



**The playful project manager:
A case study of theatre director
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Thesis of 10 ECTS credits
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“Directing can be very schizophrenic because it demands creativity and openness but at the same time a rather strict management approach both because of the scale of the project team and because everything has to come together at a very specific point. The work procedures are very complex but at the same time the most pressure is on the artistic expression which is where experience plays the most role”
- Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, April 5th, 2016 -

THE PLAYFUL PROJECT MANAGER: A CASE STUDY OF THEATRE DIRECTOR ÞORLEIFUR ÖRN ARNARSSON

Hildur Guðný Káradóttir

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ABSTRACT

This research's objective is to determine if and what project management can gain from the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson. A case study methodology was utilized in order to answer the research question. Þorleifur's latest project, *Njála*, has received exceptional reviews for untraditional and creative interpretation of one of the most beloved Icelandic saga. A variety of methods were used in order to gather information about Þorleifur's methods. Personal interviews, documentary series about Icelandic theatre productions, television interviews and the author's personal experience of the show were utilized to reach a conclusion. Results of the research indicate that Þorleifur's methods are worth sharing and that the field of project management can gain by incorporating his methodology. His modern ideas about the role of the director, his ability to build trust and motivate the project team, his ability to determine the appropriate division of labour, his emphasis on inspiring and sustaining a creative environment and his ability to give a project team full freedom to explore can really be an important addition to the field of project management.

Keywords: creativity, improvisation, social competences, theatre directing, project management.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a constantly changing environment where project managers face increasing competition and complexity, the importance of creative solutions rapidly grows. Constructing an environment where creativity and out of the box thinking can flourish and finding ways to encourage each individual within the project team to unleash their thoughts and ideas, may be one of the greatest challenge project managers will ever encounter. However, for theatre directors, this is the reality of every day's work. The author of this article therefore wonders if project managers should look at theatre directors for inspiration on managing creativity within project teams.

In the author's mind, the process of staging a theatrical performance is in many ways like managing a product development project. This is because both processes often start with an unclear vision which develops throughout the process. New ideas, solutions and possibilities appear as creativity flows and the expectations of the outcome therefore follows. The role of the theatre director (the project manager) is to manage resources within time and budget in order to reach specific objectives. However, the projects cannot be executed in the same way repeatedly which means that theatre directors constantly have to invent new ways of managing their projects.

Growing up in the theatre is the real inspiration for this research. The author was first introduced to theatre directing at an early age. The instant admiration and fascination with the role led to countless spying sessions of stage rehearsals in order to get a better glimpse of the action. Sitting in the dark, quite, motionless, monitoring every movement and word was like nothing else. The creative, challenging and dynamic environment always left the author in awe. Later in life, especially during the past two years, the author's growing interest in project management has led her back to the dark backrows of a stage rehearsal. The reason for that is the many similarities between the roles of theatre directors and project managers. The author simply had to get another chance for a spying session in order to detect if project management can gain something from the captivating methods of theatre directing. Watching Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson's documentary series *Stóra sviðið* (The big stage) was when the initial idea of the research topic became finalized. The series showcased a magical insight into the world of theatre by following different staging processes from the initial script reading to the opening night. Witnessing the staging of *Njála* and the directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson instantly interested the author.

Þorleifur is a renowned director within the Icelandic and German theatre academy (Reykjavík City Theatre, 2015). His emphasis on motivating and activating all members within the project team has led to tremendously creative and sometimes controversial outcomes. His untraditional way of bringing stories to life allow the audience to perceive classical stories in a whole new light.

Njála, one of the most beloved Icelandic saga, was premiered at the Reykjavík City Theatre on December 30th, 2015. The 13th century saga has been interpret in countless different ways throughout the years and therefore the challenge was to find a new approach in order to capture the audience's attention.

The objective of this research is to answer the twofold research question: "Can project management gain from the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson?" and if yes "What can project management gain for the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Project management within the entertainment industry has been the topic of interest in a number of studies. Their findings are very similar, that the entertainment industry rarely applies project management techniques (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998) or only uses basic planning and analysis (Ingason & Thordarson, 2009). However most producers, directors and actors are familiar with Gantt charts and basic goal structures (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2007). The Icelandic theatre community for example uses general planning processes, both intentionally and unintentionally. That means that productions are split into phases and the theatre director proceeds through each phase in a particular order (Ingason & Thordarson, 2009).

There might be various reasons for the limited use of project management techniques within the entertainment industry. One is that directors and actors hardly characterize themselves with modern project management terms since the history of theatre is much longer than the history of modern project management (Lehner, 2009). Another might be that managers in the live entertainment industry tend to place a greater emphasis on human issues rather than utilizing practical techniques (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998).

