Global project alignment and performance

Combining Chinese and Western management practices

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The research purpose is to add insights to the project management literature by studying a global project encompassing Chinese and Western project participants, to possibly increase the understanding of how project alignment can be achieved.

Method – The analytical approach for this abductive and explorative study was anchored in a six-phase thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014). A single-case study approach was used encompassing 17 interviews and 61 days of observations at a multinational manufacturing firm in China.

Results - Both Chinese and Western project managers consider project effectiveness and efficiency when evaluating project success. However, there are several key nuances that separate the two groups, as Western project managers focus on *customer satisfaction through efficient methods* when evaluating project performance, whereas Chinese project managers focus on *internal satisfaction through effective methods*. The different viewpoints although similar affect the ability of manufacturing organizations to achieve alignment within global projects. To achieve alignment within global projects manufacturing organisations need to focus on three types of alignment while accounting for the nuanced view on project success; *objective alignment, role alignment and internal alignment*.

Theoretical implications – Our study proposes an emergent model reducing the complexity of achieving alignment in global projects. The model contains three new types of alignment (objective, role and internal) that are actionable and direct compared to previous alignment types. The alignment types aids in the unification of Chinese and Western project managers view on project success.

Practical implications – We expand the understanding of the Chinese and Western view on project success and provide insight into how alignment can be achieved in global projects. Our findings suggest that project managers should first achieve objective alignment before addressing role and later internal alignment in efforts to increase project performance.

Keywords: Global projects, Project alignment, Project performance, Project success, Western project management, Chinese project management.
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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Global projects, referring to temporary endeavours where multiple actors seek to optimize outcomes by combining resources from multiple sites, organizations, cultures and countries (Anantatmula & Thomas, 2010; Mossolly, 2015), are increasingly used all around the world among multinational corporations due to favouring factors, such as dispersion of expertise, cost savings and globalization of the business environment (Mossolly, 2015). However, managing global projects is not without its challenges (Klimkeit, 2013; Sapsed & Salter, 2004). Projects in a global environment are challenging to manage on a daily basis because of the need for situation-specific attention, on the one hand, and the desire for standardization on the other (Aarseth, Rolstadås & Andesen, 2013). Moreover, they are likely to involve misunderstandings, increased transaction costs, friction between project participants, misalignment and communication difficulties (Scott, Levitt & Orr, 2011). These challenges, in turn, contribute to additional cost and time overruns that are often a significant portion of original project estimates (Orr, 2005). That is, when the organizational units within multinational corporations (e.g., sales and operations functions) are dispersed globally and the organizational interface to be integrated changes from one project to another, it can become difficult to establish alignment within projects (Turkulainen, Kujala, Artto & Levitt, 2013). Alignment in a project environment is the condition where appropriate project participants are working within acceptable tolerances to develop and meet a uniformly defined and understood set of project objectives (Griffith & Gibson, 2001). Alignment can contribute towards a number of business outcomes which include innovation, customer loyalty, satisfaction and reduction of switching costs (Sombultawee & Boon-itt, 2017).

An appropriate analogy of a misaligned project would be to that of driving a car with the front end out of alignment (Joshi, Kathuria & Porth, 2003). Three unfortunate consequences may occur. The ride is uncomfortable for the passengers, the tires wear out quickly, or the car may run off the road. Achieving project alignment, where strategy, objectives, and meaningful purpose reinforce one another, gives an organization an advantage because it has a clearer sense of what to do, and it can trust people to move in the right direction. Because of this, companies that are able to align their projects are
more likely to exhibit successful project outcomes compared to companies that do not because of its positive influence on project efficiency and effectiveness (Alsudiri, Al-Karaghouli, & Eldabi, 2013; Joslin & Müller, 2015; Joshi et al., 2003; Sirisomboonsuk, Gu, Cao, & Burns, 2017).

To achieve alignment organizational resources such as authority, policies, procedures and systems for projects ought to be used properly (Anantatmula & Thomas, 2010; Klimkeit, 2013; Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2017; von Danwitz, 2017). However, this applies only when there are motivational drivers for collaboration, consisting of interdependencies between project participants and self-interest in the project’s success (Klimkeit, 2013). Global project environments are, however, characterised by a high level of complexity and uncertainty, and are usually an altering constellation of people. This creates difficulties in identifying the motivational drivers for collaboration (Klimkeit, 2013; Sapsed & Salter, 2004). In an ideal world, project success could be measured by assessing how closely the project achieved intended outcomes once it had been decommissioned (Chipulu et al., 2014). In the real world, project managers define performance drivers up front to evaluate projects for selection and thereafter monitor progress and evaluate project success. If objectives are not clearly defined, project participants will waste time and energy on the trivial many rather than focusing on the essential tasks which actually contribute to project success.

There is currently no dominant framework for aligning functional units in an organization (Sombultawee & Boon-itt, 2017; Kathuria et al., 2007). Project alignment has been conceptualized by many authors but there is a lack of research that draws from the actual experience of practitioners (van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017; Blomquist, Hälgren, Nilsson, & Söderholm, 2010; Cicmil, Williams, Thomas & Hodgson, 2006). Thereby there is a need to understand how project alignment can be achieved in practice. There is also a call to avoid simplifying theorising of project work, and a need to build an understanding of the inherent complexity of project alignment (van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017). These calls are driven by a desire to minimise the theory-practice divide as project management theories that are not anchored in reality may compromise what otherwise would have been good practice (Tsoukas, 2017).
When developing theories on the organizing of global projects it would be particularly relevant to explore projects in which China is involved. While a growing number of companies organise their work in global projects (Zhang, Marquis, Filippov, Haasnoot & Van der Steen, 2015), the most remarkable development in the global economy is the rise of Asian economies, and specifically China (Wang, 2011). China has become a global economic powerhouse and typically takes on an important central position as the base in many global supply chains. Notably, Western project managers in China often encounter problems with alignment (Wang, 2011). While Western project management practices tend to advocate the use of flat organizational structures to facilitate project communications, the Chinese favour organizational hierarchy and centralized decision-making (Littrell, 2002; Wang, 2007). Prior research has suggested that these cultural differences create problems for project alignment and integration of different organizational units (Wang & Liu, 2007). Therefore, to achieve alignment in global projects it is important to account for cultural differences among the project participants (Wang & Liu, 2007), and more importantly to understand how project managers from different cultures view project success. The perception of what project success is creates the final point for which objectives and goals are set, and hence, is crucial for project alignment. To this background this study addresses the following research questions:

**RQ1**: How do Chinese and Western project managers, respectively, view project success?

**RQ2**: How can project alignment be achieved in global projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants?

In so doing, we will add theoretical and empirical insights to the project management literature by studying practices in global projects encompassing both Chinese and Western project participants, and how this possibly can advance understanding of how project alignment can be achieved. Despite the suggested link between alignment within global projects and project performance, this study would be among the few that explicitly examines the issues of alignment within a manufacturing organization (for an exception, please see Joshi et al., 2003). Additionally, very little research is examining the gaps regarding the complexity in global projects, and how to address the alignment of projects between Chinese and Western project participants. This study makes a
contribution to practice by providing an emergent model that can be used by project managers to advance their understanding of how to achieve alignment within global projects, with the potential to increase project performance.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To better understand alignment and performance of global project incorporating Chinese and Western project participants in manufacturing companies', literature from three different research areas have been studied: **global project alignment**, **Chinese and Western project management practices**, and **global project performance**. The theoretical framework in Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual connections between these research areas. The first section discusses how alignment can be viewed as a three-dimensional construct. The second section discusses how Chinese and Western management practices differ and how they might have an influence on achieving global project alignment. The third section explores existing research regarding different views on project performance and success. Altogether, the literature review serves the purpose of connecting the research areas and to illustrate where our study will make a contribution. Our study will contribute by addressing the link between **Chinese and Western project management views and practices** and previous literature on global project alignment.

