Patterns in the project managers’ rhythms, habits, routines and rituals
What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them?

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores rhythms and patterns in the project manager's habits, routines and rituals. The research question is as follows: What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them? Qualitative research methods based on grounded theory were used, and the research scope was limited to interviewing four project managers, one with a level A and two with a level B IPMA certification. The findings of this paper are that the main themes in the patterns revealed in the rhythms, habits, routines and rituals that define the project managers are in organization, communication and continuous improvements. In other words, balancing and renewal of resources. In that sense, the results are in line with the project management literature used in this thesis. This leads to the conclusion that project managers have similar patterns in their habits, routines and rituals to those generally described in the literature review and that in order to dig more deeply into the issue, a larger number of subjects would need to be studied and, possibly, that it would be necessary to interview the people who work closely with the subjects, as the subjects, like most of us, might have rhythms, habits, routines and rituals that they are not aware of, while the people who work closely with them may be aware of them.

Keywords: project management, rhythms, habits, routines, rituals, patterns
1. INTRODUCTION
What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them? This topic has already been researched to some extent, mostly concerning habits, routines and rituals.

I had been working on forming my own private and professional habits, routines and rituals. I then took the course Consultancy, Change and Organizational Development taught by Guðfinna Bjarnadóttir in the Master in Project Management programme at Reykjavík University. At the end of the course, the instructor talked about how we as human beings love being in rhythms, and just before we finished the course we had time to ask her about anything we wanted. Realising there can be a rhythm in habits, rituals and routines in management, I asked her if there was any rhythm that she herself applies and finds useful in her own life. She took some time to think and then came up with three. (1) The first habit was that she gives herself a clap on the back after performing and says to herself “you did alright girl” instead of putting herself down. (2) Secondly, she uses a relaxed breathing method on a regular basis, breathing all the way to her stomach - this helps her to calm down in stressful situations and to get to sleep. (3) The third was to focus in general on remembering the good aspects of things. She tries to only remember the good and quickly forgets about the bad (Guðfinna Bjarnadóttir, personal communication, 5 November 2016). But, going back to the first period, she asked each and every student to stand up and introduce themselves to her and tell her a little bit about themselves. While the students were talking, she was taking notes on them. After the first class, she used the students’ first names every time she communicated with them, and she probably used the name of each and every student more often than all the other teachers combined. My assumptions from this are that every time she teaches a new class, she takes notes on her students, and this helps her remember their names so she can establish the habit of using people's names in communicating with them. This leads to better communication, as everyone likes to hear their own name. After the course, I decided that the topic for my final thesis would be rhythms and patterns in the working habits of professional project managers. Having at first found it difficult to decide the scope of my study, I narrowed it down to patterns in project managers’ rhythms, habits, routines and rituals. This led to the thesis question: What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them? The paper is constructed as follows:

The literature review chapter covers definitions of rhythms, patterns, habits, rituals and routines and then looks more deeply into habits, routines and rituals in the project management context.

The chapter on method lays out how the research was conducted. The research involves interviewing four project managers, including one with a level A and two with a level B IPMA certification, and exploring the patterns in their rhythms, habits, routines and rituals in professional and personal life and what habits are to be avoided.

The results chapter focuses on the results of the research method and discussion of these results. The results will be used to assess the rhythms and patterns that define project managers. The results will be interpreted and compared to the literature review and how or whether the new data changes the scene. An attempt will be made to answer the research question based on the results.
The thesis will end with a conclusion chapter where the thesis results will be summed up. For further investigation of the topic, it will include possible future steps which could be taken to build upon the paper's idea.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In exploring what has been investigated about the subject of this study, one becomes aware that a range of research has been done on habits, routines and rituals in the context of project management. The literature review chapter is divided into three sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter is on general definitions of rhythms and patterns. This will help with the understanding of the following chapters. The second contains books and articles on habits, and how the understanding of them can be used to become more effective. The third part deals with routines and rituals which can be used to become more productive, more energetic and happier. Now we will look more closely at each of the sub-chapters.

**Rhythms and Patterns**

“Rhythm is a regular and repeated pattern, usually a flow of sound or movement through time” (Bradley, 2012, p. 2). “Pattern is a particular way in which something is done, is organised or happens” (“Pattern,” n.d.). What usually comes to mind when we think of rhythm is music, where rhythm is created by alternating sound and non-sound over time in predictable intervals. In fact, however, everything vibrates and moves according to certain rhythms. These rhythms establish seasons, cycles, stages of development, and patterns. Each cycle reflects the regularity of the universe and what seems to be random may be very orderly (“Law of rhythm,” n.d.).