Whatever the reason might be there is no doubt that the industry could use project management to the fullest and even to a further extent than many conventional organizations because of how project oriented the industry actually is (Ingason & Thordarson, 2009). However the same goes for the opposite because there are many interesting techniques and methods within the entertainment industry that can be utilized in traditional project management.

2.1 Carnival of creativity

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) once said: “If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it.” Meaning that it is important to have the courage to share absurd ideas because they might actually lead to something spectacular. However, in reality, managers often send out the message that failure and mistakes are not tolerated, which can completely throw creativity for a loop (Peters, 1989). Creating an environment of psychological safety where people do not fear being humiliated or punished for sharing their ideas, are not afraid to ask questions, raise concerns or even to make mistakes is a very important factor for creativity (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

According to a book called “The best place to work” pressure is another limitation to creativity. Establishing an environment that promotes play, which will alleviate pressure and enable relaxation, will, in the end lead to greater creativity. Video games are a good example of this because players get instant feedback, rewards and motivation while playing which makes them want to get better and play longer. The same goes for many other types of games, for example soccer and improvisation (Friedman, 2014).

There are many positives to engaging all members within the team to participate and contribute imagination rather than executing a top-down management style. Some might

say that team members within projects that have been managed by encouraging full participation and shared ownership are more likely to be proud of their work rather than if a less liberal management style is used.

Yet there is understandably a fundamental tension between the need for stability and the need for creativity within any organization (Goel & Singhal, 2015). Of course the balance between the two is important, but organizations should always look towards the future (Chandler, 1962) which is where creativity is the key factor towards success. This is yet another reason for why nurturing a creative environment where ideas can be tested and developed is such an important task for every project manager (Trott, 1998).

However, the most creative work sometimes misses the mark. In a television interview with Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson (2015) he explained how different expectations can lead to different thoughts of the project's outcome, especially in projects that are based on artistic expression. This is because art is not able to serve preconceived ideas of the outcome because it must have the ability and courage to provoke and push boundaries. In continuance Þorleifur admits that Njála has a surprising and unexpected factor. As an example he mentions the Njála-Carnival which is a part of the research laboratory approach, the project work was mostly based on.

Despite the surprise, Njála has received exceptional reviews and the great demand for tickets has pushed the final day of performance into next season. Having seen the show on April 3rd 2016, it is safe for the author to say that the audience receives an entire night dedicated to the Njála experience. The show lasts up to five hours in total starting with the Njála-Carnival in the theatre's foyer two hours prior to the show. The staged performance itself lasts up to three hours with one interval. The Njála-Carnival guests are offered traditional Icelandic soup filled with lamb, barley and root vegetables while listening to theoreticians reading from Njála and other related books. The theatre also provides costumes and props related to the show which guests can try out or even wear during the show. Finally, guests can watch a live broadcast from the make-up and hair department and see dancers from the Icelandic Dance Company warm up on stage while the storyteller of the show reads from Njála. This means that the audience has entered a certain mindset before the show starts which in the writer's opinion made the experience even greater.

2.2 Improvement by improvisation

Many might think improvisation is limited to the creative industries. However, recent studies show a growing interest in adjusting theatre improvisation techniques to different fields of work in order to boost creativity. Improvisation has been linked to various business settings (Kat, 2002) such as management (Crossan, 1998) and innovation (Larsen & Bogers, 2014) (Vera & Crossan, 2005) and even education (Aylesworth, 2008). These researches all lead to the same conclusion, that improvisational techniques can be applied in many different settings.

The origin of improvisational theatre traces back to the 16th century when Italian *commedia dell' arte* acting troupes travelled all over Europe to perform improvisational theatre (Schmitt, 2012). Today, improvisational methods are still recognized as one of the most used tool to develop scripts, characters, scenes and other parts of theatre performances (Jokinen, 2012).

Although practising improvisation might seem frightful for some people, the guidelines of the method are rather simple, to act without planning anything ahead. Successful improvisation relies on several rules and an understanding between the players (Aylesworth, 2008). The most important rule is called “yes and...” (Halpern, Close, & Johnson, 1952) which is fundamental for improvisational success (Aylesworth, 2008; Crosson 1998). The rule bases on two things, accepting and adding to the creation. Improvisers therefore must agree with each other to a full extent. If one for example asks the other a question, the other must respond positively (agree to the proposal) and then provide additional information, no matter how small. In this way, each improviser creates a building block which in the end will automatically lead to a complete creation which neither of them had planned. Saying “yes but...” will stop any continued growth while an empty “no” erases the block that has just been established. The rule provides a relaxing atmosphere because the fear of rejection, negativity or denial are not present (Halpern, Close, & Johnson, 1952). Other examples of improvisation rules include embracing mistakes and having a present focus (Robson, Pitt, & Berthon, 2011). However it is good to keep in mind that improvisation takes practise and a good director who is able to detect if specific improvisation exercise, which can for example build trust or confidence, are necessary (Aylesworth, 2008).