![Figure 1 - The theoretical framework illustrating the connection between global project alignment, management practices and global project performance.](image)
2.1 Global project alignment

Alignment is a concept that is broadly used in management, at the expense of a clear definition or model that explains exactly how it is being used. In general, organizational alignment between functional units is conceptualized as an actual or potential source of competitive advantage, for example by contributing to project success (Sombultawee & Boon-itt, 2017). Kathuria et al. (2007) further state that alignment of priorities is presumed to contribute to enhanced project performance, just as misalignment is expected to undermine performance. Accordingly, Ozguler (2016) found that if a project is aligned with the overall strategy of the organization, the success rate of projects would be improved steadily. It has also been shown that aligning goals and enhancing joint benefits for all actors are considered important determinants of value creation in global projects (Matinheikki, Artto, Peltokorpi & Rajala, 2016). Additionally, Beer, Voelpel, Leibold and Tekie (2005) conclude that alignment must be achieved within the organization as well as with the external business environment. However, Sombultawee and Boon-itt (2017) argue the notion of alignment is often poorly defined or inconsistent and can be difficult to operationalize.

Joshi et al. (2003) and Kathuria et al. (2007) argue that project alignment is achieved when various levels of employees within an organization agree on what is most important for the project to succeed. Specifically, Joshi et al. (2003) view alignment as the level of agreement within an organization regarding the relative importance of cost, quality, delivery and flexibility to the organization’s operational goals. Kathuria et al. (2007) distinguish between two dimensions of alignment, vertical and horizontal. However, Griffith and Gibson (2001) suggest there is a third dimension, which they refer to as longitudinal alignment. Vertical alignment refers to the configuration of strategies, objectives, action plans and decisions throughout the various hierarchical levels of the organization (Kathuria et al., 2007). Horizontal alignment can be represented in terms of cross-functional and intra-functional integration, it refers to coordination of efforts across the organization (Joshi et al., 2003). The longitudinal dimension involves alignment of objectives throughout the project, and Griffith and Gibson (2001) also argue that project
team members must address all three dimensions in order to be successful. The three
dimensions of alignment are presented in Figure 2 below.

Turkulainen et al. (2013) suggest that integration of functions within a global
organization is important for several reasons. Firstly, linking demands of the environment
and internal operational capabilities of the organization requires mutual understanding
within the organization. Secondly, the functional instability is further increased as the
needs that projects pose for the organization are also subject to change, not just across
projects, but even from one project phase to another. Terwiesch, Loch and Meyer (2002)
further point out that the key challenges in managing the interface between functions in
a project is how to acquire the right information and then communicate it to the correct
parties in other functions at the right time. Turkulainen et al. (2013) mean despite the
rapid advances and cost decreases in communications technologies, geographical
dispersion still makes information processing between the units challenging.
2.2 Chinese and Western project management practices

2.2.1 Project management implications due to the cultural differences

Chinese managerial leadership behaviours are deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese culture, which is strikingly different from Western culture. Traditional Chinese business culture is often characterized as highly collective, referring to their strong sense of group and family orientation (Wang, 2011). Western cultures on the other hand put more emphasis on individualistic values, which results in a difference in views on three particular levels Confucianism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance.

**Confucianism.** Confucianism reflects a philosophy which emphasizes the value of long-term relationships with people in the surrounding environment and the commitment of achieving long-term benefits (Wang, 2011). The Chinese emphasis on Confucianism (Wang, 2011) may lead to problems as global project teams are often temporary, hindering long-term relationships (Wang & Liu, 2007). Each member has a significant role in contributing to the successful completion of the project, but without enough guanxi connecting project participants, project performance may be impacted negatively as collaborative efforts may become neglected (Wright, Szeto & Cheng, 2002). Guanxi translates to personal relationship or sometimes to family network (Wright et al., 2002), and within the context of Chinese business relations reciprocity is the key ingredient in which mutual favours are granted and “strings pulled” (Hong & Engeström, 2004). Influenced by this particular cultural value, Western project managers may therefore find it hard to work with Chinese project participants as they have not established previous relationships with project participants resulting in a lack of guanxi (Wang & Liu, 2007).

**Uncertainty avoidance.** Uncertainty avoidance reflects an individual’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity (Zhang et al., 2015). Uncertainty avoidance is prevalent within the Chinese business culture (Wang, 2011), affecting the style of communication Chinese people adopt in conveying and interpreting meanings (Barkema, Chen, George, Luo & Tsui, 2015). They tend to rely on contextual cues to avoid conflict or embarrassment, whereas Western people tend to use explicit and coded messages while
relying little on the context itself (Barkema et al., 2015). In terms of project management, Wang (2011) argue that the Chinese avoid conflict by pushing their opinions below the surface, it encourages people to use compromising strategies in dealing with conflict. However, Somech, Desivilya and Lidogoster (2009) argue that conflict is inevitable, and it is how you deal with conflict that really counts. Project management requires people to be direct and open in handling disputes to ensure project success. Wang and Liu (2007) point out that Western project managers often encourage different opinions to be surfaced for discussion, and that meaningful conflicts can push project participants to pursue more in-depth and insightful analysis of project situations. Hence, separate views on how to handle and communicate conflicts and discussions may hinder progress and limit the project outcome.

**Power distance.** Power distance reflects the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations accept that power is distributed unequally (Wang & Liu, 2007). In Chinese organizations loyalties are vertical in their orientation and reflect the high acceptance that Chinese people have of hierarchy (Hong & Engeström, 2004). Moreover, Wang and Liu (2007) argue that the favour towards organizational hierarchy and centralized decision-making in Chinese culture creates problems for Western project management practices which anchor on cross-functional, horizontal collaboration and participative management. For instance, according to Wang (2011), Chinese corporate values are often influenced by their acceptance for hierarchical structures and are thereby unwilling to think ‘outside the box’ and engage in matters outside the individual work description. In the context of a global project, the project manager is usually not the boss over team members since many of the project participants are borrowed from different functional departments. The project manager has to coordinate the efforts of the team members without having direct line authority (Frame, 2003). Consequently, this becomes an issue as the Chinese business culture is typically classified as of large power distance and respect for authority (Zhang et al., 2015), and would therefore complicate the role of the project manager. Table 1 highlights the practical implications caused by these different cultural values in a project environment.
### Table 1 - Summary of findings in terms of differences between Chinese and Western management practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western perspective</th>
<th>Chinese perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confucianism</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-term orientation of relationships, work contributions-oriented evaluation of people and everyone plays an important role in projects (Zhang et al., 2015; Wang &amp; Liu, 2007).</td>
<td>Long-term orientation of relationships, guanxi-oriented evaluation of people and only the elite plays an important role in projects (Hong &amp; Engeström, 2004; Wright et al., 2002; Wang &amp; Liu, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty avoidance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging disagreement to be surfaced, requiring people being direct and open regarding confrontation strategy as the best way of solving conflict (Wang &amp; Liu, 2007; Zhang et al., 2015).</td>
<td>Encouraging disagreement to be buried, requiring people being less confrontational and less direct and using compromising and smoothing strategies to solve conflicts (Wang, 2011; Wang &amp; Liu, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power distance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small power distance and cross-functional communication and cooperation drives project work (Zhang et al., 2015; Wang, 2011). Completion of the task is prioritized and viewing people by their work performance rather than trying to make a senior employee satisfied (Hong &amp; Engeström, 2004).</td>
<td>Large power distance and superior-subordinator vertical work relationships drives project work (Wang, 2011; Wang &amp; Liu, 2007). Prioritization of making the boss happy and viewing people by their hierarchical position rather than their work performance is important (Wang, 2011; Frame, 2003).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importantly, young Chinese project managers have become more individually oriented, thusly are now more open to “Western-thinking” than previous generations (Wang, 2011). The challenge for Western managers who interact with their Chinese counterparts still remains, they have to be aware of the possibility of a paradoxical environment where, on one hand, managerial changes are occurring, and on the other hand, established behavioural norms may never change significantly (Barkema et al., 2015).

#### 2.2.2 Combining Chinese and Western project participants

Zhang et al. (2015) argue that a combination of both Chinese and Western approaches may lead to a win-win situation and be beneficial for overall project performance. The Chinese execute projects with a high pace, learning by doing, in a trial-and-error approach and pay little attention to planning (Wright, Szeto & Cheng, 2002). Therefore, they act more dynamically and efficiently in the execution stage (Somech et al., 2009). The Western project managers on the other hand spend a large part of project time in
the planning stage, with the purpose of foreseeing and trying to prevent as many errors and unnecessary mistakes as possible later on (Frame, 2003). Therefore, a combination could potentially lead to a more structured and efficient initial project phase.

