective practitioner.

> *"Anybody with an academic brain can follow the process and get the badge at the end of it but how are they in the real-world situation." (PMH1)*

He pointed to the attitude of some of his fellow members of the cohort and expressed concern that for some they were not committed to actually learning and gaining knowledge whilst undertaking the course but instead were just interested in doing the bare minimum in order to secure the qualification.

"Would I employ them? – the answer would be no; they would just demotivate the team around them." (PMH1)

Some participants were also concerned about the emphasis on qualifications that they felt could become the case as part of the professionalisation of project management.

"For us it would put too much weight on it, and we'd start recruiting people based on 'that person's got a chartered project manager badge' without giving kudos to their actual experience – it doesn't give me confidence." (PMD3)

This was a concern expressed by another experienced practitioner who suggested that in moving towards a more academic requirement this might not help with the development of rounded practitioners who were capable of effectively managing people.

4.7.3 Timescale for Professionalisation

One practitioner spoke about the risk of professionalising too quickly and in doing so not taking care to ensure it was right for practitioners. He felt that it was important to determine the right competency assessments and to seek feedback, ensuring that this was fully understood and could be proven to work.

"I think there is something about making sure that if it's going to take 10 years, it's going to take 10 years but let's get it right. In the age of the internet everybody wants everything immediately and if we're not willing to wait I think it could place the whole thing at risk. As a profession if we want to wave a flag at the end of the day and say we know this is working and if you need a project delivering, come here because we can guarantee it." (PMG1)

Another participant added to this suggesting that professionalisation was *"certainly not going to be achieved within a couple of years" (PMOG2).* Whilst a practitioner whose background was in surveying, raised concern that as the focus on professionalisation can be all-consuming, he feared that the professional body "might lose track of the needs of its members as he had seemed with RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors).

"You can have bits of warfare between the different professions. I have experience in digital and IT because it's a composite of everything I do. If you look at how Agile is developing in IT, there is no role

of a project manager in there, so the professional body has to be on top of that. You need to move with the times and not concentrate on defending a position instead of looking to the future and how things are changing." (PMG2)

4.7.4 Accountability

Two participants mentioned concerns around individual practitioners potentially becoming liable when projects go wrong. One individual acknowledged that whilst this was not the case at the moment, he worried that if professionalisation brought project management to the same level as engineering, then some of the liability may fall to the project manager.

This concern was echoed by another experienced practitioner who suggested that there was a danger of *"it is becoming too codified and legalistic" (PMOG1).* They went on to explain that they were worried that this would prevent the profession from being flexible enough to adapt to change as the discipline evolved, requiring constant review if qualification and standards.

4.8 Tales of the Unexpected

As a result of the semi-structured interview approach that was undertaken, the conversation with the participants occasionally touched upon areas that were not part of the originally signposted line of questioning but nonetheless provided interesting data that it is worth reporting.

During the period of conducting interviews, there was a high-profile discourse in the media around the increased use of artificial intelligence and how this was anticipated to impact on different job roles. Some participants touched upon this in the context of how they thought this might affect them.

One practitioner explained that he is involved in a steering group within the oil and gas industry and commented that, coincidentally, the group were considering the digital economy however:

"We can't quite get our heads around it and not quite sure whether we need to do anything about it because it is so uncertain as to what it includes and what it will impact. But it's going to impact every profession although it's not clear what that impact will be." (PMOG1)

The participant continued that they did not feel that project management would benefit from digitisation or the use of artificial intelligence. He felt that the management of projects was too stochastic for this to be successfully employed.

A practitioner working on IT-based projects also commented on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and was particularly enthusiastic but cautioned about how and when it was used.

> *"It's absolutely fantastic but it needs to be well targeted – you can't just throw it at your problem. I was reading recently in the news about AI technologies being used by doctors, and I've been testing different types of AI technology and it's a very long way from perfect." (PMOG2)*

Whilst there was deemed to be potential for AI to assist with the management of projects, one participant argued that there would always be a need for the crucial role of a project manager because of the uniquely human element of decision making.

The topic of AI did not form part of the scope of this study however it represents an interesting development worthy of future exploration.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented data collected from 28 semi-structured interviews, ranging in duration from 35 minutes through to 95 minutes. The participants were aged between 26 to over 46 years, and with varying levels of project management experience. Some were relatively new entrants to the field whilst others could demonstrate more than 25 years' worth of experience across a range of industry sectors.

Given the broad demographic, it is perhaps not surprising that such a diverse range of views emerged. In fact, in some areas these opinions were somewhat polarized, in particular, when considering whether project management is a profession, for example and the role of certification and registration. But more broadly, there was a general lack of consensus throughout the study.

The participants sought to define a profession, and in doing so identified key traits, some of which aligned with those drawn from the literature. However, they were largely dismissive of the relevance of authority over

clients, autonomy and altruism.

Certification, widely considered to be central to a professionalisation process in the literature as a core trait, was examined and participants again presented a wide variety of opinions regarding the importance of this in benchmarking standards. But whilst there was acknowledgement that there remains a lack of clarity over a defined entry route into project management, whether this should be through a minimum of degree level education or professional body certification was subject to some dispute.

The one area where participants were in broad agreement was in respect of the level of recognition afforded to project management as a distinct profession at both an organisational level and externally within the wider population. Although some were hopeful that the award of a Royal Charter to the UK-based Association for Project Management may serve to raise the profile of the profession.

Finally, perceived benefits of professionalisation of project management included greater recognition, standardization of practice and career progression. However, concern was expressed that potential risks resulting from this process, were the introduction of barriers to entry that would deter new entrants, and a greater focus on certification rather than competency.

Chapter 5 : Discussion

Overview

This chapter examines the results presented in Chapter 4 and analyses the key findings and the theoretical implications reviewed against the extant literature (Chapter 2).

This discussion is structured around seven macro themes that emerged from the topics presented in Chapter 4. The themes discussed here represent the more pertinent and interesting findings from the data. (1) Anatomy of the Profession, (2) Tension between Inclusivity and Control of Title, (3) Challenges around Wider Perception and Recognition, (4) Competency through Experience over Certification, (5) Jurisdiction of Knowledge Provision, (6) Contentious Role of the Professional Bodies, (7) Benefits and Risks of Professionalisation. It follows on from the initial thematic analysis of the last chapter and explores the data at a second level by reviewing the themes against the entire data set.

Introduction

The data from the study have provided an insight into the practitioner experience of the professionalisation process so far. A number of key themes have emerged which serve to highlight the main considerations and perceptions of the practitioner participants, who represented 8 industry sectors, 3 age group categories with experience ranging from 4 years to 29 years within the field of project management. However, it would be reasonable to highlight at this juncture that the themes did not merely emerge, as Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, but have been actively derived from an interpretation of the links formed within the data captured during the study. The data have been subject to a holistic examination and interesting highlights selected for closer interrogation.

5.1 Theme: Anatomy of the Profession

Efforts to define a profession have resulted in numerous models appearing across the decades, some of which have been more abstract than others. In fact, such is the confusion that “there is even disagreement about the existence of that confusion” (Johnson, 1972, p22).

Early sociological literature on professionalisation points to the presence of certain traits (Parsons, 1939; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933) and how these differentiate a profession from an occupation, although whether any of these still hold true for the newer, emergent professions of the latter part of the twentieth century is subject to conjecture. Indeed, Olesen and Whittaker (1970) argue that all occupations and professions are continuing to evolve and suggest that it is therefore impossible to clearly define a profession in this way. As the study of the professions moved across the latter decades of the twentieth century, feverish attempts to identify the 'demarcation criteria' have failed to assuage the criticism of this approach (Burns, 2019; Young and Muller, 2014).

However, the participants sought to paint a picture of what, to them, a profession looks like and how it gets there, identifying such elements as providing a sense of identity, improved, and recognised status, jurisdiction of practice and certified specialist knowledge. All of which, on the face of it, seem to align with the characteristics reflected within the literature (Bosanac and Jacobs, 2006; Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986), and appear to reflect the more traditional approach to the characteristics or traits first proffered by Parsons (1939) and Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933). When these were further explored through closer examination, many individuals felt that a few of the original characteristics are still relevant to emergent professions, such as project management, primarily citing education/certification and a distinct body of knowledge as key elements. Legal recognition and control of title were also considered to be pertinent, however many participants questioned the relevance of autonomy and authority over clients, suggesting that these harked back to a different era.

The concept of altruism was also met with some scepticism by almost all the participants who indicated that unfortunately this seemed to have no real place in business activity, if indeed it ever did. This is reflective perhaps of the view by some (Muzio et al., 2013; Goodrick and Reay, 2011; Suddaby et al., 2009) that "efficiency and commerce have displaced traditional logics of ethics and public service" (Muzio et al, 2013, p 700). Although, Friedson (1970) and Berlant (1975) argued that the ethos of the professions was more about dominance than service to the public.

A small number of participants agreed that all the traits remained relevant and should be used as a benchmark

against which all professions should be measured. However, for the majority, a more modern approach was preferred that better reflected the evolved nature of professions since their origins in the Medieval Guilds and the formation of the early professions of Law and Medicine. Participants suggested an adapted list of traits might be more appropriate that acknowledged the very different nature of professions in the twenty-first century, and in particular, project management.

> *"I would say some of these are valid, but if the question is 'are all of these valid or should we use an evolved model', then I would say the evolved model. I'm not sure all of these are even relevant for project management." (PMF1)*

This would certainly be supportive of Johnson's (1972) suggestion that it is necessary to consider the 'space and time dimensions' (p27) when attempting to determine applicability of such traits or characteristics.

The lack of consensus amongst the practitioners as to the definition of a profession is reflective of the body of literature in this regard. Indeed, as a leading proponent of the critical perspective, Johnson (1972) argues that trait theory and its attempts to define a profession, is flawed not only in so far as it is built upon the notion that there have been 'true professions which exhibit to some degree all of the essential elements" (p23) but also that it tends to accept "the professionals' own definitions of themselves" (p25). Although, the findings of this study reveal a lack of unity in this type of self-definition.