2.3 The mindful project manager

Managers leading project within the entertainment industry place great emphasis on human issues (Hartman, Ashrafi, & Jergeas, 1998). According to Georg von Krogh (1998) the most important behavioural aspects in relationships can be categorized into five different dimensions. They are mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, leniency in judgement and courage. These dimensions are all essentially human, emotional and personal qualities conducive to caring for others, showing support, taking risks and not being penalised for trying things that may not work (Gammack, Hobbs, & Pigott, 2011).

Consistent with previous literature, Hwang and Burgers (1997) research concluded trust as a key element of interaction between individuals who will benefit from cooperating with each other, but at the same time have to worry about being taken advantage of by one another. Therefore trust and fear are tightly connected to one another in a rather interesting way. According to Hwang and Burgers (1997) trust has the capability to reduce fear in cooperative behaviour and that full trust can even eliminate all fear. Trust in management can similarly reduce fear of being betrayed, deceived or easily replaceable, in other words, the fear of losing one's unique value (Renzl, 2008). Therefore trust in management allows employees to focus on important tasks in order to add value to their organizations (Mayer & Gavin, 2005).

The International Project Management Association or IPMA publishes a competence baseline for project managers. The latest version (ICB 4.0) consists of 29 competences that are divided into three different areas; perspective, people and practise. The baseline is a global standard of the competences required by individuals working in the field of projects, program and portfolio management. Hence, they have been acknowledged by the association, as important qualities for effective project management. The competences related to people consist of the personal and interpersonal competences required to successfully participate in or lead a project (IPMA - International Project Management Association, 2015).

Table 1: IPMA competences related to people

Self-reflection and self-management	Teamwork
Personal integrity and reliability	Conflict and crisis
Personal communication	Resourcefulness
Relationships and engagement	Negotiation
Leadership	Results orientation

The demand for behavioural competences of project managers and team members have become more pronounced in recent years (IPMA - International Project Management Association, 2006). This means that the success of projects largely depends on competences such as personal communication, teamwork and resourcefulness.

Examples of desirable competences are the abilities to reflect on one's own emotions, set personal goals, create an open and creative team environment, build relationships, communicate accurate and consistent information to the whole team and stimulate and steer the team to realize its optimal results (IPMA - International Project Management Association, 2015).

3. METHOD

The objective of this research is to evaluate if and what project management can gain from the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson. A qualitative case study methodology, which bases on studying complex phenomena within certain contexts, was selected as the most appropriate method to acquire knowledge and an understanding of the directing methods in question (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Information was gathered from:

- Personal interviews performed by the author on April 5th, 2016.
- Stóra sviðið - documentary series which showcased the staging process of Njála.
- Menningin - television interview with Þorleifur in 2015.
- Leikstjóraspjall - online interview with Þorleifur in 2013.
- The author's personal experience of the show.

3.1 Participants

Participants for the personal interviews were selected by the purposive sampling method which means that both individuals were carefully selected by the author. The sampling was based on selecting participants who had opposite roles within the project team with the aim of gathering information from different perspectives. The selected sampling consisted of:

- Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, theatre director
- Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, leading actress

Since this research is based on a case study of Þorleifur, he was evaluated as the most qualified person to explain his own methods and management style. However, Brynhildur was invited to participate in order to support Þorleifur's statements and beliefs and to prevent the great limitation of only interviewing the person behind the methods in question. Her participation also provided useful information about how the methods worked on the project team.

Kristín Eysteinsdóttir, the director of the Reykjavík City Theatre, was contacted in order to present the research and request for cooperation and support. Her response was very positive and she provided contact information of the selected sampling. In continuance both individuals were contacted and asked to participate in the research. Both participants only received information about the research question to prevent the risk of influencing the results. Both participants agreed to participate in the research and interviews were scheduled in cooperation with them.

Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, producer of Stóra sviðið documentary series, was contacted to gain access to the series and ask for approval of usage. He showed a great interest in the research and provided the author full access to the appropriate episodes.

Ilmur Stefánsdóttir, set designer of Njála and therefore a team member in the project, was also contacted with the aim of getting certain statements from the main interviews confirmed.