When it comes to projects in general, a clear goal is obviously important. However, Zhang et al. (2015) points out that Chinese project managers tend to be rather flexible with project goals, which become subject to changes while the project is in execution. However, this rather volatile scope management has some benefits. For instance, the Chinese hierarchical project governance makes decision-making quicker and more efficient (Wang, 2011). This in turn makes the Chinese strong in incremental innovative projects using a trial-and-error approach (Zhang et al., 2015), although it comes at a cost of initially sacrificing quality (Ralston et al., 1999). Western project managers on the other hand prefer to stick with the project goals formulated at project initiation (Zhang et al., 2015), their scope management is characterised by a predefined process rather than allowing for “trial-and-error” (Wang & Liu, 2007). The Western project managers pay a lot of attention to cost and quality control, which is the primary reason to why the decision-making process becomes longer initially compared to the Chinese (Wang, 2011).

Therefore, Zhang et al., (2015) argue that Western project managers feel more comfortable in disruptive innovation projects, primarily because they are far more advanced in planning and prefer to stick with pre-agreed terms throughout. The Chinese and Western project management practices are in some regards opposites of each other, which we argue could hopefully be used to discover synergizes between the two. Hence, aid in the process of aligning global projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants.
2.3 Global project performance and success

The success of global project management is usually measured by achieving the scope, time and cost criteria for the project, typically referred to as “the iron triangle” or the triple constraint criteria (Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2017; Shenhar, Dvir, & Maltz, 2001; Atkinson, 1999). The iron triangle can be used to measure project performance, it is however increasingly regarded to be incomplete among both project management scholars and practitioners (Chipulu et al., 2014; ul Musawir, Serra, Zwikael, & Ali, 2017). Atkinson (1999) argues that other criteria need to be adopted to accurately evaluate project performance as time and cost of a project are at best only guesses, calculated when little is known about the project. Furthermore, scope can be regarded as a phenomenon that is subject to project participants’ different attitudes and beliefs which are often subject to change during the project. Naturally some projects need to be evaluated primarily on factors related to scope, time or cost, but there are also projects which performance is better evaluated by other criteria (Chipulu et al., 2014). Especially since the focus of many projects have shifted from product creation to value creation thus creating a need to include the full range of value delivered by the project in the project performance evaluation, and not only focus on outputs and outcomes, but also benefits (ul Musawir et al., 2017).

Thereby there is a need to introduce additional criteria to provide a more realistic and balanced indication of success (Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2017). By adding criteria that account for organizational and stakeholder benefits it is possible to better assess project performance (Atkinson, 1999; Badewi, 2016). A benefit is described as an advantage on behalf of a stakeholder or stakeholder group (Badewi, 2016). The criteria used for determining the success and performance of the project should be dynamic and flexible as the importance of different dimensions varies both within one project and among different projects (Shenhar et al., 2001). Furthermore, it would be beneficial to include the perspectives of different stakeholders when assessing project performance (Atkinson, 1999; Fowler & Walsh, 1999). The perception of success criteria can vary between stakeholders especially in global projects where there may exist significant cultural differences in practitioners’ definition of project success (Pereira, Verner, Rivas, &
Procaccino, 2008). Thereby, both individually- and culturally primed perceptions are key in the identification of criteria that determine the success and performance of global projects (Chipulu et al., 2014). Furthermore, the outcome is more complex than just a binary outcome of success or failure, creating a need to conceptualize project success as a multidimensional construct (ul Musawir et al., 2017).

Ika (2009) differentiates between project management success and project success. Project management success relates to efficiency and refers to the internal success of the project team and the successful project execution. Project success however, embraces concerns for both efficiency and effectiveness, meaning that it both encompasses project execution and outcome. Where the former represents the triple constraint criteria, the latter represents the project owner and other stakeholders who benefit from the project (ul Musawir et al., 2017). By including more judgement criteria, it may be possible to provide a more complete view of what constitute for project performance and more accurately determine project success. Hence, we define project performance as a concept with two levels encompassing both efficiency and effectiveness, where performance is judged by the fulfilment of the triple constraints as well as value generated for project stakeholders.

2.4 Connection between theory and research purpose

The literature review has been conducted to showcase key findings in three areas of relevance to the research purpose. Three different dimensions of alignment (e.g., Kathuria et al. 2007; Griffith & Gibson, 2001) give the analysis depth in terms of connecting informant’s statements and phrases to specific dimensions. Furthermore, by understanding the proposed differences and the potential joint benefits from Chinese and Western project management practices (e.g., Zhang et al., 2015; Wang, 2011; Wang & Liu, 2007) it should aid in the understanding of how they view the concept of project success differently (e.g., Chipulu et al., 2014; Pereira et al., 2008), what criteria they prefer besides the traditional “iron triangle” (e.g., Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2017; Shenhar et al., 2001; Atkinson, 1999), and further, what dimensions of alignment they consider.
are the most challenging and important. Hence, it should be possible to anchor the findings in practicality rather than oversimplified theorising, and thus answer to the call of minimizing the theory-practice divide (Tsoukas, 2017).
3. METHODS

3.1 Research context

This research intended to increase the understanding of how Chinese and Western project managers, respectively, view project success to investigate potential differences that can hinder the achievement of alignment within global projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. To develop the literature on aligning functional business units (e.g., Sombultawee & Boon-itt, 2017; Kathuria et al., 2007), the need for research that draws from the actual research of practitioners (e.g., Blomquist et al., 2010; Cicmil et al., 2006), and the need to understand the inherent complexity of project alignment (van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017) we adopted an explorative and abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

3.2 Case selection

The study was centered on the project-based manufacturing company, henceforth referred to as AlphaCo and their Asian headquarters in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, China. AlphaCo’s headquarter is in a Western country and it operates several international hubs besides the Asian headquarter. Projects include the design of shop concepts which can be done either by the customer or by AlphaCo’s design department, product production can be done either in-house by AlphaCo or by an external supplier followed by installation of custom shop concepts at customer site. The different stages of the project are often conducted at different or multiple locations.

The company was selected due to the company’s organisational structure where a large emphasis is placed on global project work. Thereby, AlphaCo was an interesting case for this research as the company regularly conducts global projects encompassing both Chinese and Western project participants. The chosen study design was a single-case study as it was advantageous when the study was directed towards analyses of numerous interdependent variables, it was therefore beneficial to go deeper into one case rather than analysing several shallow case studies (Dubois & Gadde, 2014).
3.3 Data collection

Interviews constituted the primary source of data, to obtain information from people experiencing the situation of interest (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). The research primarily aimed to investigate global project alignment incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. Hence, to ensure the fulfilment of the research purpose, it was important to have access to people representing both the Western and the Chinese perspective. To select informants, and thereby sample information, a selective and purposeful qualitative sampling method was used (Coyne 1996; Sandelowksi et al. 1992). Informants with potentially different viewpoints were prioritized to provide more perspectives on the topics of interest, but confirmatory data was also continuously sought during the study (Charmaz, 2006; Huy et al. 2014).

The data was gathered on location in Suzhou, China during a two month visit at the headquarters of the Chinese subsidiary. In total, the data collection resulted in 61 days of observatory data and 17 interviews ranging from 35 minutes to 90 minutes. Informants were all located in China and the interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, one informant was interviewed through Skype due to him being located in Sweden. Every interview was recorded and transcribed, and the interviews were conducted in two consecutive waves to ensure depth and richness. Observatory and informal data was collected throughout the 61 days in China to better understand the theoretical and practical context of the situation.
3.3.1 Wave 1: Putting the study into a theoretical perspective

The first wave of interviews had a semi-structured character, and the questions were based around our curiosity from studying the literature, but also, nuances were taken from informal conversations on site. Additionally, the initial wave included a section were the informants had the opportunity to freely express their thoughts on broader topics such as “According to you, what constitutes for a successful project?”, thus facilitating interesting discussions which would potentially be used later on in the formation of a second interview round. The main purpose with this wave was to get a contextual understanding, and to situate our empirical context in relation to the current literature. In all, this wave included ten interviews, six of them were conducted with Chinese informants and three were conducted with Western informants located at the Chinese office, additionally one Western informant was interviewed through Skype.