Johnson (1972) contends that beyond the widely acknowledged classic professions of medicine and law, the use of these traits is perhaps more to do with striving for the 'ideal type' of profession. This, of course, may well be true as Beckman in Burrage and Torstendahl (1990) suggests, the Aristotelian pursuit of the essence of a profession is akin to chasing shadows. The problem arguably lies within the disparity of characteristics across widely acknowledged professions (Burns, 2019). Of course, not all professions exemplify a given set of traits, as Burns (2019) highlights, even the traditional professions can fall foul here, arguing that law is not scientific, nor is engineering independent practice. But the findings of this study do seem to suggest that there may be some merit in an argument for a set of core characteristics being present in a profession.

Indeed, whilst the literature has revealed a shift in thinking over recent decades, away from trait theory,

focusing more on the ability of occupational groups to secure jurisdictional claims, it could be argued that the validity of certain core traits remains just as relevant today. Certainly, the move away from attempting to define a profession and more towards the process of professionalisation has resulted in a somewhat abandoned area of research (Nolin, 2008) which has further added to the challenges for many occupations seeking to acquire professional status.

But it is the lack of importance attached to such traits as autonomy and authority as being core that is quite revealing. The majority of participants indicated that they did not see themselves as having any substantive authority in their roles and yet this and the characteristic of having autonomy, are notably associated with the more revered traditional professions of law and medicine. This may perhaps be connected to the commonly expressed complaint of a perceived lack of respect for project management and the skills involved.

This raises key questions regarding the importance attached to these traits and whether some should in fact be central to professionalisation in order to secure the respect that the traditional professions enjoy. It may not be sufficient for practitioners and professional bodies to dismiss these as irrelevant at a time where the organizational structures provide a battle ground for jurisdictional claims (Abbott, 2005).

It is perhaps unsurprising then that the extent to which the practitioners felt project management met the benchmark of profession status was also the subject of some disagreement. Indeed, the polarized views expressed amongst the participants on this theme proved to be a common thread that was evident throughout the study.

The findings revealed an almost equal split amongst the participants between those that felt project management had achieved this status and those that felt it still had a way to go. The process of professionalisation was felt to be incomplete for many, albeit there was a sense of positivity around the progress made so far, not least as a result of the recent acquisition of a Royal Charter for the Association for Project Management. Although again, this seems to reflect the characterisation issue discussed earlier in so far as there is no agreed, definitive measurement as to the anatomy of a profession.

Of those who were convinced that project management was a profession in its own right, many were in the

early stages of their careers perhaps indicative of an absence of experience in a substantive discipline, exemplified by one such individual:

> *"I certainly think that it's an important profession and a profession in its own right, it requires a specific set of skills, whilst it may not have the rich history or the different traits, I do think it holds water in its own right." (PMR1)*

For many, the 'accidental' nature of project management (Hodgson et al., 2011; Paton & Hodgson, 2016; Davis, 1971) might appear to have influenced their view. Where there was a substantive or technical discipline, for example, engineering or IT, practitioners seemed to consider these as being the core profession and view project management more as a subset activity.

For these individuals, the move into project management often represented a career opportunity to move into more senior roles or positions of responsibility from a technical or specialist domain rather than as a career of first choice, which is in line with the findings of Richardson et al. (2015), suggesting perhaps that more needs to be done to address the defined entry requirements more associated with a profession. Indeed, this lack of a clearly defined, and widely understood entry route was felt might undermine any notion of project management becoming recognised as a 'proper profession' (PMF6).

5.2 Theme: Tension between Inclusivity and Control of Title

An interesting outcome of the research seemed to point to the paradox of inclusivity versus control of the title. Practitioners were, on the one hand, keen for the profession to be seen as inclusive yet on the other, they wanted to secure control of the title 'project manager' and therefore by default, becoming exclusive.

This is perhaps all the more surprising given the accidental career trajectory of many of the participants who 'fell' into project management through opportunity, luck, or twist of fate. All of whom had agreed that this had proven to be fortuitous and fulfilling.

But many expressed frustration at the perception that currently anyone could present themselves as a project manager without sufficient credentials, competency, or experience, particularly within the organisational setting, arguably, in the same way that they had done so themselves. It is this position of 'pulling up the

drawbridge', often in stark contrast to their own experiences, that is perhaps suggestive of tension between open participation and control of title. Indeed, there was a sense that many had benefited from the opportunity to move into project management and had secured a respected position for themselves as competent project managers. The passing of judgement on others deemed to be less able perhaps indicating the need for controlled entry.

Control of title speaks to the legal recognition afforded to those who can legitimately practice in a given role. An acknowledged trait or characteristic of a profession it offers standing and is exemplified by engineers in Europe and the United States where only those who are licensed are permitted to use the term (Kleiner, 2006). It is notable that in the UK, however, even the post-Enlightenment occupation of engineering, a so-called 'real' profession (Krause, 1996) has yet to secure control of title even with its historical backdrop of immense importance during the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century (Ackroyd, 2016).

This control of the term is often a source of contention and the participants reported a sense that organisations often sought to utilise existing resources regardless of whether specific project management skills were evidenced.

> *"I think they all believe they're experts in it – they think they can do better and most of them simplify it down, but you can't simplify it to a simple structure in a plan or else you're going to end up with a plan that doesn't mean anything." (PMD2)*

This would seem to point toward potential jurisdictional disputes between practitioners and those perceived to be non-professionals encroaching on their territory (Lewis, 2012; Freidson, 2001; Abbott, 1988).

This protection of boundaries becomes particularly challenging for those professions that have yet to secure closure (Noordegraaf, 2007). Many occupational groups seek to professionalise but there are stumbling blocks which Noordegraaf (2007) argues, results in the need for a 'hybrid' approach to professionalisation, particularly where those groups are knowledge intensive. Indeed, even Wilensky (1964) had doubts as to the possibility of these 'wannabe' professions actually achieving the status. However, using a neo-Weberian theoretical approach to professions, it becomes less about the traits or characteristics and more about the ability to secure

a monopoly or 'exclusionary social closure in the marketplace' (Saks, 2010; Freidson, 1994). Thus, the jurisdiction question becomes very important.

But, as a management discipline, project management draws on many of the theories in this domain, such as, for example, leadership, planning, stakeholder engagement etc., and therefore there are arguably commonalities and a degree of blurring of boundaries. The challenge in laying claim to the very specific work of managing projects is how to clearly identify distinct ownership. There are potentially a number of contradictions here in that for some the underpinning technical or discipline area has far greater importance than merely the management of the projects within this field whilst for others managing the project is the locale for the expertise. Whilst project management does have a body of knowledge (in fact, each of the professional bodies active within the UK, presents its own version) and practitioners demonstrate application of that expertise (Lewis, 2012; Abbott, 1988), it is not subject to their unique control and the main issue surrounds the jurisdictional challenges of this (Gieryn, 1983).

In lamenting this issue, the practitioners drew comparisons with the traditional professions of law and medicine, highlighting that unlicensed individuals cannot simply set themselves up as a lawyer or doctor without first being subject to stringent entry requirements and training. However, whilst this is still largely true, even these traditional professions are not immune from challenges from other forces seeking to erode the control of their expertise.

There have been increasing challenges for the medical profession, with growing managerial and accounting control (Lewis, 2012) and the rise of nursing practitioners taking on some of the traditional duties of a doctor (Pescosolido, 2006). Epstein (2014) points to new technology providing the mechanism to support this, where ancillary staff are able to provide services that would otherwise have fallen wholly within the medical practitioner's domain, citing pregnancy tests and electrocardiograms (EKGs) as examples. Automation has allowed for a standardisation of complex, and expensive services which can be offered non-professionals (Epstein, 2014).

With this in mind it is perhaps interesting to note that the project practitioners of this study identified artificial intelligence (AI) as a useful development for the field and yet, they did not feel threatened by its potential to

erode their power or importance, citing that there would always be a need for the crucial role of a project manager due to the uniquely human element of decision making. This is a particularly interesting finding given that the very essence of artificial intelligence is to determine solutions to problems (Plant, 1994). Indeed, the benefits of its use to support project management were being explored for use on engineering projects back in the 1980's (Levitt and Kunz, 2009).

The erosion of professional dominance in jurisdictional terms, albeit in incremental stages can be seen to present a threat that many see as the beginning of de-professionalisation (Splichal and Dahlgren, 2016; Epstein, 2014; Pescosolido, 2006; Haug, 1975).

This study found that some participants acknowledged that a clear route of entry was obviously needed to facilitate the inflow of new talent to sustain the number of practitioners, but this was balanced by a feeling that those managing projects needed to somehow "earn their stripes".

Many of the participants were keen that barriers were not put in place to prevent wider participation within the field. Indeed, they were supportive of the need for more work being undertaken within the secondary education system to bring project management onto the radar for students at an earlier age in much the same way that the traditional professions are addressed so that it is seen as a career profession. Ironically, this points to an academic entry point which had not garnered much support when directly asked about certification.

This theme of open participation extended to the availability of chartership whereby practitioners did not want to see this restricted only to those who were in project manager or programme manager roles. However, this was balanced with the pragmatic view that, in reality, it would be highly likely that only individuals within those roles would be able to demonstrate the requisite proficiencies in order to become Chartered Project Professionals. This of itself, could perhaps be argued, might represent a degree of implicit exclusion.

But the desire that the profession should not become exclusionary in nature, indeed many were keen that the term 'elite' was not used in the context of project management, is perhaps at odds with the pivotal role of closure in professionalisation. Indeed, this reluctance to be considered as elite arguably undermines efforts to secure greater respect afforded to other professions. It is perhaps what Sarfatti-Larson (1977) views as the

scarcity of the specific skills that allows an occupation to 'sustain exclusive control over expertise in the market' (p. xvii) that is key here. And part of this is the degree of difficulty with which entrants find gaining access to the profession. Arguably, respect and authority derive from an appreciation of what it takes to become a professional. Indeed, the study revealed such views, that those practising law and medicine were so revered because of the significant training required.