3.2 Collecting and processing

The personal interviews were prepared beforehand by listing down the questions that needed to be answered. Some questions were used in both interviews but others were dependant on participants because of their different roles within the project. The questions were designed to encourage the participants to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences. Open-ended questions were used in order to gain as detailed information as possible. Participants were not interrupted mid-sentence and phrases such as “what do you mean by” and “how so” were used to encourage participants to dig deeper for answers and to ensure the right understanding of what they really meant.

The interviews were unstructured meaning that their format was flexible depending on the course of the conversations. The prepared list of questions was therefore only used as a memory list that guided the interviews (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2005). Both participants were interviewed on April 5th, 2016 at Stofan, a quite coffee house in Reykjavík, and both interview lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

Interviewing both participants on the same day at the same place was important to the research in order to prevent the risk of discrepancies in the results if something would for example happen during the time in between the two interviews.

Both interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. In continuance the recordings were transmitted onto paper for a subsequent analysis. The data, including from the documentary series and official interviews, was processed by detecting certain themes of repeated words and emotions.

3.3. Limitations

The purposing sampling method is a possible limitation to this research because the results are directly linked to which participants are selected. The same could apply for the scheduling details of the interviews because dates, time of day or even place can lead to different results. The number of participants might be a methodological shortcoming because the personal experience of more participants could have resulted in an even deeper understanding of the topic. Lastly, there is often a possibility of misinterpretation when interviews and personal experience is used for gathering information. For example the author can jump to conclusions or draw assumptions about something that was not explained well enough or not asked about.

4. RESULTS

4.1 The process – a laboratory approach

Following are the core elements to Þorleifur's method, gathered from the different research methods.

- An individual meeting with each member of the project team where the director talks about his work and tries to detect individual interest in characters and scenes.
- A kick-off group meeting with the whole project team where the goal of the project and the basics of the process are presented.
- The process is divided into two defined phases.

Phase one - research work:

- Vision of final product is unclear.
- Schedule is not fixed. Team can select tasks for the day.
- Division of labour is not defined but slowly appears according to individual interest that the director aims to detect at this stage.
- Basic script is only used as a guideline. The team has full freedom to change it.
- The whole team shows up every workday. Teamwork is important.
- Improvisation with emphasis on “yes and...” used to develop characters and scenes.
- Complete freedom to work on what each team member is interested in.
- Important to motivate creativity and inspire and sustain the right atmosphere.
- Different components of the show are developed separately.
- Pressure on the team to deliver material.
- No decisions are made and new ideas are welcomed.
- Uncertainty and fear of the unknown are the biggest challenges.
- Important to build trust and belief in the process among team members.

Phase two - artistic work:

- Vision of final product becomes clearer.
- More focus on the schedule.
- Division of labour is defined according to individual interest.
- The whole team still shows up every workday. Teamwork is important.
- New ideas still welcomed even though characters and scenes have better developed.
- Different components of the show come together.
- Most pressure on the director to deliver the final product.
- Final decisions are made but new ideas are still welcomed.
- Uncertainty and fear diminish. Trust and belief in the process grows.
- Division of labour fully is defined.

4.2 Management style

Þorleifur believes that the stereotypical manager who collects power and demands being the only one in charge is based on ideas of old fashioned patriarchy and male dominance. The way he sees it, he is simply hired to create a show which in a way gives him power. However he would rather like to call it responsibility. He then chooses to “give the power away” which simply means to show the project team complete trust (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016). In his opinion this results in shared ownership of the project which he thinks is much greater than if one or maybe none would claim ownership of it. Brynhildur agrees with that and also adds how proud she is of the project because she experiences how much she has put into it (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5rd 2016). Þorleifur believes that managers, no matter in what industry, who are confident in themselves and their work choose to hand the power over to the project team instead of being in everyone’s business. In his opinion it takes a very special type of fearful egomaniac to think that the result will always be better if he/she is the only one in charge, rather than allowing the whole team to participate (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016).

In Brynhildur’s opinion Þorleifur helped those who felt lost and approached people within the team as an equal, not as a dictator or a teacher. She believes those are important qualities to have because people can simply just lock up or lose the willingness to work for directors who yell, micromanage or use power to get what they want, because the spark and the magic disappears. This is why the importance of good direction is essential. Brynhildur for example explains the process as being in the eye of a storm, not being able to identify what is really going on. While Þorleifur, who is mostly observing, is able to pinpoint all the little details that will in the end come together and make the show. Brynhildur also believes having a director who always says “yes and” instead of “not but” is really important for the process (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016). Þorleifur thinks promising actors full freedom to create without meaning it is like providing freedom but slamming chains on as soon as someone wants to exploit. He believes the fear of rejection is the reason why so many actors are afraid of allowing themselves to go all in. Therefore it is very important to build trust within the team (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016).

