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Thesis of 12 ECTS credits  
**Master of Project Management (MPM)**

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Student:

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Jóhannes Martin L. Sörensen

Supervisor:

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Jerry Manas

Department:

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Haukur Ingi Jónasson

## **Managing creative projects: lessons from dance, theatre, film and fashion**

Jóhannes Martin L. Sörensen<sup>1</sup>

Reykjavik University<sup>2</sup>

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores project management in creative projects, drawing wisdom from interviews with four leaders of artistic projects from dance, theatre, film and fashion. The results tell us that several factors are important in such projects: project culture and atmosphere are extremely important; challenge and fun in the work are necessary for people to feel engaged; the participants focus on the process itself, rather than the outcome; passion, rather than specific requirements, drives the work; understanding the project environment is important; the leader must mark the direction and communicate the project vision clearly; barriers of language, culture and physical space must be broken to facilitate creative work; attention to the human side of a project is especially important as feelings, artistic expression, and deep relationships are often involved.

Keywords: project management, creative projects, artistic projects, leadership, team management, creativity.

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<sup>1</sup> Jóhannes Martin L. Sörensen. Email: [martinleifs@gmail.com](mailto:martinleifs@gmail.com). Tel.: +354 824-4699.

<sup>2</sup> Reykjavik University, School of Science and Engineering, Reykjavík, Iceland. Email: [mpm@ru.is](mailto:mpm@ru.is).

# 1. Introduction

While the author of this paper was studying project management at Reykjavik University he started work in a local theatre and also took on the organisation of an annual independent conference event. At the theatre he met many and diverse groups of artists who came there to put on shows. These experiences led him to wonder how project management could be used in creative projects. Creative projects weren't mentioned very often in the study material at the university and most of the guest professors were from commercial or engineering environments. At the same time, the author felt there was evident need for effective project management in creative and artistic projects (drama, dance, art festivals, and other performances). It was communicated directly to him by the artists, how much use there would be for such a manager, and what the nuances might entail.

Thus the focus of this paper is on management in creative projects. Four successful managers from different artistic fields are interviewed with the goal of learning from them and extracting management wisdom for project managers who might wish to work in creative projects. Several of the lessons are applicable to project management in general as well. The research question that guided this study was **“What do project managers need to know in order to successfully manage creative projects?”** A secondary question is **“What can the project management field in general learn from managers in creative projects?”** The paper is meant to add knowledge to the professional project manager's repertoire before he takes on the leadership of a creative project by drawing lessons from these four artistic project leaders.

## 2. Literature review

Looking to learn from managers in creative projects, a few themes have been selected to focus on. These are *leadership and team management*, *creativity* and *implementation*. The focus here is on articles and books that cover creative/artistic or live event projects. Methods of measuring success is one of the items studied in this paper and therefore two models of success criteria/measurement were looked at and compared to the findings.

Laurent Simon researched creative teams in different creative sectors: video games, multimedia software for TV, general advertising and a circus company. The point was to provide “an integrated synthesis of what creative project managers actually do” (Simon, 2006). He finds

that this project manager acts as a *sense-maker*, a *web-weaver*, a *game-master* and a *flow-balancer*. Furthermore, his findings were that these managers employed their talents more in dealing with people in and around the project, than in planning and controlling it. The project manager's role as a sense-maker is to interpret the situation and translate the project into visions, goals and tasks. He also builds shared meaning in the project. The project manager as web-weaver puts his communication skills heavily into practice in dealing with her team members and their skills, defining channels of communication and knowledge-sharing and networking with "resource-persons" outside the project. The game-master defines the borders of the "game" that is the project, sets the rules, inspires people to chase the goal, keeps track of sanctions and rewards and fosters gamesmanship. The job of the flow-balancer is to define "a specific environment that should allow each team-mate to get involved at full potential." As such, he motivates team members individually and sets challenges (for challenges are necessary when working with members of Generation Y, also known as Millennials, according to the study). He also balances constraints and freedom, and believes in and respects fun at the workplace. The concept of flow comes from positive psychology research, which states that to achieve a state of flow, or peak concentration, there must be an adequate mix of challenge and ability. Too much challenge creates frustration and too little creates apathy. Comparing Simon's study to this thesis' findings is interesting as many of them are echoed here, despite the fact that the creative teams and workplaces in his study differ from those looked at in this one.

Hartman, Ashrafi and Jergeas studied project management in the live entertainment industry in Canada with a view to discovering what was done differently there. Their main reason to study this was that almost all of these projects are on time, and that's despite not necessarily employing traditional tools of project management. Similarly to Simon's study, Hartman et al. found that "one of the major differences is that there is a strong focus on human, creative and aesthetic aspects of projects compared to what happens in traditional (i.e. capital) project-oriented industries" (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998). They looked at what were the most important success factors, success metrics and project priorities among project owners, contractors and consultants. Having the project develop and finish on time was a recurring theme with different stakeholders, but aside from that, the study found a common understanding lacking in this respect. They recommend "involving sponsors and contractors to develop common critical success factors [as] one way to ensure better cooperation and incentive to effectively complete the project." Their findings also revealed that "four primary

elements shaped the state of the industry's projects [...] The four components were culture, communications, stakeholders' involvement and planning" (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998).

In her master's thesis, Tinna Lind Gunnlaugsdóttir, explores the method of the clown in theatre and its application in project leadership. She finds that "the technique of the clown unites all of the main factors that an actor builds on to be credible and have a strong presence, something that's valuable for all project managers" (Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2013). Among these factors are being alert in the present moment, speaking wisely and not unnecessarily, acknowledging and celebrating mistakes, connecting with one person when speaking, stating very clearly one's motives and directions and being receptive to what the environment presents. The biggest lesson of the clown is being authentic. Although the present paper does not delve deeply into specific theatre techniques, Tinna Lind's thesis shows that management has much to learn from the arts.

C S Lim and M Zain Mohamed provide a framework with which measuring success can be studied. They divide success criteria into two main categories: macro and micro. Macro success criteria "will address the question: Is the original project concept achieved?" If it is, it's a success, if it's not, it's either less successful or a failure (Lim & Mohamed, 1999). This can be achieved even though the project goes beyond budget and time and has problems during the project period. Generally, this is what matters to the owner, the users, the stakeholders and the general public. The micro viewpoint deals with smaller components of the project (technical, financial, commercial, finance, organisation, risk, environment, human, etc.). In general, the developer (non-operator) and the contractor are the ones who will consider project success from this viewpoint.

Wateridge lists six ways to measure project success:

1. It is profitable for the sponsor/owner and contractors;
2. It achieves its business purpose in three ways (strategically, tactically and operationally);
3. It meets its defined objectives;
4. It meets quality thresholds;
5. It is produced to specification, within budget and on time;
6. All parties (users, sponsors, the project team) are happy during the project and with the outcome of the project (Wateridge, 1998).