**Habits**

Habits emerge due to the fact that the animal brain — and hence also the human brain — is constantly looking for ways to save effort by creating automatic routines (Duhigg, 2012). An experiment showed that 40 percent of the actions people performed each day were not actual decisions but habits. This is shown in a paper published by Duke University (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). By understanding how habits work, we can recognise them and consciously direct them because they are what controls our behaviour and results (Duhigg, 2012). The so-called **habit loop** is a three-step process within our brain that governs any habit. “First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells the brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Then there is the routine, which can be physical, mental or emotional. Finally, there is a reward, which helps the brain figure out if this particular loop is worth remembering for the future” (Duhigg, 2012, p. 18). Experiments have shown that almost all cues fall into one of five categories: location, time, emotions, actions of other people and the last action made (as cited in Duhigg, 2012). A **keystone habit** is an individual pattern that can make a change in behaviour and, by focusing on it and changing it, a process starts automatically and also triggers a change in other routines over time, for example, when people start exercising they usually start eating more healthily (Duhigg, 2012). Duhigg mentions how some organisations have used habits successfully, and takes an example from Starbucks. Starbucks has dozens of routines for employees for dealing with angry customers, for example, when customers complain about getting the wrong drink, a particular routine answer is triggered. By choosing a particular response ahead of time employees can provide the high level of service that makes customers keep coming back for expensive lattes. Keystone habits can also be used to make changes within organisations. When Paul O'Neill started as a CEO of the manufacturer Alcoa, the first thing he wanted to make changes to was workers’ safety. A lot of people questioned his decision, but by the time he left, Alcoa's income had risen 500%, and its market capitalization
had increased by $27 billion (Duhigg, 2012). Later, he is reported to have said “I knew I had to transform Alcoa . . . . But you can’t order people to change. That’s not how the brain works. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing. If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company.” (as cited in Duhigg, 2012, p. 100). “Habits, as much as memory and reason, are at the root of how we behave. We might not remember the experiences that create our habits, but once they are lodged within our brains they influence how we act – often without our realisation.” (Duhigg, 2012, p. 24).

Habits “are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character and produce our effectiveness or ineffectiveness”(Covey, 2013, location 629). In The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Stephen R. Covey talks about the habits of effective people, and then he interprets them for managers in his audiobook “The 7 Habits for Managers: Managing Yourself, Leading Others, Unleashing Potential”.

For our purposes, we will define a habit as the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire. Knowledge is the theoretical paradigm, the what to do and the why. Skill is the how to do. And desire is the motivation, the want to do. In order to make something a habit in our lives, we have to have all three. I may be ineffective in my interactions with my work associates, my spouse, or my children because I constantly tell them what I think, but I never actually listen to them. Unless I search out correct principles of human interaction, I may not even know I need to listen. Even if I do know that to interact effectively with others I need to listen to them, I may not have the skill. I may not know how to listen deeply to another human being. But knowing I need to listen and knowing how to listen is not enough. Unless I want to listen, unless I have the desire, it won’t be a habit in my life. Creating a habit requires work in all three dimensions (Covey, 2013, location 647).

The following seven habits are:

**Independence**
According to Covey, the first three habits are about private victories. They move a person from dependence to independence, mastering them gives internal security (Covey, 2013). One cannot become an active manager if one cannot manage oneself but if one is effective in managing oneself, then the discipline comes from within (Covey, 2015).

1. **Be Proactive.** Proactive people work from the centre of their influence and constantly work on expanding it. They take the initiative instead of waiting in reactive mode for problems to happen to them (Covey, 2013). The effective manager assumes responsibility for the quality of service in his department/team. He targets the areas of employment that he can influence and takes actions in them. When things become uncontrollable he does not become paralysed; he knows there's always a way, so he finds a solution with the resources available to him and he is always thinking of ways to expand his resources (Covey, 2015).

2. **Begin with the End in Mind.** Envision the end destination, make plans to achieve it and make every action be driven by that vision. Begin with the end in mind is based on the principle that everything is created twice, first there's a mental creation, and then there's a physical creation (Covey, 2013). To establish a mutual understanding of how the result should look, the project manager and his unit should create a vision, share it and develop a mission statement (Covey, 2015). He should also consider all potential risks to the project and use a methodology which allows him to predict the impact of those risks (Saltzman, 2004).

3. **Put First Things First.** Identify priorities and focus on what is important. The time management matrix categorises tasks into four quadrants: q1. Urgent and important, q2. Important, q3. Urgent and q4. neither important nor urgent. A common pitfall is to focus only
on q1 and q3, but effective people shrink the size of q1 by spending time in q2, and they stay out of q3 and q4. It’s not possible to do everything, but it is possible to organise, set goals and execute around priorities (Covey, 2013). The project manager needs to set clear priorities for his unit and make sure that the reward system for accomplishments is set for long-term success, not just short term gains, because if you put good people in bad systems, you get bad results (Covey, 2015).

**Interdependence**

"As a person becomes truly independent, he or she has the foundation for interdependence and the character base to work effectively on more public victories with others in habits 4,5 and 6 (Covey, 2013). Good character is the foundation for effective management, and if it is faulty, everything the manager does is seen as manipulative (Covey, 2015).

4. **Think Win-Win.** Look for solutions that benefit both parties in human interactions to establish better long-term relationships (Covey, 2013). The effective manager is always looking for solutions that will meet his needs and the needs of the customer or his staff. He looks at service as an opportunity for mutual benefit, he delegates works expectations and is not be afraid to teach others (Covey, 2015).

5. **Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.** Use strong listening skills to genuinely try to understand the other person, their perspective and where they are coming from, before trying to influence them (Covey, 2013). The effective manager develops and implements conventional methods of gathering inputs for better understanding, and he communicates, so conflicts lead to better relationships (Covey, 2015).

6. **Synergize.** “The whole is better than the sum of its parts” (Covey, 2013, location 4405) The effective project manager can be open and vulnerable and he can think out loud with his unit which can lead to building upon each other's ideas. He cultivates relationships with other departments and continually seeks for something better, he seeks out differences, he does not just accept them(Covey, 2015).