3.3.2 Wave 2: Deeper understanding for the identified themes

Wave two was a series of interviews conducted in a semi-structured manner and a continuation of the first ten interviews to further provide a deeper understanding for project management incorporating Chinese (C) and Western (W) project participants. The questions in this wave were pre-determined and centred on the themes that emerged from the first wave and the observations made on site. The second wave in combination with the first wave ensured that all data needed to answer the research questions had been collected. Some of the informants participated in both waves, mainly due to their current position at the company and their knowledge about the research topic which was deemed important. Table 2 below showcases the interviews.
Table 2 - Summary of the interview structure and whom the informants were.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Current position (department)</th>
<th>Duration (min)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>12/2/18</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>W1</td>
<td>12/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (management trainee)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>12/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (supply chain)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>13/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (production engineering)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>W2</td>
<td>19/2/18</td>
<td>Key account manager</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C4</td>
<td>23/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (supply chain)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>W3</td>
<td>23/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (product engineering)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>C5</td>
<td>23/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (quality engineering)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>C6</td>
<td>24/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (administration)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C7</td>
<td>24/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (sales)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>C3</td>
<td>26/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (product engineering)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>C8</td>
<td>27/2/18</td>
<td>Project manager (engineering)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>W4</td>
<td>27/2/18</td>
<td>Sales director</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>C9</td>
<td>1/3/18</td>
<td>Project manager (purchasing)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>2/3/18</td>
<td>Project manager (supply chain)</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>W2</td>
<td>2/3/18</td>
<td>Key account manager</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>W1</td>
<td>29/3/18</td>
<td>Project manager (management trainee)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WAVE 1: Exploratory / Semi-structured**

**WAVE 2: Exploratory / Semi-structured**

3.4 Data analysis

The analytical approach for this abductive and explorative study was anchored in a six-phase thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014), to ensure qualitative rigor and a systematic approach to organizing the collected data. We were therefore, able to understand how the Chinese and Western project managers’ perspectives on the concept of project success diverged. Thereafter, the analysis continued across the entire dataset. An in-depth understanding regarding the research problem was needed to ensure qualitative results. In addition to that, a model centred on practicality was developed, to illustrate how global project alignment could be achieved when including both Chinese and Western project participants. The analysed data was continuously compared to current literature and if gaps were detected, additional interviews were conducted to...
ensure fulfilment of these gaps. However, since Tsoukas (2017) highlighted the need to minimize the theory–practice divide, we were careful not to take every theoretical finding for granted without reviewing the contents of that finding in relation to the present study.

Furthermore, thematic analysis was selected as it offered flexibility for analysing qualitative data, which allowed complex datasets to be described in a rich, informative and detailed way. Phase one through phase six were performed iteratively to facilitate new ways of thinking and approaching the data. The ability to make sense of the data and to generate seminal ideas is attributed to the researcher’s closeness and immersion in the data (Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon & Chandler, 2002). Due to our iterative way of utilizing the thematic analysis we were able to review and ensure that the research questions were answered justly and in accordance with the collected interview data. Figure 4 illustrates the data analysis process.
Phase 1: Familiarizing with the data and identify items of potential interest

The first phase provided a general understanding through immersion of the dataset by reading each and every interview transcription to learn the content of the dataset “inside out”. Additionally, every voice recording was listened to multiple times to ensure that each transcription was indeed what had been said during the individual interviews. This provided a more accurate representation of the data as well as a holistic understanding of the entire dataset. After every interview we highlighted the most interesting aspects in relation to the research questions, discussions were then held to discover patterns, point out interesting features of the data, and to formulate initial ideas.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

During the second phase initial codes were generated based on the informant’s mentioned terms and phrases. They included interesting information which seemed meaningful for the completion of the research purpose. To be certain that the 25 initial codes generated adhered to the informant’s intentions only minor grammatical errors was altered. Some of the data was coded for several potential themes and this was mainly due to the difficulties of deciding which data would be relevant for the fulfilment of the research questions.

Phase 3: Searching for sub-themes and themes

In the third phase of the analysis, codes were sorted into sub-themes and themes based on the highlighted similarities and differences that the codes had amongst each other. The themes and sub-themes were evaluated based on their ability to describe and explain the studied phenomenon. Different relationships between specific themes were thoroughly discussed before the initial thematic map was developed. Sub-themes that were not suitable to fit into other identified themes were placed in a temporary-theme category (Clarke & Braun, 2014), and later discussed to ensure that they were not put there unjustifiably. Figure 3 illustrates an example of the process for generating initial codes, sub-themes and themes from the collected data extracts. In all, 10 sub-themes were identified.
Figure 4 - The process of generating themes that would later become the thematic map.

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

The sub-themes and themes generated during phase three were reviewed and refined thoroughly. Certain groups of sub-themes were merged into larger themes or sometimes used to form entirely new themes. The themes were checked to ensure that they did indeed work in relation to the entire dataset and that everything fairly represented the data. Throughout the process of reviewing the themes, it was made certain that each theme was coherent and substantial, with clear boundaries and a distinct central organizing concept (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Finally, this process resulted in five different themes, and thereby this contributed to the creation of an iterative process which ensured richness of the collected data and resulted in an in-depth analysis.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

The process of defining and naming themes was the phase where the most substantive and interpretive analysis was done. Each theme was carefully described and further refined in regards to the research questions. The final set of themes was confirmed through additional “check-up interviews”. To maintain the richness of the data and to ensure a nuanced and conceptually informed interpretative story about the meanings embedded in the data, a new interview guide was created based on the specific theme to act as a means of verification. The names of the themes were chosen to be engaging and informative and thereby capture the essence of the dataset.
**Phase 6: Producing the report**

The sixth and final phase was producing the report. This phase provided a final opportunity for refining the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Quotes and examples that represented the data in a meaningful way were chosen to provide proof for our interpretations, furthermore, they were used to clarify critical components of the analysis.

**3.5 Quality improvement measures**

To ensure mutual understanding regarding the area of interest continuous discussions were held. Furthermore, we did not at any time solely focus on collecting interview data or observatory data, but rather these were done in parallel with each other for a more reliable result. The selective and purposeful sampling method allowed selection of informants with experience in regards to the research purpose. Additionally, it allowed the collection of data from informants with conflicting views on the particular research questions, which decreased the level of bias throughout the study. The iterative nature of the data analysis allowed the confirmation of previous interviews and observatory data by asking informants validating questions.
4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the research, the first part addresses how Chinese and Western project managers respectively view project success. The second part presents factors that are important for achieving global project alignment. In addition, an emergent model is presented for achieving global project alignment incorporating Chinese and Western project participants, conducted by multinational manufacturing organisations.

4.1 Chinese and Western project managers’ view on project success

By analysing the interviews and observations held with employees it was possible to conclude that Chinese and Western project managers view project success differently. By identifying sub-themes extracted from the interviews with Chinese and Western project managers, respectively, it was possible to identify that both groups consider both efficiency and effectiveness when evaluating project success. However, the two groups did emphasize different nuances of effectiveness and efficiency in relation to their view on project success. Based on the analysis it was possible to identify two themes that described the two groups view on project success, the Western group identified project success as customer satisfaction through efficient methods, whereas the Chinese group identified it as internal satisfaction through effective methods, see Figure 5. It is important to understand how project success is perceived as it affects how different project participants seek to accomplish the particular project objectives.
4.1.1 Western focus on customer satisfaction through efficient methods

The analysis showed that Western project managers considered project success as a concept encompassing both effectiveness and efficiency. Western project managers thereby focus both on the outcome of the project and how the outcome was achieved. They are customer centric by prioritizing customer satisfaction when assessing the outcome of the project and are process and result oriented when assessing the project performance.