Whilst the findings of this study support Sabini and Muzio's (2017) suggestion of a competence-based closure, it is still unclear as to how this might manifest without some degree of licensing or registration. Ackroyd (1996) argues that it is in fact a dual closure that is the desired state – "occupational closure in the labour market with the control over specific spaces, tasks and processes within their employing organisations" (Muzio et al., 2013, p 710).

But there were mixed opinions as to the necessity or value of formal licensing or registration, which in itself serves to support the control of title issue. Some participants saw this as potentially very positive, particularly in respect of professionalising, whilst others were of the view that it was not important to have a register of practitioners. Registration was associated with providing a safety assurance and therefore was dismissed as being unnecessary for a project manager, and in a return to the context of inclusivity, "I think you need to have flexibility to try these people within the company to see what you can manage" (PMOG4). However, if the essence of a profession sits within its ability to secure its boundaries and therefore achieve occupational closure (Abbott, 1988), then this would seem to beg the question is project management at risk of de-professionalising before it has professionalised?

5.3 Theme: Challenges Around Wider Perception and Recognition

Many of the emergent professions of the late twentieth century are rooted within organisational contexts – the so-called 'corporate professions' (Ackroyd, 2016; Kipping and Kilpatrick, 2013; Fincham, 2012; Muzio et al., 2011; Noordegraaf, 2007; Reed, 1996; Abbott, 1988) such as HR practitioners, supply chain management, management consultants and project management.

These professions do not fit the traditional mould of law and medicine, instead existing within the confines of an organisational setting, serving corporate clients rather than the individual members of the public. It is

possibly because of this that the participants felt there was widespread limited understanding as to the nature of the role of a project manager.

The role of project manager was widely acknowledged as being more complex and skilled than many outside of the field appreciated. Whilst the industry sectors and the nature of the project experience varied, there was consensus amongst the participants as to the core responsibilities, requirements, and challenges of the role. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that this study found that there is a strong appetite amongst practitioners for project management to acquire the wider recognition that they feel it deserves.

With the exception of those in the later stages of their career, most practitioners felt that it would be a welcome development. Cross disciplinary perceptions were also a factor for some, particularly for those working alongside engineering professionals, where they spoke of disparaging attitudes towards project managers and issues around a lack of authority.

> *"I see it here where some of the engineers look down on some of the PMs – you don't even have a degree or you're not as qualified as I am" (PMD3)*

This served to highlight a possible unconscious ranking of professions. When participants considered whether they felt there was a case for occupational stratification as proffered by Treiman (1977) or whether all professions were seen as equal, it was perhaps, unsurprising that almost all acknowledged that the traditional professions of law and medicine were more highly revered than any subsequent ones, even those such as engineering, nursing, teaching. Whilst there was limited support for formalizing any kind of tier structure, this perhaps belies the significance of such aspects as autonomy, authority, recognition and respect in the positioning of the professions.

Whilst the participants recognised that the highly respected legal and medical professions were subject to very strict entry criteria through degree qualification and further training, they did not appear to make a connection between this and the level of reverence.

> *"To get into project management it's quite easy, whereas to get to entry level in a legal or medicine role it isn't" (PMF6)*

Indeed, some were frustrated by the lack of recognition and respect afforded to those managing projects from within their own organisations. There was a view that the corporate professions were nonetheless important constructs.

> *"You couldn't deliver change and things like that without project managers. But they're the ones that kind of pull it together so to me, it's important to be seen as a profession" (PMF3)*

As a corporate profession, project management faces the same challenges in terms of recognition as others within this arena. The perceived failure of management consulting to professionalise is well documented (Butler and Collins, 2016; Muzio et al., 2011; Kipping, 2011; Alveson and Robertson, 2006; Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). However, proponents argue that there is a case to suggest that professionalisation should be viewed differently, and a 'hybrid' approach is much needed (Butler and Collins, 2016) that can accommodate not just the fragmented knowledge base but also the increasing role of the organisational context.

Comparisons can also be drawn here with more general management which has long struggled to secure its own professionalisation project (Hodgson et al., 2015; Grey, 1997) with some suggesting that this was due in no small part to the nature of the knowledge base being a "congery of overlapping yet disconnected topics, results and pronouncements with little in common except its institutional base" (Whitley, 1984, p387; Byrkjeflot and Nygaard, 2018). These challenges remain despite increasing efforts to organise through education and training, for example MBA and Executive MBA qualifications becoming the basic currency for a career in this field (Watson, 1995). The argument that management is actually a technical practice (Grey, 1997; Reed, 1989) has done little to help the claim and arguably, project management is also vulnerable to these claims as some view this more as a methodology for delivering projects than a distinct discipline. Interestingly, in the case of management, whilst its efforts to secure its own standing as a profession have failed to gain traction, specialisms within this broader field, such as human resource management and project management, have demonstrated more progress with their professionalisation projects (Hodgson et al., 2015).

But in seeking to secure the respect and recognition, it may perhaps be necessary for the management professions to consider the importance of the relationship with autonomy and authority. Jurisdictional claims require focus on boundary work but without acknowledged authority over these areas the challenge still

remains. Without entry restrictions the broad discipline of management, where experience is often valued over certification, suffers from a lack of controlled boundaries and distinction.

This potentially presents a conundrum for all professional bodies and practitioners, but particularly those within project management, as to how they can develop or acquire authority and autonomy, requiring perhaps stronger messaging in respect of the knowledge and expertise necessary to effectively deliver projects and how this can be demonstrated.

Indeed, practitioners within this study reported being viewed negatively and seen as less valuable than technical experts on projects, such as engineers and acknowledged that there was very little appreciation of project management beyond those most closely involved.

> *"No, I don't think the wider general population really understand or know what a project manager does. I mean, certainly speaking with my friends and I tell them what I do, and they go 'I didn't know that you had people doing that'. They don't see it as being separate from just being a manager and trying to organise and get things done." (PMP1)*

They suggested that project management tends to feature in public discourse around problematic high-profile projects where there are notable delays or cost overruns. Otherwise, practitioners pointed to the less than flattering image portrayed in recent years by reality television in the form of 'The Apprentice', which many felt had actually done more damage in the public consciousness.

Beyond this, it was felt that the wider public had very little understanding of what the role required in terms of skills, expertise, and knowledge. Yet, according to the functionalist and critical perspectives championed by many theorists of the 1970s (see for example, Johnson, 1972; Freidson, 1970), the professions rely on the "societal value of professional knowledge" (Hodgson, 2002, p 804).

The acquisition of a Royal Charter is often viewed as a key step in the professionalisation process (Slater, 2019; Wang and Stewart, 2018; Tobin, 2004; Morgan, 1998) however, whilst this provides a degree of state legitimacy, it is predicated on the traditional approach to the professions and begs the question is a royal charter enough?

The APM successfully secured its Royal Charter in 2017 despite numerous legal challenges by the Project Management Institute (PMI). However, there was a lack of consensus amongst practitioners as to the importance of the acquisition of the Royal Charter by the APM in 2017. For some, this represented a significant step forward in the professionalisation process in terms of recognition whilst for others there was a degree of apathy.

The Association for Project Management (APM) had built their claim around the ideal of "creating a world where all projects succeed", however as Wang and Stewart (2018) argue, there is, as yet no proven connection between successful delivery and professionalisation.

However, whilst the theoretical approach to the concept of the professions has evolved over recent decades, moving away from the early functionalist and trait theory and subsequent critical perspectives to considering them through the various lenses of neo-institutionalism, sociology, neo-Weberian and so on (Muzio et al., 2013; Scott, 2008; Hodgson, 2002) this does not seem to have translated through to the wider consciousness. Indeed, both practitioners and the public alike, seemingly registering only a small handful of professions such as teaching, accountancy, and engineering, beyond the traditional duo of law and medicine.

The lack of wider recognition of the importance of the key skills, and authority required to successfully manage projects could perhaps be indicative of an emergent trend over recent years which has seen somewhat dismissive attitudes towards experts. The participants of this study reported attitudinal challenges within organisations where coworkers had suggested that 'anyone could do it' (manage a project). This, arguably, stems from a lack of understanding or appreciation for the expertise being provided and can be seen in a much wider context in relation to experts advising on the risks of Brexit (the UK's departure from the European Union) and during the initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Expert advice dismissed or downplayed to suit the narrative. So, in much the same way as leaders rely on followership (Kelly, 1992) and legitimacy theory (Zelditch, 2018), professions need to consider more carefully how they position themselves in a way that demonstrates their credibility and authority in the eyes of their audience, perhaps evoking Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals; ethos, logos or pathos (see Fortenbaugh, 1992) to facilitate a stronger messaging.

5.4 Theme: Competency through Experience over Certification

Abbott (1991) identifies trained skill as "necessary for practice and helps differentiate the officially competent from the unofficially competent as well as from the officially incompetent" (p 363).

Certification is widely acknowledged as being an important aspect of the professionalisation process (Wilensky, 1964) with some (Farashah, Thomas and Blomquist, 2019) pointing to the positive behavioural impacts of certification. However, the findings of this study reflect a far from consistent view in this area, to such an extent that again there were polarized opinions. Indeed, for some, certification was viewed with a degree of scepticism.

Amongst the participants, there was recognition that there needed to be some form of metric, but they reported wanting to be recognised for their abilities derived from their wealth of experience and were sceptical that such skills could be developed through any means of theoretical training. However, this might be argued, does not provide the underpinning knowledge so evident within the traditional professions of law and medicine.

There was certainly a noticeable lack of real appetite for any minimum benchmarking either for entry or as an ongoing measure. This in itself presents a challenge for the professionalisation project not least in terms of its ability to command respect and recognition, and to elevate its status. Indeed, many participants made reference to the stringent requirements of respected professions such as medicine and law although as previously noted, any correlation with improved status was seemingly missed.