**Continuous Improvements**

7. **Sharpen the Saw.** This means balanced renewal in all four dimensions. Physical (exercise, nutrition, stress management), spiritual (value clarification & commitment, study & meditation), mental (reading, visualising, planning, reading) and social/emotional (service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security) (Covey, 2013). The effective project manager treats himself, his team members and his customer’s as a whole person (physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual). He identifies his circle of influence and seeks out opportunities for growth and development in personal and professional areas that are of concern to him (Covey, 2015).

Later on, he added the 8.th habit which is “find your voice and inspire others to find theirs”, which means finding your personal significance and helping others find theirs. Those who have found their voice and encouraged others to find theirs are the leaders needed now and for the future (Covey, 2006).

**Routines and Rituals**

Routines and rituals are both a series of repetitive actions or a type of behaviour performed regularly, but not automatically. The difference is that routines serve the purpose as steps to get work done and have no deeper meaning, but rituals are essential practices and provide energy
and happiness to our lives. A routine can be turned into a ritual if a person stops looking at their daily activities as something that just needs to get done, and instead performs them with attention and thought. They'll serve a positive function in the person's life and become something they enjoy doing (Hasa, 2016).

Routines are the regular way of doing things in a particular order, and we form them in our day-to-day lives. They can also serve their purpose as steps to get work done. Routine is just a series of actions regularly done, and it has no deeper meaning, not a lot of thought goes into performing these activities, they are almost automatic. Having a routine often saves time, energy and makes life easier and gives a sense of security (Hasa, 2016). By routinizing individual actions, you can allow yourself to get started with them more quickly, without having to invest as much strategic planning into them (Hills, 2015). When workers observe the same routines each day, they are more productive. That means wearing the same clothes, using the same lavatory at the same time every day and arranging items on desks in a familiar pattern. This strategy helps to boost work rates, according to research commissioned by Office Angels, a recruitment company (Bennett, 2001). People in leadership roles usually have to make a bunch of important decisions, and some do not realise that their decision-making ability is deteriorating. Steve Jobs famously wore the same black turtleneck, blue jeans and New Balance sneakers every day. It's pretty clear that Steve understood he had a finite capacity for making excellent decisions (Harper, 2016).

Rituals are a series of actions, or a type of behaviour performed regularly. They are important practices, carefully selected steps that have a purpose and demand particular focus and presence of mind. Rituals provide energy and happiness to our lives; they're not just about getting work done - they are about celebrating life. The purpose of a ritual can be relaxation, enjoyment, nourishment, etc. (Hasa, 2016). Rituals help people connect to specific mental states or emotions and every community in every culture around the world is built through rituals, just as it's hard to imagine a society without language, it's equally hard to imagine a society without rituals (Hills, 2015).

When well-known procedures are executed together in a group, it synchronises people and strengthens the common ground on which to build trust. A group's rituals are often what makes it different from other groups. For example, the Americans recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," and say "I do" when they marry. Boy and girl scouts make their promise and make the scouting sign and religious groups follow dietary laws, chant, light candles, kneel, stand up, sing songs, eat symbolic foods, fast, and make sacrifices, all following carefully specified rules (Hills, 2015).

The same goes for teams; rituals can act as a social glue by making the team feel closer and more connected. Sometimes teams invent their secret rituals to bind the team even more closely (Hills, 2015). With teams in an office, rituals tend to boost performance. A possible reason for that could be that rituals tend to increase people's interest and involvement, according to a recent study co-written by Kathleen Vohs, a marketing professor at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Gino and others.” (Shellenbarger, 2013). A few examples are the start and end of the work day, week, month, quarter and year, when you achieve milestones, when a team member has performed exceptionally well, when you experience failures or setbacks and many more (Hills, 2015).

Sometimes individuals develop their personal rituals to help them prepare for or overcome significant challenges (Hills, 2015). Gandhi is reported to have said, “I have so much to accomplish today that I must meditate for two hours instead of one” (as cited in Borys, 2013, p. 6). Rituals are also common among gamblers and sports figures; they can be in the form of blowing on the dices before rolling them, wearing a lucky piece of clothing to counting dribbles before a free throw (Shellenbarger, 2013). The basketball superstar Michael Jordan wore his North Carolina shorts underneath his Chicago Bulls shorts in every game (Hills, 2015).
Researchers are finding that people who engage in ritualistic behaviour before a difficult task are less anxious, get more involved and tend to perform better than people who don't have rituals. According to research at Harvard Business School, the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management and other universities (as cited in Shellenbarger, 2013).

Routines and “rituals are created by the human need for certainty in an uncertain world”(Craig, 2005, p. 58). "People tend to impose workplace rituals” and routines “upon themselves as a way of showing that they are in control of their situation,” said Paul Jacobs of Office Angels. Research among 1,500 office staff showed the behaviour increased confidence and helped keep work rates high (Bennett, 2001). In the context of rhythms, patterns, habits routines and rituals, the following two sayings could apply "What has worked in the past will probably work in the immediate future" (Craig, 2005, p. 58) because "history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes", as Mark Twain is reported to have said (as cited in Knoop, 2009, p. 161).