**Customer centric.** Customer centric project success focuses on how much value the project has delivered to the customer (e.g., meeting all the requirements from the customer). Thereby, company internal satisfaction (e.g., delivering the project to the lowest cost) was not the primary objective for Western project managers, see Table 3. Western project managers considered that the main mission for AlphaCo was to deliver customer value, for instance by delivering high quality goods at a low cost. Their main focus was not the internal cost of the products, instead they focused more on the final cost of the products for the customer as they believed that customers are price sensitive.
For instance, Western project managers expressed a will to solve a potential problem even if the solution to the problem was associated with additional costs, as the long-term cost of losing a customer was perceived to be higher. The Western project managers meant that when faulty products are shipped high after-sales costs are bound to happen. Thereby, it is important to get it right the first time, especially when sampling products for new customers that are in the process of testing and selecting suppliers. Western project managers adopt a customer centric view when judging the project success. They believed that the delivered customer value reflected internal performance both in the short and long term by reducing after-sales costs and promoting repeat business from customers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CUSTOMER CENTRIC</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representative Quotes</td>
<td>Customer cost sensibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus need to be on how much it will cost for customers and what it delivers in terms of value (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the margins are a bit low as the customers are cost conscious (W2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need to deliver value to the customer, if there is a problem that can be solved but will add additional cost to the project it is likely that the cost will be insignificant compared to the loss of future orders (W4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our main mission is to create value for the customer, they need to see AlphaCo as a partner that creates value which includes delivering high quality to a low cost to the customer (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of course, we do not want to delay shipments to the customers, but I believe that it is often better to delay a shipment and send products that fulfil the customer requirements as opposed to just shipping faulty products (W4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there are quality issues with the products when they arrive to the customer many additional costs may occur (W2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Right the first time

**Process and result oriented.** Western project managers placed an emphasis on both the outcome of the project as well as the process used to achieve the project outcome, see Table 4 for quotes. The process of achieving the outcome was considered important as an efficient process can enable faster deliveries of better products to the customers to a lower cost. Moreover, they believed that more emphasis should be placed on value creating activates to better deliver customer value. Western project managers considered project performance as a combination of customer demand fulfilment and contribution to the internal success while considering what internal resources had been used to
complete the project. Western project managers considered relationships as a factor that
can contribute to project success, for instance by promoting repeat business from
customers. However, they did not believe that relationships were crucial for project
success. It was considered more important to directly solve problems as opposed to taking
a long lunch to discuss topics not related to the problem. The Western project managers
placed some importance on cultivating relationship both internally with people inside the
project team and externally with stakeholders, such as customers. They believed that
relationships could enable better communication and trust within the project. Thereby,
it seemed that for Western project managers personal relationships within the project
team and with other stakeholders were linked to project performance but not crucial for
project success. Hence, a project can be successful even if the personal relationships are
not in focus during the project.

Table 4 - Representative quotes for the theme process and result oriented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCESS AND RESULT ORIENTED</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important that the result of the project is good but it is also important to consider how it was achieved and if the project was managed successfully so that the result was achieved using a good method that quickly delivered a good product at reasonable cost to the customer (W3)</td>
<td>Project effectiveness and efficiency are important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project performance depends on all of these factors [efficiency and effectiveness] (W2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need to focus on value creating activities and not time consuming non-value creating activities (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I believe that it would be more beneficial to focus on the project as opposed to taking a long lunch (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that better relations can enable better communication [...] which can give better results (W3)</td>
<td>Relationships contribute to project success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Chinese focus on internal satisfaction through effective methods

The analysis showed that Chinese project managers considered project success as a
concept focusing on effectiveness while also encompassing efficiency. Chinese project
managers considered both the outcome of the project and how it was achieved as
important but placed a stronger emphasis on the outcome. They were company centric
by prioritizing internal satisfaction when assessing the outcome of the project and were relationship and result oriented when assessing the project performance.
Company centric. Company centric project success focuses on how well the project fulfils company internal performance measures (e.g., low cost of products). Chinese project managers mostly considered internal success and performance when evaluating a project. Less focus was placed on external customer satisfaction when assessing the outcome of projects, see Table 5 for quotes. Chinese project managers considered that the main mission for AlphaCo was to deliver goods that fulfils customers’ requirements at a low cost. Their main focus was therefore to translate customer requirements and instructions to a finalized product at a low cost while rarely omitting to propose changes that will increase the customer value of the product. This is in line with the view of Wang (2011) that Chinese managers seek harmony and avoid uncertainty by not going outside the predetermined goal of the project. Chinese project managers also displayed a strong sense of personal responsibility which can, according to Wang and Liu (2007), be a result of the rigid hierarchical corporate culture often found in Chinese firms. By having a rigid functional company structure, personal responsibilities are clear but cross functional collaboration can be hindered, making it difficult to solve issues that concern multiple departments. The functional department structure used in the organization was also causing trouble according to Chinese project managers as no one in the organisation had full responsibility for the project. By creating more routines for how a project should be managed (e.g., creating predefined project structures with responsibilities and communication channels) one Chinese project manager mentioned that it could be possible to reduce project mistakes. Hence, Chinese project managers adopted a company centric view when judging the project outcome and believed that the internal performance reflected on the delivered customer value.
### COMPANY CENTRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internally our biggest challenge in projects are costs, I think it is very important for us to manage these in the company (C2)</td>
<td>Cost conscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost is an important metric for us (C8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I worked in Europe and there was an issue who concerned everyone they always worked together to find a solution […] in China it is more like it is not my job to fix the problem, even if it concerns that person a little bit […] it is more like everyone is responsible for their own part (C4)</td>
<td>Personal responsibility focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we want to push lead times, its purchasing’s job, not for me as an engineer (C3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The departments are normally not parallel, no cross functional (C8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information flow is not well defined in the beginning […] I believe that we can summarize in two or four structures that can be directly implemented so we have, so that we have not all the documents, but all the responsibilities, workflow settled down already, instead of everything is trial and error which can cause trouble (C4)</td>
<td>Trial and error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the customer has not specified I choose something and asks for ok from customer (C3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship and result oriented.** Chinese project managers placed a strong emphasis on the outcome of the project and its effect on relationships both within and outside the firm, see Table 6. The Chinese project managers also showed concern for the process used to achieve the outcome, but emphasized the end product of the project, as this is considered to be what generates value to the firm. The process of achieving the outcome is currently of lower importance to Chinese project managers, but this may change as several of the informants expressed concern for increased labour costs in China. Chinese project managers considered project performance as a concept that mainly encompassed effectiveness and placed limited regards to efficiency besides their focus on internal cost. Chinese project managers considered relationships as a key success factor for projects as they play a crucial role for keeping the project up to speed, further confirming the study conducted by Wright et al. (2002) which describes how lack of guanxi, a concept similar to relations can affect project performance negatively.
Table 6 - Representative quotes for the theme relationship and result oriented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIONSHIP AND RESULT ORIENTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Quotes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project success, it when we receive the full order for mass production. No matter what we do in step 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 (W3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not have any type of KPI for projects, basically, if we are able to get the block order it is considered a success (C9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project is successful when we can achieve long term business. The first project should not determine if we are succeeding or not. Future work is what I think is important (C7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The network [relationship with suppliers, customers and co-workers] is what makes us a success, especially in China (C4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Key similarities and differences between the viewpoints

The analysis of the interviews showed that Chinese and Western project managers perceive project success differently. Both groups considered effectiveness and efficiency in regards to project stakeholders and the triple constraint criteria but they emphasized different perspectives. Furthermore, both groups considered personal relationships as a contributor to project success. Consequently, there were similarities on the perception of project success but also some key differences in how the two groups prioritized and expressed different aspects of project success.

The Western project managers took a more customer centric view on project performance as compared to their Chinese counterparts who focused more on internal performance when determining project success. Western project managers viewed the generated customer value of projects as a reflection on the internal performance, see Figure 6, meaning that the value created for customers determine if the internal workings of the project were successful. Chinese project managers viewed internal performance as the creator of customer value, meaning that good internal processes create customer value by for instance delivering low costs. The implications of this discrepancy are that even though both groups considered customer value and internal performance when assessing project success, they often had an opposing view of what was most important. This can cause project members to have different priorities on what is important to achieve in projects. In order to create alignment within global projects it is important that the project
members are aligned towards the same goal and have the same priorities, creating a need to understand how project participants perceive project success.

Western project managers had a more customer centric focus which can explain why Western project managers were more focused on getting it right the first time, as opposed to Chinese project managers who focused more on personal responsibility and to some extent used a “trial and error” approach. Chinese project managers believed that to deliver customer value it is essential to have high internal performance, which creates a stronger emphasis on personal responsibility as opposed to the more holistic customer centred viewpoint adopted by Western project managers.

Chinese and Western project managers emphasized project effectiveness and wanted to deliver value to the customers. However, they did emphasize different aspects of effectiveness. Western project managers primarily expressed concern for the product and its usability for the customer. Chinese project managers focused more on internal factors such as delivery time and cost, by placing more emphasis on their personal tasks and less on their overall contribution. Consequently, Chinese project managers placed less emphasis on the overall efficiency of the project compared their individual role. Chinese project managers placed a stronger emphasis on personal relationships in projects, making it complicated for Western project managers who preferred to use a more direct form of communication.