Þorleifur believes the theatre has great potential and possibilities that are not being explored because of the tools actors are provided with. These tools can quickly convert into crutches that only get in the way and even become restrictive. Therefore he thinks it is important to have the patience to stick through times when people become angry at him. He believes in his directing methods and therefore thinks it is much better to motivate people to fight their own personal battles rather than placing band aids on whenever people are not happy with something. Because in the end, the push will bring something great out of people. To trust that people will find their own way to overcome the obstacle but being able to guide them with the right things at the right time is therefore very important in his opinion (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016).

4.3 Assembling a creative team

From the early start, Þorleifur had a clear goal of researching the story in order to cast light on the Icelandic nation's identity. Although he was unsure about how the outcome would be he had plans on how to approach the project. Since the staging of *Njála* was mostly about the artistic expression it was not suitable for the project team to simply read and analyse the book in order to reach the goal of the project. Therefore the process started with a laboratory approach rather than a traditional script (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016). At the kick-off meeting Þorleifur announced that the team was going on a journey with the aim of honouring the Icelandic nation and create a *Njála-Carnival* (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016a).

In Þorleifur's opinion, the selection of the project team is the most important factor in order for the process to succeed. This is because the process bases on giving team members the full freedom to experience with new ideas and interpret the story (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5rd 2016) Ilmur Stefánsdóttir fully agrees with that and thinks it is wonderful for artists to work with Þorleifur (Ilmur Stefánsdóttir, personal communication, April 26th 2016). However, everyone is not able to work according to such methods. Having the right knowledge and experience to tackle the tasks at hand are therefore crucial because the team's input is vital for the process to sustain (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5rd 2016).

Having selected the project team, the real work begins. At the beginning of the process Þorleifur does not have a clear vision how the final outcome will be. This is because gathering as many opinions, perspectives and ideas before the final decisions are made is the fundamental aspect of the process (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016; 2013). Starting with a clear vision of the final product, would therefore really eliminate the creative freedom of the team and the results would possible reflect one man's vision. Because of this, new ideas are welcomed throughout the whole process, even during the phase of performance. This means that the team is allowed to improvise during a stage performance which leads to a different show every time. The reason why Þorleifur likes to leave his work open for changes is because he does not think it is suitable to present a fixed performance in the theatre. In his mind the audience is such an important aspect and for the actors to have the ability and freedom to play with the audience will make the show very organic and lively (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016; 2013). Brynhildur also mentions the importance of playing with the audience because in her opinion the performance really takes place between the stage and the audience (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

Not selecting which roles the actors should play is another example of the same methodology. As a part of the process Þorleifur wanted to keep the option of roles open in order to detect which characters the actors were most interested in. This means that actors are not limited in any way to certain characters and could interpret and participate in developing different characters and scenes (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016) (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016b). Teamwork was therefore an essential part of the process. In addition Þorleifur asked all team members to

attend all rehearsals which led to great team cohesion (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

Þorleifur believes it is important to respect the fact that every member within the team is an artist. Therefore everyone has to have the freedom to practise their craft without limitations. As an example Þorleifur made the bold decision to allow Brynhildur to withdraw from fully participating in the improvisation process. The reason for this was because it was hard for Brynhildur to develop and build her character Njáll, a very vice and passive character who likes to sit, watch and wait till his time comes rather than being in the middle the chaos. Brynhildur could therefore not participate in a process “where others were doing cartwheels screaming” (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016) (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

Þorleifur also inspired Sunneva Weissappel, costume designer and stylist, to stay true to who she is as an artist and dream big rather than just sewing clothes for the show. She provided wigs, hats, meat body suits for the actors to play with and according to Brynhildur’s personal interview the team never knew what would come next. There were so many different outfits that Þorleifur had trouble with finding time for the actors to change clothes. As an example of the importance of giving people artistic freedom and to welcome everyone’s ideas, Sunneva came up with the idea of creating a whole scene of garment changing which became a part of the show (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

The same goes for Ilmur Stefánsdóttir, set designer who used the book of Njála as an inspiration to create six different stage sets. In her opinion, Þorleifur gave her complete freedom to puzzle the sets into the show, as it was being created. Therefore the sets were not literally placed where they were supposed to but much rather used as symbols which she detected from the book. As an example the famous “mowed meadows and pink fields” appeared as pink linoleum. Gunnar’s fatal decision to ignore his exile appears as a huge ship which is a metaphor for him never sailing from Iceland (Ilmur Stefánsdóttir, personal communication, April 26th 2016). Þorleifur was very satisfied with the outcome because Ilmur provided many different components which the actors could play with in order to develop new scenes (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th) (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016c).