3. METHOD

The objective of this research project was to interview four project managers to find out if they have any specific rhythms or patterns in their habits, rituals and routines. The result would then be mirrored in the literature to determine similarities and differences. In order to maintain accuracy and gender balance in the research results, two men and two women were chosen with the help of the thesis advisor, Dr. Haukur Ingi Jónasson. To gain a deeper understanding of the subject, this essay is built on qualitative research methods. Four project managers were interviewed, including one with a level A and two with a level B IPMA certification. To prepare the subjects, they were sent the questions and the definitions of the keywords in advance. For how the keywords: rhythm, pattern, habits, routines and rituals are defined for this thesis, see the following definitions:

- **Rhythm** “is a regular and repeated pattern” (Bradley, 2012).
- **Pattern** “is a particular way in which something is done, is organised or happens” (“Pattern,” n.d.).
- **Habits** “are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character and produce our effectiveness or ineffectiveness . . . . For our purposes, we will define a habit as the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire.”(Covey, 2013, location 629)
- **Routines and rituals** are a series of actions or types of behaviour performed regularly (Hasa, 2016). **Routines** serve their purpose as steps to get work done; they have no deeper meaning (Hasa, 2016). **Rituals** are essential to practice and provide energy and happiness to our lives. A routine can be turned into a ritual - if a person stops looking at their daily activities as something that just needs to get done, and instead performs them with attention and thought, they'll serve a positive function in the person's life and become something they enjoy doing (Hasa, 2016).

In an attempt to find the answer to the research question the following questions were asked:

- **What rhythms do you keep in your professional life?**
- **What habits make you more effective in your professional life?**
- **What routines make you more productive in your professional life?**
- **What rituals provide energy and happiness to you in your professional life?**
- **What habits do you think a project manager should avoid?**
• What rhythms, habits, routines or rituals do you apply in your personal life?

The answer to the first question or parts of the answer could possibly be categorised as a habit, routine or a ritual, if that happens, the answer will be put under the question it belongs to.

4. RESULTS

Here we will look at the main results from the interviews. Each of the four interviewed subjects will be featured in turn. The first two interviews were conducted on April 19th, 2017 and the second two on April 24th, 2017. Let us have a look at the first subject.

Subject A, currently working as a project manager at a theatre (Subject.1, personal communication, 19 April 2017).

What rhythms do you keep in your professional life?

There are a few rhythms I keep, the long-term one is probably the most important one. In it, I look at the big picture and prepare for the coming months. In the weekly rhythm, I update the next six weeks’ plan almost daily, and people can see live updates on the company’s intranet, and then I publish it formally every Friday. Also, every Friday I plan the next week for each staff member so he or she can see their plan with a week’s notice. My daily rhythm is rapid, I work on all sorts of tasks and people look to me for solutions. There are also regular rhythms in most of the meetings - daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly.

What habits make you more effective in your professional life?

My door is always open. It’s crucial that people are comfortable with approaching me. When people reach out to me for something, I always pay it attention and usually I’m willing to put my work on hold for a while and try to help others with what's on their mind. When I’m at my office, I always leave the door open so people can come in with whatever they need help with. I want people to feel that they can talk to me about anything, and if there's a problem, there's always a will on my behalf in trying to find a solution.

Keep it moving. I’m often approached for various things, and it can be from problems to improvements, suggestions or things people simply don't know what to do with. The first thing I do is to estimate whether I should deal with it or not, if not, I direct it to the person who should deal with it. I try not to get involved in the things I don’t need to participate in. But if I should deal with it, I estimate the importance of it before acting on it. I try to keep the flow going by deciding on things immediately.

Stay organised. To stay organised, I decide what to do with whatever comes to me. I don’t let things stack up on my desk or put them away in my drawer, where they are more likely to be forgotten.

Slow down, get organised and prioritise. The downside of being so approachable and being willing to help people solve their problems is that sometimes I find myself juggling too many balls at the same time, which can be overwhelming. When that happens, I slow down and take a step back, try to minimise taking on new tasks, get organised and distinguish between what is important and what is not. But even though I have a lot going on, I never close the door on people when they approach me.

Put people first. It's important to put people first in my work field. There can be significant workload points, and if people feel that they are well taken care of, then they are more willing to keep going and deliver when times get tough.
**Personal interactions.** When there are changes to the plan, I prefer to let people know about them in person, unless the changes are minor. The plan is available on the intranet for everyone to see, but I find it’s better to discuss them in person.

**Informal communication.** I’m very informal in my communication, and I feel that is a big part of keeping a friendlier and more caring atmosphere at the workplace.

**What routines make you more productive in your professional life?**

I always start off the workday by processing my mail, and I don’t have it on my phone to avoid being constantly disturbed by it. If people need to reach me with something urgent and important they can call me.

**What rituals provide energy and happiness to you in your professional life?**

I can’t think of anything regarding myself, but there are a few regular gatherings of staff members.

**What habits do you think a project manager should avoid?**

Micromanaging too much. That can lead to losing sight of the big picture.

**What rhythms, habits, routines or rituals do you apply in your personal life?**

I make sure to take care of basic human needs, to sleep, eat, and exercise. I often walk to and from work to get a little exercise. When the workday is over, I try not to take work home with me. Often I feel like I could work 24/7, but on the other hand, nobody will die if I don’t.

Subject.B, currently working as an event manager (Subject.B, personal communication, 19 April 2017).

**What rhythms do you keep in your professional life?**

There is a regular weekly rhythm in my workplace, the patterns in it are very clear for those who are responsible for its functioning.

My role is to make sure that information from the customer has arrived and then deliver it to all divisions, and the pattern of the type of work I do is probably 70% meetings and 30% working on the computer. On Mondays, I prepare for the coming week, and I try to book no meetings on Mondays. On Tuesdays, I have meetings with all in-house divisions, and we prepare for the coming week. Wednesdays, that's when information for the next ten days arrives, and I meet up with project managers and technicians to discuss this information. We try to get a clear view of the coming weekend, because that's when most of the traffic occurs. Lastly, on Fridays, I try to book no meetings, so I can process notes from all the week's meetings. There’s also an online plan for the coming week on the company’s intranet for the staff to see.