It is perhaps a perceived quality issue with the current certifications that many felt was central here with many practitioners doubtful that they provided sufficient rigour beyond a rather perfunctory testing of a pre-determined basic syllabus, lending support to the argument posed by Fertig, Zeitz and Blau (2009) that they are ill equipped to assess "the tacit knowledge usually important to effective practice" (p 203). Perhaps central to this is the differing types of professional expertise (Kotzee, 2014) and the facets that need to be examined (Collins, 2013), taking into account not just the acquisition and development of some expertise but the extent to which this knowledge is esoteric, and requiring tacit knowledge.

With many participants questioning the validity of current certifications, the findings of this study would seem to support an argument to adopt a multi-dimensional evaluation of expertise that considers both experience and appropriate accreditation.

Many of these current certifications are built around the central professional bodies of knowledge from PMI and APM, although these have been subject to conjecture and refutation (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011), often disparaged until recent years due to the lack of any underpinning empirical research. Indeed, Morris (2013) questioned their value in their current form despite regular attempts to update content to maintain relevance. A major criticism within this study, was the splintered approach across the field with a number of practitioners complaining that the duality of professional associations combined with proprietary certifications such as PRINCE2 left many feeling confused as to the where they should focus their investment.

The certifications also take little account of the wide variety of project contexts which many participants suggested is a key flaw. Whilst it is suggested that some project management skills are indeed transferable across sectors (see APM, 2020) participants argued that managing an IT project represents a very different proposition to an engineering one. Indeed, Paton and Hodgson (2016) recounted a similar discourse to the findings of this study in so far as the technical nature of projects often provides a unique setting which requires a greater emphasis on relevant experiential wisdom.

A number of the participants were resistant to any form of certification stressing that their track record should speak for their capability. Perhaps unsurprisingly however, it was the more experienced practitioners who were minded to argue for evaluation of their practical track record in place of any requirement for certification, which they dismissed as *"a badge or a piece of paper"* (PMH1)

But this would seem to be at odds with Morris et al. (2006) who assert that the value of certification lies in the status and recognition it affords the holder. Again, this highlights the paradox of wishing to secure the respect and authority of other more revered professions versus a desire to not introduce barriers. Participants pointed to the years of academic training required to become lawyers or doctors but were reluctant to see a degree level education as a point of entry to project management. Indeed, the suggestion of raising the profile of project management as a career of choice alongside other professions within secondary schools is somewhat

inconsistent with this approach.

Some participants relayed anecdotal evidence of individuals with extensive levels of certification but judged to be incompetent in the role however, the extent to which there is a correlation beyond coincidence could be subject to conjecture, and reflective perhaps of a need for a more cohesive period of overall training, along the lines of other professions, such as law, medicine, engineering etc. Equally, the reliance on an innate ability of individual practitioners to manage complex situations through increasing experience is clearly insufficient for the development and sustainability of a respected profession, suggestive instead of some kind of mastery of the dark arts.

However, many of the younger, early career participants in this study recognised the importance of certification and had embraced these as part of their strategy for career progression. The notable divergence of opinions between the early-stage and more established practitioners may point to the perceived benefits to be gained from the investment required. It is perhaps encouraging for the future of the profession that the younger participants were receptive to the need for certification.

Certainly, the findings of this study support the notion of voluntary certification examined by Lipner et al. (2006) who suggested that it is pursued as ongoing professional development based upon the perceived cost to benefit. For those participants interested in certification it was also driven by market demands in terms of whether job roles specified a given professional certification as a minimum requirement. Indeed, this study found a variety of motivations for certification – recruitment requirements, professional development support available from employers, and recognition of the future direction of the profession, perhaps echoing the findings of de los Rios, Puente and Almela (2011) who found 75% of practitioners to be supportive of certification and its positive impact on their employability.

It would seem, therefore, that there is a need to address attitudinal challenges amongst practitioners in order to further progress the professionalisation project. Part of this might require the development of a more widely acceptable measure of competence. Morris et al. (2006) highlighted this dilemma as to the ‘who and what’ of certification and other newer professions have faced similar challenges.

Financial advisers, for example, are subject to compulsory certification and licensing (Ring, 2016) through the benchmark Diploma in Financial Services (DipFS) which is a level 4 qualification (equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree in England). Competency through experience is then assessed through Competent Adviser Status (CAS). Consideration of this by the participants revealed a sense that this seemed reasonable given the importance attached to securing reputable advice on one's finances in light of previous scandals, such as miss-selling of pensions and investments (see FSA, 2009).

However, the approach taken within the profession of Management Accountants was cited as an example by one participant who suggested that perhaps this would be more appropriate to Project Management to afford equivalency recognition of experience. She pointed to the CV-based approach adopted by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA).

> *"CIMA said, OK we know you know it all – there's no point in you sitting in a classroom for five days and then doing something at the end, and there's no point in making you jump through these hoops. But we do need to be able to see some kind of evidence."* (PMF7)

Indeed, there is evidence of this more pragmatic approach being taken in respect of securing individual Chartership (perhaps the ultimate certification) through the APM where 'Route 3' provides for submission of a portfolio of experiential evidence (see APM, 2020).

Whilst participants could see some merit in registration of practitioners to support verification of competence – indeed, the APM does maintain a register of Chartered Project Professionals, this study found limited appetite for any form of licensure. Common in the United States of America, licensing is less prevalent within the UK (Kleiner, 2006) where only around 14% of jobs are subject to this kind of regulation (Forth et al., 2011). And it is its role in limiting the number of entrants (Wilensky, 1964), that was subject to much debate amongst the practitioners.

Certainly, the practitioners interviewed during this study were largely dismissive of such a stance, arguing that *"nobody dies because project management doesn't succeed"* (PMD2) although whilst there may be some truth to this, the financial ramifications for failed or challenged projects can be extremely serious for the

organisation. Whilst others pointed to the presence of contextual regulation such as for example, within financial services, nuclear industry, and construction which add additional legislative restrictions designed to protect interests and lives.

5.5 Theme: Jurisdiction of Knowledge Provision

Knowledge is central to professionalisation and serves to underpin the jurisdiction claim (Abbott, 1991) but where responsibility for provision of this valuable commodity lies is subject to some debate. Whilst the traditional professions of law and medicine are inextricably bound to the universities (Jackson, 1970) it is a different story for the newer professions. Jackson (1970) acknowledges, there is a tension between the purely theoretical and the practical training required. Although, that being said, the professional body moderated certifications for project management are equally theoretical in nature.

Whilst the findings of this study suggest a widely disparate collection of views regarding the need and value of certification, it is interesting to explore the perceptions as to the preferred site for learning. Again, this study found a similar lack of consensus here with almost half of the participants suggesting that it should sit within the domain of the professional bodies rather than fall to the behest of the universities.

Indeed, the reach of the universities in education for the newer professions is less controlling than in the case of law and medicine, however that is not to say they do not have significant influence (O'Dey, 2009). Rather than being mandatory for entry into the profession, it has become accepted that an individual must obtain a degree in an appropriate discipline area for engineering roles, for example, such as mechanical engineer, civil engineer, electrical engineer, albeit there is no strict legal control of the title. There is a similar story for teaching and nursing. However, for the corporate professions, such as HR practitioners, supply chain management, management consultants and project management, entry requirements are less structured.

That there are no regulated entry requirements for these newer professions has not prevented universities from designing curricula for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, suggesting perhaps either a response to market requirements or an attempt to create demand through a 'make it and they will come' approach.

Central to this question is arguably the level of the training or education being provided. There is often a lack of transparency around the equivalency of professional certifications to the widely acknowledged academic qualifications and this can prove to be frustrating for practitioners and employers alike. However, the level of the Project Management Qualification (APMQ) provided by the APM is benchmarked against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) at a level 7, an equivalency to Higher National Certificates (HNC) in England. This puts these well below the university-level qualifications required for some professions, such as nursing or teaching. Other professions such as financial advisors require mandatory completion of the Diploma in Financial Services (DipFS), however this is still not degree level.

The participants of this study were largely reluctant to see any minimum entry benchmark in terms of a degree or any kind of professional certification suggesting that this risks exclusionary practice. It could therefore be the case that it falls to employers to determine minimum certifications or qualifications rather than the profession itself.

But it is Abbott's (2005) work on ecologies in the context of professions that provides an interesting lens through which to view the relationships between inter-related groups. He asserts that "professions wish to aggrandize themselves in competition, taking over this or that area of work which constitute into 'jurisdiction' by means of professional knowledge systems" (ibid, p246). He points to the jostling for position amongst professions (ecologies) and the factors, both internal and external which come into play resulting in potential jurisdictional gains and losses. This would seem to be of particular relevance to the corporate professions such as project management which operate within an organisational system and are subject to overlapping boundaries.

Therefore, it might be that the location of education and knowledge provision is actually rather important to the jurisdictional claim. It is perhaps possible that the first of these corporate professions to stake a more robust claim through strict entry requirements may achieve the necessary formalised boundary work to secure their position.

So, whilst the participants are individually reluctant to accept entry by degree, it may represent a necessary step in the broader context of achieving full professionalisation and securing the recognition they crave.

Universities are perhaps more adept at cross disciplinary instruction where degree programmes employ pertinent modules from other areas of theory such as leadership, management, and finance. But there are growing calls for inclusion of instruction around the use of soft skills and emotional intelligence. Indeed, Pant and Baroudi (2008) suggest that the time has come for project management education and training to move away from the more systems theory focus on hard techniques and to embrace emotional intelligence.

This was certainly borne out in the findings of this study where participants acknowledged that a large part of their role was persuasion, negotiation and collaboration, all key soft skills that are required for the successful delivery of project objectives (Whitty, 2005; Kleim and Ludin, 1997)

Traditionally, universities have been strongly associated with the development of a profession, serving to legitimise authority and competence over a field (Jackson, 1970; Wilensky, 1964). So, it is perhaps a missed opportunity that the universities have not carved out a much stronger, central position in the development of project management as a profession, given the early criticism directed towards the content of the professional bodies of knowledge (Shepherd and Atkinson, 2011; Morris, Jamieson and Shepherd, 2006; Morris et al., 2006; Gale and Brown, 2003) on which the professional certifications are based.