An 8 year quantitative study by Gabriella Cserhádi and Lajos Szabó into the success factors of organisational event projects, published in 2012, further supports the findings of Simon and Hartman et al. They conclude that relationship-oriented success factors are considerably

stronger in that type of project than task focussed factors (Cserháti & Szabó, 2014). Naturally, identifying objectives, defining scope and main activity areas, and elaborating task structure are important, but they are not always realised in detail because of the many uncertainties and changes that can arise. The type of projects they research, namely international sport events, is extremely time-constrained, relies greatly on the support of the various stakeholders (national and international sport organisations, city and national governments, etc.) and requires the team and partners to cooperate tightly together, with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities. Because of this, “in the implementation of project objectives as well as in the achievement of external stakeholders’ satisfaction, it is mainly the soft, relationship-oriented factors such as project leadership, co-operation, communication and partnerships that are essential, whereas the hard, task-oriented factors play a less important role” (Cserháti & Szabó, 2014). Certainly, their study deals with sporting events and not creative or artistic ones, but they are event projects, much like most artistic projects are.

Furthermore, Yang, Huang and Wu find that their “results suggest that projects with high complexity were more likely to be successful when they experienced a high level of team communication, collaboration, and cohesiveness than those with less complexity” (Yang, Huang, & Wu, 2011). Creative arts projects are by nature complex, as their success depends heavily on effective human execution across a wide array of talents and skills. One poor move or flaw in execution can jeopardise the whole initiative, despite the best of plans.

### 3. Research method

The goal of this research is to draw on the wisdom of managers of creative projects and form a set of tools that project managers in that kind of project can use, as well as learning from that field to benefit project management on the whole. To this end, a qualitative research method was chosen, instead of other possible methods. A quantitative research method, including fixed questionnaires or statistical measurements, would not have suited this particular project, as it would have limited the possibility of delving deep into the subject’s world of experience. Personal interviews enable the subject to brainstorm and capture moments of experience relevant to the research, guided by the interviewer. Also, the purpose is to learn from these people things that are possibly outside the researchers’ field of awareness, so the questions needed to be open and allow for the unexpected to come forward. Case studies might have



suited such a research project as they would have allowed an in-depth study, but then it would not have been possible to generalise between different projects within the same field (one manager's various experiences in his/her field) and across fields (by comparing the results from the four subjects).

So the method chosen for this master's thesis is a qualitative approach, including four in-depth interviews with people that have experience with managing creative projects. They were interviewed for an hour up to 1.5 hours between September and December 2014. A list of questions was prepared beforehand, that covered the topics under the three main focus points: leadership and teamwork, creativity and implementation. The list is in its entirety in the Appendix. These interviews, taken in person or via Skype, allowed for a dialogue that could sway and go deeper into issues that the interviewer found important or interesting, or that the subject had much experience in or much to say about.

The subjects for the interviews were chosen for their experience and successful management of creative projects. These people have managed projects in dance, theatre, fashion design and filmmaking. It was important to cover a certain variety of artistic fields, in order to be able to compare and see overlaps between them, possibly providing an indication that creative projects might have something in common across fields.

Careful attention was paid to selecting people that have had to have their feet 'on both sides of the artistic/execution line', meaning that they've had much to do with the artistic creation itself as well as the administrative side of the project (f.ex. budget, team and stakeholder management). The interviewees are Katrín Hall, former artistic director of the Icelandic Dance Company (IDC), Guðmundur Jörundsson, manager of the fashion house JÖR, Simón Hanukai, director, theatre-maker and educator, and Ragnar Bragason, writer and director of TV and film.

Katrín Hall, an educated dancer, was artistic director for the Icelandic Dance Company for 15 years. In her time with the company she formed a clear artistic vision for the company, moving away from a company that covers many possible genres of dance, instead focussing on contemporary dance, with special emphasis on what the Icelandic dance sector had to bring. The company travelled to different countries, showing at various festivals and venues, and collaborated at different times with musical artists and choreographers from Iceland and from abroad.

Guðmundur Jörundsson studied fashion design at the Icelandic Academy of Arts and soon after founded his own fashion house, JÖR. In 2014 his company has been active two years and presented two collections. His core team numbers 5 people, including himself, an executive

manager, a production manager, a designer and an art director. In addition, there are employees of the store they opened in 2013. They are currently planning sales of their products abroad. The JÖR fashion label is not old and the team has not reached a high level of maturity, but their success thus far in the Icelandic fashion market, which is small and relatively inactive, is worthy of attention and aroused the researcher's curiosity of the dynamics within their team.

Simón Adinia Hanukai is a theatre-maker, director and educator in New York City. He is a founding member of headRush Crew and the co-artistic director of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company. Working with both companies for six years he took part in creating original full-length dance theatre pieces, which toured nationally and were seen by over 25,000 people per year. He has also assisted William Forsythe on *Selon*, Anne Bogart on the remounting of *Death and the Ploughman*, Tina Landau on *A Civil War Christmas*, and Robert Woodruff on directing *Festen*. Simón is the Talent Curator for Mass Bliss Productions, as well as an Adjunct Professor at the Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Center for Worker Education at CUNY and the department of Speech, Communications and Theatre Arts at BMCC in New York.

Ragnar Bragason, an Icelandic writer and director, has made several full feature films, his latest being *Metalhead* which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2013 and won 8 Edda Awards, the Icelandic annual film and TV awards. He has also made several TV series, the most popular of which were *The Night Shift*, *The Day Shift* and *The Prison Shift*.

## 4. Results

The focus in this paper is on three main areas of creative management: leadership and team management, creativity and implementation. The following text describes the outcome of these interviews, mostly in the order they were received but with certain irrelevant points removed.

### **4.1 Leadership**

#### **Katrín Hall**

Katrín says the team comes at the top of the list, when it comes to her style of leadership. She mentions her background, being a dancer herself and not educated in management. She's learned the team of vital importance, as you can't get everything done on your own. She selects people to work with that compensate for the abilities that she has less of herself.

"Hierarchy is not an efficient way to manage," she says, and this applies to both the dancers in her company and others working with them. She prefers a flat organisation, where people have easy access to and are unafraid to approach the leader. An open and smooth flow of information is important, as many things that can go wrong are based on misunderstandings. Also, everyone has to feel they can speak their mind. Katrín says that parts of the way she builds a cohesive team is to schedule regular meetings, keep the information flow open, and make sure that team members have access to her when they need.

Part of Katrín's leadership style is setting an example and being demanding. She says she asks a lot of the people working with her, but not least herself. "It all starts with yourself," you set an example.

"Most important of all important things is that we all know where we're headed," she says, making the common goal, *the artistic vision*, essential.