**What habits make you more effective in your professional life?**

*Smile and send good vibes.* Smiling to people comes naturally to me, and I laugh and try to get people to laugh with me, I don’t take things too seriously unless I need to. I’m aware of my big personality, and people can often sense if I’m in a good or bad mood and I realise that this can affect the work environment.

*Be Frank.* If I’m not satisfied with something, I will let the person know about it. I have no problem telling people my thoughts on the matter. Sometimes I can be too harsh and must hold myself back, but I do that without putting up a front. Being frank is kind of written on my face.
Be Solution-oriented. When people come to me with problems, I approach them with an open mind and look at these as something to figure out and prevent from happening again. If I’m having a bad day, it can be easy to respond in the wrong way, like “Why didn't I know about this ?, Why didn't you let me know ?, Are you kidding me ?” sometimes that is the first thing that comes to my mind, but then it’s important to have some sort of a filter to avoid responding like that, because it would have a negative effect in the long run.

Deal with problems, move on and try to part on good terms. Whenever there are problems or issues, I deal with them and then move on. I don’t dwell on things longer than necessary. Some people are more sensitive than others, and if the atmosphere gets uncomfortable after confronting a problem and the conversational ball has been dropped, I usually pick it up by asking the person about something else or suggest going for a tea or a coffee in order to part on good terms.

Be willing to lend a helping hand. We've all been there at some point, in need of help from a fellow employee, with many types of tasks you basically can’t accomplish alone, so it’s very important to be willing to lend a helping hand so as to be able to ask for one later in return. It's also a kind of a pay it forward thing here. "I assist you, and then you help somebody else”.

Plan. I keep a to-do list on a paper block for what’s currently going on, and when many things are completed, I rewrite it. This usually happens two or three times over the week. When dealing with large projects, I often create a mind map to get a better overview of the scope of the project.

Personal interactions. I feel it's better to discuss things in person, in conversations or in meetings instead of just putting information on the intranet or some other place and waiting for people to see it.

What routines make you more productive in your professional life?
I keep to-do lists for certain types of repeating tasks that I need to do on certain days to keep up with the rhythm of the workplace.

What rituals provide energy and happiness to you in your professional life?
I don’t listen to the radio on my way to work, I only listen to music I like, and that's a part of getting in the mood for the day. I also drink one cup of coffee every day, never two, only one, and that is kind of my treat for the day.

What habits do you think a project manager should avoid
Defence mechanisms - it's important to recognize them when they pop up, because they can prevent good communication.

What rhythms, habits, routines or rituals do you apply in your personal life
I pay no attention to and avoid news and society debates, staying away from them makes my life easier and less stressful.

I prefer to put my energy and focus on what matters to me, which is my personal life and my work life. I have asked people close to me to let me know if something extremely out of the ordinary happens that I should be worried about, such as volcanic eruptions.

I used to take my work home with me all the time, but now I try not to do this as often as I used to. I take it home with me on Mondays and make exceptions if there’s something urgent and important on other days. It’s important for the mind to take breaks from work and think about other things, otherwise it gets exhausted.

I also take care of basic human needs, such as getting a good night’s sleep, eating regularly throughout the day and exercising. I make up for lack of exercise by always taking the stairs at my workplace. I also walk or cycle to and from work frequently. This also helps with clearing my head. In my job, I’m often under a lot of pressure, and if I fail to take care of basic human needs, then everything becomes more difficult.
Subject.C, currently working as an Agile coach for a software development company (Subject.C, personal communication, 24 April 2017)

**What rhythms do you keep in your professional life?**

I’m in a supportive role for many teams, and my rhythm is mostly defined by the rhythms of the teams I’m supporting. The rhythm of a team is called a sprint, and usually lasts for one or two weeks. Before a sprint starts, there’s a planning meeting for setting goals to accomplish within the coming sprint. I encourage teams to keep the sprint as short as possible. The reason for this is that the future gets blurrier the further ahead we look. After the sprint, there’s a retrospective meeting, and we go over what went well, and what needs to change before the next sprint. I also meet with the other coaches every Friday for a retrospective meeting, and we reflect on the past week.

**What habits make you more effective in your professional life?**

*Try to see the whole picture.* I try to look at the whole picture and figure out what is causing the problem instead of just looking at the consequences. The role of the manager is to see the whole picture of the project.

*Open-ended questions.* Asking open-ended questions is critical in figuring out the whole picture and also in helping others to find their solutions within themselves.

*Help others to find their solutions within themselves.* Usually, I don’t have the solutions, but often I can help others by asking open-ended questions, which leads to their looking inwards for solutions within themselves.

*Be present.* I’m present when communicating with people, I listen carefully and keep eye contact. I’m not on my phone or doing something else.

*Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.* It might be possible to reach the same goal by improving the tools or the means of communication, but which is more efficient in the end? Replacing the tools can often be a quick fix, but you need to look deeper when it comes to people.

*Shake things up when it gets too comfortable.* When the repeated pattern becomes too comfortable, people are not as engaged in the process, and the result is not as effective as in the beginning. At this point it might be time to shake things up a little bit.

**What routines make you more productive in your professional life?**

I can’t think of anything at the moment.