Figure 6 - Chinese and Western view on the creation and reflection of customer value and internal performance.
4.2 Important factors for achieving global project alignment

In addition to the findings of how Chinese and Western project managers, respectively view project success, the analysis also made it possible to identify important themes for aligning global projects in manufacturing organizations. Chinese and Western project participants highlighted different views on project success affecting alignment. Based on the analysis three themes were identified which describes underlying factors for global project alignment. The identified themes are, (1) *Objective alignment* which highlights the process of ensuring that objectives are aligned with the company and the customers’ requirements. (2) *Role alignment* signifies the importance of ensuring that each project role is clearly defined to the individual, but also to the project team. (3) *Internal alignment* highlights the importance of integrating departments. Figure 7, illustrates how these themes emerged based on the codes that were found during the interviews.

![Figure 7 - Important factors for global project alignment](image-url)
4.2.1 Objective alignment

Objective alignment facilitates global project alignment incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. The structure of how project objectives are set, measured and communicated is important for many reasons, for instance it provides project participants with an idea of which tasks are critical, and which are not. It provides the project team with the possibility of creating a process in which similar projects can be conducted in the future, while also giving the project manager the ability to continuously measure the progress of the project.

**Overall project characteristics.** In accordance with Pereira et al. (2008) and Chipulu et al. (2014) the perception of what constitutes success in global projects can vary depending on the constellation of project participants. Hence, this reflects the importance of measuring and benchmarking the progress of the current project continuously through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs), see Table 7. Several informants thought that additional KPIs could be valuable and useful when conducting global projects, the current binary metrics used at AlphaCo were not considered sufficient (e.g., we were assigned the project / we were not assigned the project), the KPIs should reflect the company's requirements, as well as the customers’ requirements.

> We need to study [measure] projects to know if it is good or bad, maybe we have a new customer, we collect a lot of information for the customer, then we understand all the information then we know how we will price them, then we know what we need to highlight and what to focus on during the project. – C8

The analysis also indicated that initial project planning is beneficial when conducting global projects. It increases project participants’ confidence in what steps to follow, which objectives to prioritize and provides an oversight of whom is assigned to tasks during the project. The time spent on production in the manufacturing company seemed to be fixed, for instance, one informant stated “to produce article ABC will require X hours in the painting line and Y hours to assemble the final product before shipping. Hence, the work that is being conducted ‘outside’ of the fixed production time should be planned thoroughly” (W1). Therefore, project planning is crucial to ensure alignment and on time delivery in global projects.
### OVERALL PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is not well structured so the information flow is not well defined in the beginning, so if something is not structured it may take longer time [...], I think that we should be very careful in the beginning especially we need to have a person as a leader, a project manager, which we don't really have here (C7)</td>
<td>Initial project planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, we need to do this because kick off meeting is like the start of the project so before the kick off we need to understand what we need to do in the project and what is the very important things in project and special things in the project. For every project we need to do this first, because the kick off meeting we can show everything, so we should know how to do this before (C4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing is usually clearly defined, it takes X weeks to produce the products. However, to transfer a sell order can take several days, almost a week sometimes, it should not take more than a few hours. If this worked better we could focus more on planning the projects properly rather than stressing our suppliers to create poor quality products (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not really have any type of KPI, basically, if we are able to get the block order it is considered a success. If we do not get the block order, we failed. I think KPIs could be really good for us to use throughout a project, not just when we get an order (C9)</td>
<td>Measure project’s progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we create objectives for a project we never measure them, we are generally not so good at measuring things such as hours spent on the project etc., it is more about delivering to the customer. That is the first objective, second objective is to ensure that the customer is satisfied (W4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ambiguous objectives.** To ensure that the project objectives are clear, accurate and reflect what is necessary for the project, it is important to *communicate and verify customer values* and to avoid *customer centric views conflicting with company centric views on objectives*, see Table 8. Accordingly, informants expressed concern about not verifying and communicating customer values to the project team.

> Sometimes people make offers to customers without actually analysing the consequences of putting a very low price. Sure, we get the order, but it means that our margins become worse. So, if something goes wrong during project execution and the costs goes up, it can quickly turn into a project where we lose money. - W2

The level of ambiguousness in project objectives was expressed to be important as it functions as a foundation for the individual task objectives that are communicated to the specific project roles. The lack of department integration and overall project structure and conflicting views regarding which objectives are important may lead to problems mentioned previously by other authors (e.g., project overruns and internal misalignment). Several informants provided evidence that this was a factor limiting project alignment.
For instance, some Chinese project participants thought that it did not matter what happened during the project phases, as long as they got passed the stage of sampling orders. Meanwhile, a Western project manager in charge of projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants stated:

We need to make better trade-offs when it comes to handling important objectives such as delivery time, or product quality. For instance, if we cannot take a minor cost, which in the end will ensure that the customers goods are shipped properly we are doing something wrong. I mean, considering the cost of losing the customer due to something as basic as proper packaging is far more than the extra cost for better packaging. - W1

Hence, ensuring that the project participants’ views are uniform with the customers’ requirements and that objectives are controlled and measured will increase the likelihood of project alignment.

Table 8 - Representative quotes for the theme ambiguous objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMBIGUOUS OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At the same time, I want to make sure that the customers are also integrated and get the right information, at the right time and so that we can produce the items they want. Not the items we think they want (W1)</td>
<td>Communicating and verifying customer values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes people make offers to customers without actually analysing the consequences of putting a very low price. Sure, we get the order, but it means that our margins become worse [indicating the need to use KPIs as guidance]. So, if something goes wrong during project execution and the costs goes up, it can quickly turn into a project where we lose money (W2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The biggest challenges in projects here at AlphaCo is when it comes to big customers, departments usually have different views on what is important, which make it difficult (C8)</td>
<td>Customer centric views conflicting with company centric views on objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project success, it when we receive the full order for mass production. No matter what we do in step 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 [The steps refers to the informant describing the project phases at AlphaCo] (W3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Role alignment

Knowledge about project roles and task ownership were highlighted as fundamental factors for achieving global project alignment. This ensures that roles are clearly defined in projects, not only to the individual but also to the project team. Additionally, as role alignment is achieved participants will better understand what objectives that are tied to their particular role. Hence, contributing to global project alignment.
Projects roles. The analysis indicated that project roles played an important part in achieving global project alignment, see Table 9. Several of the Western project participants expressed that their project roles were neither defined by top management, nor from their surrounding project team. The Chinese project participants on the other hand thought that their project roles were clearly defined by top management and from their surrounding project team. This implied two things for project participants. Firstly, even if their role was clearly defined, their responsibilities were generally not. Secondly, some project participants had very defined work roles and very rigid responsibilities, which in the end seemed to decrease task ownership. In the context of conducting global projects it is necessary to have clearly defined roles, but more importantly it is key to have a set of responsibilities connected to each role so that the transition phase becomes quicker and more efficient. Having too much responsibility erases the point of having defined project roles as they are more likely to overlap with others. Hence, vague project roles will limit the level of alignment that is achieved.

In conformity with several informants, the role of the project manager was shown to contribute to project alignment. Project managers should be able to override the department silos and be the one ‘pulling the strings’. However, according to the analysis, due to the large power distance in the Chinese business culture it can become difficult to change such a culturally rooted hierarchy. For instance, one Chinese project manager made this clear by saying, “our Managing Director makes all the final decisions. However, at my previous workplace [in China], hierarchical decision-making was even more strict than here. It made the process very slow” (C9). Consequently, having a defined project manager throughout the project with known and recognized authority could assist in linking people and departments with each other during project execution.
**PROJECT ROLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I guess that the Chinese have clearly defined roles, but they are very rigid and I think most Westerners don’t have defined roles. Maybe if I knew the language better I would know better, I don't really speak Chinese (W4)</td>
<td>Rigid or vague work roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My responsibilities in projects are quotation for new items and such. If a customer receives an inquiry, they contact sales and forward it to me. However, we analyse […] I do some price calculation, so sales can communicate it to the customer and also add a profit margin. If we have a new item, I am also responsible for checking samples and giving feedback on whether we can produce the item, I am also responsible for checking that packaging is OK before the order is shipped. My role is quite coordinative in that regard (W3)</td>
<td>Project manager tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What capabilities should a project manager have, what should be the limits, it is very difficult to say (C1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think we should have a project manager, for instance in the project for COMPANY XYZ, I suggest we have a project manager that is responsible for everything, all the timelines, the drawings, quotation, and someone who is the link with the customer (C9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Project ownership.** Informants expressed the importance of working together, not just within their respective department, but also within their project team. The analysis indicated that emphasis on project ownership was necessary, where project participants take responsibility for the project success, see Table 10. In accordance with Wang (2011), Chinese project participants were unwilling to engage in matters outside the individual work description limiting project ownership. However, the aspect of *cross-functional awareness* was highlighted as it enables project participants with an overview of other participants’ roles and tasks, enabling coordination and cooperation. Hence, by defining responsibilities and connecting it to other project roles, project ownership can be promoted.