In an effort to increase the dancers' work satisfaction, Katrín tries to enable them to become better artists. To always be learning something is important. Part of this is to get new choreographers to work with them, who challenge them and drive them to better themselves. Katrín also tries to compensate the people for their work and make sure that they feel their work is appreciated.

She says that it's important to make sure that their work with the dance company never becomes "only work". If that happens she knows she's entered a dangerous zone. It has to be a passion. The opposite is in fact a more likely problem, because as passionate artists they always want more. She needs to remind them to take their mind off the work.

As artists the dancers are inwardly-focused. And they need to be, they need to concentrate on themselves and their bodies. Katrín considers it a part of her role to provide support to them, making sure they don't get carried away with their emotions. She puts things in context, provides logic and reminds them how good they have it, when they get caught up in their ambition. When asked how she handles a situation when someone behaves like a "primadonna" or takes themselves too seriously, she says that everyone is a primadonna. Some actually require more motivation to be a primadonna! In general, she meets with her people regularly to discuss one-on-one how they are doing. There, they speak of attendance, discipline, how they feel, specific things they'd like to touch upon, and the colleagues and staff. She also says it's important to notice the ones who don't boast and put themselves forward.

### **Guðmundur Jörundsson**

Guðmundur tries to divide tasks between people and look for each and every one person's strengths. It's important for him to have an atmosphere in the team where everyone can bring their own ideas without being afraid they'll be shot down. His style is not one where he's very involved in every part of the process. Instead he believes in delegating tasks and trusting each member of the team to do their part. But he has also experienced being too much to the side and not involved enough, and so he's trying to find the middle way – not interfering too much, but not being too distant.

It has helped a lot to have people that are doing exactly what they want to be doing. Motivation is not a problem. Also again, selecting the right people on the team. He recently picked a member that eases communication a great deal, "he's just that kind of person". Also, after moving everybody on the team into the same work area helped a lot. They used to be in two office/studio spaces, but being together in a rather small space improves team morale.

The best thing to keep people happy in their work is to praise them and their work. It can be easy to forget. The members of the team have freedom in their work; they are allowed to work in the hours that they choose. Activities together with the team are of course useful, like going out to dinner together. They also go on fashion shows together abroad, so that's both work and pleasure at the same time. Guðmundur easily makes jokes about his teammates, for example on the subject that they're "so crazy." Things like that can lighten the mood when work gets to their head and they start to take things seriously.

It's extremely important in a start-up company like his that people adore the work that they do. There have been rough moments, for example when they haven't been able to pay salaries

on time, and that wouldn't be possible without very dedicated people. But they do have that. Every member on the team feels like the company belongs to her/him.

Guðmundur describes codependency as something that has been difficult for him as a leader. It has gotten better though, with time. It used to be that when he wasn't happy with something he'd just not talk about it or go around the issues, avoiding it. Their production manager helped on that. He brought things up and talked about them.

### **Simón Hanukai**

Simón looks at himself as a facilitator when he's in the role of director. He doesn't like a dictatorial style. He'll open the group up, for example with a question that he then asks people to answer as a team. Although he makes it very clear that he has to come to the table with a clear idea of what he's looking for, there is always much room for input from the entire team. His attitude assumes that we're "all a part of a collective consciousness" and through allowing all the ideas to come forward, the strongest idea will survive and bring them to the best result.

In an effort to build a cohesive team, he'll get everybody to meet and share food. "Eating together is one of the closest things you can do together." Also, he'll ask people to participate in games and activities where they speak about themselves and get to know each other. As part of these activities, he tries to find a link to the piece they're going to work on. "For example, if we're working on a piece about immigration, we're going to talk about everyone's background, how everyone comes from somewhere, how everyone's an immigrant. Especially in New York, this is very much the case." He tries to get people to know each other closely and see each other as persons, not just as "the artist in the room I'm working with."

Simón's attitude towards team spirit is that while everybody is deeply involved in the process and is an active participant (meaning for example that their input is always listened to) they will not lose motivation and feel good about the project. That's most important when it comes to keeping up morale and making sure project members are happy. He makes sure everyone feels this; the team member "is not just a worker bee". It also insures that every person finds his spot on the team.

Another way to get people to work together and at the same time a method to deal with too much personal focus, or even the tendency for the "primadonna attitude" is to get everyone to focus on the product. It's not about them personally, but it's about what they're creating. He tells them "we're creating this baby together. This is what matters". This lowers people's ego and they focus on the project at hand and on their fellow teammates.

If he knows in advance that he'll be working with someone who has ego issues that might contaminate the team spirit, he'll talk to that person one-on-one right at the beginning. On a positive note, he'll let them know they're appreciated and put them in the role of a mentor, saying something like "I'm really happy to have you on this project and I think you have a lot to contribute. You have much that the others can learn from you." Put in this position, they'll want to look good to the others and not screw up.

If he realises later on that he's dealing with a primadonna on the team, he'll first ask himself if that person is worth having on the team. If they are expert at what they do, he'll talk to them in the same way as described before. If not, he'll tell them this behaviour won't be tolerated and they have to change and make an effort to work with the others. If that doesn't work, they might have to leave the team.

He says it's important not to avoid conflicts but to tackle the issues when they come up. He has witnessed directors pamper the primadonnas and doesn't like it. "It gives other people in the team the feeling that not everyone is on an equal level."

On his methods in working with creative types, he comes again to the importance of listening to people. "People come from different directions and have different mind-sets. You start by listening to everyone. Their hopes, expectations, what they're looking to get out of it. Then you start asking questions and building on top of that".

Simón makes sure to work with people that he can trust. He'll select people on his team that he knows are hard-working and function well in a team. But he also selects new people as well, not only people that know each other. This brings new blood into the team and keeps the older members on their toes. One of the good things about using team members that know each other beforehand is that they have a common vocabulary. They speak the same artistic language.

### **Ragnar Bragason**

To Ragnar, it is essential to choose well the people you work with. The director can't do everything himself and the final product will be a whole put together out of the puzzles that the different members in the team are. He tries to select people that are better than him. That way he challenges himself and learns from the process. He speaks of responsibility as well, stating that even though the creative process is a participative one, he is ultimately responsible and thus has the final say.

In much the same way as expressed by Simón Hanukai, Ragnar tries to let other people in on the creative process, welcoming all ideas. But at the same time, it's essential to give a very clear

roadmap of what his vision is. “The clearer your idea is, the less you have to actually manage people. People will serve that vision.” Also, if the vision is clear from the beginning, there is more space to change it along the way. Other, possibly better, ideas pop up during the process and can be taken in.

“You get more ‘square’ as you age. So I do what I can to stay fresh,” Ragnar says, and admits that in the movie business there is less risk of that than in many other fields, because there’s such a large group of people working together on the project.