**What rituals provide energy and happiness to you in your professional life?**

I do a personal retrospective every Thursday, where I reflect on the past week, what has been going well and what needs to change. The urgent, unimportant things can become noisy and distracting, and the personal retrospective helps with putting the focus back on the important stuff. (The retrospective meeting with the agile coach could also be mentioned here - see the first question).

**What habits do you think a project manager should avoid?**

First, micromanaging. When the manager starts micromanaging, he loses the overview of the project. Micromanaging is not trusting people to do their job, and if the manager knows what to do and how to do it and he starts telling people what to do and how to do it, this usually leads to people growing dependent on him.

Second, asking closed-ended questions. By doing so the manager is leading the person to the solution he has in his mind. Third, approaching situations with tunnel vision, only looking at the consequence when the cause can be something totally different from what it appears to be.

**What rhythms, habits, routines or rituals do you apply in your personal life?**

Taking care of basic human needs, such as sleep and exercise. If one forgets to do this then everything else collapses.
Subject D, currently working as CEO of a construction company (Subject D, personal communication, 24 April 2017).

What rhythms do you keep in your professional life?
There are regular rhythms in my meetings - daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and yearly.

What habits make you more effective in your professional life?

Optimising communication tools. I have developed a system for using my most used communication tools, which are emails, phone calls and meetings. Using this system is a habit, and it’s also part of my routine.

Act on what has priority. I use my email as a digital task management system. I have an overview of what is currently going on, and when I process it I go over it a few times and each time I only act on the tasks that I consider to be a priority. When sending important emails, I often send them to myself as well, so they show up in my inbox, and then I can keep track of them.

Stay organised. I review my task management system regularly, which is mostly my email inbox. It’s important to keep it organised to maintain the overview; when you lose the overview things can start slipping through the cracks.

Plan. I make all sorts of plans for projects, Gantt charts, financial, human resources and more. Being able to make plans and follow them through is vital for being an effective project manager. I also use a paper block and post-it notes for my physical to-do list.

Be friendly. I try to be friendly and cheerful, and sometimes I crack jokes when appropriate, which is good for the atmosphere in the workplace.

Be frank. I say things as I see them, I don’t say one thing to someone and then another thing when they have left.

Be clear in commands and instructions. It’s important to be clear in commands and instructions. Being unclear in these can lead to problems which could have been prevented with more clarity in the first place.

Delegation. Delegating tasks and projects is vital for maintaining the overview - plus you can’t do everything yourself. When I delegate, I trust people to deliver, but when the results come in it shows whether they're capable or not.

Try to bring the best out in people. I’m often like the coach of my team, and I try to bring the best out of my people by standing on the side-line, motivating them and complimenting them on a well done job. When I need to criticise an employee, I always talk to him in private (see also under habits to avoid). By focusing on bringing out the best in people, you can get small seeds to bear fruit.

Personal interactions. Even though a significant number of my communications are by email, they do not replace personal interactions. Also, an employee probably appreciates a personal or phone conversation with me, the CEO of the company, more than an email or nothing at all.

Give yourself the time to give back. I make sure I give myself time to give back by walking around, nurturing relationships with employees, making small talk, listening and showing interest in them. If I’m effective when I’m working, then I can afford to give myself more time to give back. In my position, it's necessary to have people on your side.

Seek knowledge in your field and improve your skill sets. I often educate myself in my professional area in my personal time. I keep my professional training up to date with lectures and reading material related to my field. I do this to keep up to speed in my job and stay on top of current topics in my line of work.
Inspire others by sharing experience and knowledge. I often visit schools and hold lectures, hopefully to inspire others by sharing my experience and knowledge in the field of project management, I regard this as my duty and try to do it as often as I can, apart from the fact that I enjoy doing it.

What routines make you more productive in your professional life?
The first thing that comes to mind is how I run meetings. Meetings are a useful management tool, but to be productive, they need to fulfil three things. They need to be scheduled at a particular time, everybody needs to receive the agenda before the meeting so they can prepare, and the facilitator needs to make sure that the meeting focuses on the order of the day. If it wanders off-subject, the facilitator needs to direct the focus back to the agenda. But they can’t be so strict that there’s no room for a little fun - there’s always room for some small talk and a few laughs, as long as things don’t get out of control.

The second thing is - I try to work on the go to save time, for example, I make phone calls while driving and do computer work at airports and on airplanes. The third thing I do to increase productivity over the day is to minimise distraction from my communication devices, my computer and my phone. I turn off all the notification "bling" sounds heard when a new mail or a message arrives. Instead of being in reactive mode all day I check my mail and messages regularly over the day. If somebody needs to get in touch with me right now, he can call.

What rituals provide energy and happiness to you in your professional life?
At the beginning of each year, I set myself goals, both professional and personal.

What habits do you think a project manager should avoid?
Micromanaging. A manager must keep an overview of the whole, and he loses that when he gets involved in too many details in too many places. Also - never criticise an employee in front of others, if an employee is humiliated in front of other staff members it can be difficult to motivate him later on. Let people keep their dignity.

What rhythms, habits, routines or rituals do you apply in your personal life?
I make sure I take care of basic human needs, such as sleep, eating and exercise. If I don't get enough sleep or don’t eat regularly, then my brain doesn’t function as it should, and if I don’t exercise, I probably won’t have the stamina to last the day, as I am often moving around a lot. Taking good care of those three things is vital for functioning properly. If I’m not functioning properly, it’s difficult to give my all round best. I also try to get some exercise by cycling to and from work, instead of driving to the gym after work.