At the moment, it is not so cross-functional here, we work parallel to each other I think. The work roles here are very specific, and people only do their job. If we have product related issues it goes through our department managers, so we do not really discuss with the people who are actually doing the tasks. - W3

To assist in the process of integrating departments, documentation was shown to provide clarity in terms of what is expected of a project team. *References of previous projects* could act as a template for setting up initial objectives. These objectives would provide a frame of reference by connecting responsibilities with tasks promoting project ownership throughout the project.
### Table 10 - Representative quotes for the theme project ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Quotes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the managing director has not confirmed something it becomes hard for the Chinese to act, it is very hierarchical. The Chinese do not want to take responsibility for something that can end up involving uncertainty (W4)</td>
<td>Task objectives &amp; responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually, when I’m given a task it comes with no goal or objectives tied to the actual task (W3)</td>
<td>Cross-functional awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The departments are normally not parallel, no cross-functionality in the project teams, someone that can be involved in all. Not many have this in China so it would be good for us to have this. But I think it is difficult to change our current way of working also (C8)</td>
<td>References of previous projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transition phases in our projects are not so good, they do not exist, we are lacking structure. It is pretty common that one individual is involved in several projects, so more often than not the correct information is not passed on properly. Everybody involved should have access to project information (W1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say that it is not clear, because if it was clear who to talk to, then the two departments could talk directly to each other, because they know who is responsible. The problem is when everyone says it is not my job or it is not my departments job, then it becomes a problem (C7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes you don't know if there are very similar projects being conducted, you could even design parts to be used in both projects without having a clue. There have been some cases where I have noticed that something has been done before. If we had more structure it would be easier to know if someone has done similar work instead of reinventing the wheel every time we get a new project (W4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make people in their role take on more responsibility ties back to sharing information, in meetings and such. For instance, if I am designing part A for a larger part B, if I don’t know what part B actually looks like it might be difficult to avoid simple mistakes. But if I have a better understanding of the entire project or product my team is making, it becomes much easier (C9)</td>
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#### 4.2.3 Internal alignment

Achieving internal alignment refers to the ability to integrate, structure communication and provide feedback between departments. However, achieving internal alignment in a manufacturing organization incorporating Chinese and Western project participants was shown to be challenging, primarily because of the language and cultural barriers which made integration, communication and feedback difficult.

**Communication channels.** Communication channels refer to internal structures enabling communication, conflict resolution and feedback sharing. In accordance with Loch and Meyer (2002), this study also found that acquiring the right information, and communicating it to the correct counterpart at the right time is critical in global projects. There was a common understanding among the informants that internal communication
was important for enabling project alignment as it would allow them to receive information necessary to complete tasks, see Table 11. In China, it is common to utilize *informal communication* channels to share information among project participants. WeChat is the predominant communication application, but it is also used to manage mundane tasks (e.g., in store payments, food ordering and cab hailing), hence informal communication channels have become culturally accepted to use in China. Western project participants on the other hand were prone to highlight the importance of the ability to trace the flow of information continuously during projects, which is not possible through informal platforms such as WeChat. Thereby, they preferred to use email during project execution, especially when deadlines were narrow, “If everything related to the project is stored in personal chat conversations it can become an issue when that individual is sick, or if someone else is supposed to continue where he or she left off” (W4).

However, informal communication seemed to be associated with some benefits when working in global projects, as it offers project participants means to quickly communicate independently of their geographical location. Hence, it is important to have a clear structure of how to communicate (e.g., what should be sent through informal platforms and what should be sent through email services), and more importantly, what type of information should be documented and accessible for everyone in the project team.

Communication channels in a project is not just about sharing information related to specific tasks, it is also about providing a structured way of sending and receiving *continuous feedback*. Project participants should have the space to share feedback regarding project progress and improvement measures, which can assist the project manager in adjusting the project plan and allocating resources. Additionally, another aspect of communication in global project teams, according to the analysis is *conflict management*. In accordance with Barkema et al., (2015) and Wang (2011), the Chinese business culture is collective and therefore, it becomes the project manager's job to handle conflicts and feedback. However, administering these processes through a middleman will make them slower and hinder meaningful discussions from pushing project participants to pursue more in-depth and insightful analysis. A Chinese manager pointed
out that “it's up to the manager to have a good attitude, like in the family, the children look at their parents and follow what they do. If there is a conflict or a discussion in my team I will usually handle it so we can work together” (C7).

This means that the communication channels should be managed and structured to connect the project team and be open and welcoming to meaningful discussions to enable collaborative efforts.

Table 11 - Representative quotes for the theme communication channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATION CHANNELS</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really think WeChat is a nice tool, however it can sometimes be used too much and then I think it is very likely that important information gets lost in chat conversations between people. Also, in my work it is important to have access to this information when I do follow-ups with people. Everything that needs to be documented should go through our email client (W4)</td>
<td>Informal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally we only use email, face to face and WeChat. Mostly, it is on WeChat, but if it is very serious problem we use email (C6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that here you don't want to embarrass the other [when discussing project matters that could become a minor conflict of interest], in Europe we say to the boss if something is really stupid or unnecessary, otherwise it is just a waste of everyone's time (C2)</td>
<td>Conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now, I do my job, person B does his job and sometimes we do not match, an no one fix the problem for us. When we do not match it takes a lot of extra time, and finally we can match. But usually it takes a lot of time and energy. Finally, we will compromise (C9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department had an excel spreadsheet, where we could log changes and everyone could write in it and then we discussed the topics during weekly meetings. There should be more encouragement like that here, I think it is good to find problems, it means we have room for improvement (W4)</td>
<td>Continuous feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think we need to have team building to get to know each other, then they usually relax and talk more with each other. When I go to a customer I usually bring an engineer with me so we can support the customer in the best possible way. But then we can also talk about work but also life in general and get close to each other (C7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Department integration.** Chinese and Western informants expressed the importance of integrating the departments properly during projects, see Table 12. However, they also pointed out, many Chinese companies have not adopted the organizational structure necessary for such integration. Previously, many companies in emerging markets, and China in particular were solely used for trading operations, which meant finding a local supplier and thereafter exporting the goods to the customer. Today, Chinese companies are not only trading but also developing goods for customers around the globe, hence
highlighting the importance minimizing the existence of current *department silos* created from when trading was the main business activity. In accordance with Turkulainen et al. (2013), demands of the environment should be linked with internal operational capabilities. An informant from the Chinese sales department stated the following in regards to department integration, “*We should not see ourselves as separate departments [silos], so for example sales people should not view themselves as the profit maker of the company. Each department is important for every project, we need to work together better*” (C7).

Similarly, to *communication channels*, department integration is about creating structure in the project environment so that the different project participants’ work does not limit or interfere with the project. The structure should enhance how project teams work and collaborate, accordingly, several informants expressed the importance of having *known routines for documentation*. Considering the complex and the dynamic global project environment it may be beneficial to have standardized documentation that can assist in transitioning between project phases. Otherwise, information gaps may prevent optimal project performance, for instance a department manager said, “*we need better support and training to understand technical information also, maybe if we can better integrate our department with engineering it is possible*” (C4).