The morale on the set is extremely important. There has to be a quiet work environment. “It all starts with the people you pick. I try to choose people that work well in a team. It only takes one person to ruin the morale. They have to be sympathetic and not complain much.” He’d rather pick someone that’s young and hungry, than someone who’s old and experienced and tired.

Ragnar has some work rules or principles in place when people work on the set. First and foremost, people must respect the work of the actors, who in his opinion do the most difficult job. They are vulnerable, put themselves out there and push themselves far. Ragnar wants to have a quiet, low-key environment, where people walk between places and talk, instead of shouting.

It depends on the project whether people’s roles are clearly defined. In large projects, they are. However, there are smaller projects where people must be able to cross over to other tasks that need to be done. The only time he has ever had to let someone leave was on such a project, where that person’s mentality was too strictly hierarchical and they didn’t see the need to be flexible.

In his work with creatives, especially actors, he’s guided by trying to work with their talent as much as possible. He’ll often spend months working with actors before the shooting begins. There’s a very personal relationship that develops, most between actors and director. In that relationship there needs to be trust. The director needs to be there for the actor and provide support. Working on artistic projects is unlike many other projects in that there are feelings involved. People open up and go deep within. It’s all about the human experience and the stories we have to tell. It’s emotional, personal and often they deal with difficult issues. So he’ll often end up working with the same people over again, because they have reached a point where they have a deep connection and don’t have to start from the beginning.

If it happens that someone starts behaving like a “primadonna,” Ragnar says it’s probably related to his/her own insecurity. “It’s not an overestimation of their talent, but rather that

they're insecure. The best actors out there are usually humble and comfortable to work with." His reaction will be to sit down with the person and talk, try to find out where the insecurity or frustration comes from. Usually it stems from something inside them, but affects the people around them.

## **4.2 Creativity**

### **Katrín Hall**

Choosing projects to work on can be done according to very different reasons. Sometimes a piece is a good choice because it challenges the dancers, sometimes it's something that has an obvious appeal to the audience, or it can be a project that is financially very feasible. It can also happen that projects bring together more than one factor, for example a piece that includes a known choreographer and also a strong connection to the audience.

For Katrín, it's important to always be "on the floor," even though she's not directing the piece. She likes to be present, available to the people and sometimes be very involved in the project they're putting on. As the artistic director, she also has the last say in all important decisions.

### **Guðmundur Jörundsson**

Guðmundur doesn't like brainstorming as a method. He prefers that everybody works on their own and then they meet and discuss. They did do one collection in the beginning together as a team, "and that was just a disaster." Since then he forms the idea on his own and then presents it to the team. At that point the team starts working on it and something starts happening. It gets edited and new ideas come in. But he's already formed the idea beforehand, which means there is a basis for everyone to work on. The vision has been decided by the leader and communicated to the team.

Part of this is the importance for him to get over the initial doubts about his idea and become fascinated by it when it's ready. At that point he can present it to the others with enthusiasm and they'll believe in it too.

Guðmundur believes in a culture where everyone on the team is a friend. The leader is not a "boss," but somebody that's on the floor with everyone. They have a casual culture, where people are free to joke around. "It's more likely that something's going to happen in that kind of atmosphere," he says and is referring to new ideas and innovations.



The fashion brand that they work under also provides a set of values and a vision that the team rallies behind. The brand has become defined and everyone on the team knows what it's about. This provides them with a common heading and vision. It's still open for change and they discuss between them elements that concern the brand itself. This again provides them with a space to form their common vision.

The culture he wants to have is a culture where people don't take themselves too seriously. He mentions a cultural difference where some of his (foreign) designers were protective of their design and didn't even want to allow school visits to the studio. In his opinion that's taking yourself too seriously.

### **Simón Hanukai**

At the start of a project Simón gets his creative team (the designers) together, in an effort to get everyone on the same page. He'll ask people to bring a couple of images that they connect to the piece they're about to work on, or a song or something else that comes to their mind. This opens up a dialogue on the project, people talk and express themselves. Through this, the team builds a common vocabulary, which enables them to work more easily together.

Even though the start of the project is a venue for everyone to bring something to the table and the whole project is an on-going process of creation where team members constantly bring in input, Simón underlines the importance of artistic leadership. "You have to start with something." The team needs something to guide it along and somebody to push it forward. Also, ultimately, the leader is responsible for the outcome.

Simón is very clear on his intention to build a culture within his team. He mentions three elements. Number one is to have a culture where anything is possible. "People have to have the feeling and the confidence that they can make something happen and that they're contributing something to it. The moment people shut down is where you know you're headed for disaster." The second element he talks about is rigour. Having an atmosphere that is lax and allows people to show up late, for instance, is not OK. It has to be rigorous and punctual. This goes both for the administrative way and the artistic work. The third point is again the importance of "we're all working together for this baby." It's the culture of "we're working for a common goal."

### **Ragnar Bragason**

Ragnar mentions two different types of processes for projects. One is where he comes up with complete idea on his own. He forms the idea in his mind and the rest of the process is a chase to

catch that original thought and put it in form. This applies much rather to dramatic pieces, and less to comedy. The other type of project is one where he has an idea and that idea serves as a base. He then spends long periods of time other actors and cowriters brainstorming ideas and developing characters and plot. After that he works again on the script alone and chooses the final elements. The second process is very organic and rewarding. And a lot of fun! The final outcome is much vaguer. He does more of the second type today. He says he's realised that time is precious and life is short. So he does it because he's closer to other people in the process and has more fun.

When it comes to finding a balance between artistry and money, he says that's not his favourite part. Especially since film is probably the most expensive art form. "You have to think practically. Some things you just can't do. Like a group scene with 7000 people and big stuff like that." That would just not happen. So he doesn't write that into his movies. "The practical thinking leaks into the artistic work. You know the frame and don't go outside it. Instead you try to do great things within that frame. You connect with and impact the viewer in a different way."

## ***4.3 Implementation***

### **Katrín Hall**

With the dance company, Katrín had to answer to the government and meet certain agreed upon goals, as it was the primary funder of the company. Those were figures that reflected income and audience numbers, for example. Katrín makes it very clear that you can't measure artistic success in money or audience numbers. So there were other factors that mattered more to her and the troupe.

The dance company's reputation and image mattered. The recognition that they received internationally and demand from abroad for the company (dancers, choreographers) was something that told her how good her company was doing. Objectives closer to home included reducing the number of free tickets as opposed to sold tickets. What success was most important for you personally? "The artistic success," she answers without hesitation. "What choreographers we worked with, what pieces we put up, what the dancers learned and got to do."