I try not to take my work home after working hours, but in my position I pretty much need to be reachable all the time, so keeping professional and personal life separate is impossible, and I’m fine with that. But I strive to be effective in working hours to minimise the need to take work home with me.

I also seek all sorts of knowledge. I’m responsible for projects all over the country, so I must stay on top of what's going on in society, and that includes watching the news and reading the paper, which can lead to grabbing opportunities or foreseeing problems and trying to prevent them from harming the company. I am also in the habit of seeking knowledge simply because I consider it a good attribute to be well-informed and to know what has happened in the past and what is currently going on in society.

Nurturing relationships with my family and friends is also very important. Research done by Harvard University shows that the quality of your relationships with the people closest to you defines whether you’re happy or unhappy (as cited in Curtin, 2017).

5. DISCUSSION
Here we will look at the key points from the interviews, and mirror them in the literature covered, in order to find similarities and/or differences between the two. This will help shed
light on the thesis’ research question: What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them?

**Key points**

When asked about *rhythms in professional life*, all subjects mentioned a regular rhythm in the meetings they attend within their company, and this varied from daily up to yearly and everything in-between. Also, they all mentioned making plans for the coming weeks or months. Sometimes the answers to the first question led into an answer to another question and if that was the case the answer was put under the question it belonged to.

As for *habits* to be more effective, all the subjects mentioned personal interactions. Planning was mentioned three times, prioritising, staying organised, being frank in communication and individuals over processes and tools were mentioned twice. A few of the habits that could be categorised under “comfortable presence” were mentioned, and they varied from smiling and sending out good vibes to being friendly, informal communication, being present in communication, keeping eye contact, being willing to lend a helping hand to a fellow employee, allowing yourself to take the time to nurture relationships with employees and leaving the office door open. A few were also mentioned regarding problem-solving such as, trying to see the whole picture, asking open-ended questions, being solution-oriented and dealing with problems and then moving on. Delegating, being clear in communications and instructions, and optimising most-used communication tools were also mentioned. Seeking knowledge in one’s field, improving skills and shaking things up when patterns get too comfortable and are not as effective as they used to be were also mentioned, as were trying to bring the best out of people by motivating and complimenting for jobs well done. Finally, inspiring others by sharing your experience and knowledge was touched upon.

As for *routines to be more productive*, there were a few mentioned regarding the rhythm of the workplace. The first one was about holding productive meetings and the second was using a to-do list template for repeating tasks. Checking regularly on communication devices over the day to minimise disturbance from the environment was also referred to. And finally, we heard of working on the go, using free time gaps which occur at regularly visited places.

As for *rituals that provide energy and happiness*, getting in the mood for the day by listening to hand-picked music instead of the radio was mentioned, and also having a little me-time by drinking the one and only coffee of the day, while doing various things. Taking the time at the end of the week to reflect, reset the focus and plan were mentioned, and also the yearly setting of both professional and personal goals.

As for habits that the project manager should *avoid*, three of the interviewers referred to micromanagement, because it leads to losing the overview of the whole project. Letting undecided tasks stack up can also have the same effect. Defence mechanisms were also mentioned, as they can prevent good communication, as was criticising an employee in front of others.

As for *rhythms, habits, routines and rituals in personal life*, throughout the interviews it was clear that taking care of the patterns in our biological rhythm such as sleep, eating and exercise is vital in order to function properly and to be able to take on the tasks of the day. Getting some exercise while going to and from work was mentioned by three. Avoiding taking work home after working hours, unless it’s something important and urgent, was also referred to three
times. The need for news in order to stay on top of what was currently going on in society varied from person to person. The need to nurture relationships with family and friends for the sake of a happier life was also given importance.

**Comparison to literature review**

We can see both similarities and differences in the subjects’ responses and the literature review. In both, there are some underlying patterns and they are organization, communication and continuous improvements, or in other words, balance and renewal in one’s resources in all four dimensions - physical (exercise, nutrition, stress management), mental (visualizing and planning), spiritual (meditation), social/emotional (service, synergy) and finally finding one’s own voice and inspiring others to find theirs.

It could be observed that the literature only covered the definitions of rhythms and patterns. The answers to the first question regarding rhythms often belonged in the category of habits, routines or rituals and therefore they were categorised after the interviews, but the type of rhythms that remained were the rhythms at their workplace, mostly in meetings and making plans.

The habits that were mentioned in both are, **Begin with the end in mind**: The visualisation of the end was not mentioned specifically, but making plans was. **First things first**: Prioritise and distinguish between the important and the seemingly urgent unimportant and stay organised in order to maintain the overview - people are more important than processes and tools. **Seek first to understand, then to be understood**: The two parts of these answers were not mentioned by the same subjects. When seeking to understand, listen and ask open-ended questions and when seeking to be understood, be clear and frank. **Synergize**: Individuals and interactions over processes and tools, in other words, personal communications such as meetings, conversations in person or over the phone are more effective than digital communications, such as emails, messages and plans available on the company's intranet. Trying to bring the best out of people by motivating and complimenting them for jobs well done and, finally, being willing to lend a helping hand to a fellow employee. **Continuous Improvements**: Stay on top of things in your field by constantly seeking knowledge about what affects your professional area. Be on the lookout for opportunities and try to foresee problems. Also, seek for ways to improve your skills. **Find your voice and inspire others to find theirs**: By sharing knowledge and experience. Habits that were mentioned in the literature review but not specifically in the interviews are being proactive and thinking win-win. There were a few habits mentioned in the interviews but not found in the literature review, for example regarding having a comfortable presence, such as smiling and sending out good vibes, being friendly, cracking jokes when appropriate, informal communications, being present in communications, keeping eye contact, allowing yourself to take the time to nurture relationships with employees and leaving the office door open. Others that were mentioned are: being solution-oriented, being frank, dealing with problems and then moving on, delegating and shaking things up when patterns get too comfortable and are not as effective as they used to be and optimising most-used communication tools.