There is also a compelling argument for the universities to work closely with both corporate organisations and the professional bodies to provide 'fit for purpose' training (Bredillet et al. 2013; Gale and Brown, 2003). This was certainly evidenced within this study with sixteen practitioners suggesting that a more nuanced approach would be most beneficial. This, they argue, would see project management mirror such professions as accountancy, for example, where individuals require a first degree before then undertaking professional examinations.

However, this field is perhaps unique in that the management of projects occurs within other discipline areas, such as for example, financial services, oil and gas, engineering, and IT. If entry were to be restricted to those with a degree, many participants questioned whether a degree in project management would be the most appropriate, pointing to the need for *"industry specific knowledge"* (PMF2). This might appear to bring the issue back full circle to whether it can be a distinct profession or whether it is a specialism within another field.

5.6 Theme: Contentious Role of the Professional Bodies

The professional bodies, both PMI and APM, have been actively engaged in raising the profile of project management over the last four decades and the relatively recent acquisition of a Royal Charter by the APM in 2017, seen as the" locus of professionalisation" (Wang and Stewart, 2013) is viewed as a very positive step within the professionalisation process.

Originally established by practitioners as communities of practice to share experiences and approaches, the professional bodies have grown in membership with the APM now reporting more than 500 corporate members, and individual membership amounting to over 30,000[3] with the PMI at some 600,000 as of 2020. It is worth noting, of course, that the PMI membership figure relates to global membership whilst the APM is predominantly UK based with a small number (~ 2,000) of overseas memberships.

To provide a degree of context, there are suggested to be around 75,000 project managers in the UK, in the construction industry alone (Statista, 2020). Membership of the project professional bodies would therefore seem to be a long way from achieving universal appeal.

Indeed, attitudes towards professional body membership varied amongst the sample frame. Of the 28 participants, ten reported being a member of the APM and only one being a member of the PMI. This is perhaps to be expected given the predominance of the APM within the UK (Wang and Stewart, 2013). However, an equally significant number stated that they did not hold any professional body membership at all. The remainder of the participants (five) indicated that they held discipline-specific membership with bodies such as the British Computer Society (BCS), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET).

When examining the reasoning behind the membership, or lack thereof, the participants revealed an interesting insight into the perceived value that this represented. For some, membership was felt to be useful in order to demonstrate commitment to their careers, particularly when moving roles which seemed to support the views of Williams et al. (2011) who suggest that "a key point to see professionalism is at the point of

[3] Figures from APM.org Feb 2021

recruitment – so accreditation by a body gives that" (p 13). However, of the 10 members of the APM, only 4 were notably enthusiastic about the importance of membership. This may perhaps suggest a more pragmatic approach by the other 6 or a degree of impression management for recruitment purposes (Blomquist, Farashah and Thomas, 2018) or symbolic "perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989 p21).

The issue of value, for many, revolves around the annual cost versus the perceived benefits to the individual practitioner, something that has always been contentious (Shoffman and White, 2012). Annual subscription rates range from $129 for PMI membership (~£95) or £175 for full membership/£138 for associate membership of the APM. Whilst the professional bodies extol the virtues of membership, which include reduced exam fees for certifications; free monthly magazines; networking events; templates and other resources; and job advertisement boards, some practitioners expressed a degree of scepticism as to whether these warranted the fees being charged:

> *"You can join groups without paying fees and being in touch with lots of people around the world and fellow professionals – it makes it much harder to justify a couple of hundred pounds each to join these bodies, as good as the monthly magazine and some of these forums are, it's still quite a tough sell!"* (PMP1)

However, whilst there was scepticism around their value for money, there was acknowledgement amongst the participants of the important role played by the professional bodies in driving forward the professionalisation project, which they hoped would go some way to improving the levels of wider recognition. Although, some participants tempered this view with arguably a degree of realism:

> *"They're there to fight the cause and get the recognition that they think it deserves, but they're also looking to make money at the end of the day, with memberships – let's not kid ourselves."* (PMD3)

Indeed, many felt that it was the professional bodies who were driving the professionalisation project and whilst the success of this probably mattered to the practitioners and the corporate organisations the impetus was, by and large, primarily located within the professional associations.

In fact, it might be argued that the involvement of corporate members in this process has further supported their efforts. The APM have successfully engaged with significant numbers of organisations that employ project managers, selling the vision of improved project performance as a result of the increased professionalisation of this occupational group. They have done so through the development and provision of a framework of certifications, including the newly developed Chartership, presenting these to corporate members as signalling benchmark competency (Aguinis, Michaelis and Jones, 2005).

This would appear to have benefited individual practitioners in certain instances as organisations have supported their professional development through certification and mentoring, but this is by no means consistent. Some practitioners reported feeling undervalued by their organisation and a lack of respect for the skills involved in delivering on project objectives.

That notwithstanding, by securing the support of corporate members this has been a clever strategy on the part of the professional bodies in extending their reach, arguably using these organisations as their proxy agents. Indeed, Suddaby and Viale (2011) suggest that far from being constrained by the employing organisations the corporate professions have instead taken advantage of the accessibility of these resources and power in a bid to initiate the necessary change to secure the successful professionalisation project. But it could be argued, at what cost? Paton et al. (2013) highlighted that in offering membership to corporate organisations as well as individuals project professionals, the professional body in the UK has effectively marginalised the interests of the practitioners, putting such important elements as autonomy increasingly out of reach.

The findings of this study point to a complex relationship with the professional bodies, indicative of a sense of representation and support on one hand whilst on the other a costly burden offering limited perceived value. The importance of the success of the professionalisation project varied amongst the practitioners, perhaps holding greater significance to those in the early to mid-career stage. But, for others the professional bodies were seen to be positive actors in the push to improve standards.

The professional bodies themselves, seemingly faced with incompatible objectives of increasing income through membership whilst seeking to accredit a limited number of practitioners through certification and

latterly, chartership which for some participants, was felt to help the cause by elevating the status of project management to that of engineering, accountancy, and similar professions with Chartered Professional Bodies.

5.7 Theme: Benefits and Risks of Professionalisation

Whilst the professional bodies have vested interests in the professionalisation of their occupational group, it is interesting to examine what the benefits and risks are to those closely involved in the work, the practitioners themselves, and is an area that has not received any real attention in the literature.

The findings of this study revealed an interesting portrait of the perceived benefits in the context of improved recognition, career development, and standardisation of practice.

Practitioners felt that as professionalisation continued there would be a resultant increase in the level of recognition within wider organisational structures as well amongst society as a whole. This, they hoped, would see a move away from uncontrolled participation by inexperienced colleagues assuming that it was a role that could be readily adopted.

> *"People don't really understand what a project manager does and therefore 'Joe in Accounts' can go and do it for a few months."* (PMF1)

Indeed, it was this open entry that was felt to be most damaging, often resulting in problem projects which in turn tarnished the image of project management within the organisation. Therefore, professionalisation, they speculated, would serve to provide employing organisations increased confidence when recruiting and appointing their project managers.

Whilst many participants when asked directly, expressed a desire not to introduce any restrictions to entry to the profession, they did, however, want to see 'rogue' practitioners removed and 'pretenders' discouraged. This paradoxical approach to occupational closure perhaps presents a challenge to the jurisdictional claim for the profession and seems to highlight the potential for disputes between practitioners and those perceived to be non-professionals encroaching on their territory (Lewis, 2012; Freidson, 2001; Abbott, 1988).

Another key benefit that was identified was a more structured approach to career development. The

participants felt that this would help to move away from the notion of it being an 'accident profession' towards there being a clear career path. This would provide visibility for students considering their career options at an early stage, in the same way as the traditional professions of medicine and law, but also those of engineering, nursing, teaching etc.

One of the more notable frustrations for engineers is that many felt their career progression was somehow pegged and the only option to progress into senior roles was through a sideways move into project management (Johnson and Sargeant, 1998; Gomez-Mejia et al, 1990). However, this truncation often comes with a perceived loss of individual professional status (Hodgson et al, 2011) whilst also being detrimental to the organisation in terms of technical expertise.

The acquisition of a Royal Charter for the APM, with its associated prestige and status, was welcomed by many of the participants, although not all intended to pursue this. Nonetheless, they felt it provided a key development which afforded a credibility to the profession. This means that the Association for Project Management (APM) now joins the ranks of those associations for emerging and new professions such as the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII).

It allows for practitioners to work towards individual chartership in a similar way to engineers, financial advisers, HR professionals through a framework of certification and evidence of practice. The APM (2019) argue that "being chartered is seen by professionals and the public alike as a hallmark of trust and quality" and the findings of this study would seem to support this to some degree.

Perhaps most importantly though, this study found practitioners hoped that greater standardisation would be an outcome of the professionalisation project, particularly in terms of competency which they felt would allow for meaningful benchmarking, ultimately leading to improved project performance. However, this point comes back to the earlier question of how competency is defined and certified – a contentious issue in itself. Indeed, a number of attempts have been made over recent years to determine a correlation between certification and successful project performance (Catanio, Armstrong and Tucker, 2013; Hällgren et al., 2012; Starkweather and Stevenson, 2011; Stevenson and Starkweather, 2010) however with little discernible success (Joseph and

Marnewick, 2018).

The practitioners also cautioned of the potential risks they felt might result as the professionalisation project moved further forward. Most of the participants of this study expressed concern around the introduction of a barrier to entry in the form of certification. This is a somewhat contradictory view to what is ultimately a jurisdictional issue and therefore central to the whole professionalisation process. Whilst on one hand the participants were keen to 'remove the rogues' and 'deter the pretenders', they were seemingly also not keen to install barriers at the jurisdictional boundary (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 1986).