She says the main challenges she faced as artistic director of IDC were financial. Working within a very tight budget meant that she could never really relax and just do what they wanted. She had to plan intensely and far ahead and organise the projects in such a way that they could also make money of them, which they did by doing shows abroad. When getting foreign

choreographers and dancers to work with them, she had to employ her negotiation skills, and appeal to them using Iceland's small size and peculiarity and the company's character and specialty, because she couldn't pay them the full ticket.

### **Guðmundur Jörundsson**

The success factors for Guðmundur are primarily financial, or at least outwards signs that they're doing well. It's when he sees that they're reaching somewhere they were headed. He's happy that they managed to kick off a fashion brand in Iceland, which is a small and difficult market to work in. "I feel we've reached the goal we were going for, which was to be the largest fashion brand in Iceland." One of their initial goals was always to take the brand abroad, and they are now having talks with investors to make that happen.

His main challenges have been to be able to be clear on what he wants and what he thinks. To be able to tell someone when things are not working out, facing the issues in a small team. He also feels a lot of responsibility on him vis-à-vis his team, which are people that believe in the project and are giving it everything they've got. He has to set the example and keep up.

### **Simón Hanukai**

For Simón, working with a tight budget doesn't have to be an obstacle, so long as the creative team knows the parameters within which they work. They can do brilliant things, even on a small budget. But this information has to come from the leader and be communicated clearly. The roles, too, have to be clear from the beginning. If not, things can get muddy later on.

Like with budget, a timeline has to be clear from the outset. "You plan out as much as possible, and you give yourself more time than you need, because things will always slide and you'll need it later." Simón says it's important know your limits. This means knowing the organisation you're working within, the people around you, and knowing how much you can stretch things. This can vary greatly between projects. He takes two examples of projects he is working on. One is a project that he's had on-going with a group of people for 3 years and the other where he has 5 weeks to prepare everything and direct a whole piece. Some very different parameters apply to these two projects.

Simón mentions three different markers for success. Number one for him is the audience. "We're working in a community, not in isolation." If people feel that the hours spent enjoying the piece were worth it, he feels good about it. "They don't necessarily have to be happy, but they have to be challenged." He then asks himself whether he was happy with the process. Was

the creative process successful in creating this piece? Did he challenge himself and the team? The third marker for success is the artistic community. He wants to push his field. “Am I asking questions in the field that are important right now?” To him it’s important to be in dialogue with people around him in the artistic community.

When selecting new projects to go into, there are three options. Either the idea comes from himself and it’s something he can’t leave be or it’s a project proposed by other people he knows or it can be something offered to him by people he doesn’t know. If he knows and trusts the people that have proposed the idea and he will collaborate with on it, it’s a good bet. If the people behind the idea are unknown to him it’s down to the piece itself. “At the end of the day, it comes down to the audience. What experience will they have of the project?” He might also ask himself “What do I get out of it? Does it stretch me? Do I get to play with something I’ve always wanted to try out?”

When asked about what challenges face him in his role as a leader, Simón answers that these can be either artistic or logistical. Artistically, he has to ask himself “What am I missing? Where are my blind spots?” He’s good at certain things, but he admits to have blind spots. One of them is that he tends to be even too inclusive and get distracted by all the voices that he wants to include. They can distract him from the original idea. Logistical obstacles are easier to deal with. For example, the budget can be smaller than he likes. In that case, for example, it can be trickier to get the actors he wants for the piece.

Adding to this, settling for an idea too early is a challenge faces by many. He means that an idea sometimes needs more looking into, more research or there this a better approach than what’s sometimes selected at first. Also, there are challenges in collaboration. Who has a say in what element of the production? Sometimes people think that others will get a certain thing done. Responsibility over tasks can get blurred and cause confusion.

In the end, he adds that wearing the hats of the director, the writer and the producer becomes tiring, but it’s something that a lot of early to mid-career artists have to deal with. He says that there’s great need for project managers with an appetite for artistic projects.

## Ragnar Bragason

Ragnar says that when he was starting, he thought the end product, for example seeing the movie on the screen, was the measure of success. Now he feels that that's a milestone, but a final point. "You're not done after that. You want to go on and do something else." Also, the premiere is fun, but it's the day-to-day work, sitting down and writing a script, working with actors, that matters. "That's your life. It's not the product, but the journey there that counts."

A certain measure of success is also simply if people will be ready to finance more of his projects or work with him again. Something else that he can't ignore neither is the audience. If a 14-year-old girl from Korea sends him an email saying that he changed her life. That counts too. His products do matter. He doesn't care what kind of reaction his works get, as long as there is a reaction.

On selecting new pieces to work on, Ragnar says: "It has to be a challenge, a mountain that I have to climb." And he bases it on his weaknesses. He takes an example of his intense work with actors. At some point he realised that he was bad at that, so he focussed on that in his following projects. "If I sense an obstacle with myself, I'll try to put it in my next project."

He makes an effort to not fall into smugness and get too comfortable. That's a risk when you do something successful, he says. He points to a TV series he directed that was a big success and people wanted more. There was demand for more of the same. But he didn't want to do exactly the same. He made two other related series, but he made changes each time. So to summarise, it's important to do it for yourself, not for the demand that's out there. He has to challenge himself and take on projects because he sincerely wants to.

He mentions one big thing when it comes to the obstacles in his work. That's the instability in the movie sector in Iceland, where he works. It's hard to finance projects and the industry relies heavily on the Icelandic Film Fund. That fund gets its money from the government, and on that end, the amount can fluctuate rapidly, making for a very insecure environment to work in. It's very hard to plan long term, when you're not even sure about the fund's capacity for the next year.

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1 An atmosphere where everything's possible*

#### **Project culture and atmosphere**

All of the leaders interviewed for this project speak of project atmosphere, culture and workplace morale as something vitally important. This is further echoed in the literature on creative projects. This is understandable as these projects demand of the team members that they actively participate, and not only participate but *create*. In most cases there's an active process of creation going on the whole time, which is different from non-creative projects, where there is only a phase of ideas and creation. This means that the project environment is a place where people come together, open up and share their ideas, feelings and passions. Understandably, there's a need to establish an atmosphere where people feel comfortable and ready to open up and actively participate in the process. Hartman, Ashrafi and Jergeas studied several live entertainment projects and found that "[a]chieving a project spirit or culture is a strength of the live entertainment industry. The culture of project management on the entertainment industry appears to be based on the creative nature of the arts as opposed to technical issues. Many interviewees referred to human issues as vital to the success of projects (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998).

Guðmundur Jörundsson says it's very important to have an atmosphere where people are comfortable with speaking their mind and don't fear that their ideas will be taken down. He prefers an ambiance where the members of the team and the leader consider each other friends. It's a casual attitude where people "don't take themselves too seriously" and feel free to joke around. In that atmosphere it's much more likely that something creative is going to happen.