In accordance with Gu et al., (2017) and von Danwitz, (2017), this study found that *varying work procedures* need to be managed to align departments and functions. This translates to a set of procedures for how projects should be conducted internally, including the responsibilities of project participants, how to coordinate and communicate within the project, thus minimizing uncertainty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPARTMENT INTEGRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representative Quotes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better routines and standard documentation are two things I find very important and that I think we are missing sometimes. I sometimes have to create my own documentation, but it is not something that the rest of the company uses when they are doing similar work (W2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are missing a lot of documentation I think, our ERP-system is underdeveloped, so if I need to collect some data I always have to ask others to get it for me because I don’t have the possibility to get it myself. It takes time and is not most efficient way of working (W4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to give the customer the best support, for us, we should be friendly to them and we should not see ourselves as separate departments (C7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently, they work very functional and not so integrated. This complicates my job as the responsible project manager, I have to go and talk to every department manager which often leads to an information gap that can cause problems later on before shipment to the customer (W1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we have, let’s say different 20 projects it is not like we have 20 different ways of working. I believe that we can summarize in two or three different structures that can be directly implemented [...] all the responsibilities, workflow etc., are settled down already, instead of everything is trial and error, that can cause a lot of troubles (C4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Chinese subsidiary we are lacking routines, how to make decisions, and how to run a project in general. China is no longer just about producing items like before, we have to change our procedures to adapt with the environment (W1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. AN EMERGENT MODEL FOR GLOBAL PROJECT ALIGNMENT

Our analysis revealed a set of emergent themes and concluded that Chinese and Western project managers viewed the concept of project success differently even though there are some similarities. To achieve global project alignment incorporating project participants from both groups it is important to consider these themes and differences. The data indicated that clarity and structure are important in every aspect of achieving global project alignment. Objectives should reflect company and customer requirements. Project roles should be structured around the defined objectives to ensure that ownership is taken, and internal operations should enable communication and collaboration within the project. We propose an emergent model, see Figure 8 that links the nuanced perspectives on project success with the discovered alignment factors to give a holistic view on how global project alignment can be achieved in practice.

![Figure 8 - An emergent model for global project alignment](image)

The three types of alignment (objective, role and internal alignment) all contribute towards creating project alignment and support in minimizing the differences between Chinese and Western project managers. The most significant type of alignment is
**Objective alignment**, which aids in bridging the differences between the nuanced views on what constitutes project success and provides the project participants with an increased understanding of the overall goal of the project. Thereby, it is possible to enhance joint benefits for all actors. By focusing on **objective alignment**, it is possible to utilize the strengths of both Chinese and Western project managers through the combination of customer and company centric viewpoints. To achieve successful objective alignment, it is important to fully understand the customers’ requirements, which should then be converted into objectives that are realistic in terms of the manufacturing organisations capabilities and resources.

When objectives are aligned is possible to achieve **role alignment** which aims to coordinate the roles of project participants towards the objectives. Roles should consider the strengths within the organization, for instance, by allowing Western project managers to focus on customer centric tasks (e.g., managing customer interactions), and allow Chinese project managers to focus on company centric tasks (e.g., developing internal processes). To further reduce the alignment gap in global projects **internal alignment** should be utilized and project managers should focus on coordinating the project to enable intra and cross functional integration, which can be done once the objectives are set and roles are formed, see Figure 9.

![Figure 9 - Prioritization of alignment types](image)

Achieving each of the three types of alignment will reduce the alignment gap. The different views of project participants on project success may hinder the gap from closing completely as the views are likely culturally rooted and hard to overcome. Accordingly, the challenge for Western managers who interact with their Chinese counterparts still remains and vice versa, they have to be aware of the possibility of a paradoxical
environment where, on one hand, managerial changes are occurring, and on the other hand, established behavioural norms may never change significantly (Barkema et al., 2015).
5. DISCUSSION

By considering the global business environment, where Chinese and Western project participants are increasingly collaborating in global projects, we have created an emergent model which describes this interaction with the purpose of achieving global project alignment. Our study uncovered three important factors (objective alignment, role alignment and internal alignment) to consider when working towards the achievement of global project alignment. Additionally, the study revealed that Chinese and Western project managers view the concept of project success differently. Chinese project managers tended to be more company centric in determining objectives, whereas Western project managers primarily had a customer centric viewpoint. These differences were shown to make the process of aligning project teams more difficult. Our emergent model encompasses this potential hazard by showing how manufacturing firms should prioritize and work with the three alignment factors and how the differences viewpoints on project success can be minimized in practice. The emergent model provides current and future project managers with an enhanced understanding of global project alignment incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. The study also provides the literature with an alternative view on the issue of achieving global project alignment by emphasizing practicality rather than over-simplified theorising. Moreover, the study is one of few that specifically look at global projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants in a manufacturing organization. Hence, the present study enriches the literature through a different and rather new perspective.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

First, our study provides insights into how Chinese and Western project managers, respectively, view project success. Prior studies have concluded that there are cultural differences between Chinese and Western project managers and that they favour different organizational structures when working on projects (e.g., Littrell, 2002; Wang & Liu, 2007). Our study expands the understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western project managers by illustrating how the two groups perceive project success. Western project managers see customer value as the main driver of performance that
reflects the internal performance whereas Chinese project managers see the internal performance as the driver of customer value. Thereby, our study builds upon the study of Zhang et al. (2015) by further illustrating that a combination of Chinese and Western management practices may be beneficial for project performance. Project success encompasses both internal metrics (e.g., fulfilment of the triple constraint criteria) and external metrics (e.g., stakeholder satisfaction). Hence, by combining the Chinese focus on internal metrics with the Western focus on external metrics it may be possible to receive the benefits of both perspectives and increase project performance. Secondly, our study answers the call for research that draws from the actual experience of practitioners (e.g., Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2017; Blomquist et al., 2010; Cicmil et al., 2006), by describing methods to achieve alignment in global projects derived from project practitioners. Our study identifies three types of alignment (1) objective alignment, (2) role alignment and (3) internal alignment, which all contribute to alignment in global projects. These alignment types differs from previously proposed alignment types (e.g., horizontal, longitudinal and vertical alignment) by being actionable and direct. Hence, addressing the concern raised by Sombultawee and Boon-itt (2017) that alignment is difficult to operationalize. Lastly, our study provides an emergent model for how alignment can be achieved in practice within global projects. The emergent model proposes links between the identified types of alignment and suggest activities to achieve alignment, abbreviating the gap concerning the inherent complexity in global project
5.2 Managerial contribution

The study has three primary implications for managerial practice, it firstly expands the understanding of how Chinese and Western project managers view project success. It is important for project managers to be aware of the different views as it affects the project objective which is desired and prioritized. By understanding what constitutes project success it is possible to adapt the project objectives to better reflect the viewpoints of project participants, which can boost project ownership. Secondly, the study provides insight into how alignment practically can be achieved in global projects incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. Our findings are more defined and practically oriented compared to previous studies as we suggest how one dimension contributes to the others. Researchers have previously mentioned the existence of horizontal alignment (e.g., Kathuria et al, 2007), vertical alignment (e.g., Joshi et al., 2003) and longitudinal alignment (e.g., Griffith & Gibson, 2001), compared to these our study provides more tangible dimensions with practical activates on how to achieve them. Objective alignment should be the primary focus for project managers as it determines the project goal. Lastly, our study demonstrates the importance for project managers to stay objective during the project and not just consider their own frame of reference. One method that can increase transparency and reduce biases in projects is to increase measurability of performance.

5.3 Limitations and further research

Despite several contributions to the global project management literature, the study has three limitations that ought to be considered when interpreting the results. The limitations should assist others pursuing research related to the subject of global project alignment incorporating Chinese and Western project participants. First, the study was only conducted at one Western company with a manufacturing subsidiary in the Jiangsu province. By incorporating more manufacturing organizations, both Chinese and Western, it would be possible to conduct a more rigorous analysis in terms of cross-case comparisons, which would have increased the level of generalizability of the findings. A second limitation concerns the sampling of Chinese project participants. A minority, but
still a significant number of individuals had problems with the English language which complicated data collection and analysis. To encompass this issue, we asked confirmatory questions to other Chinese informants with a higher level of English comprehension, additionally, we simplified the questions for those who did not fully understand. For future research we suggest others who seek to enhance the understanding of global project alignment in China to get a local interpreter to overcome the language barrier. A third and final limitation was found when talking to informants, all of whom were considered managers in the context of project management. Future researchers should try to discuss the topic with non-managerial employees, which we believe would ensure greater depth and increase the practical aspect of the findings. In our case, none of the non-managerial employees had a sufficient level of English to be included in the study. Hence, similar to the second limitation, a translator would allow Western researchers to ‘dig deeper’ and further enhance the literature of global project management.
6. REFERENCES