4.4 Facing fear by building trust

Growing up in the theatre and witnessing how much of its work is tightly connected with fear is the inspiration for Þorleifur's directing method. In his opinion, fearing the staging process is very understandable because the outcome will in the end become public. Fear of the process is therefore mostly related to the audience opinions. However Þorleifur believes that fear should not be categorized as good or bad because by simply admitting fear as a fact is the only way people can start to work through it (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

The only way to overcome fear is to disconnect the ego from the idea of the results. Rather than creating a show with the vision that everyone will like it, which would automatically reflect my own character. I do my best and only take responsibility for my own work but not the audience reaction. I think that someone who gives a gift with the right motive is not to blame if the receiver does not like it. The giver can still be confident about the gift. Creating a chain of artists where everyone agrees that the art is not about the results but the process like life itself, allows a separation between the decision making process and the research process, in the making of a show (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

One of the biggest challenges Þorleifur faced while directing *Njála* was managing the team's fear and anxiety. Therefore this mentality was certainly helpful especially at the beginning of the process when uncertainty was the leading effect of the fear (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016) Although Brynhildur would absolutely like to work with Þorleifur's methods in the future she admits she gets anxious simply by thinking about it. This is because she thought the process was very challenging even exhausting both physically and emotionally, yet well worth it. In her mind, people will always experience uncertainty and fear when working with such new methods (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016). As an example Unnur Ösp Stefánsdóttir, actress and a part of the project team of *Njála*, explains how much pressure and insecurity she experienced during the process despite her many years of theatre experience. She felt as everyone was better prepared and more conscious about what was going on and the thought of inability to perform often crossed her mind (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016c).

Þorleifur had long private conversation with Unnur Ösp and other team members who needed to ask questions and explain their feelings towards the process. Unnur Ösp explained how horrid the experience was for her, which was unfortunate because she had been looking forward to working with Þorleifur for two years. She also explained that she was used to working in very different ways and was uncomfortable with not having an assigned role at the beginning of the process. She felt as if she had to compete with other team members in order to get a role and thought it was hard not being able to develop a given character from the early start (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016) (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016c).

The point was not to create a competition or conflict, but sometimes art is about walking on dangerous roads which can result in fear (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016). The competition of roles did not exist although people worked hard towards the roles they were most interested in (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

Þorleifur simply listened to Unnur Ösp, admitted she was fully entitled to her own opinions and allowed her to formulate what she was thinking and feeling, which was enough to resolve the issue (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016). When Unnur Ösp overcame her problems her spirit lifted and she really started to enjoy the process (Þorsteinn J. Vilhjálmsson, 2016c).

However, trust is the fundamental factor for this type of communication and teamwork to be possible. For Þorleifur the selection of the project team should always be based on who you trust and believe in. That is how the director is able to hand the power over to the project team and trust that they will do a great job without having to be in everyone's business. The team can then feel the trust from the director which will result in a mutual trust (Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson, personal communication, April 5th 2016). Brynhildur believes that the trust between the director and the actors is one of the biggest reason for the project's success. Having a director who never doubted the team's talent or ability to perform was a constant motivation to do better. Everyone could sense the trust Þorleifur had towards the team and he never micromanaged or tried to put his mark on anything which was very liberating. She also welcomed Þorleifur's positivity and openness to new ideas. In her opinion he team was fully aware of who was in charge without constantly being reminded of it by the use of force or negativity. She personally completely trusted Þorleifur which made the process much easier and less scary for her (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

Not everyone is able to use this method. Þorleifur is like a big baby, he is grounded but yet his head can completely be on Jupiter. And you really want to follow him there because you know that he has an oxygen tank which he will share. And when we will arrive on Jupiter and he realizes that there is nothing there to use we will just go back and there is nothing wrong with that. While others might just decide that the team is going to Jupiter and argue that everyone can breathe there even though you try to tell them otherwise because they never admit their mistakes" (Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir, personal communication, April 5th 2016).

5. DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the objective of this research is to detect if and what project management can gain for the directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson. The results strongly suggest various ways in which his methods can be utilized when managing projects outside the entertainment industry. However, the method strictly relies on the person applying it, which means that specific mentality and certain characteristics are important for the method to succeed.