For Ragnar Bragason, morale on the set is extremely important and he establishes the base by putting down ground rules that centre around concentration, respect for other people's work and quietness on the set during filming. And he also mentions that one person on the team who's not tuned into the others can ruin the morale for the rest of the group, so it's a delicate balance.

Similarly, Simón places rigour high, setting the standard for the way his team works. Also, and perhaps more importantly, it has to be an atmosphere "where everything is possible."

Laurent Simon finds out from his study of the creative industries that "[t]he project manager believes in fun. In those cases, it is not a marginal consequence of the process; it is at the heart" (Simon, 2006). According to his findings and the sources he cites, having fun at work, that in

turn allows people more readily to do the work in a state of flow, seems to be a way of working that perfectly fits the younger creative generation today. “That is what “flow” is all about: enjoying the creative exploitation of the environment and the possibilities to express oneself through the mastery of the rules and constraints of the project” (Simon, 2006).

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is the author of the term “flow” that describes being immersed in one’s work and performing highly during that state. “Being “in flow” is the way that some interviewees described the subjective experience of engaging just-manageable challenges by tackling a series of goals, continuously processing feedback about progress, and adjusting action based on this feedback” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Being challenged by the project is thus essential to performing at one’s highest potential, as well having the skills to match it. Fullagar, Knight and Sovern did research on performance anxiety versus flow on 27 music students in a music department of a Midwest American university and found that

[f]low was more likely to occur for tasks where challenges and skills were balanced, whereas performance anxiety was associated with tasks where the challenge did not match the skills of the performer. These results confirm Csikszentmihalyi’s theory that the balance between challenge and perceived skills is an essential precursor to flow, even in the performance of a complex task such as playing a passage of music (Fullagar, Knight, & Sovern, 2013).

## ***5.2 It’s more than just work***

### **Challenge and passion at the workplace**

Challenges are something inherent in creative projects, at least if the subjects of this research and the sources cited are any reference to the arts as a field. People seem to go into creative projects with their full heart. They want to be challenged and they constantly want to learn new things. Several of the interviewees of this research say that this applies both to themselves and their team members. They select projects that are challenging and involve working with new tasks. They also ask a lot from their people, trying to provide them with new experiences and challenges. Katrín Hall, for example, says that part of her role as a leader is to help her dancers become better artists. She does this by providing them with opportunities to work with choreographers they haven’t worked with before, often renowned artists from abroad. In addition to asking a lot from her team, she asks a lot of herself too. She says she’s demanding of herself, not least because “it all starts with yourself.”

Simón asks himself at the end of a project if he was happy with the process itself and part of that is challenging himself and the team. When selecting a project, part of what he considers is

if the piece will ask of him something new: “What do I get out of it? Does it stretch me? Do I get to play with something I’ve always wanted to try out?”

Ragnar will actively choose projects that challenge weaknesses in himself that he’s become aware of: “If I sense an obstacle in myself, I’ll try to put that in my next project.” Also, it’s important to remember not to get lazy, even though you have some success. He tries to select projects that will lead him somewhere new, instead of getting stuck in the same routine.

Laurent Simon discovered the same mentality in the project he researched: “The project manager sets challenges. “Y Generation” expects to be challenged at work” (Simon, 2006).

People join artistic projects because they have a passion for what they do. As Katrín says so poignantly, it’s never ‘just work’ and if you start getting the feeling that people are there just because it’s their job, you know you’re heading off track. For Guðmundur, the largest motivation he can give to people is to allow them to work on this project, where they sincerely want to be working. So the work in itself includes great satisfaction for the team. Simón’s point about involving everyone on the team in the work is important, as it’s the link between people’s passion and the work they do. They bring their artistic talent and love for this work to the project, but the leader has to enable them to use it. For Simón, as long as people really feel that they’re being involved they will not lose their motivation and feel good in their work.

One might go as far as saying that the whole process of creating the final outcome becomes the goal in itself, such is the importance these project leaders attribute to it. Simón mentions the focus on process second to the effect his work has on the audience. He asks himself whether the process was successful. That includes whether the process *worked*; whether it was successful in creating this particular piece, which can be said to be a review of the work process. But it also includes questioning oneself on whether what they did as a team pushed them forward as artists. Did they cross a line that withheld them before? Did they *stretch* themselves? Ragnar places such importance on the process that he prefers to do projects that involve intense collaborative work with other artists, rather than doing work that are strictly solo endeavours. He says that the premiere of a movie, which could be defined as the end of a project, or at least project delivery, is simply a milestone and not the end of it.

Drawing on Lim and Mohamed’s model of project success, the macro viewpoint is about whether the end product works, usually looked at by users, owner and the general public. Applying this to creative projects, one could say that the users are the audience and the general public is the ‘talk on the street,’ as well criticism and professional recognitions such as awards, which are often a considered a metric of the quality of the work. Also, ticket sales, which indicate



if the work sells, are a measure of success as well, even though many things may have gone wrong in the preparation and the director is not happy with the process. The micro viewpoint concerns technical details, such as financial, organisational and human factors. It's the people working on the project ("owner/developer and contractor") who look at these details. In creative projects these could be said to be the artists and technical people who work with them. They will ask themselves: were the artistic and technical factors OK? Also a micro viewpoint success measure is the question about the process itself and whether it pushed the artists' limits, that the leaders interviewed here mention so often. Through the interviews, one almost got the feeling that if those factors were OK, that is if they challenged themselves with the work and broke ground in the artistic endeavour, then the rest was insignificant. This resonates with what Lim and Mohamed say about this measure of success. Speaking of developers and contractors, they say that "once they achieve their aspirations, they would consider the project to be a success, whether or not the completed project satisfies the user or stakeholder or not" (Lim & Mohamed, 1999).

Wateridge's six points on measuring success do not include artistic success. One could try to fit it under "All stakeholders are pleased while the project is on-going and by the result," but it's too big for it. It's more than just being 'pleased' with the process. There is such an importance in challenging oneself artistically and personally by pushing the boundaries of the art and enjoying the whole process, that it merits a definition by itself, perhaps more fitting to creative projects than other types. We're looking at a different definition of success, where the process is what matters. As Ragnar says about the months of work he does with actors before shooting starts, "that's your life. It's not the product, but the journey there, that counts." Guðmundur Jörundsson is an interesting exception from this, as he says he looks at how good the brand is doing and if they're getting recognition, as signs that they're successful. Perhaps the fashion industry is slightly different from the other three, as it's about making tangible products that need to sell.

One could say that one independent measure of success of a creative project is the personal and artistic development of the people involved, as well pushing forward the art. Katrín says the artistic success of a project is the most important element for her and her team, even ahead of timeliness, staying on budget and popularity among the audience.