The routine that was mentioned in both included creating to-do lists for regularly repeating occasions. The ones that were not mentioned in the literature were making sure that the meetings are productive, checking regularly on communication devices instead of being available all the time and working on the go at regularly visited places.
For rituals, meditation was mentioned in the literature review and a personal retrospective would fall into that category, and possibly also into the team retrospective. The ones that were not mentioned specifically in the literature were: listening to hand-picked music instead of the radio while going to work for setting the mood for the day, having a little me-time while drinking the one and only coffee of the day and yearly goal-setting.

It could be observed that the literature did not cover undesirable habits nor rhythms, habits, routines and rituals in personal life much, but it was quite enlightening to include these in the interviews. There were a few, though, which would fall into the habit category of continuous improvements or, in other words, balancing and renewals in resources, such as taking care of basic human needs in our biological rhythm, i.e. sleeping, eating and exercising, and not taking work home, for the sake of spiritual renewal.

The Research Question

This brings us to the answering of the research question: What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them? From all the interviews and research that were carried out, it can be argued that the overall themes in the pattern of rhythms, habits, routines and rituals are organization, communication and continuous improvements, or in other words balance and renewal in resources. The main organizational habits to be effective were planning, prioritising, staying organised and valuing people over process and tools. A routine for being more productive was checking regularly on certain communication devices to minimise disturbance from them (not being available all day on all of them). As for a ritual that provided energy and happiness, one mentioned a weekly personal retrospective which included reflection and also the main habits mentioned above, prioritising and planning. In communications, the main habits to be effective were personal interactions, comfortable presence, being frank, and all subjects mentioned regular rhythms in the meetings they attend at their workplace. In continuous improvements or, in other words, balancing and renewals in resources, the habit of taking care of basic human needs in our biological rhythm such as sleeping, eating and exercising, and getting some exercise in the routine of going to and from work was common. Also, the minimising of taking work home unless it’s important and urgent. These would be the themes that describe and define them, but at the same time, they all have individual rhythms and patterns that define them and set them apart from each other.

Implementation and Exploitation

It would be ideal if project managers would look at these results and learn from them. The results can be used to raise awareness of useful patterns in rhythms, habits, routines and rituals for project managers. In other words, the patterns in the project managers’ rhythms, habits, routines and rituals could be looked upon as something to be considered as a standard for project managers to strive towards. In that instance, other project managers could look at the main rhythms, habits, routines and rituals that make the project manager more effective, productive, energetic and happier, and strive to make them their own. First and foremost, it would be best to focus on the rhythms, habits, routines and rituals that most subjects found useful in all three areas, that is, to start with organization and when this has been mastered at least to a certain degree, then to move on to communication and finally continuous improvements, in other words balance and renewal in resources. When all areas are mastered to a certain extent, then continue improving in all three areas.
It could also benefit project managers to be aware of the undesirable habits mentioned and to avoid them at all costs. This would include avoiding micromanaging, self-defence mechanisms and criticising an employee in front of others. In life in general, make sure that all basic human needs in our biological rhythm are well taken care of, such as sleep, eating and exercise in order to be able to function properly in the other useful rhythms and patterns in professional life. Following these guidelines could dramatically benefit project managers in gaining a better understanding of the whys, whats and hows in the context of project management. This could in turn lead to doing the right things in the right way, resulting in the delivery of the project with better quality, within a shorter time and using less resources. That is the development the author would like to see.
6. CONCLUSIONS
This thesis has led us through literature on the definitions of rhythms, patterns, habits, routines and rituals and then looked more deeply into habits, routines and rituals in the context of project management and the project manager. We have gone through the research exploring: What rhythms, habits, routines and rituals do project managers have? And what patterns can we find in them? The results of the research are for the most part in line with the literature used in this thesis. This leads us to the conclusion that project managers have similar patterns in their rhythms, habits, routines and rituals as those generally described in the literature review, and that the main theme in the patterns in the rhythms, habits, routines and rituals that define project managers are organization, communication and continuous improvements, or in other words, balancing and renewals in resources.

Although the themes in the project managers’ habits, routines and rituals are similar to those described in the literature, there is a possibility that further investigation could lead to a clearer definition of the rhythms, habits, routines and rituals and the patterns we find in them that define project managers. In order to dig deeper into the issue, interviews with a larger number of subjects would need to be undertaken and, possibly, interviews with the people who work closely with the subjects would need to be conducted, as the subjects, like many of us, might have rhythms, habits, routines and rituals which they’re not aware of but which the people around them recognize. Another interesting research project would be to look more closely into the patterns and gain a deeper understanding of each pattern and how it is manifested. Carrying out a similar research to this thesis with the focus on teams could also be interesting.

This thesis has opened my eyes and hopefully also yours to rhythms, habits, routines and rituals and the useful patterns to be found in them which can be applied to project management and to life in general.
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7. REFERENCES


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Appendix.1: Mind map of results from the interviews