The author believes it is not possible to literally define Þorleifur's method because it cannot be based on a fixed process that is performed repeatedly in the same way over and over again. Therefore his method is very organic, meaning it can be customized to different types of projects in order for the most effective outcome. It is obvious how much thought Þorleifur has put into his method. It is intertwined with his personal characteristics and his self-reflective view on what kind of director he likes to be. Hence, it is much rather a philosophy that he likes to work according to rather than a defined systematic strategy. For him this is more about common sense which might be the reason for why he does not think his methods are untraditional.

The two phases of the process are the perfect example of how versatile Þorleifur is as a theatre director. He is aware of how important both relationship- and task orientation is to theatre directing. Although the two aspects are very different, both have to work in order for the project to succeed. He stays true to the process and shows consistency throughout. He for example was not capable of making decisions at the beginning of the process because he had announced that everyone within the team would have the freedom to participate in research work before any decisions were made. He therefore could not justify any decision making which shows that he believes the same goes for the whole team, including himself. He stays true to his methods and does not allow himself to behave differently from the rest of the team.

Þorleifur is aware of how his directing style can affect the whole project team. He especially keeps that in mind during the second phase of the process when pressure rises and directors sometimes start yelling, as Brynhildur mentioned in her personal interview. By being aware of that unfortunate misstep and deciding to avoid it is an example of self-management in order to keep the right atmosphere alive. When conflict or crisis occurs, he solves the problem by giving people time to explain their feelings, listens and tries to understand the real meaning behind their issues. He believes that is more important than taking real action right away because sometimes people simply need to express themselves for the issue to disappear. He sticks to his method and helps those who are having a hard time working according to it. He manages fear in a way that it can be used, meaning even though fear is a challenge or even a crisis in somebody's mind, he uses it as inspiration. He is also not afraid to talk about his own feelings, admit mistakes or ask questions when he does not have the solution because in his mind there is no room for growth without admitting fear and self-doubt. He respect each individual within the team as artists and does not try to manipulate anyone for his own advantage. Instead he encourages people to be themselves because in the end, it will make the final product even richer. At the same

time, he stays true to himself as an artist which is an example of personal integrity. He believes in his methods and is honest about what he is good at and what he needs help with which makes him a very approachable project manager.

Porleifur's thoughts on responsibility are rather interesting. Instead of taking full responsibility for the outcome he disconnects himself and the team from it and focuses more on the work itself. The separation creates a more relaxed environment where creativity can flourish. However he delegates the responsibility of the work itself to the project team. It is interesting to witness how much pressure the project team experiences because in Porleifur's mind, the most important thing is that everyone will do their best. He might think it has a soothing effect on the team but in the author's mind it is hard to define what that really means. There is always room for improvement and therefore team members might constantly try to figure out ways to better themselves. Also people have a hard time with judging their own performance, meaning that each team member might be in a constant battle with whether their work is good enough or not. However, from a project management perspective, the delegation of responsibility is very effective. Rather than taking everything on himself, he delegates, guides, motivates and inspires his project team. This results in more pride within the project team because every individual has provided something into the final product.

Porleifur delegates tasks according to what team members are interested in which leads to very ambitious work within the project team. His resourceful creative solutions and emphasis on improvisation are very curious. The author would really like to see other project managers use such resourcefulness in order to loosen up working environments where absurd ideas are shameful and mistakes are not tolerated. Giving the team freedom to improvise and go on their own adventures gives a real depth to the final outcome. However, time and money has to be put into the equation. Porleifur mentions that mistakes are a part of the process meaning that a lot gets tossed at the beginning at the second phase. Yes, the creative freedom is amazing and the no blame policy is very liberating, but from a classical project management perspective it is hard to ignore how wasteful the process can be. However it might be hard to put a price tag on such mistakes because the initial scratched idea may have been the start of something that was built on and therefore usable in the end. The same goes for time, because allowing each member to take their time to experiment is hardly the most efficient way to save time. However this is very comparable to product development projects where the final outcome is the most important thing, not necessarily the failures that led to the major invention. As stated earlier, looking towards the future will in the end create a competitive advantage.

It is obvious how informal and liberal Porleifur is when it comes to personal communication. He talks a lot about having phone calls with team members who had worries on their shoulders and the author is amazed how much the team has been able to stay in contact with him throughout the process. He is interested in his project team and their feelings and obviously pays a lot of attention towards communication. The power hierarchy is very flat and he is a part of the project team even though everyone is fully aware of who is in charge. The writer believes it has a lot to do with respect. Porleifur respects each individual as an artist and the team respects him as the leader. He also pulls

the audience into the equation by stating that the show would not be possible without the audience interaction and participation. This shows a lot of respect towards the project's customer base because without them, the show would not exist.