To sum up, these leaders in creative projects place great significance in the artistic process itself, even sometimes above the outcome of the piece. Part of the artistic process is pushing

boundaries artistically and part of it is pushing the artists' limits (including the leader). They're in it for ruthless self-development and development of their art.

Finally, it is interesting to note that none of the interviewees of this research described timely project completion as a success factor, and some mentioned not finding it particularly challenging. This differs greatly from the results of Hartman et al.'s research on live entertainment, where they found a shared emphasis on time among different stakeholders of those projects. Perhaps a certain difference lies in the fact that they studied individual projects whereas this paper focuses on the managers and their projects in general.

### ***5.3 Recognise the parameters***

#### **Knowing and understanding the project environment**

Understanding the project parameters and being aware of the environment, including sponsors, organisations, venues, budget constraints are not new things to professional project managers. They are still important in creative projects, and maybe more so, due to the artistic ambitions of the team members and their need for clear directions. It's important for the leader to, first, understand the flexibility and the constraints of the project environment and, second, to communicate this clearly to the project team. For example, the budget can be small, but if it's communicated clearly and early great things can be created within the constraint.

An example from Ragnar Bragason's experience is the difference between smaller and larger projects. In smaller projects, team members need to show flexibility and manage tasks that are not typical to their experience. With larger projects, roles are more clearly defined. Knowing the structure of roles and responsibilities early on will better help the team adapt and work with it. His saying that "practical thinking leaks into artistic thinking" encapsulates the importance of this further, where he adds that the artistic endeavour of the project should be suited to its frame from the very beginning.

## 5.4 The project vision: seeing and communicating

### Vision, leadership and uncertainty

Despite describing their preference for a flat organisational structure and an open creative process, the interviewees almost all emphasize the importance of having a clear artistic vision in the project. A well-tuned team will be ready to employ their artistic talent to create the best work of art they possibly can, but they need direction. They need a vision that gives sense to and provides context for what they are going to do. And everyone needs to understand that vision. The role of the project leader is to communicate that vision as clearly as possible, and making sure the team members understand it completely.

Simón says that if this vision is known from the beginning and communicated to the team so that they get it, there's much less need for actually managing, because people are loyal to the vision and create according to it. His method of establishing a common vocabulary within the team is a way to facilitate this understanding. Laurent Simon finds that creative project managers sometimes have to finely tune themselves to each member of the team and explain the project using words that respective individuals connect with, since different individuals will be inspired by different things (Simon, 2006).

The exception from this is probably Ragnar's way of improvising and writing with his actors for a long period of time, building on his original idea. This eventually evolves into him working on the script alone, editing all the material that came through that collaborative process. On the other end is Guðmundur that had experience with a creative process involving the whole team without developing an original concept first. That ended in a "complete disaster" and since then he works on the idea himself first, passing through important stages, like the self-doubt he has about it, before getting through that and arriving at the "magical moment" where he sees it clearly and full-heartedly believes in it. At that point it's much easier to infect the rest of the team with that enthusiasm and belief in the idea. Katrín says it's "[m]ost important of all important things is that we all know where we're headed."

This also means drawing together different elements into a whole that makes sense for the team. As Laurent Simon explains it in his article, describing the project manager as *sense-maker*, "the PM makes sense out of the collective effort. She/he builds the team identity through the crafting of the situated collective understanding of what is at stake" (Simon, 2006). Similarly, at Pixar, the director of an animated film needs to have these capabilities of bringing together different elements into a whole:

What does it take for a director to be a successful leader in this environment? Of course, our directors have to be masters at knowing how to tell a story that will translate into the medium of film. This means that they must have a unifying vision—one that will give coherence to the thousands of ideas that go into a movie—and they must be able to turn that vision into clear directives that the staff can implement (Catmull, 2008).

Moving on to leadership styles, this data shows that it is important to foster honesty and openness into the work culture. Aside from that, the four people interviewed have quite different approaches. Katrín Hall prefers to be available to her team, while deeply participating in the work. She likes to be ‘on the floor’ as much as she can and often have a say in the creative work. Guðmundur has a very different style and prefers to give the members of the team space to work. He delegates tasks and backs off, trusting them to do their best. It has to be said though, that the way these two teams work are quite different. A group of dancers has different working methods than a design team. The dancers are a number of people that work tightly together, coordinating with each other’s bodies, and they might need more guidance, whereas the designers and other members of the fashion team are able to work independently on some tasks. Ragnar Bragason calls his style “diplomatic dictatorship,” but his method largely depends on the project’s type and size which method he uses. Diplomatic dictatorship for him means a certain mix of both, clear leadership on his behalf and a participative method where everybody can provide input. Simón looks at himself as a “facilitator,” where the main work and contents of the piece come from the whole group. He’s there to guide the team members and help them put their ideas forward.

Something to keep in mind despite all the common effort that’s involved in creative work is that the project leader (often director or other role) is responsible for the outcome in the end. That means that the leader can’t stray too far away from the work, allowing endless liberty to his team, because whether the finished ‘product’ is a movie, a play, or a season fashion line, one person will have the ultimate responsibility. Simón Hanukai mentions this in the context of the original idea he communicates the team. His ‘line’ has to be clear from the beginning, because he’s responsible in the end. Ragnar too says that despite all the participation of the group in the creative process, he’s the one that’s responsible for the outcome.

Setting an example is also part of being a creative leader. Guðmundur feels the weight of his role in his work. He knows the team looks up to him and follows his style. If he starts slacking off at work, it will soon infect others. Katrín demands much from herself, so she can demand the same from her team (“it all starts with you”).

Uncertainty and risk are factors that are important to consider when taking on a creative project. The start of a creative process is often a very open-ended one, where the final outcome is vague or even completely unknown. Sometimes the leader has a very clear idea of what the outcome should be, but more often than not the team works on spontaneously unfolding the next step. So a manager of a creative project has to be comfortable with risk and uncertainty. As Ed Catmull from Pixar puts it:

To act in this fashion, we as executives have to resist our natural tendency to avoid or minimize risks, which, of course, is much easier said than done. [...] If you want to be original, you have to accept the uncertainty, even when it's uncomfortable, and have the capability to recover when your organization takes a big risk and fails (Catmull, 2008).

## ***5.5 Break barriers of language, background and space***

### **A common vocabulary and communication**

Mentioned throughout this research and in the literature relating to artistic projects are the blockages that can be represented by people's diverse backgrounds, different vocabularies and the organisation of the workspace. Even though the members of a project are all of an artistic professional background, their work is subjective and even abstract, in that it involves working with ideas, concepts and other intangible things. So even though they share a certain degree of professional jargon, it's important to create a shared understanding of the ideas that are dealt with by developing a shared vocabulary. Simón, mentions this particularly, which is understandable as he works with some new people and deals with new ideas on each project. Katrín and Guðmundur work with the same troupe on many different projects. Ragnar either uses his common brainstorming/improvisation process with his actors and cowriters or forms the idea fully on his own first. Ed Catmull of Pixar describes a "natural class structure" that tends to evolve in organisations where one function is considered more valued than others. He also mentions the different languages that are spoken by different disciplines. "In a creative business like ours, these barriers are impediments to producing great work, and therefore we must do everything we can to tear them down" (Catmull, 2008).