That this exclusivity, so central to professionalisation (Macdonald, 1995), was also seen as being the darker side of professionalisation is perhaps indicative of a complex practitioner perspective. Not only did their concern revolve around restricted entry but there was also a sense that it may also discourage existing practitioners from remaining in the profession if certification become a requirement. This is perhaps not an unrealistic prediction as was proven to be the case for financial advisers, who secured occupational closure in 2012 through certification-based licensure (Ring, 2016). Whilst it had the desired effect of 'removing the rogues', it also resulted in many experienced advisers leaving the profession prematurely. Indeed, the profession lost around 25% of its practitioners overnight (Clare et al, 2013).

For project management, this contradictory picture whereby practitioners want to remain inclusive and to facilitate new entrants who may be sufficiently skilled to successfully deliver project objectives becomes further complicated by a 'territorial' claim that 'not just anyone can come and do this' and a suspicion of those with certifications.

> *"I think the risk is that someone could, on paper, look extremely competent but when it came to the real world, they would not be able to demonstrate capability. I think that is the case across a number of disciplines."* (PMOG6)

Whilst only one individual raised concern over the timescale for the professionalisation, it is perhaps rather pertinent in that it speaks to a number of other perceived risks aired by the participants of this study.

He felt that it was important not to do so too quickly and to ensure that it was right for the practitioners,

pointing to need to ensure that competency assessments were proven to work effectively. Indeed, professionalisation projects can take many years and some often experience difficulties with progress, such as in the case of management consultants, whose project faltered (Kipping 2011). Speed risked the integrity of the process and perhaps the potential benefits to be gained. Perhaps in support of this point another practitioner suggested that in driving this professionalisation project, the professional bodies must ensure the relevance of their creation. In the context of Abbott's (2005) ecological systems, the essence of a profession is its jurisdictional claim. This can become very complex where disciplines collide, arguably a common occurrence within project management.

As this study demonstrates, it is not so unusual for an individual to be a project manager tasked with delivering an IT project within an oil and gas sector organisation. Where these worlds intersect often becomes a battle ground. One participant warned that professional bodies must ensure relevance:

> *"If you look at how Agile is developing in IT, there is no role of a project manager in there, so the professional body has to be on top of that. You need to move with the times and not concentrate on defending a position instead of looking to the future and how things are changing."* (PMG2)

Perhaps given the increased reach of IT and digital projects across all sectors, this a key message.

5.8 Chapter Summary

The analysis of the findings revealed interesting insights in a number of key areas including the anatomy of a profession and how we define it. Whilst there were commonalities across the responses in terms of recognised characteristics of a profession, they did not include such aspects as autonomy and authority – indeed these were largely dismissed as not relevant. However, given the frustrations expressed around issues of legitimacy amongst other professionals, e.g., engineers, it could be argued that these are actually more important than is being suggested by both practitioners and professional bodies and that perhaps greater efforts are required within the profession if it is to be successful with its jurisdictional claim.

There appears to be a paradox of on one hand wishing to seem open to all whilst simultaneously only allowing those deemed worthy being permitted to practice. A noble requirement perhaps, and necessary for the

reputation of the profession, but the challenge it belies is how this might be achieved.

Whilst there was a strong sense of not wishing to be seen as part of an elite, it is perhaps this resistance to exclusivity that serves as a constraint and undermines efforts for project management to be respected in a way that other professions such as engineering enjoy to a far greater degree. There may be an argument that it is necessary to be bold and set strict entry requirements to control access in order to establish it more effectively as a respected profession.

The study participants were drawn from a range of industries and sectors, and it would seem that the project context represents a key challenge in unifying the profession. Many practitioners are often accidental project managers with such technically diverse backgrounds. With such varied routes into the profession, it is perhaps not surprising that there were mostly polarised professional identities evidenced in this study, and this has the potential to hinder progress in the professionalisation project. Without a unified community of practitioners, it is difficult to see how this somewhat fragmented profession might rally to secure the necessary authority over its jurisdiction.

Similarly, the reluctance by many to embrace certification as an important requirement within the profession perhaps suggests a fear of imposition of a minimum benchmark amongst the more experienced practitioners who preferred experience to be the currency of greater value, whilst younger participants were more receptive of the need for a more robust entry restriction.

However, there was a lack of consensus over the source of this knowledge provision with many indicating that it should fall to the professional bodies to determine what and how training should be necessary, rather than the universities. Although this may prove counter-productive in terms of achieving the respect so important to practitioners, as other professions continue to uphold requirements for new entrants to hold a first degree before further professional training, e.g., law, medicine, engineering, teaching.

The professional bodies, it would seem, play a contentious role in the professionalisation project. Whilst some practitioners agreed that the bodies represented their interests and provided a valuable community of practice others were more cynical and suggested that they primarily served their own ends, pointing to the vested

interests of raising fee income from membership. Whether these associations represent value for money aside, the question remains as to whether they are doing enough to effectively drive professionalisation forward or merely skirting around the fringes.

From a practitioner perspective, there were important benefits that could be identified such as improved standards, greater recognition and career progression however concern around the potential loss of capital seen in other professions such as financial advisers might prove to be damaging.

But common themes that emerged repeatedly throughout the study were those of respect, authority and legitimacy which seem to be at the heart of frustrations expressed by the participants. It is perhaps no surprise that these inter-related elements are recognisable traits of the more traditional professions.

Chapter 6 : Conclusions

Overview

This chapter considers the effectiveness of this research at addressing the aim and research questions set out in Chapter One. It discusses the significance of the findings and examines the theoretical contribution to knowledge that this study makes.

There is also consideration of the limitations of this research as well as recommendations for future investigation.

The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the research process and the development of the study.

The overarching aim of this research was to examine the practitioner perceptions of the professionalisation of project management. This process has been underway for some years and has recently made a further notable stride forward with the award of a Royal Charter for the UK-based Association for Project Management (APM). This aim was achieved by the execution of the qualitative study through the collection of rich data from semi-structured interviews.

Underpinning this aim, were key research questions:

- What is the value and relevance to the practitioner of professional status?
- Does trait theory aid understanding of professions amongst practitioners?
- What are the perceived benefits and risks to the practitioner of professionalisation?

Research question one was achieved by exploring the practitioner perceptions of the importance of being seen as a profession and who they felt was driving the professionalisation process, for example, the professional bodies, corporate organisations, or the practitioners themselves. This revealed diverse opinions across these actors.

Research question two achieved through the examination of practitioner views on what a profession means to

them, taking into account their views on characteristics or traits drawn from the literature. Whilst there were many diverse views, this revealed that many of these traits are deemed to still be relevant in the 21st century. By exploring perceptions of whether project management had yet attained the status of a profession based on these participant-driven definitions, as well as what more needed to be done this again provided a divided impression of the current status.

Research question three was achieved through examining the appetite for professionalisation amongst the practitioners themselves, and the perceived benefits and risks in achieving the status of a profession. A range of both benefits and risks were disclosed however, there were indications of tension between what might be seen as a benefit by some, was also potentially viewed to be a risk.

6.1 Key Conclusions

Based on analysis of the research findings, some key conclusions can be drawn.

The definition of a profession has long been the subject of much discussion and debate. Whilst echoing some of the lack of consensus in the literature, this study does, however, provide a theoretical contribution in respect of the core traits evident in the anatomy of a new corporate profession, in particular that of project management. Practitioners suggested that a number of key traits previously identified by theorists in the twentieth century were indeed still relevant. These included the presence of a body of knowledge, education/certification, and a code of ethics, but many did not feel that autonomy and authority were important and in fact these elements were largely dismissed as irrelevant. The findings point to the need for a revised model of traits that can be used to inform professionalisation projects going forward.

Attitudinal issues within some organisations where project management is viewed as a costly overhead or a 'necessary evil' also seem to be problematic for some resulting in frustrations around legitimacy amongst other professionals, such as for example, engineers and IT professionals. Indeed, many practitioners lamented the lack of respect afforded to them as a project manager.

The relevance of professional status was a source of polarised views with more experienced practitioners less interested, perhaps due to the stage they had reached of their career. But for others, it was viewed to be really

important. Younger practitioners, in particular, were more encouraged by recent developments with regards to the Royal Charter and its implications for individual chartership. They were also notably more open to the potential for certification as a minimum benchmark. This is particularly noteworthy as these represent the future of the profession and so it might indicate an increased level of engagement.

There was a sense that the professionalisation project is largely being driven by the professional bodies although all actors were credited with some degree of involvement. However, the motives of the professional bodies were called into question with some suggesting that these were primarily to serve their own ends pointing to the vested interests of raising fee income from membership. Indeed, perceptions of the professional bodies appear to be varied with some agreeing that they represented practitioner interests and provided a valuable community of practice whilst others viewed them more cynically. Although, this was felt to be true not just of the project management bodies but others, and a number of practitioners reported cancelling memberships due to becoming disillusioned in respect of any value to be derived.

There are key benefits to be gained from the professionalisation of project management from a practitioner perspective. Significantly, an improved recognition of what is a misunderstood and diverse profession that operates across almost every industry and sector to a greater or lesser degree. This, it was anticipated, would extend within the organisational setting and to the wider public where there appeared to be very limited understanding of what the role entailed. Whilst there was a desire for the profession to be inclusive, the potential to remove so-called 'rogue' practitioners who lacked competency was attractive to many who felt such elements caused reputational harm. With this increased appreciation, it was hoped, that the jurisdictional claim would be strengthened.

The acquisition of a Royal Charter is largely seen as a positive step not just in providing legitimacy and the ability for practitioners to become individually chartered, but also in raising the profile and credibility of the profession. This, it is felt, has the potential to improve career development and to bring about a standardisation and more meaningful benchmarking although this would likely result in certification.