The great emphasis on trust and relationship building is one of the most important thing project management can gain from this research. Porleifur completely trusts his team to perform and never doubted its talent or ability to perform. The team also trusts him to detect what is useful and important for the show, even though it means that something is not used. Rather than delegating tasks to each individual at the beginning of the process, like traditional project management bases on, Porleifur intentionally keeps the division of labour unclear. He then assigns specific tasks for the project team to solve. This means that people within the team are not working on their personal tasks in their own corner but are engaging with each other. Each member therefore has better overview of the project instead of only being aware of their personal input which sometimes is the case when working on projects. The feeling of shared ownership, shared responsibility and better teamwork also results from this method. Later in the process, Porleifur assigns tasks to each individual based on their interest and capability. Having people working on what they are interested in is for obvious reasons a very clever tactic. The same goes for assigning tasks to people according to their abilities to solve them which could easily be applied in other fields of work. Knowing that each individual is interested and capable to solve their tasks is indeed relieving because the project manager can worry less about issues like burn outs or rust outs in the project team. However, it takes a very good project managers for this not to turn into anarchy. Knowing how to create the right atmosphere but keep up the work without being micromanaging can be very challenging.

It is safe to say that Porleifur is very conscious of his leadership style. It bases on him deciding to give the power over to the project team and trusting them to do a good job. He sits and watches from the side-lines, monitors and notes down every idea the team comes up with. He then receives the power back to puzzle all the pieces together in order to make the finalized show. His project team respects him as a leader but also as an equal, which is why each member is willing to put their heart and soul into the project. Porleifur is fully aware of how important the team is to the project and how he alone would never be able to deliver the same quality of work. He respects his team, is grateful for their work and believes managers and team members should work together to reach their goals.

Porleifur only has a vague vision of the final destination but he knows how he likes the journey to be. The team as a whole goes on a trip, but the rest will come as a surprise. Some might say that nothing happens without deciding where to go and how to get there but in Porleifur's mind, the fixed goal is a limitation. By having an unclear vision on where to go, the journey might take the team to a very different place than what it had initially dreamt of.

6. CONCLUSION

It is safe to say that Þorleifur carries wisdom that is worth sharing. The first part of the research question “Can project management gain from the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson?” will be answered with a simple yes. The second part of the research question “What can project management gain for the theatre directing methods of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson?” will be answered as follows. His emphasis on approaching his role as a person who guides, inspires and motivates the team to do their best rather than limiting it to strict rules and predetermined strategies applies to many different industries. He inspires and sustains a creative environment where absurd ideas are welcomed and completely trusts his team to perform. He monitors from the side-lines and provides assistance when needed. Teamwork, relationships and personal communication is important in his method. He divides projects based on who is interested in what and does not make decisions in order to prevent limiting the creative flow. He appreciates honesty and accepts mistakes as a part of the process. He respects the team, considers himself as a part of it and the same rules apply for everyone. However, as mentioned before, the method requires certain talent, experience and characteristics to be successful.

Looking forward, it would be very interesting to invite project managers from different fields of work to participate in a workshop in order to detect how Þorleifur’s method can be used in different projects, for example product- or software development projects. This way it would be possible to receive valuable information about how other managers cope with the method in order to reach their goals. Also it would be compelling to research how Þorleifur’s method works on different types of project teams, for example multicultural teams or teams that are not used to working with creative solutions

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9. APPENDIX

Following are the questions used for the personal interviews of Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson and Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir. They come in no particular order.

Þorleifur Örn Arnarsson:

1. How would you describe your own directing method?
2. How did the team feel about the method?
3. How is the process presented to the project team?
4. How was the project's schedule?
5. What are the most important factors for the method to succeed?
6. Who within the team did the method apply to? The whole team or only parts of it?
7. How did you steer lines of communication?
8. How was the delegation of work performed?
9. How did you solve problems or crisis?
10. For how long is the method open for new ideas?
11. What are your thought on power?
12. What are your thought on management?
13. How do you work towards an unclear vision?
14. What competences (of director and the team) are essential for the method to work?
15. How can this method be utilized in classical project management?

Brynhildur Guðjónsdóttir:

1. How would you describe Þorleifur's directing method?
2. How was your experience working with Þorleifur's method?
3. Where you aware of how the method worked at the beginning of the process?
4. What are the most important factors for the method to succeed?
5. How do you like the final outcome of the project?
6. How was the teamwork? How important is teamwork?
8. How did the team feel about the method?
9. Who within the team did the method apply to? The whole team or only parts of it?
10. How do you think the final outcome of the project would be, without the method?
11. Would you like to work with this method in the future?
12. How can the method be used in classical project management?