Guðmundur describes the difference it made when his team moved together into one studio, whereas before they had been separated into two offices/spaces. He says communication flows much more smoothly and the morale is better. Their studio is even quite small for a team of 5, but he says that's better as it makes the team tighter. Catmull describes the great advantage the company has, benefitting from a building ("Steve Jobs' brainchild") with a central atrium, where

a cafeteria, bathrooms, mailboxes and meeting rooms are clustered in the same area. “It’s hard to describe just how valuable the resulting chance encounters are” (Catmull, 2008).

Communication styles on creative projects vary, according to the findings of this research and the literature reviewed. Simón and Guðmundur, for example, endorse an atmosphere where information flows freely among the team members. Laurent Simon’s study on creative industries found that in some projects, it’s very important to channel information flow through certain gate-keepers, to prevent misunderstandings and other complications (Simon, 2006), whereas at Pixar, it’s extremely important that everybody be able to speak to anybody, so as to encourage creative thinking and the flow of ideas (Catmull, 2008).

## ***5.6 There are feelings involved***

### **The people on the project**

Teamwork in creative projects can be an intimate venture, where people get close to each other emotionally and open themselves up. The work often requires such a level of involvement that interpersonal barriers must be removed. The ambiance must allow for an honest exchange of opinions and most members of the team participate by offering their ideas and reflections. Through the interviews in this paper it’s evident that this personal kind of work involves a lot of relationship building. This explains why leaders in such projects are very selective when it comes to casting or hiring people on projects. The kind of relationship that’s often required takes time to build and starting from scratch every time would mean a lot of work. These close relationships also mean that people learn a lot from each other, and perhaps on a personal note as well and not only professional. When working with people the leader has worked with before there is initial work to be done on establishing a vocabulary and breaking down the barriers mentioned earlier. Addressing relationships and trust, Ed Catmull says that getting talented people to work together effectively can be tough. “That takes trust and respect, which we as managers can’t mandate; they must be earned over time. What we can do is construct an environment that nurtures trusting and respectful relationships and unleashes everyone’s creativity” (Catmull, 2008).

Though built relationships are valuable in this kind of work, there is also value in taking in ‘new blood’. Ragnar says that there is always a risk of becoming smug and ‘square’ in one’s work and that he makes an effort to ‘stay fresh’. He says there is less risk of this in film projects, due to the large number of people that work on them. Simón selectively picks new people on his

projects as well as older teammates that he trusts, as he knows that it keeps the older ones 'on their toes'.

The creative project leaders interviewed had different opinions on dealing with 'primadonnas' on their projects, or people that have moments of inflated ego or take themselves too seriously. For Katrín, dancers are occupied with themselves and they need to be because they work so much with themselves and their bodies. To her, everyone is a primadonna. And sometimes not even enough. Artists sometimes need to be supported and encouraged to feel more secure. She also says they sometimes need attention and support, for example to get them grounded and take their mind off the work, when they get too caught up in it. To Ragnar, when people behave in that way, it's a sign of insecurity in them. In any case, a leader in a creative project must be alert to how their team members are feeling and tend to them, sometimes providing one-on-one assistance.

In a work environment that's intensely idea-driven and where many little artistic decisions have to be made in a day, a lot of honesty is needed. People need to be able to speak their mind openly and then accept the feedback. Both this factor and the tendency of people to take themselves seriously make it necessary to downplay people's ego. Simón's method of reminding people that it's about the product of their work and not about themselves is an interesting approach. He takes the focus away from people's own place and puts in the joint effort. Subtly asking those who behave like primadonnas to take on a mentoring role is another approach. At Pixar Animation Studio, they also put a lot of importance in valuing everyone's opinion on the work. People at all levels support each other. Their daily review process, a meeting they call "the brain trust," expresses this:

This group consists of John and our eight directors [...]. When a director and producer feel in need of assistance, they convene the group (and anyone else they think would be valuable) and show the current version of the work in progress. This is followed by a lively two-hour give-and-take discussion, which is all about making the movie better. There's no ego. Nobody pulls any punches to be polite. This works because all the participants have come to trust and respect one another. They know it's far better to learn about problems from colleagues when there's still time to fix them than from the audience after it's too late. The problem-solving powers of this group are immense and inspirational to watch (Catmull, 2008).

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that leaders of creative projects definitely carry wisdom that is worth sharing with managers in other fields. The effort that these leaders and their teams place on challenging and developing themselves as artists is fascinating. To focus on themselves and the process of the project can certainly be a lesson for project managers in general, whatever the subject matter. There are also certain characteristics that make many of these lessons exclusive to creative projects. The intense emphasis on an open, emotionally intimate work atmosphere might not be necessary in non-creative projects, for example, although a lot can be learned from it.

This paper takes on but four people and four artistic fields. It would be interesting to see further research into other types of art and creative projects. A quantitative study of how prevalent these trends really are across a broader spectrum and over a longer period of time would also be intriguing. In preparation for writing this paper, topics such as project culture, uncertainty and risk, and communication within a project were not studied specifically, but seem to be vital to the success of creative projects, according to these findings. Further study into this interesting section of project management would therefore do well to cover these expressly.

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## 8. Appendix

The following is the questionnaire used as a basis for each of the four interviews in this research.

### **Leadership**

1. In your opinion, do you have a certain leadership style?  
*Or "How do you approach the leadership role"?*  
*Or "Do you feel that the leadership style influences the creative, artistic part"?*
2. What methods do you use in building a cohesive team?
3. Is there something done (in your team/group) to increase the artist's contentment/happiness in their work? Are they compensated or otherwise supported in that sense?
4. How is each and every person found a place within the team?
5. How do you prefer to work with creative types?  
*Or "Any particular methods or ways of communicating or behaving that you have adopted"?*
6. How do you deal with it if someone on the team/group behaves like a "primadonna" or has a "rock star attitude"?

### **Creativity**

7. What are your methods in brainstorming or coming up with new ideas?
8. Do you consciously try to build a certain culture withing the group you work?
9. How do you strike a balance between creative thinking and the financial frame that restricts you?
10. How do you find the middle way between artistic creation and the implementation/execution?

### **Implementation**

11. How do you define "success"?
12. How do consider/take on new projects? What are your most important criteria when choosing new works?
13. What are the main challenges you face in your role as a leader (director/producer/curator)?
14. Do you ever difficulty finishing tasks by deadlines?

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