The potential introduction of a barrier to entry, however, is a source of concern to many practitioners who wish to remain inclusive to facilitate new entrants. But this becomes further complicated by a 'territorial' claim that

'not just anyone can come and do this' and a suspicion of those with certifications. Fears revolved around restricted entry and a sense that it may also discourage existing practitioners from remaining in the profession if certification were to become a requirement. Viewed as the darker side of professionalisation this is perhaps indicative of a complex practitioner perspective.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to knowledge in a number of ways. It is an in-depth study into the practitioner perspective of professionalisation of project management in the UK and how they are engaging with the profession. This has revealed a diverse spectrum of views, influenced by a broad range of industry sector experiences, and serves to highlight that as a profession, it seems to lack sufficient homogeneity which may present a challenge in achieving the status that many seek to acquire.

6.2.1 Definition of a Profession

A central challenge remains as to how we define a profession. After decades of debate there is still no real consensus on what it does, or should, look like. The practitioners highlighted some key characteristics which aligned with those found in the early trait theory literature suggesting that there is still some relevance that warrants revisiting these once again.

The drive to professionalise project management seems to have lost sight of the fact that for as long as there is still no acknowledged definition of a profession this serves to question the integrity of the process itself. Indeed, without a clear and tangible goal, ironically something that is so central to project management, how can the success of this professionalisation project ever be judged? Does this perhaps leave us with a never-ending process and the notion that, in fact, a profession is very much a social constructed phenomenon that currently appears to defy definition?

For practitioners there was a discernible link between respect and certain professions, and the fact that this respect did not seem to extend to project management was a clear source of frustration. But this unsatisfactory position should serve to encourage efforts to re-engage with the study into what defines a profession in the 21st century and what core aspects are necessary in order to provide a greater understanding of how professions are viewed within society and the associated value attached to them.

The findings of this research perhaps suggest that whilst numerous attempts have been made by academics to offer theory around the definition of professions, the reality lies far more deeply in our consciousness, ingrained at a cultural and social level, subject to numerous influences. Time, possibly being one such variable in this regard, as there was no doubt amongst the participants that law and medicine were professions, however, attitudes varied towards those professions that have emerged during the 20th century.

This study offers a theoretical contribution in respect of the core traits of a new corporate profession, such as project management. It is argued that whilst some of the original traits or attributes do remain relevant, there are those which are no longer pertinent for the emergent organisation-centred professions of the twenty first century.

Figure 6.1 - Traits of a New Corporate Profession

A revised model is offered which identifies those traits deemed most relevant for the new corporate professions of the twenty first century. Some elements of the earlier models remain (displayed in grey in figure 6.1), such as formal qualification to demonstrate specialist knowledge and expertise, supported by a body of knowledge. Entry restrictions and control of title prevent untrained practitioners from operating and serves to act as a proxy for licensing. This goes some way towards the occupational closure of the more traditional professions.

However, traits such as altruism, autonomy and authority have been removed, as these are not seen as being relevant to these emergent professions within the confines of the corporate setting. The inclusion of respect reflects the importance attached to this by the practitioners. Arguably, there is a clear link between authority and respect, but the practitioners did not articulate this.

Other suggested traits included in this new model (displayed in green in figure 6.1) are the presence of a professional body or association which acts as a community of practice and advocate for ethical behaviour. High standards are also central to the corporate professions, mandated by the relevant professional body, together with a requirement for auditable continuing professional development.

Finally, the inclusion of professional identity is seen as an important trait. This might be because for the traditional professions, this is taken for granted as it is intrinsically linked in our wider consciousness. For example, the profession identity, and its associated standing in society, of a surgeon is assumed whereas for the new corporate professions it is an element for which they struggle to secure awareness.

6.2.2 Contradictions

Interestingly, this research has also exposed a number of contradictions which represent a challenge going forward.

Practitioners acknowledged the requirement for a minimum level of education or certification (either at the point of entry or to practise) as an important characteristic of a profession but there was a lack of appetite for the introduction of such a qualification for project professionals, particularly amongst the more experienced individuals. The lack of consensus on this appeared to indicate a fault line between the age and experience divide.

The frustration at a perceived lack of respect for the role of a project manager was repeatedly reported and indeed, appeared to be a common theme throughout the study. Experiences with other professionals in the project environment, such as engineers, as well as senior management attitudes were cited as being a source of contention and a view that it needed to change. However, when considering key characteristics of a profession the notion of authority was dismissed as not being relevant, reflective perhaps of the unique

challenge faced by most project managers who are rarely afforded such a luxury.

There also appears to be a paradox in respect of those who should be allowed to become project managers. There was a desire on one hand to be seen as inclusive and be a profession open to all whilst simultaneously restricting only those deemed worthy to being permitted to practice. This was further compounded by the resistance to the use of certification to determine such worthiness with many suggesting that instead there should be greater reliance on a track record.

However, the project manager does not deliver a project on their own and there are many other factors that can arguably be cited as the reason for project failures – funding and resource restrictions, for example. A focus purely on a track record seemingly puts a project manager in a rather precarious position.

There is perhaps a case to argue therefore that a dual approach should be considered, in a similar manner to that with other professions where a minimum qualification/certification is necessary, prior to a period of probationary practice in order to demonstrate competency. Arguably, if there is any prospect of securing the respect so sought after, then the presence of an absolute benchmark qualification for entry is necessary in order to address legitimacy concerns.

6.2.3 Benefits and Risks

The study has revealed an interesting insight into the perceptions of the potential benefits to be gained by the practitioner through professionalisation of project management. These included improved standards of practitioners and performance, greater recognition, and more formalised career development. However, the perceived risks through this process were that the introduction of more formalised entry criteria in the form of qualifications and/or certifications might result in practitioners leaving the profession or that these requirements would deter new entrants.

This again highlights tensions between wanting some degree of control of title whilst being reluctant to embrace the need for closure through certification. This appears to point towards a desire for a kind of ‘soft professionalisation’. But such a prospect would potentially damage any jurisdictional claim within the organisational setting which already sees untrained and inexperienced ‘pretenders’ causing reputational harm.

This study points to a profession seemingly comprised of a somewhat non-homogenous group of practitioners, with differing priorities, affiliations, and disciplinary backgrounds all of which serve to create a challenging landscape for project management in its efforts to professionalise. It perhaps suggests that it is not quite as simple as the professional bodies would like to believe.

Perhaps the comparison with the traditional professions of medicine and law does not help. Created into a traditionalist system of rigid structures, practitioners joining their ranks with an acceptance of these strict entry requirements. However, the emergent corporate professions, whilst attempting to adopt differing strategies, still largely appear to have tried to organise and retrofit into such a structure that arguably is not appropriate.

Summary of Contribution to theory

This research contributes to the theory around the professionalisation of project management through an in-depth exploration of the practitioner perspective which has been neglected in the literature. The findings highlight a real appetite amongst practitioners for greater respect, driven by serious concerns around a perceived lack of recognition, often by other professionals. Practitioners are very interested in the debate, evidenced by their emotional response to their careers and the extent to which respect and recognition is felt to be particularly, and unjustly, lacking.

It is not sufficient to dismiss the notion of characteristics or traits in defining a profession on the basis that there can never be a perfect list of attributes, indeed it is clear from the findings of this research that core traits do remain relevant to practitioners. Whilst trait theory has been largely ignored or dismissed in recent years this study has re-examined this theoretical field and found that, for practitioners, traits are important and relevant. A revised model of the core traits for the new corporate professions is therefore offered as a significant contribution to trait theory, taking into account the very different settings in which these professions operate in contrast with the more traditional professions such as medicine and law.

6.3 Impact of Research

Whilst at the outset it was anticipated that this research would largely be of most interest to the practitioners engaged in the management of projects, as it has progressed it has become evident that this study also provides valuable insight for the professional bodies as they continue their efforts with professionalisation.

The provision of a revised trait model for the new corporate professions, such as project management, represents an important theoretical development which will support professionalisation projects amongst these emergent professions.

Given the practitioner agenda, it would appear that a primary requirement for them is greater respect and recognition and therefore this presents a key demand for these associations to address going forward.

One of the challenges that they face is that practitioners work in a hugely varied range of settings, in differing industries and come from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. The findings of this study suggest perhaps a more nuanced approach may be necessary to the professionalisation of such a non-homogeneous group.

Assumptions have been made by professional bodies as to what is important to practitioners, supported by their own surveys of membership, however, this belies the significant numbers of practitioners who are not members or who have affiliations with alternative professional associations.

Practitioners view the professional bodies in terms of what value they offer them as individuals and so these associations will need to address how they represent the whole practitioner population in order to remain relevant. The findings of this study point to a relatively low uptake of individual membership - just a little over a third of the participants reported belonging to either APM or PMI. This in itself raises questions as to how effectively they can represent the interests of all practitioners within such a diverse field, and therefore ultimately, whether professionalisation can succeed.

There may also be potential resonance with representative bodies for other professions in this regard, that have assumed a greater degree of homogeneity than is the reality.

There are important notes of interest for the corporate organisations in respect of this study's findings. Significant investment is made into the delivery of projects and therefore professionalisation potentially represents a positive move towards improved performance, albeit there is as yet no empirical evidence of a definitive correlation. But whilst some organisations have a very positive attitude towards project practitioners, it is evident that this is not as widespread as it needs to be. Many of the participants in this study reported facing challenging attitudes within organisations where the role of a project manager is not valued and

recognised as a skilled professional that cannot be replaced, out of convenience, by someone less experienced or knowledgeable.

6.4 Limitations of the Research

As a qualitative study it is acknowledged that the findings are not readily generalisable in a statistical sense, however it is important to note that universal themes have emerged from this research from which it is possible to draw inferences that there exists a wide variety of views amongst the practitioner population. Whilst this study is not an examination specifically targeted at one sector or industry it does however provide an insight into the perceptions of practitioners across a diverse cross-section of settings, which potentially has implications for other professional groups.

The timing of this research, soon after the award of the Royal Charter to the Association for Project Management (APM), was during a period where the messaging around what this meant for practitioners was arguably not well established and there remained little clarity around the route to individual chartership. However, whilst the details may not have been made public at the time of interview, participants were able to provide their views on the potential this might represent.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has provided an in-depth examination of the perceptions of 28 project/programme managers, from a range of sectors involved in different types of projects, from IT-based initiatives to traditional engineering-based endeavours. This represents a relatively small sample of practitioners from the total project population in the UK therefore, an opportunity exists for future research through quantitative studies to determine the extent to which the perceptions captured in this study are replicated more widely within the practitioner population.

The development of the revised trait model has centred around just one of the new corporate professions, project management, therefore, future research should be conducted in other organisation-based professions to examine the relative validity of these traits. This new trait model will provide a fertile base for future researchers to explore the traits of other corporate professions either through more in-depth exploration of

the significance of each of the traits or by considering the extent to which the presence of these traits is significant to the professional bodies.

Whilst this study has revealed an appetite for a 'soft professionalisation' of the field of project management this may evolve as the older practitioners retire and the younger professionals look to embrace a more formalised certification requirement that will serve to protect the jurisdictional claims. Many such individuals in this research saw certification as being important in supporting the recognition of project management as a profession. Further examination of this over the next 5-10 years could provide affirmation that progress is being made.

Examination of the rate of uptake of the recently developed Chartership programme by the APM is warranted as a barometer of attitudes towards this step in the professionalisation process. Indeed, participants pointed to this as being important drawing comparisons with engineering, surveyors, and IT professionals. It is recommended that a longitudinal study be considered in this area to illuminate not just the engagement with this measure but also to examine whether any relationship can be found between the number of chartered project professionals and a raised profile of project management as a profession.

A direction for additional research is suggested into the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the role of the project practitioner and whether this serves in any way to undermine their precarious jurisdictional claim in the context of professionalisation. This study reported interesting attitudes towards this emerging technology with some participants dismissive of its potential threat as a decision-making tool.

6.6 Reflective Summary

It is a useful exercise to reflect on the experience of a research study and consider what has gone well and perhaps not so well in order to capture lessons learned. This practice is an important element within the field of project management, and it seems appropriate to do so here.

One of the biggest challenges encountered during the course of this project has been juggling a demanding full-time role in Higher Education alongside my research, which has resulted in a more prolonged duration than might otherwise have been the case. And whilst this has at times proved stressful, it has allowed time to

consider developments within project management and the efforts taken to professionalise. Indeed, it has been an eventful period in the field, not least with the drama surrounding the award of a Royal Charter and numerous court battles, so it has been a particularly interesting time to study this subject.

In reflecting on my research journey, I have had the opportunity to consider what went well with a view to embedding this into my ongoing practice. The data collection process proved to be a particularly smooth process and benefited from careful planning and flexibility in scheduling the interviews. Many of the participants expressed enjoyment with the experience of discussing their perceptions on a range of topics, some of which they admitted had given them food for thought. This feedback was satisfying and resulted in some very interesting conversations. The extremely diverse study sample frame also proved enlightening as it revealed the extent to which, for some, their route into project management had meandered. This illuminated, first-hand, the accidental profession that is so often mentioned in the literature.

In terms of what did not go so well, I would have to point to the time constraints at different points along the journey such as for example a change of job and major relocation part way through the research. This certainly added to the demands on already finite available time, combined with being tasked with the sole responsibility for designing and creating a new academic postgraduate programme in project management. However, as both have now drawn to a conclusion it is particularly satisfying and rewarding to reflect back on these achievements.

The focus of the study has shifted from its original concept, as is often the case in research of this nature and duration. The initial proposal was to be a consideration of whether project management had achieved the profession status. However, it soon became clear, following a deep exploration of the literature, that the nature of a profession is still, after many decades of discussion, subject to conjecture and lacking in any real definition. Without an acknowledged framework to guide such an evaluation therefore, it would prove impossible to draw meaningful conclusions or add any contribution of value. So, the emphasis evolved to consider the practitioner experience of the professionalisation project. This perspective has been neglected in the extant literature with focus instead directed towards the process as well as from the viewpoint of the corporate actors and the professional bodies.

Because of the nature of the study, I explored discipline areas that were new to me, within the sociology and psychology literature which was particularly fulfilling and served to expand my knowledge horizon. I have also been in the fortunate position of having access to two university libraries, Robert Gordon University as a student member, and York St John University as a staff member. This has been extremely beneficial in providing a wealth of resources to support my study.

As an academic, the value of this research is multi-faceted not just in the contribution to my own teaching, and to the profession itself but also in providing important insight from such an in-depth examination of the practitioner experience. It has sparked a number of ideas for additional research that I wish to explore further, some of which have been touched upon in the earlier section on recommendations for future research.

If I were to consider what I might do differently, I would probably indicate a strategy of ongoing writing rather than beginning this task at a later stage in the process. Indeed, much reference is made to the 'writing-up' stage of the PhD process which promulgates a misleading perception that it should sit towards the end of the process, after collection and analysis of data. Whilst delaying writing-up might have avoided a significant edit of the thesis as the study evolved, beginning work on a draft earlier perhaps would have removed some of the pressure in the final stages.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Schedule

Demographic Questions

Gender	Male / Female
Age group	<25 26-35 36-45 46+
Number of years as a project manager	
Highest academic qualification / discipline	
Project management qualification(s)	

Experience

How would you define a project manager?

Do you think there is a clearly recognisable route into project management?

What is your experience of project management? What type of projects have you been involved in?

Has your career been enhanced by undertaking project management?

How do you feel about being a project manager?

How do you think others view your role?

Do you feel that your project management skills are valued by your organisation?

- Can you tell me a little about your experiences?

Profession

How would you define a profession?

Traditionally it was felt that professions demonstrated key traits, would you agree?

Should all aspiring professions be judged against these same criteria?

Which are most relevant to project management?

Do you think of project management as a profession?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you believe that to be the case?

Recognition

How important is it to you that project management be recognised as a profession?

Do you think the wider populous think of it as a profession?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you think that?

What barriers do you see to achieving this recognition?

Who does it matter to most – practitioners or corporate institutions? And who is driving it?

With increasing numbers of occupations seeking to secure profession status, how does this impact on the value of the status?

Is being part of an elite group important to you?

- Can you tell me a little why?

How successful have other aspiring professions been in securing recognition?

(such as financial advisors, HR specialists, management consultants)

Chartership

In light of the recent award of Royal Charter for APM:

How important is membership of a professional body to you?

How important is it that the body be Chartered?

Should only project managers be able to attain chartership?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you feel that way?

Does the Royal Charter mean anything beyond these shores?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you say that?

Qualifications and Closure

How important is, it in your view, that all project managers be subject to required registration whereby the professional body acts in part as a regulator?

Do you think there should there be a minimum qualification standard?

- Can you tell me a little more why you think that?

Would this be a good thing for practitioners?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you feel that?

If such a minimum compulsory benchmark were introduced how would this impact you?

Should certification be via a professional body or by degree?

- Can you tell me a little more about why you say that?

Benefits and Risks

As a practitioner, what do you see to be the benefits of professionalization of project management?

And what do you foresee the risks to the practitioner?

Participant Information Sheet

Name of school: **Aberdeen Business School**
Title of study: **Professionalisation of Project Management – The Practitioner Perspective**

Introduction
You are being invited to participate in this research on the professionalisation of project management. This is part of an ongoing PhD study which will examine a number of aspects from the practitioner perspective.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
The research is designed to explore the attitudes and experiences of project practitioners towards professionalisation, including such notable developments as the recent acquisition of a Royal Charter by the Association for Project Management (APM). It also seeks to explore the perceived benefits and risks to the practitioner of professionalisation.

Do you have to take part?
Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time without explanation, even after the interview has taken place.

What will you be required to do in the project?
By consenting to participate in this study, you are agreeing to engage in an interview either at a convenient location, or by telephone/Skype where this is not possible. It is anticipated that the interview will last in the region of 45 – 60 minutes. Scheduling of this interview will be wholly at your convenience either during the working day or outside of these hours if preferred. To aid with the notetaking process, you will be asked if you consent to the interview being recorded. You can refuse to agree to this if you prefer, again without any explanation. Any recording will only be used for the purpose of this research and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Why have you been invited to take part?
You have been invited to participate because you are a project or programme manager. The nature of this study is to explore practitioner experiences and attitudes to professionalisation and therefore your contribution will provide valuable insight.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
The risks involved in your participation are minimal. You will be asked to spare up to an hour of your valuable time to respond to a range of questions around central themes relating to the focus of this study.

What happens to the information in the project?
Any comments and information provided will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and for the duration of the research project any recordings, notes and transcriptions will be stored in password protected files. Upon completion, these records will be safely destroyed. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time, without explanation or issue. Any reference to your comments within the finalised study will be completely anonymised.

If you have any queries about this research study, please contact the researcher in the first instance, whose contact details are shown overleaf, together with those of the research supervisor.

Researcher Contact Information:

Alison Lawman
a.lawman1@rgu.ac.uk 07736 399227

Research Supervisor Information:

Professor Rita Marcella
r.c.marcella@rgu.ac.uk 01224 263904

This research has been ethically approved by Robert Gordon University in line with the Research Ethics Policy. The *Research Ethics Policy* is available at http://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/planning-and-policy/policies/policies

Appendix 3 Consent Form

Consent Form

Name of school: **Aberdeen Business School**
Name of researcher **Alison Lawman**
Title of study: **Professionalisation of Project Management – The Practitioner Perspective**

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

- I have received information about the research in verbal and / or written form by the researcher. **YES / NO**
- I understand that the research will involve participation in an interview, which may be recorded, subject to my express agreement. It is anticipated that the interview will require up to 1 hour. **YES / NO**
- I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without explanation by contacting Alison Lawman at a.lawman1@rgu.ac.uk or on 07736 399227. **YES / NO**
- I understand that all information about me will be treated in the strictest of confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study. **YES / NO**
- I understand that any audio recording of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of this research. **YES / NO**
- I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with others within Robert Gordon University **YES / NO**
- I consent to being a participant in the project **YES / NO**

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date: